

MERRILL FOCUS

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Serving Merrill and Lincoln County

Youths develop independence through 4-H

UW-Extension 4-H Youth development has been using the four essential elements of youth development by Cathann Kress as its guide in developing youth development activities. In last month's article, I covered the need for mastery. This time my focus is on the youth's need for independence.

AMANDA
KOSTMAN

Independence can be many things to many people. For some, independence means having their first job, being able to drive after getting their license or going away to college. Independence also can take the form of being able to cook a meal without help or having a special skill and using that skill to complete a project.

No matter what form it takes, independence



PHOTO COURTESY LINCOLN COUNTY 4-H
Erin Riddle, left, emcees events at the Lincoln County Fair with RaeAnn Brixius, the new Central District Youth Leader Counsel Representative from Lincoln County.

always has a sense of self-determination. Lincoln County 4-H members display a spirit of self-determination. They are constantly striving to do better, setting their goals a little higher each year so that they can learn all they can.

According to Cathann Kress, another aspect of independence is the "opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future." This has played

out in many ways here in Lincoln County. Youths are making decisions for their organizations; they are choosing activities to take part in and volunteering to participate in committees. They can see themselves making a difference and understand how the actions they take can help many more people. Our youths are learning about government, decision-making, parliamentary procedure, critical thinking and responsibility.

By continuing to encourage the youths to exercise their decision-making skills, we are making sure that they will gain the independence they seek. We are empowering them to strive to make the best better continually and become an active participant in not only their future, but also the future of our communities.

Erin Riddle, 18, shared her experience on the

Wisconsin State 4-H Youth Leader Council, or YLC, a state level leadership opportunity:

"And the one of the central district representatives, Erin Riddle. That was the introduction to one of the best things that ever happened to me, YLC. YLC is a group of 25 elected youths from around Wisconsin to be representatives of 4-H at the state level. There have been only three representatives from Lincoln County, and it is one of the largest honors one can hold. We meet three times a year to plan everything. It seems difficult, but it is a tremendous amount of fun! If I hadn't made YLC, I would not have had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people, out to make 4-H a better place for everyone."

Amanda Kostman is program adviser for Lincoln County 4-H Youth Development.