

DESIGNING ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN DENVER

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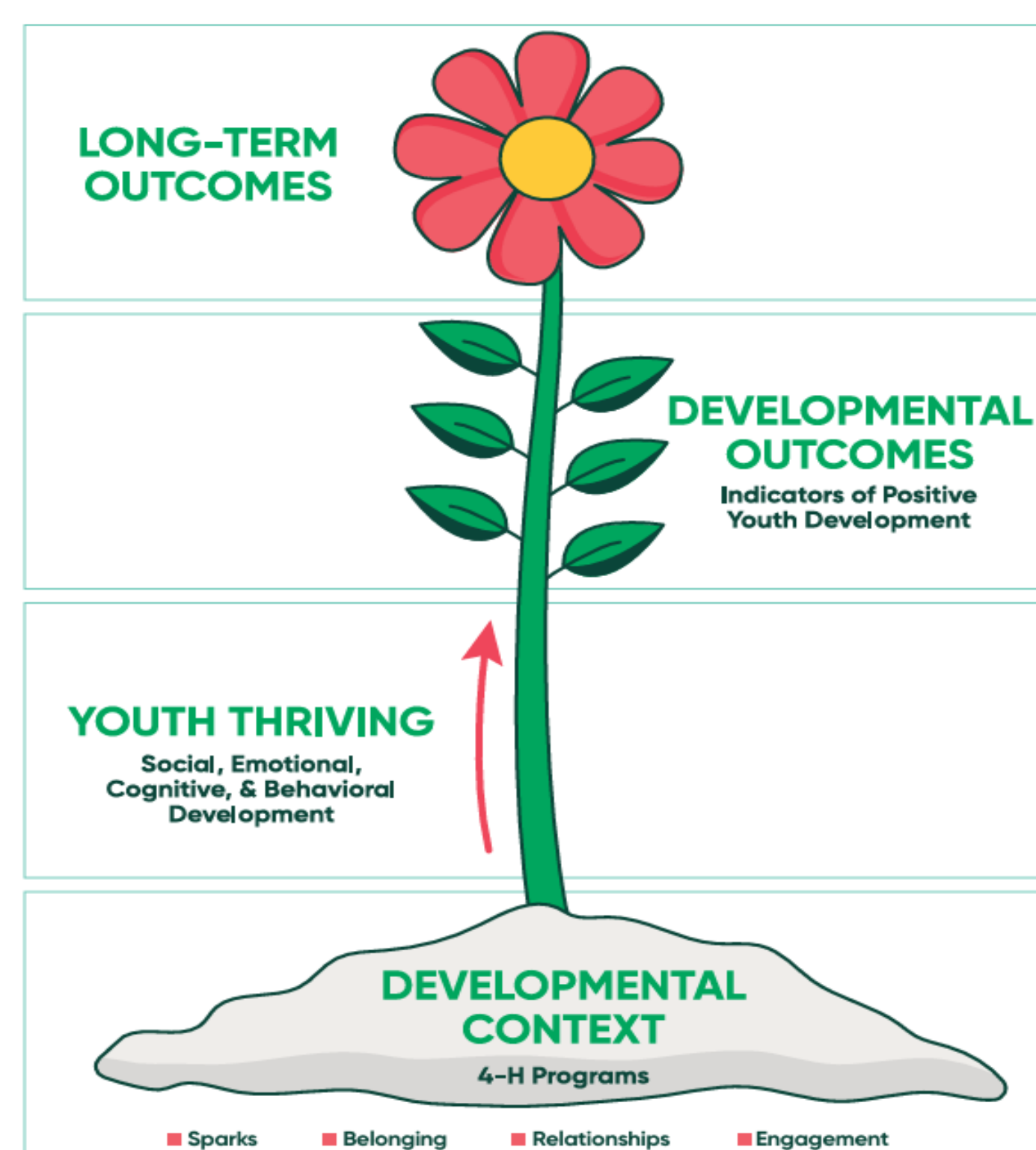
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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

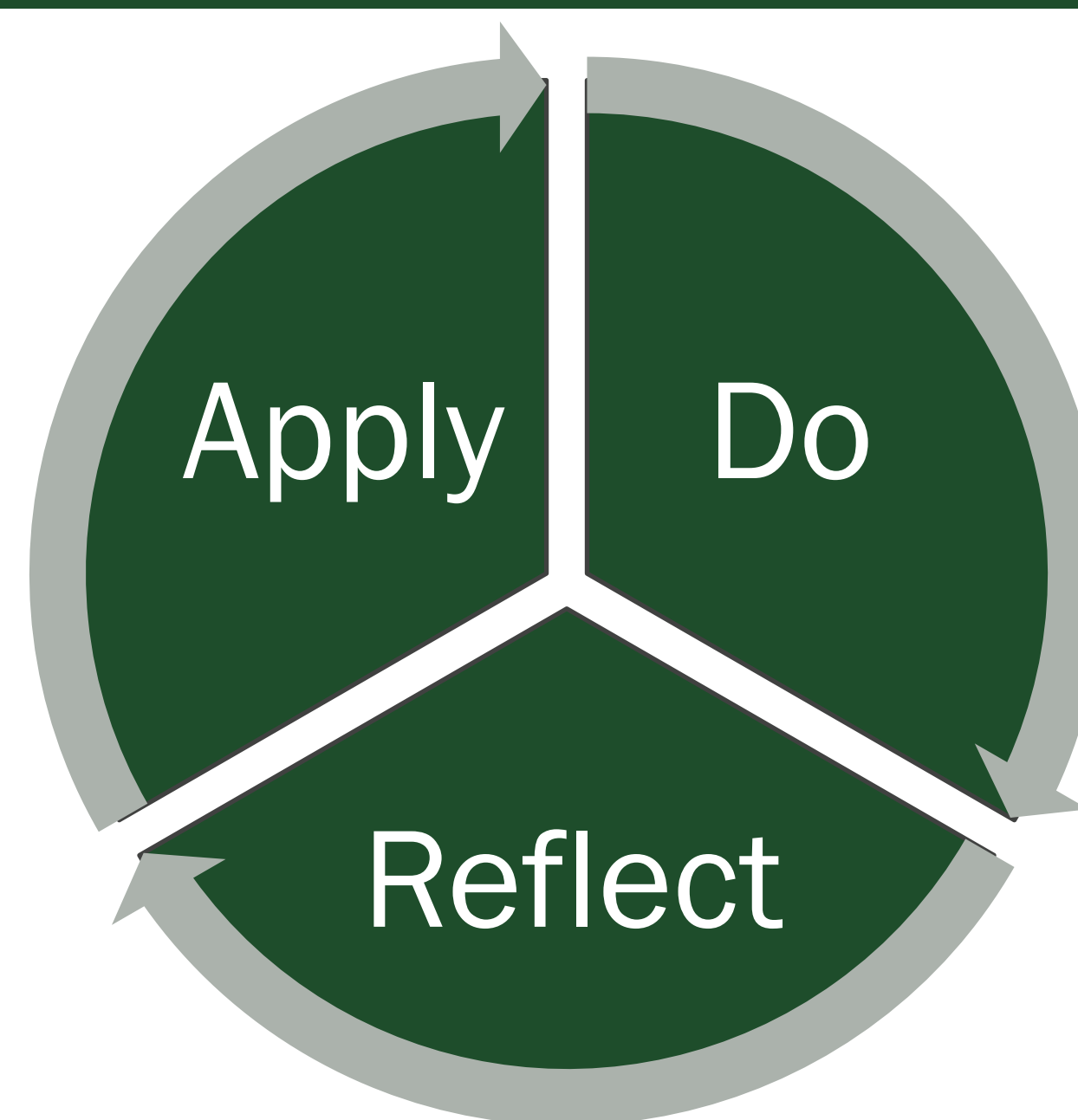
4-H is a youth development organization delivered by Cooperative Extension.¹ 4-H is focused on empowering young people by creating positive learning experiences in which youth can develop important life skills.^{2,3} This internship builds on 4-H values to provide environmental health programming.

Internship goals include:

1. Learn the scope of programming and the interests of local youth by participating in Denver 4-H educational programming.
2. Research community stakeholder and youth priorities for environmental health education and engagement.
3. Design an engaging environmental health education program for youth in Denver, based on research findings and informed by critical social science research and pedagogy.



LEARNED ABOUT PROGRAMMING



Participating as a co-facilitator in science-based educational programming, I learned how important it is to begin with an activity that learners can engage with and reflect upon.

4-H's experiential model parallels youth participatory research-action cycles. In both models, learning begins with an experiential activity,

followed by collective reflection and application.^{6,7}

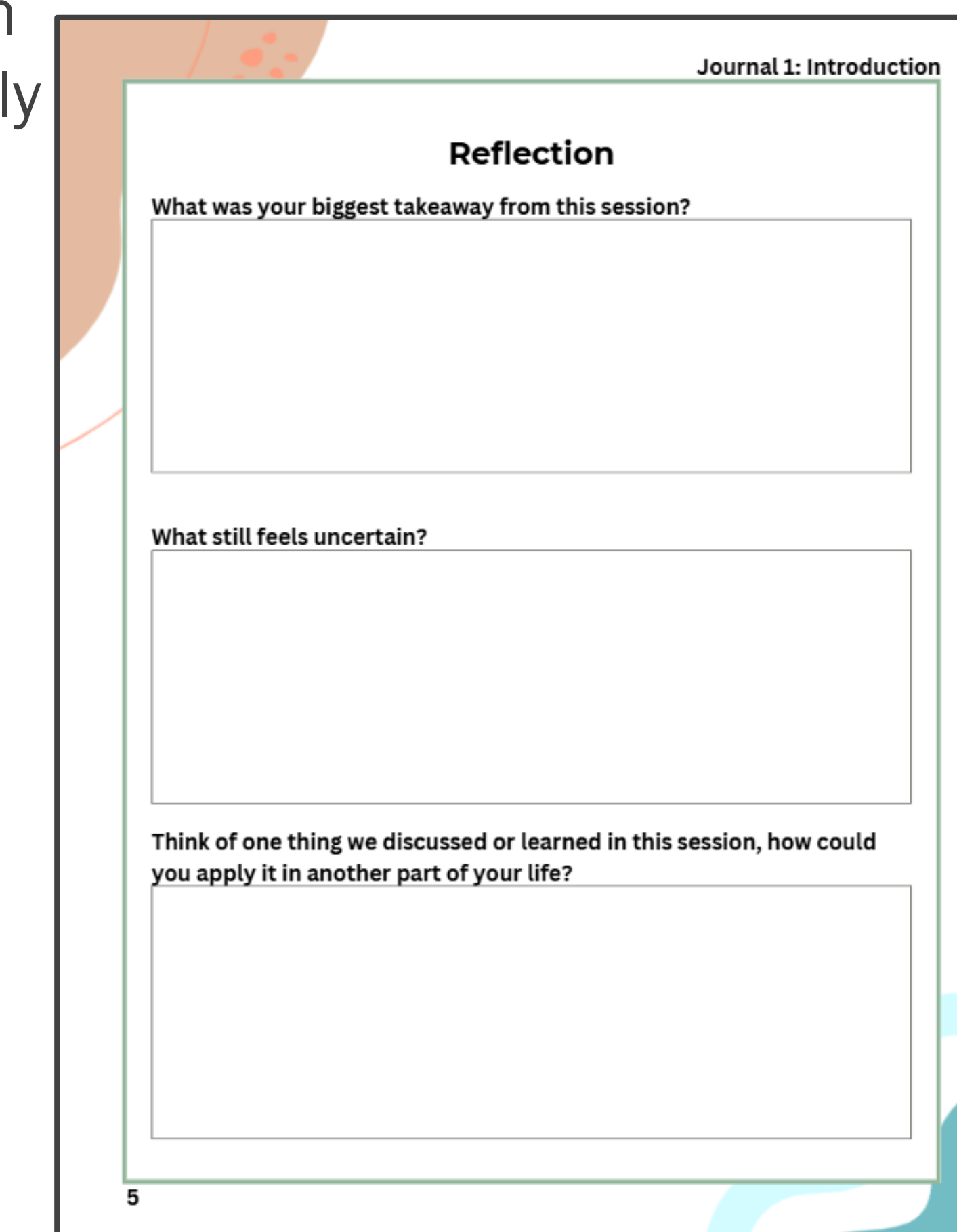
4-H's values (sparks, belonging, relationships, and engagement) parallel values common in youth participatory research, such as centering caring relationships, capacity building, and sharing power.^{3,8}



DESIGNED PROGRAMMING

Based on what I learned about Denver 4-H programming and community priorities, I designed and implemented environmental health programming about outdoor air quality and how it impacts health.

Building off this experience, I am designing environmental health educational modules in which young people collectively research structural concerns, place-making, behaviors, and feelings as they relate to environmental health. The goal is to provide a space where youth can learn and reflect on their embodied biographies to create a shared ethnography. These modules are designed to be adaptable and responsive to a partnership with an existing organization.



MY CONNECTION TO THIS INTERNSHIP

Embodiment refers to how places “get under the skin” and influence health.⁴ I am interested in “embodied biography,” or how an individual’s health is influenced by (and influences) society, knowledge production, and lived experiences.⁵ These dynamic connections between places and health are mediated by behaviors, feelings, and environmental exposures.⁵

For my dissertation research, I am interested in working with young people to study how environmental health is embodied, guided by the following questions:

- What is the significance of educational programming as sites in which young people experience and address environmental health concerns in Denver?
- How can participatory social scientists use educational programming to co-create research with young people at the intersections of health, environment, and justice?

RESEARCHED COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

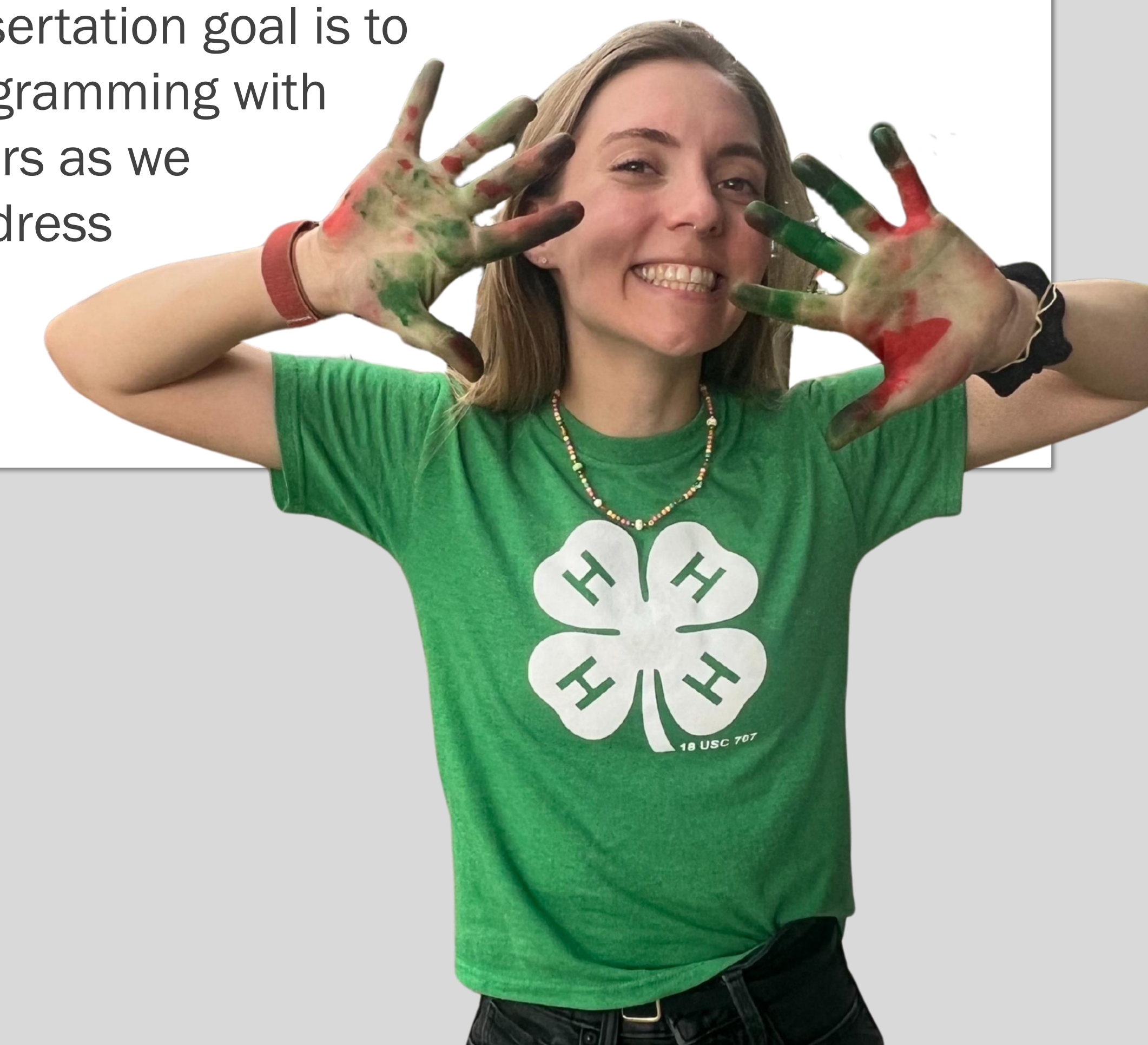
Conversations with community members and educators regarding environmental health education and research engagement provided helpful insights for my next steps.

From these conversations, I learned that there are a lot of academic, community-based, and governmental organizations that work with youth on related topics. To navigate this complex social network, interested researchers should look at building partnerships with already-existing and trusted entities.

Relationships between community members and academic researchers require intentionality. It is important to remain transparent throughout the research process and compensate community partners for their time and energy engaging with research projects. For this reason, it is also important to be thoughtful about what you ask of community members. Being too open-ended when recruiting for research may be a barrier to building meaningful partnerships.

NEXT STEPS

Going forward, I am fine-tuning the Embodied Ethnography programming for qualitative research and making it publicly accessible. My dissertation goal is to implement the programming with youth co-researchers as we investigate and address environmental health concerns.



References

