So, have you ever wondered what 4-H is all about?

Some of you may have heard the name 4-H while others of you are saying, “What is 4-H?” As most people see it, 4-H is a youth organization devoted to helping youth learn about animals and agriculture.

I would like to dispel some myths about 4-H. The first one is that 4-H is just for youth who have animals. Did you know that there are more than 300 different projects in 4-H and less than one-quarter of these projects deal with animals? There are eight basic categories in which projects are grouped:

- Citizenship and civic education
- Communications and expressive arts
- Consumer and family sciences
- Environmental education and earth sciences
- Healthy lifestyle education
- Personal development and leadership
- Plants and animals
- Science and technology

As you can tell, there is bound to be something for everyone.

The next myth I would like to clear up is that 4-H just teaches about the project the youth is in. When a 4-H club is functioning right, there are so many more things that the youth learns. The life skills that a youth learns while participating in 4-H will last a lifetime.

Life skills are picked up in the subjects of relating, caring, giving, working, being, living, thinking and managing. According to a study done by Iowa State University, there are more than 40 life skills that fall within these categories.
So when a youth is participating, they may be learning about an item but they are learning so much more. Let’s look at the sport fishing project. While learning about bait casting they are learning problem solving, or when cooking fish they are learning decision-making skills.

4-H is a wonderful youth program that lets a youth decide on an area of interest that they would like to learn more about and then takes them further through teaching them life skills.

4-H would not be possible without the volunteer leaders, though. Our hats go off to them as they donate many hours and resources to the program and help it become better every year. As with changing times, 4-H has a process for an individual to become a leader. To become a leader one must apply, and then reference checks and a background check will be done, followed with training on how to organize and run a club. We are striving to provide a safe learning environment for the youth involved.

When educating 4-H youth about their projects, there is a five-step learning model that leaders are encouraged to use. The steps are:

1. Experience the activity; perform, do it. Youth do it before being told or shown how.

2. Share the results, reactions, observations publicly. Youth describe the experience and their reaction.

3. Process by discussing, looking at the experience; analyze, reflect. Youth discuss what was most important about what they did.

4. Generalize to connect the experience to real-world examples. Youth relate the project and life skill practiced to their everyday experience.

5. Apply what was learned to a similar or different situation; practice. Youth share how they will use the project and life skill practiced in other parts of their lives.

In 4-H, there is not only the commitment of the leaders, but also dedicated parents. 4-H is a family affair. Some projects require help from a parent at home to complete them. As a parent you would not let your kids fail in school. — you always make sure they get their homework done. So with 4-H, I would hope that, as a parent, you would show some interest and help them with their projects.

As we look at the overall picture, it is not just the leader, youth or parent that completes the 4-H experience — it takes everyone.

To learn more about the 4-H Program, contact Marla Lowder, UAF Cooperative Extension Service Tanana District 4-H and youth development agent, at 907-474-2427 or mklowder@alaska.edu. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.