

## Inclusion as a Philosophy

In the Indiana 4-H Horse and Pony program, we are committed to the inclusion philosophy to make 4-H more accessible to youth with disabilities. There is an extensive body of educational research indicating that the inclusive philosophy maximizes learning for youth with and without disabilities. Integration has been found to improve social acceptance, self-esteem, and social skills for all youth involved (Wolfe & Hall, 2003) when it involves the active mixing of youth with and without disabilities (Rafferty, Boettcher, & Griffin, 2001). All youth can benefit from the opportunity to become more aware of differences and more tolerant and accepting of others (Killoran, 2002).

Youth with disabilities have been found to benefit from interaction with their peers in a multitude of ways. The range of activities they can participate in is expanded, providing them with more opportunities to learn and interact, resulting in greater preparation for the real world (Rafferty et al., 2001).

Youth without disabilities reap social and academic rewards, as well. The primary results of an integrated education for youth without disabilities are in the areas of friendship, social practice relationships, and tolerance for diversity (Fisher, 1999). In the Fisher (1999) study of students' perspectives of inclusion, while several students spoke to the rights of students with disabilities to be with their non-disabled peers, one student expressed that he has a right to benefit from a class with a diverse student population and that includes students with disabilities.