For the love of leadership

Kansas 4-H Youth Leadership Council inspires youth of all ages

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

MANHATTAN, Kan. – When most folks think about 4-H, the ideas that typically come to mind are projects and leadership.

Leadership for life is an important value for the Kansas 4-H program, which offers many opportunities for youth to grow in those skills. One of these opportunities is the Kansas State 4-H Youth Leadership Council.

“The first time I heard about 4-H Youth Council was the first time I attended a state event (the Kansas Youth Leadership Forum),” said Chanae Parker, a 3-year council member from Manhattan. “I saw (Council members’) dedication to 4-H and the difference they were able to make and was inspired. I wanted to be able to give back to the organization that challenged and shaped me into the individual I was then. So, I ran for (election to) Youth Council.”

Youth Council members include many of the highest performing 4-Hers in the state, but they don’t reach that level right away.

“I started 4-H as a Cloverbud at five years old,” Parker said. “Prior to Council, I was heavily involved in my club and my county. I had served every office in my 4-H club and been an officer for our county 4-H Council. I was a county 4-H Ambassador and had attended state and regional events like Kansas Youth Leadership Forum, the Northeast Leadership Event, and Citizenship in Action. When I decided to run for Council, I spent months refining my application, developing my speech, and practicing interviewing.”

Once she was elected, Parker said the real work of being on Council begins.

“Council not only hosts events for Kansas 4-H, but provides opportunities for youth to develop into effective leaders, citizens, and servants in their communities,” she said. “This is what 4-H is all about and Council is a key piece in the growth and development of our future leaders.”
Parker noted that serving as chair of the Kansas Youth Leadership Forum planning committee “was one of the most challenging and impactful things I’ve done on Council.”

“It took months of planning and taught me a lot about leadership. As a committee, we worked extremely hard to host the best event we could, and I am so proud to say that it was a success. All of the work behind the scenes was worth it because I know we were able to make a difference for Kansas 4-Hers and inspire them to make a difference in their clubs and their communities.”

Beyond planning events, Council members serve as mentors -- inspiring and encouraging the next generation of leaders.

“As a younger 4-Her, I admired the 4-H Youth Council members for the work that they did,” Parker said. “They had already attended the events, they had learned and grown in 4-H and so easily could have decided to step out. But they didn’t. Council isn’t about growing individually; it’s about the impact you are able to make on others because of the meaningful events and work you are able to do.”

“The ability to give back to 4-H and shape the organization for others is truly inspiring to me, and the heart of what I do on Council. One of my favorite parts about state events is watching delegates take home what they learned to share with others in their counties.”

Parker said being a member of the 4-H Youth Council involves significant responsibilities and hours of hard work, but the members attest to their growth in leadership, communication and organization skills.

She said: “Serving on Youth Council has made me the person I am today. It has instilled in me a passion for giving back and working for others. I’m truly grateful for the challenges and tribulations that I have encountered and how they have enabled me to grow. I cannot wait to see what the next generation of leaders can do for this organization.”

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

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas 4-H youth development, www.kansas4-h.org
K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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