

Military OneSource Podcast — 4-H Military Partnership Program

Title: C&Y Youth Programs

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. We support military families during their journey through military life. There is a lot that we do and we try to discuss as much of it as we can in this podcast. Youth programs, they're a huge part of what we do, and we don't do it alone because there's a lot of amazing youth organizations out there, and so we work with them so we can bring what they do to military families.

4-H is one of those organizations, and we'll talk about 4-H today with our guest, who is David Britton. And David is a youth development specialist. David, welcome to the podcast and can you tell us a little bit about yourself and as a youth development specialist, how do you tie the 4-H with the military?

David Britton:

Hey, Bruce. Thank you for having me. And yes, I do have a very unique role with this 4-H military partnership. I actually work for NC State, but I'm on loan with the military to help support our child and youth programs and staff and youth and teens.

While on this 4-H military partnership, I've worked for both Army Child and Youth Services and Air Force Child and Youth Programs for many years. It's an incredible collaboration that brings together the resources of the Defense Department and the United States Department of Agriculture to help support our military families.

The Defense Department has the kids, the programs, the space, the places, and 4-H has the curriculum, the resources and the educators created through land grant universities to help positive youth development. It's a natural fit to bring 4-H and the military together to support our youth, teens and families.

It also has incredible resources for our staff. There are trainings available, curriculum available, everything to expand on what happens in our school-age programs and our youth centers. So, 4-H and military child and youth programs, it's an incredible, natural fit that works well together. You can almost say it's like peanut butter and jelly.

Bruce:

All right. Well, we love peanut butter and jelly, and it's really interesting to hear about the partnership that you have. Before we get too far ahead about the partnership and what we're doing on military installations, I don't know anything about the 4-H, so I'll just say that straight away. I grew up and, in my town, I joined the Boy Scouts. There probably was a 4-H chapter in my community, but I didn't know about it. And for those of us who never really joined the 4-H or knew much about it, why don't you tell us a little bit about 4-H?

David:

Sure. First of all, Scouts is a wonderful program, so that's great that you were involved in that. The more touch points we have with caring adults, the greater success we'll have. It's great that you're involved in Scouts. But I even said myself, 4-H is one of the best-kept secrets. Honestly, I hate admitting this, but I did not know about 4-H until I started working for them. 4-H is over 100 years old and has strong roots in agriculture, but over the years, it's evolved into so much more. If a youth has an interest in 4-H, there's definitely a program for them to learn more about and to gain new skills.

Bruce:

No doubt, no doubt. But honestly, the formal motto is head, heart, hands and health, which really gets into a lot of things that are relevant to what kids are experiencing today. They're not bringing agricultural tips to the dinner table. They're talking about what's happening in their modern communities. So, let's just get more into that. When we are looking at the partnership that the military has with 4-H, what are some of the programs and activities available for youth?

David:

Definitely. There's so much available for youth in 4-H. If there's a subject youth are interested in and learning more about, 4-H most likely has a curriculum on the topic. Science and agriculture, civic engagement and healthy living; those are the core program areas that 4-H focuses on. But there are hundreds of projects available for youth to learn new skills. Some examples include photography, art, STEM, cooking, outdoor adventures, fashion, citizenship, animals, robotics, entrepreneurship and nutrition, and there's so much more. As I said, if a youth has an interest in a subject area, 4-H can provide an opportunity to spark that interest for the youth and they can learn more about it.

Bruce:

Right. Listening to that list, for each person, probably a trigger for a different person. Robots? That's wild. That's awesome. Glad to hear it. But when you are working with military youth, what do you find to be the programs that are most popular or maybe the most successful?

David:

Of course. STEM programs have the most participation in 4-H. Science is fun and it's all around us. So, when you introduce youth to the new wonders of the world around them, it can be so powerful. Each year, Air Force programs participate in the National 4-H STEM Challenge. This year it's called "Explorers of the Deep." It introduces youth to the mysteries and adventures of

ocean exploration with robots. 4-H takes a look at issues currently involved in the world and how youth could have an impact in solving them. And we want to create leaders for tomorrow, today.

4-H cooking clubs are extremely popular as well. Kids love to learn how to cook and bake, and then they enjoy the benefits of their efforts. So, hopefully they learned really well and made some great treats. Programs are really successful when they have creative adults leading them. It's all about the approach and the relationships built with youth. One of the examples of the Cooking Club that was so successful is that at the end of their program, they created a fancy meal for date night for their parents. And another program had a top chef or Orange Chef Challenge to showcase their skills. Learning should be fun and hands on, and that's what 4-H does for our youth.

Bruce:

Very, very cool. Really interested to hear that. Any stories that you can share about that? Because I'm sure these kids are doing all kinds of amazing things.

David:

It's wonderful to see their programs highlighted at state fairs or a lot of times our programs will have their projects displayed in the lobby or in the commander's buildings. A couple stories that come to mind is public speaking. 4-H has a demonstration portion of all their projects, so youth will have the opportunity to speak in public. When I'm out in the airport with my 4-H shirt on and people see the 4-H clover, they'll come up to me and say, "I was so terrified of public speaking, but 4-H helped me get over that fear. I now teach, I do this." So, it's wonderful to run into folks who have that 4-H experience and how it's impacted them.

Another story that really stands out to me is several years after a team leadership camp that we hosted, I received a letter from a camper thanking me. It was this experience at this high adventure camp that made him realize he wanted to be an educator and work with kids and teens. Something I'll never forget. I still have that letter and it just shows you never know the impact that you have on children's lives. It's why I'm so thankful for all the work and how impressed I am with our military child and youth programs professionals and the 4-H educators. They make such a difference each and every day with our youth and children.

Bruce:

Yeah. What I'm getting right now is 4-H is way more cool and relevant and current than I had previously imagined. So, what's the age range for kids who can be involved in 4-H?

David:

There's something for everyone in 4-H. As I said, if you have that interest, you'll definitely find something to do. For 4-H, it's for youth between the ages of eight and 18 years old. There's also a 4-H Clover Buds program, and that's typically for youth between the ages of five and seven, so the programs are for younger kids. And there's even a collegiate 4-H programs for students and for college students.

Bruce:

Now, what about parents? You mentioned that adults are getting involved. What can they do and how much can they shape or direct what's happening in a chapter?

David:

Well, 4-H is run by volunteers. So, there's a lot of parents who act as the 4-H leaders for 4-H clubs. We have a lot of parent involvement that way. Parents can be involved if they have a special skill or talent that they want to share or teach with the youth so they can lead those clubs. But parents are always welcome and actively involved in our programs.

Bruce:

Do you have chapters overseas?

David:

4-H is through each of the land grant universities. We have programs in all the states. Right now, 4-H, we have for our military programs, we have 4-H of supported by certain states. But as you know, COVID had such a huge impact on all of our programs where actually the 4-H military partnership is meeting to discuss how we can best support our overseas locations.

In the past, we had four states, Hawaii, Maryland, Florida and Alaska support all of our military child and youth programs overseas. But with the lack of travel and lack of programs, we were offering virtual opportunities. But we now are looking into new ways that to best support our programs.

Bruce:

I'm really enjoying this conversation. And honestly, I wish I had this conversation some years ago because my boys' Scout troop, all they wanted to do was play basketball and you're sending robots into the ocean. That's way more cool than what I did. What other opportunities that are available for military youth?

David:

There's a ton of opportunities for youth through 4-H. There are typical ways that we provide experiences are through community clubs, spin clubs, which are a little bit shorter duration, camps, afterschool programs and lots of projects. The 4-H military partnership provides a variety of 4-H camps and scholarship opportunities for military youth to attend. There are 4-H military teen adventure camps that are sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Purdue University that provides high-adventure camp experiences for military teens, outdoor adventures. I mentioned earlier, each October, youth participate in the National 4-H STEM Challenge.

And then youth can learn new skills and have the opportunity to share what they've learned at their county and state fairs. I'm sure you may have seen those or attended those. They can attend local events and possibly even experience, there's a National 4-H conference in Washington, D.C., each year. There's a national 4-H Congress in Atlanta, Georgia, and in the past couple of years, 4-H started hosting National 4-H youth summits in healthy living, photography and agrosience, and students come to Washington, D.C., to learn more and share what they've

learned. So, as I mentioned earlier, 4-H is one of the best-kept secrets and that has so much for youth to do and all for teens and families.

Bruce:

Yeah, so, two more questions that I have. As they're growing and continuing their involvement, are there leadership opportunities for kids who are in the 4-H chapters? And the other half of my question is, as military families move, what can they do as they want to move from chapter to chapter? What can they take them from one chapter to the next?

David:

Each of the 4-H clubs, there's leadership roles included. There are presidents, vice presidents and secretaries, so there's a host of leadership opportunities provided through the 4-H experience. Enrolled in 4-H, they would keep, if they're enrolled, they would have their record books. They can keep their records. And that's what we try to do, just like the military youth programs has youth sponsorship. As families move from one location to another, we try to make the connection as seamless as possible as families moves to make that transition process much easier. We try to connect youth on one side from their base that they're leaving to the base that they're going to. And 4-H can do the same thing.

We have a state 4-H military liaison in every state and they can connect military families to their local county 4-H office. And, as families move and transition, 4-H can go with them. It's part of the reason for the 4-H military partnership. We really didn't get much into the history of the partnership, but that was one aspect of it is to have a slice of home. As families move from location to location to location, they'll be something familiar to that youth as they go to that new location. And 4-H was one option to have available, since it's in every county and every state. The youth can bring their knowledge and their record books with them and hopefully seamlessly fit into a new 4-H club or program in their new home state.

Bruce:

Glad to hear it. Very interesting. Any final words?

David:

We're going to share several links down below. For military families who'd like to get more information on what they can do in their area, they can contact their local 4-H office or contact their state 4-H military liaison. Air Force has me as a youth development specialist to connect families or youth with programs either on base or within their community. And, the Army and Navy have 4-H specialists as well. So, it's not just an Air Force program, it's a 4-H military partnership program that supports all of our military families. We'll make sure we have those links for 4-H.org down below and also a 4-H military partnership link so you can get more information on programs and activities for youth.

Bruce:

Well, I appreciate all of this information. This has been a really fun conversation, really eye-opening. It is just such a pleasure to know that 4-H is so richly involved in the military community. David Britton, thank you so much for joining us today.

David:

Bruce, thank you so much. I appreciate the opportunity.

Bruce:

Absolutely. And I want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We're a website, we're a call center, we're all over social media and now we're a podcast. So, we hope that you'll subscribe. We touch on all kinds of topics that help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks for listening. Bye-bye.