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**Citizenship Washington Focus teaches leadership, citizenship, responsibility**

4-H members participate in a week-long educational event in Washington D.C.

*By Annika Wiebers, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – At a time when many are concerned for the future of our country, it may be comforting to know that youth are being prepared to be future leaders.

The National 4-H Council recently hosted Citizenship Washington Focus, an event that teaches youth about leadership, citizenship, the legislative process and our country’s history. CWF is held for several weeks each summer, though each state typically sends a group for just under a week.

“The National 4-H CWF program is a unique and long running experience for 4-H.” said Daniel Skucius, a Pottawatomie county 4-H youth development agent and a first-time chaperone for Kansas’ group this year. “The program brings 4-H youth delegations from across the country together through the summer for five days. The programs consist of experiential learning in leadership and citizenship while experiencing Washington D.C.”

Through this trip, students learn not only about government and leadership, but for many, it’s their first opportunity to be independent and learn responsibility.

“I think it was valuable (for Kansas 4-H members) from the broad spectrum of experiences that they got in such a short time, and the responsibility that was entrusted to them,” Skucius said. “Never before have most of them had the experience of being ‘on their own’ for 10 days, entrusted to making decisions as young leaders.”

Riley County 4-Her Morgan Disberger said she “initially decided I wanted to go on CWF because I thought it would be a super cool experience to get to see DC, and it was. I loved getting to see all the monuments and memorials, and learning about the different aspects of them was so cool.

However, one of her favorite things, she said, wasn’t even in the nation’s Capitol. “It was a stop we made on the way there. Gettysburg really fascinated me. Being able to walk and see where the Battle of Gettysburg happened was so cool and it gives you a whole new perspective.”
“I was pretty nervous before the trip because I didn’t know anyone that was going, but by the end I had made several really good friends. For me, it was a little hard being gone for 10 days, but once I started making friends the time started flying by faster.”

While the kids were having fun and learning, Skucius said it was also satisfying for the adults watching youth gain new experiences.

“I’ll always remember how impactful the Holocaust museum was to our youth,” he said. “I appreciated their ability to really take in such an important but emotionally taxing museum as they strived to comprehend all the information and historical pieces within. The museum was truly impactful and you could tell it moved many.”

The purpose of the trip, however, isn’t only for the youth to have fun and pick up some D.C. trivia, Skucius said. The goal is for them to return with the skills and confidence they need to become future leaders.

“Simply gaining a first-person lesson in citizenship, leadership, and democracy in such an important place will help them so much going forward,” Skucius said. “I think having such an experience in D.C. will help them be more skilled in and focused on these life skills going forward.”

More information on opportunities available through Kansas 4-H is available at local extension offices in Kansas.

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