

# 4-H internship: reflection and renewal

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Have you ever wanted "to get away from it all" to complete a study, reflect on program directions, have uninterrupted time to read the *Journal of Extension* and other related materials? The National 4-H Internship program located at the National 4-H Center in Washington, D.C., provided an opportunity for me to continue my study of the younger child in 4-H programs, reflect on future program goals with 4-H specialists from across the country, read the *Journal* and other current Extension publications and reports while working part-time as a staff assistant in the educational division. Financial assistance from the National 4-H Foundation met my expenses including plane fare, room and board, and incidentals.

## National Study

My seven-week staff internship program was designed to meet my personal situation and interests. I'm married and my husband and I have a young son. Being away from home for an extended period was difficult to arrange. I'd just completed a quarter study program at the University of Minnesota focusing on observation and teaching experiences with kindergarten through third grade children. I was ready to explore the current situation in 4-H regarding programs for younger children.

With the help of three staff intern advisors and my Minnesota Extension colleagues, I designed a national survey to gain current information on 4-H programs for younger children. This was done in Minnesota for two weeks before the five-week residence experience at the National 4-H Center. Survey responses were waiting for me when I arrived there. The center's many supportive staff as well as Extension colleagues attending meetings, staff development courses, and the National 4-H Conference took time to help me interpret the results and consider future program directions and needs.

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## **Unique Resources**

Washington, D.C., provides a unique variety of resources for study. I was able to consult parent, pre-school, and youth education specialists in USDA and HEW as well as nearby community college and state university personnel. A final survey report was completed and intern seminar conducted before returning home.

As a staff member in the Education Division, I taught components of several staff development courses, helped with a seminar at the Leaders' Forum, and served as advisor for the delegate evaluation committee at the National 4-H Conference. During the month of April, the National 4-H Center was a hub of activity and these staff assignments provided an opportunity to meet and share ideas with youth and Extension staff from across the nation.

## **Growth— Not Vacation**

All of this "doing" amounted to much more than a pleasant, paid vacation! I'm not sure that I've ever worked so hard and enjoyed so much in such a short period of time. Of course, I worked in "visits" to 22 restaurants, a theatre experience, two weekends with my husband (who was able to stop in D.C. on a business trip), and reviewed several term papers and intern reports being prepared by friends in the "community of 4-H scholars."

I feel I've grown professionally in three major ways as a result of the internship program:

1. I have an appreciation for the value of, need for, and current efforts in educational programs for young children.
2. I have new knowledge, resources, and personal skills that are helpful in developing 4-H programs for children under nine years of age. A leader notebook has been completed for the Minnesota "Discovering with 4-H" program. Also, volunteer leader and staff development courses have been conducted in Minnesota as well as several other states since completing the internship three years ago.
3. I have a better understanding of the 4-H Foundation's valuable role in supporting state and county 4-H programs. Since the internship experience, I've served on the 4-H Foundation Board of Trustees contributing ideas relative to program development.

## **It's Worth It**

It's difficult to arrange for learning. Our jobs and families are important and making the decision to devote

time away from them is tough. However, after making the decision, living with the consequences, and appreciating the opportunity for myself as well as my family, I can only hope that this experience<sup>1</sup> is possible for more of my colleagues. Time for professional renewal is a must!

**Footnote**

1. Information about 4-H internship opportunities for professional staff, paraprofessionals, and volunteer teen and adult leaders is available from: Educational Programs and Services Division, National 4-H Council, 7100 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20015.