



Dear Chippewa County 4-H Families,

As I woke up this morning, much like every morning, thinking about my day ahead and what my plan was for the day, both personally and professionally, and just like each morning in our new home, Jason and I sat and ate breakfast together. The conversation centered around what we would have been doing if this was any other year. We would have been at the fair and the preparation for the swine show would have been in full swing. Youth abuzz washing their animals, hoping that they had the champion pig that year or running their showmanship Q&A in their head, to be the best in their age division. We reminisced on a time that wasn't straight out of the Twilight Zone and relished in the memories that we have had in the fairs we've been involved in.

As I looked on social media, many of you are doing the same. Wishing your animals their final goodbye, talking about what would have been, participating in the 7 Days of the Northern Wisconsin State Fair Challenge and it's a different way to "end" the 4-H year. The fair is a pinnacle of the 4-H year, not the end, 4-H is year round!

Back in March, there was a night in the barn where I was in tears and Jason just listened. I was in tears because of what youth were losing out on and how much my role as an educator was changing. All of the emotions were coming out through these tears and after I was done talking and crying, Jason's response to me was, "Heidi, you'll find a way to reinvent yourself in your role and 4-H."

After reflecting over the past few months within my own work and what our clubs are doing, we are reinventing the way 4-H looks like and the youth experience is in our program without losing out on the fundamental purposes of what 4-H is. While your club meetings may look and feel different, we are still giving youth the opportunity to learn and lead in our program. While a project never turned into an exhibit, youth still engaged with the experiential learning process, with the support of a parent or trusted adult. For those who have participated in 4-H Family Fun nights, we are challenging youth how to creatively build relationships in an online community. I encourage our families to continue to showing up and challenging their own growth to continue "making the best, better."

I understand virtual learning is not everyone's cup of tea, yet, for some, this might be an opportunity to learn a new skill or project at home in their living room. I would encourage your family to check out Wisconsin 4-H's Virtual Learning Community here <https://bit.ly/3iufzxx> to learn more about what your family can learn about in the next few weeks. If you would like to submit a proposal to teach, please reach out to me about the process. I would love to see Chippewa participate in the learning online or by participating in one or more of the challenges in your own home. I am excited about the potential this has to help us move towards providing more education statewide, especially in project areas that might not have the volunteer support.

I hope you all find some time to reflect on the last few months to realize what you've learned about yourself throughout this time. I also encourage you to look to the future and get excited about the possibilities. While we may not have the answer to what things look like in a few months, we can still dream and learn through the process. Over the past 100 years, 4-H has stood the test of time through wars, economic depression, and provided youth with the skills for the future. 4-H and our world has changed a lot since 1902, and we will continue to do our best to meet the needs of youth around Chippewa County, Wisconsin, the United States and the world.

-Best, Heidi Vanderloop Benson

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