

SD Youth Gain through 4-H Shooting Sports



Patrol Officer, Scott Price says communication plays a large role in his daily activities as a member of the Watertown Police Department.

"Even if you end up taking someone to jail, developing rapport and gaining cooperation is important. Maybe they will tell you incriminating information," says the 25-year-old Britton native.

Price attributes the years he spent as a 4-H member involved in 4-H Shooting Sports with developing the communication skills necessary to not only succeed in, but to secure, the career he enjoys today. When Price applied to the force in 2012 he was one of 25 applicants vying for a single position. "They narrowed it down to 10 applicants. In the end it came down to the interview and score we received on the competency test," explained Price.

Today, Price is among the more than 350 trained volunteers who coach 4-H members.

"Through 4-H I met new people at every tournament I competed in and I gained even more communication skills as I branched out and got involved in the 4-H Teen Leadership Conference," says Price, who was named the 2014 Rookie of the Year.

Aimee Allcock would agree with Price. The 2015 graduate of Britton/Hecla High School has competed in 4-H Shooting Sports since she was 9. It wasn't until high school speech class however, that she realized her 4-H involvement gave her an edge off the shooting range as well. "Every year we had to give a speech in front of our club. It was terrifying at first. But over time, it got easier and easier. When I got to speech class, I was comfortable when many of classmates, who were not in 4-H, were scared," Aimee, 18 says.

During the 2015 State 4-H Shooting Sports Competition held in Pierre this April, Aimee, her twin sister, Jessie and their teammate, Jena Lunzman, received the top three individual placings in the Air Rifle division. A month earlier, the team, with the addition of their team mate, Lyndsey Effling, placed first.

The twin's mom, Holly Wismer, values the independence her daughters have developed through 4-H Shooting Sports. "They graduate this year and will be on their own in college. I'm not worried about them, because through shooting sports they have learned how to solve their own problems," Wismer says.

She explains that when her daughters step up to the line during competition and aim at the target, they are on their own. "This sport is not just about shooting the gun. It's about the decisions they make when they are on the line and how those decisions effect the end result," Wismer says. "They have a spotting scope so they can see each shot. After each shot they can adjust the site so the next shot is better. Sometimes, during competition they will be on that line, alone, for more than an hour."

Before youth ever step up to the line, they must first participate in an intensive safety training and pass a safety test, explains Mark Rowen, SDSU Extension 4-H Youth Program

Advisor for Stanley, Hughes and Sully Counties. "Shooting sports creates an opportunity for youth to learn safety and from there, they can safely shoot recreationally or competitively - whatever they choose."

A part of South Dakota's 4-H programming since 1983, Rowen says due to South Dakotans' affection for the outdoors and recreational hunting, 4-H Shooting Sports has always been popular. In recent years, numbers have continued to climb; perhaps due to pop culture - movies like Hunger Games are driving interest in archery.

Although outside influences may initially attract youth and their families to 4-H Shooting Sports; it's the objective nature of the sport that Kathryn Reeves says retains the more than 3,800 South Dakota youth who compete in 4-H Shooting Sports each year. "You aim and your score is determined by where you hit the target," explains Reeves, SDSU Extension 4-H Science Field Specialist. "In today's world there are very few activities where youth can look at the numbers objectively and see how good they are and where they need to improve."

Like all sports, training is essential to success. "It's more than aiming and taking a shot at a target. This sport takes a lot of self-discipline," says Jessie Allcock, who practices up to three nights a week with her sister and teammates in preparation for a tournament. "My coaches have always said its 10 percent talent and skill and 90 percent mental. When you're on the line, it's about being in control of your thoughts and actions."

Jessie, her sister and teammates have traveled the nation competing in 4-H shooting sports. She says the exposure to people and places outside of South Dakota have been eye-opening. "I have a certain awareness for what goes on in the world outside my high school and home town. As I have searched for what I want to do after high school, 4-H has opened up so many opportunities for me and allowed me to explore many different areas of interest," says Jessie, who plans to pursue a college degree that will lead her to a career in diplomatic relations.

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