

# Volunteers who provide sense of belonging to youth invaluable

## Volunteers are key to the success of the Wyoming 4-H program

The Wyoming 4-H program serves over 6,900 youth and their families because of strong and motivated volunteers.

If you are a volunteer in a youth organization like 4-H, look at your involvement; are you helping or hindering belonging?

A sense of belonging is one of the most important elements volunteers can provide young people. All youth want to belong and be members of groups. Groups may be formal, like classrooms and school sports teams, or informal, like 4-H clubs. Belonging includes having a positive relationship with a caring adult, being in a safe emotional and physical environment, and being part of an inclusive environment.

### That Belonging Feeling

If you think back to your own personal experiences with groups, you were more likely to get involved, stay involved, and have good experiences if you felt a sense of belonging within the group. As an adult working with youth, you may be wondering what you can do to help create a sense of belonging in an organization.

A positive relationship with a caring adult is the most important belonging element to a positive youth development experience. Caring adults in 4-H act as adviser, guide, and mentor. This happens when adults can serve as the supporter, friend, and advocate for the 4-H member while helping set boundaries and expectations.

In a 4-H setting, or in any youth organization, there are simple ways to make this happen. Something as simple as volunteers calling youth by their first names. Getting to know the interests of members can happen by asking questions that show you care while also being an active listener to what youth have to say. Pay attention to the activities of youth outside of the organization. Look to structure group activities so youth and adults have time to learn about one another.

### Feeling physically, emotionally safe

Youth need to feel physically and emotionally safe in their environments. Volunteers need to create an environment of support and encouragement.



Learn how you can be involved and help develop the next generation by visiting the Wyoming State 4-H Program website [www.uwyo.edu/4-h](http://www.uwyo.edu/4-h).



**4-H'er Keira Woffinden in a 4-H Horse Camp session last year with volunteer instructor Connie McGinley of Buffalo.**

We cannot tolerate or participate in bullying, cliques, or put-downs. Be sure the young people in a group are helping plan, implement, and evaluate what the group is doing.

Finally, we need to encourage a program that brings together youth and adults from different backgrounds, experiences, and comfort levels. An organization needs to be a place where individual members and leaders feel supported and encouraged. This can happen by looking for ways to recognize all members, not just those who excel in competition. Meetings and events can start with ice breakers and fun games that get everyone involved.

Please contact me for more information on how to create an environment of belonging in 4-H or other youth organizations.

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information; they trust experience. Sensing types observe and remember specifics they use to build carefully and sequentially toward a conclusion. People who prefer intuition are more comfortable looking at the big picture. They look for patterns and connections between facts; they relate patterns back to the larger meaning. It is not uncommon for Intuitive types to have a hunch about some future possibility that they cannot fully explain but just know to be right.

### Thinking or Feeling

The Thinking-Feeling dichotomy explains how we make decisions and the types of criteria we use. Those who prefer thinking tend to solve problems with logic; they generally like to use objective standards to analyze and weigh decisions. When making decisions, people who prefer feeling generally rely on personal and/or group values. Considering how a decision will impact others is a crucial piece of a feeler's process. It is very important to note both types use rational decision-making processes; whether we use subjective or objective criteria, it is critical

we recognize each different, yet equally valid, approach.

### Judging or Perceiving

The final dichotomy, Judging-Perceiving, is about how we implement decisions. People who prefer judging typically have scheduled, organized approaches to assignments/tasks. Judgers like having things decided so they can avoid the stress of doing things last-minute. People who prefer perceiving typically like to be spontaneous and flexible; they prefer things to be open-ended so they can change them at will. Perceivers feel energized by last-minute pressures and will often say that is when their brains "turn on."

### Putting It all together

You have an individual's personality type when you consider an individual's preferences on all four of the MBTI scales. The assessment shows what we prefer to do and what comes naturally, not what we can or cannot do. Each type has something to offer teams, organizations, and our communities.

### COMMUNICATION TIPS

- Give introverts time to process.
- Let extraverts "think out loud."
- Know that sensors prefer a linear conversation format; intuitives prefer a circular format.
- Feeling types appreciate warmth and tactfulness; thinking types prefer directness and logic.

Members of UW Extension's community development education team are available to help you learn more about personality types and how to use them to improve group dynamics.

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