



4-H Thriving Model in Action

Turning Sparks into Leadership Opportunities



Situation: In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the way youth could connect with each other due to limited in-person contact. Traditional youth leadership opportunities were not feasible, prompting organizations like 4-H to innovate. The Dane County 4-H Educator and volunteers recognized the importance of connection and leadership, and committed to develop opportunities for youth to learn and lead during this challenging time. Connecting youth to meaningful experiences related to their interests was crucial to maintain engagement and foster leadership.

Response: To keep youth connected and provide leadership opportunities during the pandemic, the Dane County 4-H Program Educator and volunteers offered continuing education virtually. They recruited youth interested in various project areas, helped them locate curriculum, and assisted in building presentations in a Zoom format. Three youth from different 4-H clubs, sharing a common interest in poultry, bonded as virtual presenters and were affectionately called, The Poultry Posse. Over the next four years, they connected virtually and in person at educational events, fairs, and animal shows, gaining confidence and camaraderie. The 4-H Program Educator regularly engaged with these youth, identifying other sparks and inviting them to volunteer in additional leadership roles.

Results: Introducing youth to leadership opportunities connected to their personal interests (sparks) helped them build relationships, engage meaningfully, and feel a sense of belonging, aligning with the 4-H Thriving Model. As their confidence grew, the 4-H Educator invited them to take on deeper leadership roles, such as leading sessions at other local 4-H events, acting as Dane County 4-H camp counselors, representing youth on the Dane County 4-H Leaders Board, and presenting at the statewide Summer Academy. Youth members in 4-H benefited from having role models their own age, encouraging them to become leaders themselves. This increased Dane County 4-H youth engagement and leadership in education presentations.



These youth became confident in their presentation and leadership skills, volunteering to lead multiple sessions. They showed interest in organizing other events and created connections to further leadership opportunities. This evidence demonstrates the positive impact of inviting youth to lead, encouraging growth, and maximizing their strengths. Consistent with the 4-H Thriving Model, these youth showed evidence of thriving and developmental outcomes with openness to challenge & discovery, positive emotions, contribution, and connection with others.

Feedback from The Poultry Posse members:

“These leadership opportunities have helped me build confidence in so many ways from being able to stand in front of a room telling them about my poultry experience and knowledge to standing in front of a board of judges or classroom full of my peers.”

~ Christina

“I have grown so much through 4-H, specifically through poultry. The opportunities have allowed me to expand my horizons and take leadership in many capacities. Opportunities like this have not only grown me as a leader, but also mentally as a human.”

~ Makenzie

“Leadership in the poultry project helped me meet other chicken enthusiasts and acted as a stepping stone for me into other 4-H leadership activities. Leadership in 4-H has given me the opportunity to improve my public speaking, do interesting veterinary science research, foster youth interest in 4-H, help new families get into chicken keeping and showing, and share my love of chickens and science with other 4-H members.”

~ Clarity

