4-H develops leaders

Source: Rachel Noble, 4-H youth development specialist

Throughout 4-H, members have numerous opportunities to explore and engage in leadership roles. By learning to become a leader, young people develop critical thinking, communication and life skills that will aid them in making future decisions and becoming the leaders of tomorrow.

Leadership opportunities begin at the county level as 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 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.

During Teen Conference, 4-H’ers elect state officers, who serve until the end of the next year’s conference. The 4-H officers serve in leadership roles in State 4-H Teen Council, and past members often are invited to serve as advisors to the following year’s council and officers. The 2019-2020 state officers are:

President: Gloria Bolin, Nelson County

Vice President: Luke Jacobs, Butler County

Secretary: Hannah Snyder, Jessamine County

Treasurer: Reba Prather, Pulaski County

Two of the most prestigious leadership roles in 4-H include becoming a delegate to either the National 4-H Conference in Washington, D.C., or the National 4-H Congress in Atlanta.

At the National 4-H Conference, youth join extension professionals and adult volunteer leaders to discuss ways 4-H can better serve young people on local and national levels. Leaders share recommendations from the conference with the Secretary of Agriculture, national extension leaders and those involved with 4-H programming. Each year, the four Emerald Award winners from the 4-H Achievement Program serve as Kentucky’s representatives at the national conference. This year’s recipients include Walter Steely of Webster County, Morelia Falcon of Grayson County, Will Banks of Harrison County and Beth Huffman of Oldham County.

During the National 4-H Congress, delegates learn about cultural diversity and serving others and their communities. Kentucky’s delegates are the 30 winners of the 4-H Achievement Program’s Gold Award.

For more information on leadership opportunities through 4-H, contact the (COUNTY NAME) Extension office.

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