4-H Exhibits are Important Positive Youth Development Opportunities

County fairs and 4-H shows are a long standing tradition of the 4-H program. Participation enhances positive youth development through learning that occurs while exhibiting projects, interacting with caring adults, volunteering, and assisting with special events.

Having a project ready to exhibit at the 4-H show is the culmination of a year’s worth of discovering, creating, and exploring with “hands on” experiences. At last year’s Peoria County 4-H Show, 162 youth exhibited over 1,000 projects, with 75 of those youth moving on to exhibit at the Illinois State Fair.

Exhibiting a project, whether it be an animal or non-livestock project, offers several opportunities for youth to interact with caring adults. Conference judging brings 4-H members and judges together to evaluate projects and involves face-to-face communication. This style of judging provides a unique opportunity for 4-H exhibitors to learn from the experiences and knowledge of the judge. 4-H Superintendents, Illinois Extension staff, and other Extension volunteers also offer guidance, support, and leadership development to the youth during the 4-H show.

“Judging is a learning experience where youth learn what they did well and how they could improve in the future,” mentioned Cathy Ludolph, 4-H program coordinator. “It’s important for youth to know that an exhibit does not measure all that they have learned, but it is one example of how they have applied what they have learned so far. The conversation with the judge gives youth the opportunity to verbally process their goals achieved, ways they could improve, and how they can continue applying what they have learned through their project.”

“I like that we get to talk with the judges and explain how we made our projects,” stated Annemarie Litwiller of the Horse Hustlers 4-H club. “I also like when they give us ideas on how we could do things differently. I’ve used the judges suggestions to improve my project for the next year.”

With the summer fair season in full swing be sure to check out the Peoria, Fulton, Mason & Tazewell County 4-H exhibit opportunities and look at all the 4-H projects. When you see the innovative, creative, and outstanding projects think of all the learning that took place and skills the youth gained to get the project ready for show.

For more 4-H show and county fair information, dates, locations & details visit https://web.extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/4hshowsfair/