

4-H clubs help foster a thirst for learning, science

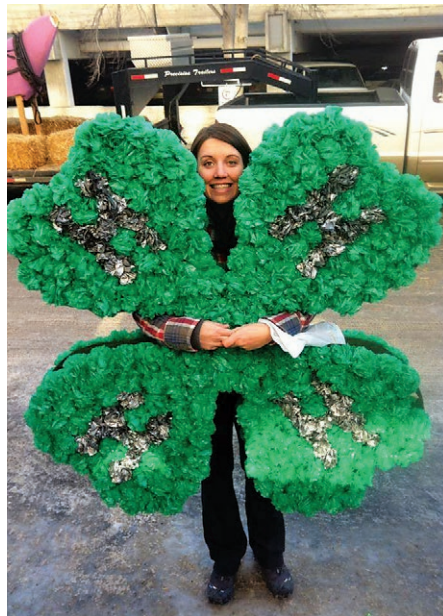
“I pledge my HEAD to clearer thinking, my HEART to greater loyalty, my HANDS to larger service, and my HEALTH to better living, for my club, my community, my country, and my world.” That is the pledge that 25,000 young people across Canada take when they join the world of 4-H.

By Sheri Monk

It's a rite of rural passage, a tradition and a hobby. But for many kids, their involvement in 4-H leads to a career in agricultural science.

“4-H offers a lot in the way of career exploration. We have one program, Careers on the Grow, designed entirely to expose youth to careers in the agriculture sector as well as related sectors such as science and technology and the environment and healthy living. This program includes a job matching platform, internship opportunities, mentorship and resources to support career development,” said Erin Smith, program director for 4-H Canada. “Many of our other programs also allow members to build networks, develop leadership skills and explore and learn about emerging career paths, information about labour gaps and trends in various sectors, including agri-business and agri-food.”

Hilary Baker grew up in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta and joined 4-H when she was 11 years old. She joined a variety of clubs, mostly centered around her passion for horses and riding. She attended the University of Alberta, achieving a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, and she was part of the University of Alberta Collegiate 4-H.



Hilary is dressed in her 4-H costume best at an agriculture club fundraiser for STARS Air Ambulance.

“My university faculty was Agriculture, Life, and Environmental Sciences which was an incredibly supportive faculty with some amazing clubs, one of which was Collegiate 4-H. I was lucky to connect with 4-H members from all around Canada, continue to work with 4-H youth, develop my leadership skills and take part in some great conferences,” Baker said.

Now working as an area rangeland management specialist with the Alberta government and living next to the Rocky Mountains, she is able to reflect on how much her involvement with 4-H shaped her life.

“For anyone considering putting their children in 4-H, I would confidently say that you should unconditionally support them. There are some incredible clubs and projects and the sky is the limit. It is an excellent way to educate and connect youth to agriculture, science and life skills. There are even some really awesome urban bumblebee and gardening projects,” she said. “I am thankful for the skills and connections which 4-H gave me throughout my years of involvement because I think I have the best job in the world.”

Smith would not be surprised by Baker's story, but she would be proud of it.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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“Through our positive youth development formula and experiential learning approach, we do our best to ensure that all of our programming is relevant, engaging and appealing to our members. Generation Z is globally minded, collaborative, entrepreneurial, tech savvy and savvy in general. These factors all come into the mix when designing and delivering programming for youth.”

Alyssa Barbero was raised on a ranch in southwest Alberta, near a tiny town called Beaver Mines. In an area where people from all over Canada, and even the world, come to play, she learned the beef business, joining 4-H at age nine and sticking with it until she was 17.

The ripple effect for young people is that rural communities can be vibrant, innovative places worth investing time in and maybe even worth staying in. ~ Erin Smith

“I joined the new Rocky Mountain 4-H Swine Club in 2007. This club was brought up and organized by my mom, dad and other family members. I began to fall in love with pigs,” she said.

Anyone with even a passing introduction to 4-H is usually aware of the public speaking portion of the club, and it is

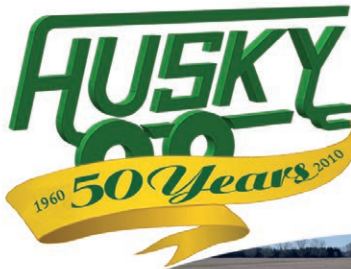


Having been raised on a beef ranch, Alyssa's 4-H experience helped her appreciate the swine industry.

no secret that according to research, many people fear public speaking more than they fear death. Most 4-H kids get over that throughout their participation in the program.

“I loved the community aspect of 4-H and being involved with new people. Public speaking assisted in meeting these new people and communicating with them without being timid,” said Barbero.

In the fall, Barbero will finish her Ecosystem Management Bachelor of Applied Science degree and she currently

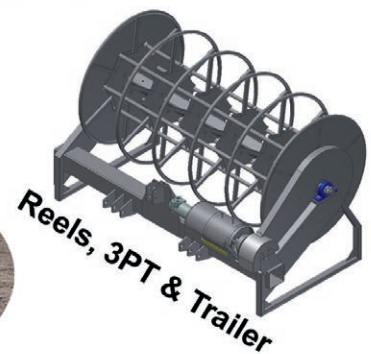


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works as a conservation technician with the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

“We hear over and over through our evaluation and in testimonials from youth members, that they have a sense of belonging through 4-H and within their rural communities. There is a strong sense of pride among 4-H’ers, and I think that means for their achievements and growth through 4-H, but also their contributions and connection to their communities,” Smith said.

Jillanna Hammond is from the Pincher Creek, Alberta area, and graduated from Grade 12 in June. While she hasn’t chosen to go into an agricultural field – she’s taking sociology at the University of Lethbridge – she says 4-H was instrumental in helping her become the person she is today.

“It’s a good way to break out of your comfort zone. It teaches you responsibility and commitment. It’s a really good way to get kids into the real world before they’re actually in the real world and it develops those skills and experiences at a young age,” she said.



Alyssa now works as a conservation technician with the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

In a world that draws most young people to large, urban centres, programs that help develop skills and opportunities in agriculture are extremely unique and valuable.

“4-H offers a network of support for rural youth, but it also opens doors and exposes youth to different ways of looking at agriculture or rural Canada. They begin to see that agriculture is also about science, innovation, a healthy planet, technology, communication, etc. The ripple effect for young people is that rural communities can be vibrant, innovative places worth investing time in and maybe even worth staying in. 4-H allows them to make that investment through community engagement, volunteerism and youth-adult partnerships (and) that creates concrete positive change and that matters a lot to Generation Z,” Smith said.

For more information on 4-H in Canada, visit www.4-h-canada.ca. ■



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