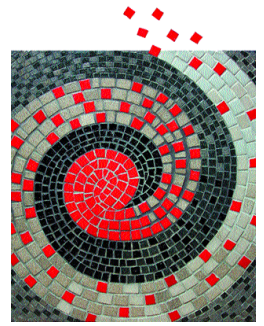


Create Incentive for Advancement



Kathleen Lodl

University of Nebraska – Lincoln Extension 4-H

“Youth workers (particularly those new to the field) can be easily overwhelmed by the need for flexibility in planning and implementing programs. We need to help youth workers focus on the bigger picture ... the value of the work we do with youth.”

CAREER LADDER

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln Nebraska Extension 4-H offers a summer internship program for college juniors and seniors interested in careers with the 4-H system. The program is designed to help college students understand more about available positions and is the first step in a career ladder that prepares them for those jobs. Most students who apply for internships are already familiar with the programs the system offers but want to explore career options further. Twelve student interns are selected each summer and placed in county offices where they can get hands-on experiences. Every effort is made to place students in county offices that most closely matches the students’ interests, and will provide them the best educational and skill building experience.

Through their summer internships, students get a feel for the amount of flexibility required in planning for and around situations that come up unexpectedly. Since the challenges that present themselves can sometimes be overwhelming, especially for new youth workers, a mentor in the county office and the campus Extension coordinator work closely with students. This mentoring relationship is continued through the students’ masters programs, should they decide to continue their education.

As part of the career ladder, those students who begin work as Extension Assistants (entry-level positions in the system requiring

a bachelor's degree) are eligible for free tuition credit at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and pay \$1 per credit (up to 15 credits per year). This incentive is offered to encourage students to work towards a masters degree and move into positions as 4-H educators (positions that require a master's degree). Typically, assistant hours are flexible to accommodate students' class schedules, and advisors work closely with them in planning their academic program to ensure that students take the right courses to accomplish their goals.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Recognizing that ongoing education improves skills, in-service and more in-depth training on topics such as the youth development process, marketing youth development programs, and youth-adult partnerships are provided for staff. Monthly interactive, web-based educational programming that provides information on current program updates and training on youth development also is available to staff. Through these training opportunities, staff learn effective strategies for teaching life skills to youth. The University of Nebraska–Lincoln Nebraska Extension 4-H believes that it is important to convey to staff the value of their work - that they are working with our country's most prized possessions and training future leaders - and is committed to preparing all staff to have the skills and knowledge necessary to do that effectively.

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln Nebraska Extension 4-H is a statewide system that annually reaches 118,000 youth (ages 9–19 years old) in 93 counties in Nebraska. The majority (99%) of the seventy-seven full-time and sixteen part-time staff are white (non-Hispanic/Latino). A bachelors degree is required for an entry level position as a 4-H assistant. Previous experience in youth work is preferable but not required. Opportunities vary greatly between rural and urban areas, but an overall challenge throughout the state is higher salaries and more regular work hours available in other jobs. The organization believes, however, that the ongoing education and advancement opportunities they offer their staff helps offset these challenges.

