One of the main goals of the 4-H program is to help youth develop a thriving orientation—an outlook and approach to life that is ever growing and expanding in a positive direction. Thriving is more than the mere absence of problems, and more than just doing “okay.” Rather, thriving is marked by a set of positive vital signs that point toward a young person reaching his or her full potential, happiness, optimism, and personal fulfillment. Thriving youth are youth who are healthy and flourishing as they make their way from childhood to adulthood.

Thriving develops from mutual, positive interactions between youth and others in programs like 4-H. Research shows that thriving youth typically do well on important outcomes, such as academic motivation and success, social competence, and high personal standards. Thriving youth are also more connected to others, and more engaged in service to others, often making a difference in their communities.

Research conducted by Search Institute has identified six indicators of a thriving trajectory:

1. **Openness to Challenge and Discovery**: Youth have the desire and ability to explore and try new things and challenges. Youth also possesses a growth mindset that supports effort in learning over innate ability.

2. **Hopeful Purpose**: Youth have a sense of hope and purpose for their lives, and are on their way to a happy and successful future.

3. **Transcendent Awareness**: Youth have an awareness of a sacred or transcendent force and the role of faith or spirituality in shaping everyday thoughts and actions. They have a sense of meaning in life, and hold beliefs and values that guide decision making.

4. **Positive Emotionality**: Youth view helping others as a personal responsibility, and live up to the values of respect, responsibility, honesty, and caring.

5. **Pro-Social Orientation**: Youth care about others, and demonstrate this care through empathy, concern, inclusion, and the ability to consider how their actions affect the thoughts and feelings of others.

6. **Intentional Self-Regulation**: Youth employ an effective balance of goal setting and pursuing strategies, including persevering, and making adjustments when goals are not attained. In addition, the youth are able to make self-regulatory decisions that lead to better short-term and long-term success.
4-H is Positive Youth Development

4-H is based on a positive youth development (PYD) approach that recognizes all youth have interests, abilities, and strengths that can be enhanced by participation in 4-H programs. Research shows that participation in high quality 4-H programs increases thriving in youth, and thriving youth achieve important developmental outcomes, such as academic motivation and achievement.

References


