

Welcoming Club Environment

The County Fair and the start of a new school year bring with them much interest and excitement for new families wishing to join 4-H. When we receive phone calls, our process is to talk about the ages and interests of the children, and provide information about the opportunities available. We follow up by sending them information about 4-H along with the list of clubs. We refer new families to you – and then your job kicks in!

Often times, we wonder what influences a new family on the decision of which club to join and stay involved. We have 18 active clubs throughout Waupaca County; certainly, location will play a part in the decision. But aside from location, what makes one club different than the other? Is there something that sets one club apart from others? How welcoming and inviting is your club? How promptly do you respond to phone calls or emails? What is the environment like at your meetings? How do you welcome guests? Are your meetings run smoothly and timely? It should not just be the job of the officers and main leader to make people feel welcome...it should be EVERY member & leader's responsibility.

So, how do you create a welcoming environment in your club? First, it is important to look at what you are currently doing. Keep doing the things that help create inclusiveness, and consider strengthening areas where you are weaker. At your next meeting, think about the following things:

- ◆ Do you consider new ideas?
- ◆ Do you call all members and adults by name? Do you know everyone's names? Do you wear name tags at meetings?
- ◆ Do you introduce guests or new members/families?
- ◆ Do all members share a common approach to decision making and understand the decision making process?
- ◆ Do you review your club activities annually to be sure you are doing what the majority of members want?
- ◆ Do you use ice breakers or games regularly to mix people up, learn more about each other, and have fun?
- ◆ Do you sit by people you don't know very well, or are you always sitting by the same people?
- ◆ Do you have an agenda for the business part of the meeting? Do you follow it?
- ◆ Do you keep the meetings moving?
- ◆ Does the club stay on topic?
- ◆ Do you have a new family mentor program in your club, someone who can talk with the new family throughout the year about projects, programs and activities?
- ◆ Do you discuss countywide events like Super Saturday, camp, officer training, New Family Night, fair or is there time at each meeting for people to ask questions?

These are just a few ideas that might help you create a welcoming environment in your 4-H club. Some of you have been members in your 4-H club for many years – try to remember what it was like when you were a new member. Waupaca County 4-H will benefit when all members feel connected, respected and cared for!

Adapted from Outagamie County 4-H Newsletter

Penny Tank

Penny Tank
4-H Program Assistant