

# Welcome to University of Maine Cooperative Extension 4-H!

For more than 100 years, UMaine Extension 4-H volunteers have been making a difference in their communities by contributing their life experiences, love of learning, and energy in support of Maine’s most precious resource – our children. As the largest youth development program in the country, 4-H continues to depend on its dedicated volunteers as a true partner in that success.

This handbook is designed to provide practical information about Extension and the 4-H program, the many roles volunteers can choose from, and ways to make your experience with 4-H as meaningful as possible.

We are excited to have you join us as we work together in empowering young people to reach their full potential.

Lisa Phelps John Rebar

4-H Program Administrator Executive Director

# Understanding University of Maine Cooperative Extension and 4-H

University of Maine Cooperative Extension is part of the publicly funded Cooperative Extension System, an educational partnership extending nationwide with the support of USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), 74 land-grant universities, and 3,150 counties. For 100 years, UMaine Extension has made access to University of Maine research possible across the state, focusing on the Maine Food System, Positive Youth Development, and Community and Economic Development. Extension is cooperatively funded through USDA, Maine’s land-grant university, and county governments.

As the largest informal youth development organization in the world, 4-H is the youth development program of the Cooperative Extension System, providing opportunities for youth ages 5-19 to learn by doing. Through organized clubs, after-school programs, camps and independent projects, 4-H members gain experience in leadership development, citizenship, and essential life skills. Volunteers are the heart of 4-H, working with staff and educators in guiding and challenging youth to make the best better.

**4-H is about youth, their families and the communities in which they live.**

Positive youth development is the goal of 4-H, recognizing and strengthening positive assets of youth instead of highlighting the negative. Being acknowledged and valued for who they are now, what they can accomplish during childhood and adolescence and not just for the future adults they will become, is essential to the practice of positive youth development. As young people learn about something that interests them, they begin to learn and master project-specific skills while also developing basic life skills. The focus, then, is on learning and doing more than what specific project a 4-H’er pursues. The ultimate goal is for the young person to develop positive personal assets needed to live successfully in a diverse and changing world.

The essence of 4-H youth development is to:

• Create opportunities that promote positive youth development

• Teach knowledge and life skills that enhance quality of life

• Engage young people in the work of the land-grant university

The [mission of 4-H](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/youthdevelopment4h.cfm) is to provide meaningful opportunities for youth and adults to work together to create sustainable community change. This is accomplished within three primary content areas, or mission mandates – citizenship, healthy living, and science. The educational foundation of 4-H lies in these three mission mandates. These mandates reiterate the founding purposes of Extension (e.g., community leadership, quality of life, and technology transfer) in the context of 21st century challenges and opportunities.

Based on its [guiding principles](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/res/pdfs/4h_guid_prin_2012.pdf), each 4-H program offers unique learning opportunities with support of the cooperative federal, state and county partnership; with the positive environments created by members, families, Extension staff and volunteers; and with community engagement by way of inclusive and intergenerational hands-on learning.

More information about the 4-H public partnership between the USDA and the country’s land-grant universities is available online [nifa.usda.gov/extension](http://nifa.usda.gov/extension).