Kansas 4-H officials estimate $20.8M impact of volunteers in the state

National Volunteer Week is set for April 16-22

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

MANHATTAN, Kan. – The numbers are staggering.

In 2022, the Kansas 4-H office reported a five-year average of 6,442 volunteers that have supported its youth programs, providing expert guidance on such projects as sewing, shooting sports, livestock, rocketry and nearly three dozen other pursuits.

Sarah Maass, director of the Kansas 4-H program, cited a study reporting that volunteers donate an average nine hours per month, or an estimated 695,736 hours annually to Kansas' largest youth development program.

Also in 2022, Independent Sector – a coalition of nonprofits, foundations and corporate giving programs – released findings indicating that the value of one volunteer hour in the United States is $29.95

Doing the math, the annual contribution of volunteers to the Kansas 4-H program tops $20.8 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 16-22 to recognize the contributions of those who donate their time to worthy causes.

“Volunteers have a passion to bring their time and knowledge to 4-H youth,” said Bob Harlan, a retired engineer for the Landoll Corporation in Marysville, now living in Manhattan.

Statistics don’t always bear out the passion of volunteers like Harlan, who began as a project leader in the Hanover 4-H Club when his daughter wanted to participate in the photography project.
“Three or four years later, I was asked to be a countywide project leader,” he said. “My wife, Annette, was co-leader with me and we continued that until 2013. When the River Valley District was formed (in northcentral Kansas), all in that district were invited to our project meetings. In 1989, I joined the photography action team and am still a member of that team today.”

Ray Bartholomew of Hutchinson is the Reno County 4-H shooting sports coordinator and has been the countywide project club leader for 27 years.

“I have a passion for working with youth and providing the basics of safety and fundamentals of the shooting sports disciplines,” said Bartholomew, who worked for the USDA Farm Service Agency for 38 years prior to retirement.

Bartholomew said he has obtained national Level II certification in archery and coordinator, and state Level I certification in archery, coordinator, hunting skills, pistol, rifle and western heritage/cowboy action. “Prior to 4-H certification training,” he said, “I had limited background, particularly as it relates to competitive shooting events.”

Bartholomew estimates he has volunteered more than 1,500 hours per year to Kansas 4-H...for 23 years.

Harlan’s interest in photography was self-taught; he was asked to take pictures for advertising as part of his job. As he became involved in volunteering for 4-H, “I expanded my knowledge of photography to stay ahead of the youth.”

“Now,” he adds, “photography is one of my main hobbies.”

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.

Maass lauded Kansas’ volunteers, noting they “add a tremendous amount of public value to our programs and the other organizations they serve.”

“From my perspective, the 4-H program’s success is centered around being able to recruit and retain qualified adult volunteers,” Bartholomew said. “With the vast variety of projects, no one 4-H agent would be expected to have the skill set nor the time to provide instruction and guidance for all projects.”

“Volunteers are key to expanding the impact of 4-H in the community.”

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas 4-H, https://www.kansas4-h.org

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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