Got Job Skills?
Ohio 4-H Camp Counselors Do!

Going to camp is more than fun and games around the campfire. Ohio 4-H’ers are learning by doing as camp counselors. They are developing job skills that employers say are lacking in many new entrants to the job market, but are key to success in the workforce of the 21st century. Camp counseling gives 4-H’ers job skills they can add to their resume, for success now and in the future.

4-H camp counselors have challenging, meaningful roles and carry out real responsibilities as part of their experience. They plan and lead a four- or five-day camp for younger campers from their county. They attend training, lead and serve on committees, and spend time gathering supplies and preparing to go to camp. Once at camp, they lead groups of campers in activities, live with them in cabins, and teach them everything from crafts to canoeing, all while taking the initiative to get the job done along with their fellow counselors. They work hard and they have fun doing it!

The skills camp counselors develop are those that will transfer to a variety of work settings because they have to do with one’s approach to work, interactions with others, and the application of skills to a variety of work tasks and roles (see Figure 1). These are the skills we want in our 21st century workforce and our communities!

When 4-H professionals use an approach that emphasizes job skills as well as skills specific to being a camp counselor (see Figure 2), camp counselors thought of being a counselor as a job (even though they don’t get paid) and they develop a better understanding of the world of work. They also gain insights about future career decisions.

Camp counselors significantly improve their job skills such as leadership, teamwork, problem solving, time management, and good work habits (being punctual, honest, and responsible) through this approach (see Table 1). They tend to excel in the areas of teamwork and professionalism.

“It has taught me the skills that are important in life no matter what kind of job you get.”

Figure 1
Camp Counselors Gain Job Skills Valued by Employers in the 21st Century

Support provided by the Erie and Orlys Sauder Fund, Ohio 4-H Foundation
What Camp Counselors Say About Their Experience

“It showed me that everything in the future is going to take more responsibility, and camp counseling was the first step in showing me how to be more responsible.”

“Being a counselor made me a stronger team member and communicator, two skills that will be valuable in the future.”

“I have learned work ethic and have been put into a work-type environment. This has helped me to communicate, lead, organize, manage time, and to be a responsible and hardworking person.”

“Being a camp counselor has helped me to learn that I have patience with younger children. This will help me when I decide my career path.”

Table 1
Skill Ratings of 4-H Camp Counselors by 4-H Professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Category</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Skills</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork &amp; Leadership</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratings of 247 camp counselors in 16 counties in 2010. Rated on a 5-point scale, with 5 indicating consistently excels. All differences significant, p < .000.

Figure 2
What Does It Take To Be An Ohio 4-H Camp Counselor?

“Camp counseling is one of the best things I have ever gotten involved with. I love the adults and the fellow counselors I got to work with this year. Camp is fun and the best experience I ever had.”