

Inclusive 4-H

Expanding Inclusive Opportunities for Youth and Volunteers



What a disability is ... and isn't

A disability is ...

... a limitation of a person's ability to perform certain life skills.

A disability is not ...

... something you can catch.

A disability is ...

... a condition that may require adapting an activity to the person's ability.

A disability is not ...

... a reason to expect a person to be helpless.

A disability is ...

... a reason to have clear, concise rules for behavior.

A disability is not ...

... an excuse for accepting repeated inappropriate behavior.

A disability is ...

... an opportunity to value individuals for their abilities.

A disability is not ...

... an opportunity to pity a person and avoid social contact.

Today we find a far richer mixture of family backgrounds, ethnic heritages, and physical and mental abilities in our 4-H membership than ever before. This mixture sometimes presents challenges for volunteer leaders and members alike as they learn to function successfully in this larger picture. But what a terrific opportunity we have to blend our talents into positive outcomes.

No one has yet come up with a sure-fire recipe for success in inclusive programming. However, there are some key ingredients in the base of every good mix:

- **Positive attitude** — Begins with the volunteer leader and spreads contagiously to the members.
- **Clear and consistent expectations** — What is okay today will be okay tomorrow, and doing what is not okay will have defined consequences.
- **Everybody counts** — Each individual is a valued member of the group and care is taken to recognize and meet each individual's needs.
- **Adaptation is acceptable** — "That's the way we've always done it" is out. "Let's see how we can do this to make it work" is in.

Once these key ingredients are in place, the programming possibilities are unlimited. In order to offer 4-H experiences and opportunities to everyone and anyone who wants to be involved, we need to do our best to get rid of any obstacles that might keep 4-H from including everyone.

The Best Advice for Inclusion — Treat Every Child Equally

Ron Morley, 4-H volunteer leader in Clare County and assistant superintendent for special education for the Clare Gladwin Regional Educational Service District, offers these quick tips for volunteers who have opportunities to include young people with disabilities in their 4-H club:

- When you plan a meeting make sure it is in a space or location that is accessible to everyone.
- Use your teens. Encourage teen leader pairing so that a child with a disability has someone to work with.
- All projects should involve everyone. The beauty of the project is in the eye of the beholder - the important thing is that everyone gets to complete the project.
- One thing a volunteer or club can do is contact the special education department of the local school district. They can be great resources - they have people trained to work with children with special needs.
- Ask parents about the specific disabilities and needs of a child and offer to accommodate and pay attention to the child's needs.
- Encourage team showmanship. This allows a team to bring their individual strengths to the team's success. It also reduces the emphasis on any team member's individual abilities or disabilities.

Consider Physical Environments When Programming

When working to make 4-H activities accessible, consider the physical environment. Whether you're looking for a meeting site that will accommodate a wheelchair user or planning inclusive activities for your 4-H club or group, keep the following tips in mind:

- Check the accessibility of the building entrances and exits, hallways, rooms, lighting, drinking fountains, safety procedures and other factors.
- Doorways and walkways should be 32 inches to 36 inches wide.
- Ramp slopes should not be greater than 1:12.
- When working around a table, leave a space without a chair to accommodate a person who uses a wheelchair.
- Keep all walkways free of clutter.
- Place all supplies and educational materials within reach and convenient to where 4-H'ers will use them. This way, you and the young people don't have to carry things from place to place.

Everyone Shares the Opportunity to Serve

4-H groups that engage in community service give their members a chance to learn what it's like to help someone else by using their individual abilities. Abilities are found in persons with and without disabilities. Involve 4-H'ers who

have disabilities as active participants in your community service projects. Through participating in community service efforts, all 4-H'ers can develop the very qualities that will prepare them to become good citizens and leaders.

Tips for serving as a sighted guide

When a person who has a visual disability has accepted your offer of help as a sighted guide in unfamiliar surroundings, please keep the following tips in mind:

- The person will grasp your arm just above the elbow with his or her thumb on the outer side and four fingers on the inner side of your arm.
- Walk a half step ahead of the person you're helping.
- When approaching a space that's too narrow for two people to pass through at the same time, move your guiding arm slightly behind you to let the person know you need to continue in single file.
- Describe the environment out loud as you go.
- Give the person specific verbal cues as you approach turns, steps or other changes in the walking surface. Say, for example, "We're going to turn right here" or "We're going to go down two steps now."
- When you're preparing to sit down, place the person's hand on the back of his or her chair and wait for him or her to be seated.
- Enjoy sharing a friendship!

"We have to improve life not just for those who have the most skills and those who know how to manipulate the system. But also for those who often have so much to give but never get the opportunity."

- Dorothy I. Height

Adaptations can be simple, common sense



Think of something you can do easily now that you couldn't do easily the first time you tried it. Do you remember how you gained the ability to perform that task? You practiced, and maybe you modified the task until you could master all the steps.

Individuals with disabilities often need only a few adaptations and modifications to help them successfully complete 4-H activities alongside their peers. Many of those adaptations aren't any more complicated than what you or any other beginner would need to tackle a new task. When you're thinking about how to include members with disabilities in your 4-H programming, a few of the factors you need to consider are the young people's coordination, vision, hearing and attention span. (Here's a hint: Your group will be more successful if you consider these same factors when planning projects with the nondisabled kids in the group, too!)

Break large projects into smaller tasks. If you're modifying an activity for someone who has limited motor skills, you may have to do some pre-cutting or pre-assembly. Make sure the tools your group is using are appropriate for the ages, skill levels and physical abilities of the 4-H'ers. Craft knives, irons, stoves, glue guns and similar tools are not meant to be used by children without adult supervision! Stress that everyone must observe all safety rules.

Keep an eye on the frustration and anxiety levels of your group. Frustration and anxiety are often signs that what you hoped was going to be a challenge is a bit too difficult for the kids. It's okay to take a time out on a project, or to change or discontinue it all together!

Some ideas for modifications include:

- Use puff paint to create designs on fabric instead of needle and thread.
- Punch holes for easier threading, and use shoe-strings or large plastic needles.
- Use adaptive or blunt-tipped scissors.
- Stain or sand your pre-cut

pieces and mark where any nails or screws should be placed.

- Use iron-on materials and do some of the work in advance.
- Measure ingredients or count out the supplies members will need for projects ahead of time and have everything ready to use as needed.
- Place a square of nonskid material (the kind that goes under rugs or lines shelves) under mixing bowls or things that might slide around on the work surface.
- Teach the "measure twice, cut once" rule.
- Have the young people practice sewing techniques on scrap muslin or paper before working on "good" fabric.
- Make cutting lines more pronounced by marking them with a fine-tipped permanent marker or provide strong light for or magnification of the cutting area.
- Watch a how-to video or go through a three-step process:
 1. Model the task for the child.
 2. Work on the task together
 3. Have the child perform the task independently.
- Pair members so that their strengths are complementary.
- Plan for extra setup and cleanup time.
- Arrange appropriate seating for persons who have limited vision or hearing or who need special access.

Make the activity rewarding for everyone who finishes, including those who complete projects before the other participants. Instead of just giving early finishers extra work, or instructing them to help others with their projects, plan extensions or applications that include the

project. There may be an additional step they could tackle, or a way to mount or frame the project. Perhaps they could find a way to make their project part of a community service activity.

"Inclusion is changing the rules of the game so that everyone can play and everyone can win."

– Richard Villa

Constructive evaluation promotes and rewards learning



There has been much controversy over the appropriateness of having individuals with disabilities participate in competitive situations. Competition, however, can be a good learning experience for anyone if the event is planned so that the emphasis is on constructive evaluation of the project being exhibited, rather than on a win/lose philosophy. Positive results can include a sense of achievement, recognition and increased self-esteem.

Setting realistic, individual goals with each member at the beginning of a project and monitoring progress toward those goals is an important step in making evaluation a successful experience. Goals should be challenging enough to encourage growth and learning, but within the abilities of the member.

When planning project evaluations in the club, at the fair, at county achievement days or in other settings, emphasize helping the young person learn and grow, rather than simply ranking projects. The following considerations can

help make evaluation experiences helpful for members who do and members who don't have disabilities.

- Arrange to have members present whenever possible when their projects are evaluated.
- Encourage members to talk about what they learned while completing the project.
- Discuss the evaluation process with members before they participate in it. A practice evaluation that simulates the official event can help settle the nerves and answer the questions of participants, especially first-timers.
- Inform the people who will be doing the evaluating of the project goals and standards.
- Encourage evaluators to help members identify the strong points of their projects as well as the areas that need improvement.
- Provide some form of participation recognition for all members.

Simulations increase appreciation for others' talents



Nothing helps people appreciate the talents and accomplishments of others as much as trying to do what others not only do routinely, but make look easy in the process. One way to gain some insight into the lives of individuals with disabilities is to assume a disability and see how having that disability changes how you perform routine tasks.

Many of the nondisabled teens who participate in disability simulations during the “Getting Around and Getting It Done” session at 4-H Exploration Days develop a new appreciation for living with a disability: “You got to learn how people with disabilities cope with life,” one said.

Another 4-H'er commented, “We actually were able to see what it was like to have a disability.”

“I learned that people with disabilities could participate in adventure, too,” said a third.

The purpose of having people participate in disability simulations is to create empathy, not sympathy, and to further the participants' understanding and respect for individual differences and abilities.

Try these simulations with your 4-H'ers. While using a wheelchair, crutches, walker or other mobility aid:

- Exit and re-enter the room or building you're in.
- Get a drink of water.
- Cross a street.
- Join a group sitting at a table for a meal, game or other activity.
- Shop at your favorite store.
- Prepare a snack or a family meal.
- Brush your teeth.

With your dominant hand and arm in a sling or immobilized in a vertical position with no elbow bend, or wearing oversized work gloves or hot mitts on one or both hands, try the activities listed above, or:

- Set the table for a meal.
- Put on your jacket and snap, button or zip it closed.
- Use a computer.
- Do your homework.
- Sew a button on a shirt.
- Tie your shoes.

Wearing sunglasses that have been covered with opaque tape to allow low (with a small hole in the center or the center covered to simulate peripheral vision) or no vision in one or both eyes, try any of the activities listed above, or:

- Select the clothes you'll wear tomorrow.
- Ask someone to help you find your way to the restroom.
- Introduce yourself to someone you don't know or don't know well.
- Accompany a group of friends to a party, a movie, on a field trip or other outing.

Wearing earplugs or other devices to limit your ability to hear, try any of the activities listed above, or:

- Ask someone for directions to a new location.
- Carry on a conversation with another person who has a hearing impairment.

Wearing a personal stereo with headphones that plays a constant stream of irritating sounds, try any of the activities listed above, or:

- Read an instruction book once and complete the task(s) in it according to the instructions.
- Balance your checkbook.

As you and your 4-H'ers reflect on what you've learned in these activities, it's important to remember that once the exercise was over, you were able to abandon the disability. An individual who actually has a disability lives with its limitations all the time.

Expressive, eloquent language provides another way to communicate



Humans use nonverbal communication so naturally that most of us don't think much about it. People use signs to communicate every day, whether by telling someone to be quiet by putting an index finger to their lips (a gesture) or by expressing disappointment in someone else by giving them "the look" (a facial expression). We often add emphasis to what we're saying by "talking" with our hands, which is a natural way of communicating for Deaf people.

American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual-gestural language. It's the language of the American Deaf community and the fourth most used language in the United States. ASL isn't the same as signing exact English, which is also possible; ASL is a full, complete and eloquent language in itself. In fact, many ASL signs don't translate into spoken English well at all. Actually, some people feel that ASL is more expressive than spoken English.

I've taught sign language at 4-H Exploration Days for almost 10 years. Participants learn and practice basic vocabulary with games and conversation. Kids and adults in the session find that signing is fun and easy to learn. They don't all learn to sign well during the short time that we have, nor do they all continue to study sign language, but many do stay interested in signing and enjoy using their new skills.

ASL is becoming increasingly popular across the nation. It has gained acceptance as a second language course in many schools. ASL interpreters are exposing us to the language as they interpret in schools, churches, at meetings

Signing Tips

- Speak normally as you sign, using good facial expression and body language.
- Sign and speak at the same rate of speed.
- Look directly at the person you're speaking to and maintain eye contact with the person.
- Make your signs about mid-chest level.
- Practice, practice, practice! It will help you gain smoothness, clarity, vocabulary and speed

and important public functions. In addition to conversation, people are discovering ASL as an art form in musical performances and theater productions.

Many Michigan communities offer sign language courses, often through community education programs, community colleges or the intermediate school district. You can also find books and videos on learning to sign at your local library, bookstore or video store.

Author, Carrie Dersham, is a former 4-H'er and a certified teacher of the hearing impaired. She teaches kindergarten at Henry H. North Elementary School in Lansing. Carrie has taught sign language classes through community education programs in Holt and Okemos, and has taught ASL as a foreign language at Everett High School in Lansing.

Get your group off to a colorful start



You can help your 4-H'ers — new, veteran, disabled and nondisabled — get acquainted by having them participate in one or more of these icebreakers. Of course, you and your 4-H'ers may choose to create your own icebreakers, too!

A Colorful Start:

Divide the group into teams of three or four people. Give each team member a different colored marker or a paint brush and one color of paint. Give the team one piece of newsprint or other large paper. Tell the teams they are not allowed to talk while the team members work together to create a drawing or painting. They must find nonverbal ways to communicate.

Grab Bag Stories:

Place squares of different colored construction paper or poster board in a paper bag. Divide the group into two-person teams. Have each team draw one square from the grab bag. Give the teams 5 minutes to think of as many things as possible that are the color of their square and make up a sentence or story using the names of those objects. After the 5 minutes are up, have the teams take turns telling their stories to the group.

Hide and Seek Directions:

Choose a small item such as an eraser or a clover pin to hide. Ask for a volunteer to be the seeker, who leaves the room while the rest of the group decides where in the room to hide the object. When the seeker returns, have the other players take turns giving him or her clues about where the object is. (For example, "Look behind something big" or "Look to the left of the lamp.") When the seeker finds the object, the person who gave the last clue becomes the new seeker.

High Five:

Creating a special handshake is always a fun way to build group unity. Have your group come up with a special secret handshake you can all do together. A series of involved motions performed in a special order is best.

Quick Crafts:

Craft activities such as carving pumpkins, building scarecrows, and making holiday ornaments are good ways to encourage low-key interaction.

We Can Do This:

Break the group into three- to five-person teams. Focus on team problem-solving games that promote teamwork, respect for others, working toward a common goal and leadership.

Wink:

This fun group game requires that you have enough space to arrange a group of chairs into a large circle, facing in. You'll need enough chairs for half of your group members, less one. (If you have an even number of players you'll need to play, too.) Have half the group members sit in a chair (there should be one empty chair). Have the rest of the members stand behind the chairs, one person per chair, including the empty one. The person standing behind the empty chair will wink at one seated person. The person who has been winked at must then try to leave the chair and move to the winker's chair. "Try to leave the chair" because the person standing behind that chair will also be trying to grab the winked-at person's shoulders and keep him or her from moving. If the winked-at person escapes, the person behind the now-empty chair becomes the next winker.

Building confidence and positive attitudes through communication



Everyone who is involved in 4-H – adult and teen volunteers, members, parents, staff and supporters – has the chance to learn, grow and mature.

Inclusive programming isn't difficult, but as a 4-H staff member I find that I often need to diminish the barrier of skepticism, along with assorted physical barriers. My role is critical in helping volunteers develop confidence that they can work with young people who have disabilities.

“Exactly how do I do it?” people ask. I think that's a great question! It indicates that we're halfway there; the attitude is positive that inclusive programming can and will happen!

For us to continue to progress toward an inclusive 4-H program that allows all individuals to realize their full potential, we must take the time to understand the differences that exist among us. Programs such as True Colors, Walk in My Shoes, character education and SPACES allow us to see ourselves and others more clearly.

I don't know everything I could about inclusive programming, and I don't expect volunteers to, either. Together we can problem-solve using research-based MSU Extension materials such as the 4-H Handibox. If I'm still puzzled, and believe we need a more personal approach, I can call Kay O'Daniel, state 4-H coordinator for inclusive programming.

I also build supporting links, and gain access to local resources, by working collaboratively

with many organizations in my community. For additional support and a more in-depth understanding of disabling illnesses or conditions, organizations such as the National Easter Seal Society and the Association for Children With Learning Disabilities are excellent resources. Together both the volunteer and I gain a better understanding of young people with special needs and what we might do as a next step in working with them.

What would I say is the key to unlocking the mysteries of inclusive programming? Communication! It's vital for volunteers to become comfortable expressing their true feelings of frustration, confusion and insecurity – as well as joy and excitement – about their accomplishments along the way.

Young people shouldn't have to leave their differences (physical, mental, learning) at the door when they come to a 4-H meeting or special event. We must all lead by example to recognize, accept and celebrate people for who they are. Each of us, with our unique “packages,” can be a treasured friend; just take a look! After all, everyone has the chance to grow, mature and learn through 4-H!

Author, Jean Proctor is a 4-H program associate III in Cheboygan County and a member of the Michigan 4-H Handicapper Issues Programming Committee. She has been involved with the Getting Around and Getting It Done session at 4-H Exploration Days since the session was first offered in 1996.