



## Supporting Youth with Special Needs

### How Can You Support Youth with Special Needs?

You may have a member(s) in your 4-H club who is differently abled. Regardless of the disability (physical, mental, developmental, etc.), it is imperative to work with the child and his or her parents/guardians to set goals and modify experiences to meet the child's needs. Being sensitive to the concerns of the parent and child is important to help them feel included.

### Types of Special Needs

- Physical—Visual or hearing impaired, spinal cord injuries, trauma injuries related to an accident, certain medical conditions or illnesses.
- Mental—Conditions associated with below or above average intellectual functioning.
- Developmental—Learning disabilities and emotional disorders.

### Plan to Ensure a Positive Experience for Youth with Disabilities

- Learn about the child and the special need. Talk to the parents or guardians and research the special need on the Internet, at the library, or through a local support group.
- Treat each child as a special child, regardless of special need. Recognize each child's skills, abilities, talents, and needs.
- Recognize positive behaviors and give lots of positive reinforcement. Make expectations realistic.
- Help the total club membership appreciate and understand the disability of its members.
- Have parents or guardians share information with your county Extension professional to help the 4-H organization better prepare for the special needs member's participation in project judging, skillathons, camp, and other 4-H opportunities.

Your goal is to provide a positive enriching experience for every 4-H member. Encourage all parents to explain disabilities on the 4-H enrollment form. Even though this is optional, the information can assist your county Extension professional in planning a positive 4-H experience for all youth.