CLOVERBUDS, 4-H FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

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An on-going objective of 4-H is to provide the 4-H opportunity to more youth. One group often overlooked is the pre 4-H age youth. Involving this age youth accomplishes two objectives: Involving the youth, and involving the parents of these youth.

After members graduate from 4-H, they usually do not become involved in 4-H again until they have a nine year old child. Many of these young parents, though capable leaders, have very limited time. Hence, the opportunity of working with a small group of youth in a short term project is ideal for both parents and young children.

Marinette County has set up such a program called 4-H Cloverbuds, which helps meet the needs of both pre 4-H age youth and their parents. This pre 4-H age group has a high need for group identification and it is this age child that is the most accepting of advice and leaders help. Also, their high level of enthusiasm and willingness to meet adult expectations make them exceptionally fun to work with in small groups.

The Cloverbud program appeals to the working mother who is gone all week but likes to do something special with her children on weekends. These projects are set up for 5 or 6 one hour sessions which may be taught once per week or perhaps once per month. In several cases, parents alternate teaching the group either by meetings or by projects. The easy to teach, pre-planned projects aid in making the Cloverbud program popular.

Another source of Cloverbud leadership is teenagers. A small 4-H Cloverbud unit is an ideal situation for teens to gain practical experience both in developing leadership skills and in handling the responsibility of working with children.

A definite plus for the Cloverbud program is that it provides opportunities for developing permanent 4-H clubs. One of our major goals is that both parents and members will have a memorable pre 4-H experience so as to aid in future leader
recruitment and in starting new clubs. Two permanent 4-H clubs have thus far been formed as a result of the Cloverbud contact.

Over the years many younger brothers and sisters of 4-H members have tagged along to 4-H meetings or activities. In some clubs they were allowed to actually participate in the club.

Through the Cloverbud program these eager youngsters can legitimately be involved. The Cloverbud program is just another project within the club. In one of the larger clubs, the Cloverbuds meet in another room while the older members are having their regular club meeting.

The literature used includes Exploring 4-H plus literature developed in Marinette County on "Gardening", "Horses", and "Food and Nutrition". Also, we obtained copies of literature written by Joan Steiner, Summer Agent in Calumet County, on "Nature", "Birds", "Animals", and "Fossils and Arrowheads".

The entire program is flexible to meet the needs of members and leaders. Youth from ages 4 to 12 have enrolled in Cloverbud projects, which the leader or leaders select. Both teens and parents have had enjoyable leadership experiences. Each group of 4 to 10 children meet as often as their leaders decide is convenient and may discontinue after six meetings on one project or move on to other projects.

Overall, this endeavor has been low key in so far as agent time investment is concerned. It is promoted along with the total 4-H program or whenever a filler is needed for a radio tape or a Saturday column. The Marinette County 4-H Leaders Executive Council has encouraged Cloverbud participation in all county 4-H events and Cloverbuds may exhibit items at the County Fair, which are judged for blue and red participation ribbons.

Eight 4-H clubs have Cloverbuds as a project, several other clubs involve one or two Cloverbud members but do not have separate leaders for them. Cloverbuds is a way to involve more of the total family and a method of exposing more individuals and families to 4-H.