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Finding Normal Through 4-H

The following column was written by Frontenac Jr. High School student Harper Davis. A photo release has been filed with the Wildcat District to distribute the attached photo:

The year 2020 has been unlike every year before it. The world has struggled with the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people have lost their lives, families have lost love ones, and communities have changed. Adults struggle with the “reality” of the world today, and everyday seems to present a new problem. Adults are not the only ones struggling in this time. Adolescents are struggling too and looking to those around them to find something “normal.” I recently sat down with several members of my 4-H club to examine their struggles during a pandemic, and why 4-H and the Bone Creek 4-H club were important to them during this time.

In March 2020, Kansas Schools were closed, community activities were cancelled, and to many, the world seemed to stop moving. Adolescents and adults alike were confined to their homes to stop the spread of the virus. Both young and old became accustomed to virtual meetings, classrooms, and gatherings. Those participating in 4-H were no different. Regular monthly, in person, meetings were cancelled, project meetings were postponed, clinics and camps cancelled, and the highlight of the 4-H year, the fairs, were facing possible cancellation.

Corey Humble, Girard High School Student & President of the Bone Creek 4-H Club, said “Frustration was overwhelming. We were unable to participate in some of our favorite activities that drive us. “

“I was really deeply sad, and very scared,” said Gavin Huber, of Girard. The consensus of those that I spoke to was that after schools were closed and Crawford County went into “lock down,” they were frustrated, scared, bored, and missed the world outside their homes.

4-H gave everyone that I spoke to the opportunities, even in lock down, to feel safe, accomplished, and motivated. The club felt it important to bring the kids together. Leaders and officers of the club worked diligently to make the meetings virtual. The Bone Creek 4-H club didn’t miss a meeting. While they were unable to participate in-person, the meetings were conducted in a virtual format. Youth still presented project talks & demonstrations, which were posted on the club Facebook account so others could watch and learn from their peers.

Bone Creek is a member of the K-State Research and Extension Wildcat District. The district includes all clubs in Crawford, Labette, Montgomery, and Wilson Counties. At a district level, virtual Tuesday meetings were held. Contests, webinars, virtual camps, and project meetings were implemented virtually. Wildcat District Agents worked diligently to ensure a fair would happen at some level. These activities, meetings, and the idea of a fair gave the youth something to look forward to. Allison Huber, of Girard, said that having 4-H during that time, “took my mind off the things around me I could not control. I had other things to do, and I didn’t have time to sit and worry.”

Members of my 4-H club work throughout the year to complete their projects. In the months of April, May, and June, it still had not been determined if they would be allowed to exhibit those projects at the Fair. This did not detour members of the club. They dedicated themselves to completing their projects. Many spent time crafting, cooking, or working with their livestock.

“It gave me the chance to get out of the house. It made me happy. Everyday I walked and trained my livestock. It finally gave me something to do,” said Gavin Jackman, of Girard.

Club President Humble said that during the lock-down it was important to him that 4-H continue in some facet as to not “cheat the younger members of the club of the memorable experiences that 4-H provides to youth.”

In July, it was announced that, while some things would look different, the Crawford County Fair would proceed. Bone Creek Club members participated in fair clean-ups, the Pre-Fair Barbeque, and had their Club Tour. The tour was different this year, but still allowed every member of the club the opportunity to show off all their hard work in preparation for the fair.

“I missed my friends, and it was nice to see them again,” said Caleb Humble, of Girard. “It was really nice to finally have something to look forward to,” added Gavin Huber.

The fair came and went, and most members of the Bone Creek 4-H club participated and excelled. As in years past, many members were selected as Grand or Reserve Champions in their individual projects. The club had a very productive and award-winning fair.

Marlee Bradshaw, of Pittsburg, added a very eloquent perspective in one word; “Normal. We finally had one thing that was normal. It was different from past years, but it felt normal.”

As the 4-H year program year ended, it was easy to see that 4-H provided these youth a much-needed outlet, in a year of the unknown. It gave them the opportunity to connect with other youth, set goals and achieve them, and it gave them motivation and determination to continue. Just having one “normal” occasion drove the youth to push themselves and others around them.

The new 4-H year will start on October 1st. While it may continue to be different, it will continue to happen. If you are a youth ages 7 to 18, an adult who wants to volunteer, or a parent who has a child that needs an “outlet,” you can receive more information on 4-H, join a club, or enroll in the 2020-2021 4-H year by visiting the Wildcat District online at the following location: www.wildcatdistrict.k-state.edu/4-h/index.html. Members of the club encourage you explore the opportunities 4-H can offer. The year 2020 exhibited to them that 4-H is far more than projects,

livestock, and camps. 4-H provides an outlet to youth. It teaches leadership, service, and commitment. When the world appears to stop spinning and your life as you know it stops, 4-H can make you feel “normal” again.

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