



Inclusive 4-H and the Americans with Disabilities Act*

We're all unique...

4-H educators and volunteer leaders know every young person is unique. Meeting the needs of individual children and young people is something 4-H understands. All University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UWCES) programs, including 4-H, are federally mandated under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure that programs are accessible to persons with disabilities. This includes any young person or adult who is connected with UW 4-H: a youth, a parent, a volunteer or committee member, and a 4-H staff or office staff person.

Opportunity for inclusion...

The ADA gives the opportunity to include children and young people with disabilities in 4-H. Educators, leaders, youths, and parents all benefit. Including both children and young people with and without disabilities in 4-H reflects our larger community where people with and without disabilities live, work, and play together. Inclusion contributes to acceptance, improved socialization, and understanding of individual differences.¹

Success in inclusive programming...

To ensure that the 4-H experience is rewarding to young people with disabilities, keep the following in mind:

- **Positive attitude**—Begins with the volunteer leader and spreads contagiously to the members.
- **Clear and consistent expectations**—What is okay today will be okay tomorrow, and doing what is not okay will have defined consequences.
- **Everybody counts**—Each individual is a valued member of the group, and care is taken to recognize and meet each individual's needs.
- **Adaptation is acceptable**—"That's the way we've always done it" is out. "Let's see how we can do this to make it work" is in.



Once this attitude is in place, the programming possibilities are unlimited. In order to offer 4-H experiences and opportunities to everyone and anyone who wants to be involved, one's best effort is needed to remove any obstacles that might keep 4-H from including everyone.²

The Best Advice for Inclusion — Treat Every Child Equally

Ron Morley, 4-H volunteer leader with Michigan 4-H, offers these tips for volunteers and educators who have opportunities to include young people with disabilities in their 4-H club and programs:

- When a meeting is planned, make sure it is in a space or location that is accessible to everyone.
- Encourage pairing teen leaders with a member having a disability so the member has someone to work with.
- All projects should involve everyone. The beauty of a project is in the eye of the beholder—the important thing is that everyone gets to complete the project.
- One thing a volunteer or club can do is contact the special education department of a local school district. Such departments can be a great resource because they have people trained to work with children with special needs.
- Ask parents about the specific disabilities and needs of a child, and offer to accommodate and pay attention to the child's needs.
- Encourage team showmanship. This allows a team to bring its individual strengths to the team's success. It also reduces the emphasis on any team member's individual abilities or disabilities.

Consider Physical Environments When Programming

When working to make 4-H activities accessible, consider the physical environment. Whether looking for a meeting site that will accommodate a wheelchair user or planning inclusive activities for a 4-H club or group, keep the following tips in mind:



- Check the accessibility of the building entrances and exits, hallways, rooms, lighting, drinking fountains, safety procedures, and other factors.
- Doorways and walkways should be 32 inches to 36 inches wide.
- Ramp slopes should not be greater than 1:12.
- When working around a table, leave a space without a chair to accommodate a person who uses a wheelchair.
- Keep all walkways free of clutter.
- Place all supplies and educational materials within reach so 4-Hers can easily use them. This way, leaders and members don't have to carry things from place to place.²

More Ideas on Accessibility

- Where existing UWCES office facilities are inaccessible, staff members and volunteers may make program services that are normally provided at those sites available to disabled persons through other methods such as meeting in accessible locations, making home visits, or communicating through writing, telephone calls, and audiotapes.
- For activities held in publicly owned facilities outside of UWCES, staff members and volunteers should select accessible facilities wherever possible. For activities held at privately-owned facilities such as homes and farm buildings, staff should select accessible facilities whenever disabled persons requiring such accessibility are participating. If accessible facilities are unavailable or inappropriate to the nature of the activity, staff should use other methods to deliver program benefits to the disabled person.
- All county publications, meeting flyers, newsletters, and other materials should state that the county offices and meeting sites are accessible to individuals in wheelchairs, or that disabled individuals may call the county office for more information on accommodations. To indicate that a meeting location is accessible to wheelchairs, consider using the “wheelchair accessible” logo.³



The “spirit” of the ADA

The ADA supports the rights of individuals with disabilities as the rights of all human beings and encourages all of us to develop a “can do” attitude for helping achieve this goal. The ADA does not force programs to change, but it does encourage programs to engage in creative problem-solving that may make a big difference in the lives of children and young people with disabilities and their families.⁴

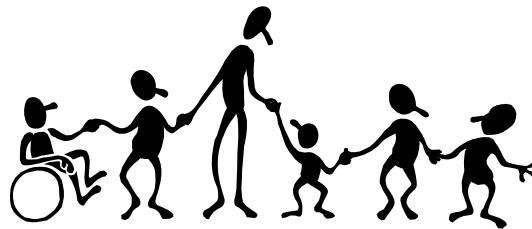
The basic philosophy of Wyoming 4-H is to strengthen the mental, physical, moral, and social development of young people, thereby helping them to develop into competent, committed, and self-assured adults. The main objective is the development of young people through participation in projects, events, and various activities. To achieve this, accommodations are needed to allow a child with a disability to participate in an activity with their peers. Accommodation should:

- Allow a child with a disability to participate in the same collective activity. Observation of the activity without direct involvement does not constitute participation;
- Not adversely affect how other participants in the activity perform, are judged, or evaluated. Every effort should be made to minimize the effects of the accommodation on other participants.

Handling issues of reasonable accommodations is done on a case-by-case basis. It is important to contact the Wyoming State 4-H Office when the need for reasonable accommodations occurs.

For information about reasonable accommodations, visit the Americans with Disabilities Act home page at: <http://www.ada.gov>

* Material compiled by Randolph R. Weigel, professor and human development specialist, UW Cooperative Extension Service.



References:

1. Washington State Department of Health, (2004). *Child care and the Americans with Disabilities Act*. Seattle, WA: Author.

2. Michigan 4-H Youth Development, (n.d.). *Inclusive 4-H: Expanding inclusive opportunities for youth and volunteers*. Retrieved April 4, 2005 from <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/inclusive/index.html>.
3. California 4-H State Ambassador Team, (2003-2004). *Youth with special needs leaders' handbook: Making 4-H more accessible*. Oakland, CA: California 4-H Youth Development Program.
4. Harper-Whalen. S., (2005, February). *Strategies for including children with disabilities in early care and education*. Retrieved April 14, 2005, from http://cecl.nl.edu/forums/_disc2/00000008.htm

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