

# Benefits of 4-H Youth Camping

## Youth Development through Virginia 4H Camping\*

- ✿ Youth need positive relationships with caring adults. 4-H camping provides the opportunity for youth ages 5-13 to be engaged in positive relationships with caring 4-H teen and adult volunteers. These 4-H volunteers are trained to provide emotional and moral support to youth campers.
- ✿ Youth need to feel emotionally and physically safe. A majority of 4-H camping is conducted at Virginia's six 4-H educational centers, which are accredited for safety and quality through the American Camping Association. In addition, camp directors, staff, and volunteers are trained to provide a setting and experience that is both emotionally and physically safe.
- ✿ Youth need opportunities to be involved in active, engaged learning. 4-H camping emphasizes experiential, hands-on learning ("learn by doing"). Instructors are trained to actively involve youth in their learning experiences, and staff/camper ratios of 1:8 (or less) provide youth with individualized attention.
- ✿ Youth need a structure and limits that are developmentally appropriate and that allow them to develop and master new skills. 4-H camping programs provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences. During these 4-H camping experiences, youth are divided into both small and large groups, which provide structure and limits that promote positive youth behavior. In this supportive learning environment, youth campers learn and practice new skills.
- ✿ Youth need to develop a sense of belonging in an inclusive environment. The small and large groups used during 4-H camping provide youth with an identity and sense of belonging. In addition, 4-H programs are available to all types of youth, and staff and volunteers are trained to develop and foster a 4-H camp environment that is inclusive and supportive of individual differences.
- ✿ Youth need the opportunity to value and practice service to others. Citizenship is taught and practiced at 4-H camp. Youth campers have individual and group responsibilities that teach them to take care of themselves and to contribute to the benefit of the camp community by helping others.
- ✿ Youth need opportunities for self-determination, decision making, and goal setting. 4-H camping provides youth with multiple opportunities to make choices and decisions about their educational experiences, from selecting 4-H camp classes to involvement in afternoon and evening activities.
- ✿ Youth need to be able to make a positive connection to the future. 4-H camping exposes youth to new people, new places, and new ideas. At 4-H camp, youth may be involved in unique educational experiences with other youth from different parts of Virginia. Through 4-H camping, youth are able to discover talents and strengths that provide encouragement and hope for future success.



### For more information:

- Contact your local Extension office

\* These eight features of positive youth development were identified by the National 4-H Collaboration for Youth Members (1998).

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