

Youth development programs offer tremendous opportunities
Lauren Healey, 4-H Youth Development Agent

During October 3-10, people all across the state of Georgia and the United States are celebrating National 4-H Week. Oconee County is no exception.

The 4-H program offers a variety of benefits to its participants, opportunities in leadership, service learning, and mastery of public speaking to name a few. These activities are not only important as youth grow and mature, but they are also skills that will positively influence your children for their entire lives.

Engaging in social activities, like a local youth development program, is one way to encourage positive social values and behavior. Social Activities provide children with the opportunity to be part of a group, to accept leadership roles, to engage in age-appropriate activities, and also to develop healthy relationships with other children and caring adults.

Research shows that youth who participate in social activities are more likely to earn better grades, set higher goals for themselves, attend school more regularly, and overall have a more positive self-image. Furthermore, time spent in extracurricular social activities decreases the opportunities for youth to get involved in problem behaviors such as substance abuse and delinquency.

In order for youth to develop responsibility and independence, they need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision making and action. In other words, they need to be provided with leadership opportunities and the Oconee County 4-H Club strives to meet that need in many ways. Our youth leadership activities include serving as a club officer, attending 4-H camp at Rock Eagle, helping with afterschool activities, and teaching summer classes.

Community service is very important to positive youth development. Giving to others fosters a sense of community and belonging while simultaneously increasing self-esteem. Some community service projects in our county this past year involved collecting money for animals affected by the gulf oil spill, donating pop tops for Ronald McDonald House Charities, road clean up, cooking meals for local foster families, painting butterflies for Butterfly Dream Farms, sending items to troops overseas, and raising money to help with Duchennes Muscular Dystrophy.

As the nation is celebrating 4-H this week, think about how you can get involved. Whether you are a student, parent or volunteer, we would love for you to join us!

For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.