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# With Asperger's, communication was hard. Here's how 4-H helped me become a leader

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**Editor's Note:** *Isaac Hosay is a recipient of the 2022 Emerald Award, 4-H's highest honor*

Idil Ahmed said, "Real growth is when you start checking and correcting yourself." For me, that growth came from 4-H. My journey began when I was nine when my mom pushed me to join 4-H.

In the beginning, 4-H was difficult for me because my Asperger's Syndrome diagnosis made simple things, like connecting with my peers, a challenge. Initially, I interrupted the leader, monopolized the conversation and had trouble focusing on the tasks. Before and after each meeting, my Mom and I would practice specific social scenarios such as: how to correctly interact with peers and how to speak at the appropriate times. I began making behavioral changes to better integrate into group settings.

One of the most valuable skills 4-H provided me was communicating. I have always been a big talker, but it wasn't until 4-H helped me hone my skills through opportunities like leading pledges, campaigning for club offices and competing at speech competitions that I learned to organize my thoughts, use volume control and speak with purpose.

In my first couple of years competing in speech competitions, I didn't make it past the area level. But with practice, experience and advice from judges, I made it to the state level several times. By learning to communicate more effectively, many opportunities have arisen for me to speak and connect with others. I've had the opportunity to speak on behalf of Warren County 4-H at the annual Farm Bureau meeting and was also featured on WBKO and WNKY speaking about activities 4-H offers the youth in our community. Through these experiences, communication has become one of my greatest assets.

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Beyond communication skills, 4-H also helped me realize the importance and benefits of volunteering. When I began volunteering with 4-H, I participated in service projects led by other members. Watching older members develop service projects and leadership skills inspired me to lead and create service projects of my own.

My first project was the 4-H Valentine Project where people create and donate valentines for the elderly and adults with special needs. My second project, which was during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic, was called the Need to Read Book Drive. For this project, Warren County 4-H got the community to donate books, flashcards, games and other reading materials to a local elementary school where many students didn't have access to these items. By contributing my time and sharing my ideas, I learned the value of building a better community. These experiences have helped forge me into a better leader, collaborator and volunteer.

4-H helped take me from a socially awkward and uninvolved kid to a responsible, focused leader as well as a productive member of my community. Through this program, I have gained confidence, learned responsibility and developed communication skills that will help prepare me for college and beyond.

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