

I pledge:

- My **head** to clearer thinking,
- My **heart** to greater loyalty,
- My **hands** to larger service and
- My **health** to better living,

for my Club, my Community, my Country and my World.

This pledge that has been repeated many times by thousands of youth identifies both the guiding principles and the outcomes for 4-H created over 100 years ago. These principles not only continue to be relevant but they also represent thinking ahead of its time. During the last decade, we've seen a number of other organizations recognize the importance of youth development work and express similar themes.

4-H Youth Development, which turned 100 years old in 2002, is an American idea – the world's largest, dynamic, informal educational program for young people based on democratic principles. About 100 years ago, while economic prosperity generally characterized American agriculture, something was missing. What was missing was the existence of real opportunities for rural children that would propel them to a better quality of life. In this atmosphere of economic prosperity tempered by concern for the future of a generation of rural children, the movement that became 4-H began.

From its inception, this American idea-- the 4-H Youth Development movement was about creating opportunities for young people to learn about the natural world, about technology, about themselves and their communities. 4-H, with its emphasis on "learning by doing" began to impress upon schoolchildren the importance of becoming lifelong learners. Today, the FIELD of youth development recognizes that to mature—young people need meaningful opportunities. And it's not just our rural children who need these opportunities but all our children- those living in urban and suburban areas, boys and girls of different income levels, ethnicities and religions. All are welcome to participate in 4-H.

In the 1940's New York State 4-H Program Leader, Albert Hoefler called on 4-H educators to be "champions of youth" and emphasized their critical role in guiding youth through decisions, and the important role of 4-H as a way to support young people in a time of great upheaval. Why 4-H?

This is both the distinguished history and the important future of 4-H Youth Development: that our program creates opportunities for young people—

- To be independent – because we know how important the voices of young people are

- to experience a place where they belong, because we know how important social bonds are to nurturing emerging character.
- To find ways to serve – because we know it is through giving of ourselves that we find meaning and purpose.
- And to experience opportunities to learn by doing.

4-H has always valued and nurtured young people because of what they will become, and we also recognize the value of children and youth as they are today. This week, we celebrate National 4-H Week and recognize our many partners—the youth and volunteers who are essential to our movement.

I hope you will join with us as we work diligently to honor the tradition of 4-H Youth Development by continuing to create opportunities for youth. I also hope you will join us as we celebrate the National 4-H Week and the legacy of our program; 100 years, thousands of opportunities, millions of young people, one great idea.