

4-H teaches life skills through dog project



Did you know there are approximately 72 million dogs owned as family pets in the United States? According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, that's around 37.2 percent of American households who are current dog owners.

Now the real question: of those households with a dog, how many of them wish either their dog or themselves as pet owners were trained in pet care and obedience? One of the 4-H projects youth have the opportunity to participate in is the Dog Project, where 4-H members learn dog care, showmanship and obedience skills which will last a lifetime.

Owning an animal is a big responsibility and often a fairly steep learning curve. The 4-H Dog Project helps youth learn how to select, feed, house and care for dogs properly. Through the Dog Project manuals, 4-H members also understand and recognize the importance of dogs in our world.

The Dog Project offers members the opportunity to greatly expand their knowledge of dogs of all breeds. Specifically, project participants accomplish the following learning experiences:

—learn what kind of dog would be best for each project member and his/her family.

—dog obedience and training.

—investigate dog breed origins.

—find out why dogs are spayed or neutered.

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—compare dog foods.

—learn how to communicate about dogs.

—learn about dogs that help people.

—learn how to budget.

—and many other fun experiences with dogs!

While the dogs are learning self-control and obedience, 4-H members are learning skills they will use for the rest of their lives. Some of these life skills include communication, responsibility, planning and organizing, making decisions and practicing leadership.

Other topics and activities project members participate in are making a dog care schedule, creating a plan to keep dogs from getting lost, identifying dog body parts, researching dog vaccination and parasite control steps, creating a housebreaking plan and preparing for the loss of a dog.

Dogs in the 4-H Dog Project do not have to be purebred or registered. Some of the most obedient and loveable are mixed breed dogs and even dogs rescued from animal shelters. As long as the dog is willing to learn, not aggressive and easy for the youth to handle, it is an acceptable dog for the 4-H Dog Project.

If you are interested in watching your child and your loveable family pet grow and learn together, consider signing them up for the 4-H Dog Project. For more information about the project, please call the Phillips County Extension Office at 970-854-3616.

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