Richmond County 4-H is a youth development program designed to help kids between the ages of 5 and 18 lead positive, productive, and fulfilling lives. Through afterschool programs, clubs, school enrichment, service projects, leadership retreats, and summer programs, 4-H teaches life skills and provides opportunities to succeed and gain new experiences.

At each 4-H event, a pledge that describes each of the 4-Hs is recited. If you recall, in a few previous articles I explained the meaning of “Hs,” Hands and Head. The “H” we will focus on today however, is Heart; “I pledge my Heart to greater loyalty.”

With February being heart health month and Valentine’s Day, focusing on the heart is easy to do. In 4-H, that focus is put on relating to and caring about others. In a digital world, we often forget that teaching youth how to care for others is a top priority. A text message just doesn’t cut it sometimes. Each 4-H Club is responsible for doing at least 2 activities each year that put others’ concerns before their own. This may include an activity with the elderly or veterans, volunteering time at the animal shelter, or simply delivering a meal and card to someone. Some naturally tender-hearted youth might grasp empathy and caring for others quite easily, but the saying that actions speak louder than words is still true. If youth see us caring for others and going out of our way to build a nurturing relationship, they are more likely to do the same.

Youth in 4-H Clubs also complete an annual project. Some projects include raising animals while others are more skill based such as learning to solder or sew. Youth develop a positive relationship with a caring adult or teen leader that serves as their mentor or teacher throughout the project. Completing a project takes heart, a lot of dedication, teaching youth the responsibility of follow through, even when things get challenging.

Turn on any local news channel and you’ll quickly realize how divided the world we live in really is. Some of the life skills 4-H focuses on in clubs, school enrichment, after school programs, and even camp are conflict resolution, communication, cooperation, and accepting differences. 4-H programs are available for everyone. This often means that people of all ages, races, and genders find themselves in the same room. 4-H teaches how to see past the differences and accept people for who they are.

Pledging your heart to greater loyalty can take on several different meanings. Youth find their own meaning of “Heart” when completing a 4-H project, caring for others, accepting differences, and figuring out what being loyal is all about. If your heart is ready to invest some time, consider being a 4-H volunteer and share your expertise and love of something with the youth of Richmond County, or if you have youth that are ready to learn and experience new things, call 910.997.8255 and speak with me, Catherine Shelley, Richmond County 4-H Agent.