Letter 1: What is 4-H?

In this letter you'll find:
Introduction to the letter series
What is 4-H?
How does the 4-H program work?
What's more important - the 4-H project or the 4-H boy and girl?
What is the 4-H leader's job?

Dear Leader:

So you've volunteered and have been selected to be a new 4-H leader! Congratulations! You're starting an interesting, challenging, and rewarding experience. Because we know you have many questions about this new venture, we believe you'll find the information in this and subsequent letters helpful.

This is the first in a series of six letters that you will receive in the next few months, along with supporting materials. We suggest you keep these materials together in a notebook for easy reference. When you have all six letters and the additional reference materials, you will have a useful 4-H leader's handbook.

You will notice that at the end of each letter is a section titled, “How I can use the information in this letter?” This section gives you a chance to think about the information in each letter and how you might use the information effectively in your club.

What is 4-H?

4-H is the youth audience of the Cooperative Extension System in the United States. Young people, between the ages of 8 and 19, participate in individual and group learning experiences that help them learn skills for living. Five to seven-year-olds learn life skills through Cloverbud group activities.

In Illinois, 4-H is part of University of Illinois Extension in the College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. The State 4-H Office is located on the Urbana-Champaign campus of the University of Illinois. 4-H leaders are considered volunteer staff members of the University of Illinois. At the local level, each unit (a single county, or multi-county group) has an Extension office that administers the 4-H program. At the national level, 4-H is under the leadership of the United States Department of Agriculture.

The most widely recognized symbol of 4-H is the 4-H Clover. This emblem is a green four-leaf clover with a white or gold "H" in each leaf, standing for Head, Heart, Hands, and Health.

The 4-H name and emblem may be used by locally chartered 4-H clubs and other groups officially affiliated with 4-H. The use of the 4-H Name or Emblem should be consistent with the educational purposes, character-building objectives, and dignity of the 4-H program. It cannot be used to endorse commercial firms, products, or services. If there are questions about the appropriate use of the 4-H emblem, contact your local Extension unit office.

Young people, between the ages of 8 and 19, participate in individual and group learning experiences that help them learn skills for living. Five to seven-year-olds learn life skills through Cloverbud group activities.

In Illinois, 4-H is part of University of Illinois Extension in the College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. The State 4-H Office is located on the Urbana-Champaign campus of the University of Illinois. 4-H leaders are considered volunteer staff members of the University of Illinois. At the local level, each unit (a single county, or multi-county group) has an Extension office that administers the 4-H program. At the national level, 4-H is under the leadership of the United States Department of Agriculture.

The most widely recognized symbol of 4-H is the 4-H Clover. This emblem is a green four-leaf clover with a white or gold "H" in each leaf, standing for Head, Heart, Hands, and Health.

The 4-H name and emblem may be used by locally chartered 4-H clubs and other groups officially affiliated with 4-H. The use of the 4-H Name or Emblem should be consistent with the educational purposes, character-building objectives, and dignity of the 4-H program. It cannot be used to endorse commercial firms, products, or services. If there are questions about the appropriate use of the 4-H emblem, contact your local Extension unit office.
A good description of the 4-H program and its history is given in the publication - *Helping You Help Youth: Introduction to 4-H* (L90501a). If you don't have a copy, please pick one up at your Extension unit office, or you may download a copy from the Web at: http://www.4-H.uiuc.edu.

**How does the 4-H program work?**

It is said, “It is better to build a child than to mend an adult.” This, in a nutshell, is the main objective of the 4-H program. 4-H is a learn-by-doing program. This “experiential learning” occurs when youth participate in an activity, look back to reflect on the activity, draw conclusions or observations from the experience and relate the experience to other or future experiences in their lives. Through the experiential learning process, young people develop basic, transferable skills useful in real life experiences today and in the future.

Through experiential learning, youth learn skills for living. Life skills may be categorized as three types:

- **competency - developing skills and knowledge**
  - strengthening and using decision-making skills
  - communicating with and relating to other people

- **coping - responding to life situations**
  - developing a positive self-concept
  - establishing priorities consistent with one's values

- **contributory - sharing with others**
  - developing leadership skills
  - responding to the needs of others and of the community

These life skills enable youth to become self-directing and productive, to lead satisfying lives, to contribute to society, and to function effectively in a changing world.

Of primary importance in this learn-by-doing approach, is the 4-H project. The project is a set of activities centered around a specific subject. Each member or group selects one or more projects according to interest and ability. Each project requires the member or group to establish goals, work toward those goals, and evaluate the progress made.

**What's more important - the 4-H project or the 4-H boy and girl?**

The 4-H member, of course! 4-H is a people program. Its objective is to assist in the development of boys and girls. Projects are tools for teaching youngsters by stimulating their interest. A commonly stated example of the 4-H philosophy is, “A blue ribbon 4-H’er with a red ribbon project is better than a red ribbon 4-H’er with a blue ribbon project.”

**What is the 4-H leader’s job?**

- **To help youth develop skills from their experiences in club groups, leadership activities, and projects.** Youngsters remember better if they actually experience something and have an opportunity for some “hands-on learning.” 4-H encourages skills that will be useful to the youngster now and in the future. 4-H helps each member develop good habits, experiment with new and challenging ideas, and practice problem-solving skills.

- **To teach 4-H members how to think, not what to think.** 4-H helps develop creative thinking in young people by giving them a chance to make decisions on their own. They’ll learn by making their own choices.
To recognize and encourage 4-H members so they feel noticed and important. The most significant recognition that can be given to members is praise, attention, or compliments letting them know they are important and what they have done is worthwhile. For some, 4-H may be the only place they get this support.

This is what 4-H is all about - the personal development of boys and girls.

Welcome to the world of 4-H!

How can I use the information in this letter?

1. New ideas to use in our club:

2. Other people who could help us and how they might help:

3. Questions to ask University of Illinois Extension staff and other leaders:

Your Unit Staff of University of Illinois Extension
