

idea corner

"Community" 4-H Club

Historically, 4-Hers in Oregon have been organized into project clubs. A child wanting to join would look around for an existing project club, like sewing or horses, or would convince an adult to start such a group. If no such club was available and no adult would become the new leader, the child didn't join 4-H.

Now 4-H in Oregon's Lane County is changing all that.

"In addition to their problem of finding a suitable project club, some 4-Hers weren't fully enjoying 4-H work," explained 4-H aide Geri Barnum who, along with Peggy Taylor, works with Van Vandehey and Nan Barnard, Lane County Extension 4-H agents. "They were learning, but clubs had only five or six kids, all of the same age."

Barnum and Taylor recognized that they had to enlarge the typical 4-H project club. They decided to try the 4-H system of organization used in most other states. Called a "community" 4-H Club, all youngsters living in an area join their local "community" 4-H Club. They don't have to find a project club or convince a leader to start a new project group.

Once in the community club, the kids look around at the projects being taught and join the ones that interest them.

To an uninitiated observer, there isn't much difference between the two systems. But to people deeply involved in 4-H, there is!

Now it's much easier to attract new leaders. In the past, every leader was responsible for all the paperwork and administration for their project. Under the community club system, the project leaders are released from those responsibilities. Leaders who enjoy the organizational aspects of 4-H are willing to take on those duties at the monthly community club meetings.

The kids benefit in many ways. There's a wide range of ages in each community club, giving older 4-Hers the chance to help out the younger ones. Demonstrations, an important teaching tool of 4-H, become more meaningful. Instead of teaching a technique to 5 buddies, the child is now demonstrating the technique to 40 acquaintances.

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