

# 4-H raising confidence, building resilience

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Ella Lentz is a senior member of 4-H with the Newport club in her final year. She's enjoyed participating in a number of projects since she was eight years old, from light horse to small engine repair, and plans on staying with the organization in a leadership capacity. (Contributed) - The Chronicle Herald

There are generations of 4-H participants, both past and present, who know the feeling of accomplishment that comes from trying something new, the confidence it builds and the positive influence it becomes.

"4-H is building responsible, caring, contributing leaders in Nova Scotia communities who are affecting change. They are and will be the innovators and entrepreneurs who strengthen communities in the Annapolis Valley," said David Hovell of Port Williams, the chair of the 4-H Canada board of directors, who calls 4-H the leading positive youth development organization in Canada.

Ella Lentz is a member of the Newport club in Hants County, but also participates in the governance side on the youth advisory committee at the national level and provincial members' voice committee. A third-year undergraduate student at Dalhousie University's faculty of agriculture, Lentz is taking a bachelor of science (honours) in agriculture, majoring in plant science and minoring in animal agriculture.

"I'm here because of my involvement in 4-H and it's definitely the right fit for me," she said.

Youth can build on life skills and spark their imagination through a broad variety of projects under four main pillars of learning: community engagement and communications, sustainable agriculture and food security, environment and healthy living and science and technology. Projects range from raising and marketing livestock, to small engine repair, welding, scrapbooking, cake decorating and even Lego. An important component of each project is communication and public presentation. Judging is optional.

For every activity, members get some feedback and those who do really well and are interested can compete against members of other clubs. Projects aren't gender specific, either, said Sophie Saulnier, who runs the cake-decorating projects in the Western Kings 4-H club. "There are four boys in my cake-decorating group, with one on the waiting list," she told the Valley Harvester. "They love it. And in the animal projects, there are both girls and boys."

Saulnier shared how they took cupcakes decorated with poppies into the veterans' wing at Soldiers' Memorial Hospital on Remembrance Day to share and also spent some time with veterans there. They plan on going back to do some demos.

Cloverbuds (seven and eight year olds) are introduced to the general meeting and a variety of projects through an introductory program called Exploring 4-H. As members (nine to 21 year olds), they further develop their skills within and across projects. There are also scholarships, national 4-H awards and travel opportunities, as well as jobs.

"Each year, they progress through the same program at a different level of expertise, led by volunteers and by older members mentoring younger members," said 4-H Nova Scotia's new executive director, Cathy Caswell, who was appointed in December 2018.

Caswell is also a former 4-H member, leader and regional organizer.

Members of 4-H don't have to own the livestock, as local farmers are willing to let theirs be used. "Many people think that 4-H is a program for children who live on farms. 4-H offers a structured program for all youth from all backgrounds — farming, rural or urban," said Caswell.

Both Caswell and Hovell attribute the organization's enduring popularity to the fact that it continues to evolve and engage its members. Currently, about a quarter of the province's 75 clubs are in the Valley region. With almost 2,500 members, Nova Scotia has about a third of the member population that Ontario has, which has more than 1,000 clubs spread out over a larger — and significantly more populated — area.

The crunch is needing more volunteer leaders, said Caswell. Without them, some clubs may not be able to offer specific projects from year to year. Despite the growing popularity of raising backyard hens, for example, the Newport club isn't able to run a poultry project this year.

"Individual, community and corporate partnerships is key to the ongoing success of the program that aims to strengthen communities by providing life and technical skills to those involved, including members, leaders and parents," said Caswell.

Now that she is at the club's maximum age of 21, this has to be Lentz's last year as a member. It's something she said she is bittersweet about since joining at the age of eight, but Lentz still intends to be involved in the organization in a leadership role.

"4-H is awesome because it is both competitive and non-competitive. It's what you want to make it. You get out of it what you put in. There is something to interest everybody and all you have to do is your personal best," said Lentz.

For more information, visit [novascotia4h.ca](http://novascotia4h.ca) and [4-h-canada.ca](http://4-h-canada.ca).