LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Building Family Strengths is a family 4-H project. All members of the family participate, and you can do the project in your own home. For this project, we use the Family Service Association's definition of a family:

A family consists of two or more people, whether living together or apart, related by blood, marriage, adoption, or commitment to care for one another.

—Family Service America, Inc., 1993

In today's world then, a "parent" could be a grandmother, an aunt, or a family friend. Home could be a million-dollar house or a room in a shelter. The important thing is that it is your family and your home.

Research shows that strong families share certain characteristics. Building Family Strengths will help you develop those characteristics. Each chapter has several group activities that will strengthen your family as you work on them together. Choose the ones you would like to complete. Make changes as you need to and bring your own lives and situations to the activities. Some are better for young children, and some are better for older family members. Don't be afraid to change or adjust the activities to meet the needs of your family.

Each activity is designed to help you learn an important life skill. Life skills are basic skills that every person will need to use all through life. Some examples of life skills you'll learn are problem solving, planning, and communicating with others. The life skill you'll learn in each activity is listed at the beginning of the activity.

Building Family Strengths uses the experiential learning model. Experiential learning simply means learning by doing. It's a five-step process:

- Participate in an activity.
- Talk about what happened.
- Decide what you learned from what you did.
- Talk about ways to use what you learned.
- Decide how you can apply this skill to other situations.

Every doctor recommends a physical before a patient begins to work out. Would you like to know how healthy your family is before you begin this project? Try one or two of these activities to give you an idea of what your family's strengths are right now before you start.