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Kansas 4-H official praises impact of volunteers in the state

National Volunteer Week is April 20-26

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – A Kansas 4-H official is praising the work of volunteers across the state, indicating that their contribution to the state's largest youth leadership program is vital to the development of many Kansas kids.

Sarah Maass, director of the [Kansas 4-H program](#), said there were approximately 4,196 adult volunteers who helped with various 4-H activities during the most recently completed program year.

"Volunteers play a crucial role in program delivery and advocacy of our extension and 4-H programs," Maass said. "Our organization would not be where it is today without the work and support of our volunteer base."

Maass cited a previous study reporting that volunteers donate an average nine hours per month, which translates to 37,764 volunteers hours in Kansas.

According to Independent Sector – a coalition of nonprofits, foundations and corporate giving programs – the value of one volunteer hour in the United States is \$33.49. Doing the math, the contribution of volunteers to the Kansas 4-H program during the past program year topped \$1.26 million.

Recognizing that impact, the Kansas 4-H program is joining in National Volunteer Week, a national celebration for non-profit groups set for April 20-26 to recognize the contributions of those who donate their time to worthy causes.

"Volunteers are the glue of 4-H," said Ainsley Viet, a former Crawford County 4-Her now attending Kansas State University.

Chandra Plate, the 4-H Youth Development specialist for K-State's Northwest Research-Extension Center in Colby, said Viet is "a shining example of how 4-H grows its own volunteers."

"I joined 4-H when I was 7," Viet said. "Within my club, I served various officer positions, which helped me learn to work with my peers and get out of my shell a little. I also served as a member of our county's junior leaders and 4-H Council programs, which helped me see the 'Big Picture' of 4-H."

Viet is currently a volunteer chair of the State 4-H Geology committee and a representative of the natural resources project partnership team.

Richard Becker of Manhattan became a 4-H volunteer in 2005 when his children enrolled in the program. Since then, he has become a Level II certified rifle and pistol instructor, helping to train other instructors in the 4-H Shooting Sports program.

"4-H promotes positive youth development, no matter the activity," Becker said. "I can't think of a greater cause than to invest in our youth, who will be tomorrow's leaders. There are so many friendships to be made locally, at the state level and even nationally."

Becker remembers a time when he had the opportunity to work with a hearing-impaired youth who wanted to participate in shooting sports.

"It was rewarding to devise a way that would allow this individual to participate in shooting sports in a safe manner that did not distract other youth on the firing line," he said.

The solution included red (cease-fire) and green (live-fire) lights: "He was able to participate not only in practice, but also attend matches in other areas across the state," Becker said.

Jaryth Barten, currently the program leader and a professional speaker with the Kansas Leadership Center, first enrolled in 4-H when he was seven years old. He's currently an advisor to the Kansas 4-H Youth Leadership Council, vice president of the Dickinson County 4-H Foundation, and member of the Sedgwick County 4-H program development committee.

"As a 4-H volunteer," he said, "I appreciate the opportunity to give back to a program that gave so much to me. My favorite moments are with the youth that I have the opportunity to work with for multiple years as I watch them develop from quiet observers to confident leaders."

Viets added: "I love seeing kids light up when they have that 'aha' moment. There is something so special about seeing their growth as they find the things they love. It wasn't too long ago when I was that kid, and I remember the impact 4-H volunteers had on me. I hope to provide that same impact for today's 4-Hers."

Information on how to volunteer for Kansas 4-H is available at [local extension offices in Kansas](#), or by contacting the state 4-H office at 785-532-5800.

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