4-H builds strong leaders

Source: Rachel Noble, 4-H youth development specialist

Throughout their years in 4-H, members have numerous opportunities to explore and engage in leadership roles. Leadership skills are an important part of 4-H programming, because they help young people develop critical thinking, communication and life skills. These skills will help them become productive citizens and tomorrow’s leaders and decision makers.

Opportunities begin at the county level, where young people can become an officer of a local 4-H club or participate in 4-H Summit. Summit is a three-day, two-night event during the spring where sixth- through eighth-graders meet their peers from across the state as well as State 4-H Teen Council members. During Summit, participants learn about leadership opportunities available to them when they become senior 4-H’ers.

Teen 4-H members interested in polishing their leadership skills may attend the 4-H Issues Conference and the 4-H Teen Conference. At Issues Conference, 4-H’ers from across the state meet to discuss issues affecting young people and their communities. Youth discuss ways in which they can have a positive impact on community issues and develop plans that they will implement when they return home. Young people who attend the 4-H Teen Conference, held each June at the University of Kentucky, participate in a wide range of activities designed to help improve their leadership and communication abilities and get their first glimpse of life on a college campus.

As 4-H’ers advance through the program, they can consider applying for a statewide leadership position. 4-H has several teen leadership boards geared toward specific interests. Those elected to these boards help advise 4-H staff on programs geared toward their specific interest. Leadership board opportunities are available in fashion, performing arts, natural resources, healthy living, shooting sports and science, engineering and technology. Young people can also apply to join Kentucky 4-H Teen Council, where they can serve as a sounding board for statewide 4-H programs, help 4-H state staff implement new programs and serve as mentors to younger members.

4-H’ers can also choose to apply for a state 4-H office. State officers are official ambassadors for Kentucky 4-H. They are chosen through an extensive process that includes an application, references, public speeches, teamwork activities and interviews. A group comprised of 4-H agents, Kentucky 4-H Foundation board members, youth members from each state leadership board and the Kentucky 4-H Teen Council narrow the applicants. Candidates must choose a platform to pursue for the next year if they are elected as an officer and deliver a speech about their platform. After they give the speech, voting is opened to the 4-H community.

The 2021-2022 state officers are:

President: Madison Wilmoth, LaRue County

Vice President: Emma Browning, Shelby County

Secretary: Emily Murphy, Mercer County

Treasurer: Kiersten Dotson, Pike County

For more information on 4-H leadership opportunities, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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