

## 4-H – Focus of Youth Competencies

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As a youth development professional, myself along with others, are concerned with helping youth become competent in life skills that will help prepare and transition them into adulthood. 4-H helps focus on developing life skills that are both productive and healthy for youth and their communities. These life skills are taught based on the age and stage of youth development.

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 world. This is the 4-H pledge. This pledge is the focus of youth competencies that we teach young persons.

When we take a look at the 4-H pledge, it focuses on 4 target areas: Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. I am going to break the categories down to take a closer look and reflect on how they help youth. By focusing on these 4 areas we help youth become competent, capable, caring adults.

**Head** – I pledge my head to clearer thinking. Youth learn to use their mind to form ideas and make sound decisions. They learn problem solving and critical thinking skills. They also understand and utilize service learning. In addition to this they also learn managing skills. More specifically: goal setting, planning and organizing, utilization of resources and how to keep records.

**Heart** – I pledge my heart to greater loyalty. In 4-H, we teach you relating and caring skills. Youth learn to accept differences, conflict resolution, social skills, cooperation and communications. In addition, they develop a concern for others and their community, empathy, sharing, how to nurture and how to develop healthy interpersonal relationships with adults and other youth.

**Hands** – I pledge my hands to larger service. Youth learn how to give and work in 4-H. Community service, leadership, responsibility and contribution to a group are a few examples of skills they learn. Additionally, they utilize and understand the value of team work, self-motivation and learn marketable/useful skills.

**Health** – I pledge my health to better living. Here youth learn about health and physical competencies. Personal development is very critical. They learn about positive self-esteem, self-responsibility, character, self-discipline and managing feelings. They also learn health living, positive actions and behavior, and responsibilities. More specifically, they are exposed to healthy life-style choices, stress management, personal safety and disease prevention.

By utilizing the Experiential Learning Model of do, reflect, and apply, we can help youth develop the necessary life skills. By pledging their head, heart, hands and health, they are setting the stage to develop into capable, competent, caring and responsible adults. These skills are learned through the experiences taught in the 4-H program.