

New  
Jersey **4-H**

# Leader Training Series



## The NJ 4-H Prep Program: 4-H for Younger Members

### What is 4-H Prep?

4-H can be a valuable experience for people of many ages. In New Jersey, the earliest 4-H club experience is belonging to a 4-H Prep club.

The New Jersey 4-H Prep Program is a club program for children in first, second and third grades. The purpose of the program is to provide a fun and educational experience which helps children to:

- learn to get along with others
- explore many interests
- learn subject matter skills
- build self-confidence through healthy experiences
- become prepared to graduate into the standard club program
- have fun!

### 4-H Prep Age

A child can belong to a Prep club if he or she is in first, second or third grade. The September in which the child enters fourth grade, he or she can join a standard 4-H club, usually a project or community club.

### The 4-H Prep Club

4-H Prep clubs are similar to standard clubs in that they meet regularly and are led by adult volunteer club leaders. Most Prep clubs have approximately five to eight members per leader and meet about twice each month. Some clubs elect or select officers and change them several times a year so that each member has the chance to serve in more than one office.

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4-H Prep clubs are different from standard clubs in that Prep members do not select one or two specific projects to work on

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## **4-H Prep Leader Activity Guide**

during the year. Instead, they participate in a variety of short-term activities in many different subject areas.

4-H Prep leaders are very important people. They serve as role models to these youngest 4-H members. They are also responsible for making sure that the child's first 4-H experience is a positive one.

To help 4-H Prep leaders work with their clubs, they are provided with a copy of Learn About 4-H Prep, the official activity guide for New Jersey 4-H Prep leaders. The volunteer leader for each Prep club receives a copy of this guide upon registering as a leader. This guide consists of over 50 activity sheets which cover a variety of subjects. Each sheet has all of the information a leader needs in order to teach. Most sheets also include suggestions for field trips, guest speakers and follow-up activities for the member to do at home. The guide includes a secretary's book for those clubs choosing to have officers. By using the Prep leader activity guide with flexibility, the Prep leader can give these younger 4-H'ers many opportunities which will prepare them for participation in a standard club.

## **Prep Record Books**

Keeping a record book can help a Prep member creatively express his or her experiences. Some counties have special record books for Prep members, while other Prep members make their own. Ideas sometimes used for record keeping include drawings, cut-outs from magazines, poems, souvenirs and photos. Another idea to help with keeping records is to use self-closing bags to store items made or collected at meetings or on field trips.

## **4-H Prep is Non-Competitive**

4-H Prep is a non-competitive program. There is no rating or scoring of individual projects or activities for Prep members. The statewide policy for New Jersey is that no 4-H member in first, second or third grade may be given a rating for individual projects or activities.

This policy is based on research which shows that children of this age need to progress and develop at their own speeds, and that they find it especially hard to lose. To help these youth develop self-confidence, they need to have less pressure to "win." Since success is very important at this age, the success of just having completed an activity helps to increase self-esteem. It's

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the process and the fun of participating, not the product, which is important to these children.

## **Recognition**

Although projects of Prep members are not rated, these younger 4-H'ers are still recognized for their work. This is usually done through participation ribbons at the fair or other events, end-of-year certificates or pins, and other forms of creative recognition not based on a rating or scoring system.

## **County Participation**

Many counties hold events designed especially for Prep members. These include special camp sessions, rallies, graduation ceremonies, fun nights and picnics. Often, Prep members are invited to participate in regular county events. If judging is part of the event, the member may participate with the judge providing positive comments of encouragement, but no score or rating is given.

## **4-H Prep is Fun!**

4-H Prep sets the stage for a child's participation in the 4-H program. It is an opportunity for younger children to begin to have hands-on experiences as 4-H members. It is also a chance for adults to serve as role models at this important time in a child's life. Most importantly, 4-H Prep is educational and fun for all involved!

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### ***References:***

*Learn About 4-H Prep: NJ 4-J Prep Leader Activity Guide. Department of 4-H Youth Development, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, New Brunswick, NJ, 1982.*

*New Jersey 4-H Prep Program Policy Statement. Department of 4-H Youth Development, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, New Brunswick, NJ, Rev. 1993.*

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