I pledge —

My Head to clearer thinking,
My Heart to greater loyalty,
My Hands to larger service, and
My Health to better living,
For my club, my community, my
country, and my world.

Did You Know...?

• 4-H clubs grew out of “Boys’ and Girls’ Corn Clubs” that taught young people how to successfully grow corn in the early 1900’s?
• The original 4-H Clover only had three leaves for the 3 H’s of Head, Heart, and Hands?
• The four leaf clover became the symbol for 4-H in 1912 and added the fourth H of Health?
• The name 4-H wasn’t used until 1924 to describe the work boys and girls were accomplishing in their projects — corn, canning, poultry, pigs, and cotton?
• The Extension Service was formed in 1914 to teach practical and useful information on agriculture and home economics?
• The early educators for the Extension Service learned that the best way to teach men and women was to work with their children?
• The first official 4-H club in Illinois was the Union Pig Club in Palmyra, Macoupin County in 1915?
• The 4-H Clover is one of the most recognized symbols in the world?
• Today, Illinois 4-H reaches young people from Chicago and its suburbs to Cairo? And from Jacksonville in the west to Danville in the east?

What is 4-H?

4-H makes learning fun! In 4-H clubs young people work with other youth and adult volunteers to learn new skills, practice being a leader, give back to their community, and make new friends. They learn about topics that interest them through hands-on activities. We believe in learning by doing.

4-H members select one or more topics to learn about during the year. That includes everything from learning how to cook, build a robot, or care for the environment. These topics are referred to as members’ “projects.” Hundreds of projects are offered through 4-H so members can pick the ones that most interest them. Or they can find other young people with the same interest and study that topic with the help of a volunteer that shares the same interests.

To learn about the wide variety of projects offered in 4-H, ask your 4-H staff for a copy of The Illinois Clover. You will find details about projects, other activities such as 4-H camp, fairs, leadership programs, some special events and activities, and the 4-H awards and recognition program. There is also a section just for volunteers and leaders that lists the support and resources provided for your volunteer role.

How Do Young People Join 4-H?

Joining 4-H is easy. A friend might invite a young person to join his/her club. Often young people join 4-H because they hear about the fun activities the clubs are doing. As a volunteer, you can find out what opportunities are available near you by contacting your local Extension office. There are several options to choose from.

Community Clubs — meet year round and offer a variety of learning and social activities. Volunteers and members work together to plan club activities and business meetings. Project work and social time should be included in the planning.

SPIN Clubs — help youth explore the special interests that you share with them. SPIN (special interest) clubs usually meet for about...
six weeks. This allows volunteers to make short-term commitments which may better suit their schedules.

After-school or School Clubs — meet after-school or in a school setting. Check with your local school about hosting a 4-H club.

Cloverbud Groups — are for younger children ages 5–7. During club meetings they work on projects as a group.

Activities and Events — volunteers are always needed for club, county, and state 4-H activities and events. These are short-term volunteer roles, but they are very important to our program. Some examples of short-term volunteers include project judges, chaperones, team coaches, or workshop teachers.

How Are Families Involved in 4-H?

4-H is a family friendly program. Members’ parents and siblings are invited to participate in 4-H learning activities when possible. We can always use extra help during community service projects, when showing or exhibiting projects, planning for club or county events, or just making 4-H fun for everyone.

Why Join 4-H?

4-H is a positive youth development program. It helps young people develop skills, knowledge, and character that they will use the rest of their lives. That doesn’t happen without support from volunteers. 4-H wants each member to experience:

Belonging — a place where s/he feels safe and accepted and has support from a caring adult

Independence — the ability to make decisions

Generosity — the opportunity to give service to others

Mastery — the confidence to learn knowledge and practice new skills

What is Experiential Learning?

In 4-H, we practice learning by doing. In other words, young people learn through experience. During your 4-H club meetings, you will provide learning activities. But learning doesn’t stop with the activity. The next step is to have the young people to think about what they did and what they learned — reflect on the activity. The last step of the learning process is thinking about how they can apply what they have learned to life at home or school, with friends or family, and possibly for a future career.

Those three steps — DO the activity, REFLECT on what they did and learned, and APPLY what they learned — make up the Experiential Learning Process.

Young people should also use this process when they are doing 4-H project work. It’s not enough to simply do a project. Encourage them to reflect on what they did, what they learned, and how they can use that in the future.

What Else Will Young People Learn?

When young people participate in 4-H, they learn:

• How to get along with others and make new friends
• To be comfortable with people they may not know well
• Accept responsibility
• Respect and trust others
• Settle conflict with others
• Understand their strengths and weaknesses
• Communicate clearly their thoughts and ideas
• Plan activities
• Work with others to accomplish a task
• Set goals and make plans to reach them
• To be a team player
• To be a leader
• Make good decisions

How Can I Find Out More?

Visit the Illinois 4-H website at 4-H.illinois.edu for more information on projects, special events and activities, and leadership opportunities. There is a section filled with resources for 4-H volunteers. The Illinois 4-H Clover: A Guide to the Illinois 4-H Program provides an overview of 4-H events, projects, project resources, awards and recognition, and volunteer resources.

How Do I Get Started?

Contact your local Extension office and arrange a time to meet with the youth development educator. When you decide to volunteer, you must complete an application, give permission for a background check, and provide names and contact information for references.

Once this screening process is complete and approved, you will complete a series of training opportunities based on your specific needs. Much of this can be done online at your convenience. Topics include the University of Illinois child protection policies, ages and stages of youth development, BIG-M, planning club meetings, and keeping everyone safe. Our #1 priority when working with young people is safety.

After you complete training, you’re ready to plan your club meetings and recruit young people. Now the fun really begins!