

How 4-H is changing my life

By: Paisley Boulton

Paisley Boulton is a 13-year-old girl who attends the Durham West 4-H Sheep Club. To help Paisley overcome her shyness and social struggles, her parents enrolled her in 4-H, utilizing her fondness for animals to help her conquer her social anxiety. Paisley said, "There is something comforting about having an animal present when you feel uneasy". Early on, Paisley would sometimes become distressed in the show ring due to being the center of attention with everyone present. She also attended a pizza club monthly, where she would remain silent and not speak to anyone. Thankfully, Paisley's team of leaders and senior members showed remarkable commitment by working collaboratively to find solutions to help reduce her anxiety.

This year is Paisley's third season in the Durham West 4-H sheep club. She attended her achievement day last weekend and had an impressive second-place finish in showmanship. Paisley wishes to inform everyone that despite doubts, capabilities exist. Throughout her journey in 4-H, She feels that she has been consistently encouraged and uplifted by those around me, leading to confidence that has positively impacted my social skills and academic achievements. To assist Paisley in dealing with difficult situations and lending a helping hand to the sheep club, her dad was asked to be the assistant 4-H sheep leader.

What does 4H mean to you? It is where we all can get involved, and feel accepted, valued, and heard. It is a safe place where I am developing life skills, learning to be a leader,

and learning self-confidence. This year, Paisley unexpectedly expressed interest in joining the 4-H crops club, which was encouraged by the presence of a senior member of the 4-H sheep club. Despite the age differences among the junior and senior members, the team fosters a universally encouraging and inclusive environment. She has learned to confront her fears and embrace opportunities, acknowledging the daily battle, but understands that fear can lead to missed experiences. Her participation in the crops club earned her several ribbons for her homegrown flowers and vegetables exhibited at local fairs. She identified an interest in agriculture and is considering a career in it.

Paisley serves as a press reporter for two clubs, focusing on sheep and crops. “She said when she was nominated she was terrified of the role”. She took the initiative by writing a summary with photos after each meeting and requesting her parent's input, making it a valuable experience for me. She learned time management and the value of committing to a position and fulfilling its responsibilities. None of this would have been achievable without the 4-H community, It has consistently demonstrated acceptance, encouragement, and dedication.

When asked about an absence of 4-H, “she said her path forward would be unclear”. She aspires to contribute to her community and excel as a press reporter for Durham West, while encouraging youth involvement and supporting opportunities, hoping to inspire increased support for 4-H.

