TECHNOLOGY
Communications Domain

Technology includes use of the internet, software applications, and digital devices. Volunteer managers who embrace technology can see many benefits to their volunteer programs, such as an increased and diversified recruitment pool, enhanced matching of volunteer roles, improved ability to recruit volunteer professionals, and reduced administrative burden[1].However, the inability of 4-H volunteers to embrace and use technology can be a barrier to implementing these practices. At a minimum, the ability to navigate online screening, training, and communication channels can impact your proficiency as a volunteer. Acquisition of technology skills in adults is affected by the factors of time, process, context, and the individual[2]. It is important for 4-H professionals to provide opportunities and supportive resources for volunteers to increase technology usage[3] and enhance digital literacy skills.

Digital literacy is an individual's ability to find, evaluate, and compose information on digital platforms, which could include writing, illustrating, and producing music or videos.

The link between 4-H volunteers' digital literacy skills and those of youth they serve has not been fully explored. A study by California 4-H found that youth had more positive perceptions of an online record book compared with adults[4]. However, youth who voluntarily adopted and used the online record book reported they felt supported to embrace technology by their caring adult mentor, suggesting a correlation. For youth, digital literacy skills can have a big impact on confidence, contribution, and connection[5]. The results of a poll conducted for the 4-H Teach Changemakers program showed that American teens recognize the value of digital skills when it comes to productivity, exploration, and education, agreeing that digital skills should be a core part of school curriculum. A lack of confidence in digital skills results in increased difficulty with problem-solving online. Fortunately, the 4-H'ers surveyed thought they had better digital skills compared to other teens in their communities.

As a 4-H volunteer, you can help 4-H professionals and youth by embracing technology and putting your digital literacy skills to use. Here are some tips to help you be successful:

1. **Model a positive attitude towards technology.** Focus on the benefits the technology provides; adult perceptions can influence those of youth.

2. **Seek help from others.** Youth can benefit by helping others learn to use technology and troubleshoot technology issues. This also instills resiliency.

3. **Set realistic expectations.** Be patient with yourself and others. There is almost always a learning curve with technology, and it may take time to develop a new skill.

4. **Be aware of pitfalls or limitations of the technology.** Be flexible and have alternative strategies in place.

Overall, adoption of technology can be beneficial to 4-H professionals, volunteers, and youth. Negative perceptions of technology by adults, especially those with strong voices, may jeopardize the use of potentially helpful changes [4]. Odds of successful technology adoption may be increased by managing the expectations of both adults and youths and providing training tools, technical support, and peer coaching. By embracing technology and developing digital literacy skills, you have the potential to become more efficient, innovative, and relevant in your work with 4-H and youth.

Creating a Sense of Belonging:

This is a great opportunity to practice Youth-Adult Partnership by approaching youth as partners. The intentional approach of involving youth in building digitally relevant content impacts their confidence, contribution, and connections. Sharing power with youth by collaborating and letting them lead strengthens Developmental Relationships, which are the foundation of thriving for young people.

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