INSPIRING GENERATIONS OF KIDS TO DO
Making greater and more effective investments in children and youth will be the best way to improve social mobility throughout the nation.
According to research conducted by 4-H and The Bridgespan Group, upward economic mobility — the possibility that children will grow up to earn more than their parents — has been declining for nearly half a century. In 1970, 30-year-olds had a 90 percent chance — almost a certainty — of earning more than their parents did at the same age, adjusted for inflation. By 2014, those odds had dropped to around 50 percent.

For youth of color, the odds are worse. For every 10 African American youth born to parents who are in the middle class (i.e., in the middle income quintile), only 3 in 10 remain in the middle class or move up the income ladder. That means 70% of African American youth who are born into the middle class are actually downwardly mobile by the time they reach adulthood.
A CASE FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

The fact is, too many kids lack the critical skills they need to excel in life and career, which is why an investment in our youth is an investment in healthier and more prosperous communities. Youth issues are make or break factors in upward mobility; low birth weights, teen pregnancies, high school graduation rates, unemployment and incarceration are all indicators of a community’s trajectory — positive or negative.

By focusing on life skills development, 4-H’s camp program plays a critical role in youth development. Helping children learn resilience, self-efficacy and independence is key to the training that every 4-H camp professional receives. Children at 4-H camp benefit from a deliberate, research-backed development and delivery model that focuses on life skills development. These socio-economic skills are in turn critical as a foundation for youth, as they enable them to thrive in both school and the work environment.

83% of American parents agree with studies that show that time in nature leads to better focus in the classroom. 

72% of American kids rarely — or never! — go beyond their backyard to a state or national park.

82% of American parents view spending time in nature as “very important” — second only to reading.
National 4-H Council is dedicated to a future in which millions more young people are engaged in Cooperative Extension’s high-quality 4-H youth development programs, where 4-H youth, volunteers and staff are representative of the diversity of our nation.

WHY 4-H CAMP?

4-H is America’s largest youth development organization, having inspired six million kids since 1902. 4-H was founded on the belief that when kids are empowered to pursue their passions and chart their own courses, their skills grow and take shape, helping them to become true leaders in their lives, careers and communities.

Today’s 4-H is more diverse than ever before, reaching young people in every county, parish and borough across America’s urban, suburban and rural communities. By offering the highest quality programming in a caring and supportive environment, 4-H helps to ensure that all youth — regardless of race, gender, ability or background — have the potential to become leaders.

Partnership is at the heart of the 4-H delivery model, with the 4-H network including the Cooperative Extension System of America’s land-grant universities, the United States Department of Agriculture, National 4-H Council and thousands of local partners. These entities work together to create the best possible research-driven youth development models and expertise, providing all 4-H’ers with opportunities to grow.

Our local partners in particular are key to the 4-H camp program, as they have a unique grassroots focus that enables us to reach kids from all walks of life. These partners include health and human services departments, rural development organizations, school districts, places of worship, local businesses and agencies, individual activists and other youth and community-serving organizations.

Every year approximately 475,000 4-H’ers from around the country participate in day and overnight outdoor camp experiences. Leveraging our network of 4-H camps in all 50 states and several U.S. territories, we connect kids with nature and cultivate in them a greater sense of environmental appreciation and stewardship.
4-H camps provide the full benefits of a 4-H experience — caring adult counselors, university-backed educational curriculum and youth leadership opportunities for teens — coupled with the additional benefits of a youth camping experience that bring opportunities for independence, resiliency and teamwork.

Key to 4-H camps are meaningful interactions with highly-trained, compassionate staff, as well as small group experiences that enable campers to participate through experiential learning in both structured and unstructured settings. Our 4-H teen leaders are invaluable to the 4-H camp experience, as each is passionate not only about the outdoors, but also about the kids they mentor. By guiding younger campers to learn and grow in a safe and nurturing environment, our teen leaders in turn learn valuable life lessons about leadership and responsibility, under the watchful guidance of our adult counselors.

All our camp counselors are trained in various disciplines to create a safe environment for campers to thrive. This training includes group facilitation, conflict resolution and creating emotionally safe spaces, in addition to traditional skills such as CPR and wilderness safety.

The American Camp Association has cautioned that only 44 percent of camps offer specialized programs for individuals with special needs, yet for youth from vulnerable populations, including rural areas, native communities, girls, and youth who may feel excluded due to disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and mental health, camp is transformative.

Importantly, by providing children with a wide range of positive youth development approaches, positive youth behavior outcomes and the prevention of negative behaviors has been found. This is helped by the fact that 4-H camps are screen-free; by requiring youth to unplug, 4-H camps encourage kids to come together and build stronger social-emotional well-being.

“Participating in Special Clovers Camp the first time led her to being more independent,” Rebecca Harlow, mom of Hannah, explains. “She goes to school where she’s the only student with special needs, so I think it’s important to expose her to other children with special needs. This camp is really special because the kids do all the same activities and are fully immersed in the camp experience.”

475,000 young people go to 4-H camps every year, in all 50 states and several U.S. territories.
INVESTING IN A GENERATION OF DOERS

Thanks to our many dedicated counselors, volunteers and staff, we have impacted thousands of youth, yet 58 million children across America, many of them from disadvantaged backgrounds, still have no access to youth development programming. It is for this reason that our aim is to grow our camps to reach even more diverse and underserved audiences, as part of our growth strategy to reach 10 million young people by 2025.

“You can’t even begin to imagine the lives of some kids, yet you give us a place where we can be anything we want to be — no boundaries and no worries. It’s like a transition from a borderline dystopia to what seems to be a utopia for one week each summer and it may not seem like enough, but kids wait all year for that one week, that one experience. Thank you! ... I truly encourage you to keep sponsoring kids, keep giving them the opportunity to be where I am; you won’t be disappointed with the amount of kids whose lives change for the better.” (Donasia, L.G. Cook 4-H Camp, Branchville, New Jersey)

To provide a welcoming yet stimulating environment for every young person, 4-H needs to make an investment into our facilities, staff and training tools, all of which are critical to our ability to ensure an effective impact. For this reason, capital is needed to improve various assets, including:

• enhancements to cabins, nurses’ offices, dining halls, restrooms, swimming pools and other key areas;
• accommodations for the hearing impaired, including hearing loop systems;
• equipment and supplies for kids with special needs, such as portable tactile maps and air conditioners required for health needs; and
• trained facilitators, such as certified military family life counselors who are equipped to serve those addressing mental health needs related to wounded, ill, injured and fallen family members.

Coupled with the emotional and developmental needs of youth, the 4-H centers work to meet the physical needs of youth while away at camp, including access to nourishing food and accessible facilities and cabins.

In addition, 4-H provides scholarships for underserved youth from vulnerable populations who wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford this opportunity.
“Camp was amazing. It was nice to know I would be getting good food at breakfast, lunch and dinner and not worry if there was enough food for me and my family.” (2018 4-H camp participant)

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

An encouraging fact that has emerged from the volumes of data on social mobility and equity is that those communities that invest in young people and their development are most likely to find economic success and upward mobility. For while larger economic forces such as regional economies and state policies can drive (or constrain) economic mobility, individual communities play an integral role in supporting positive change amongst individuals.

The best gift we can give our children is to empower them with the skills to lead for a lifetime, and 4-H camps provide a powerful way in which to do this. Yet for too many minority and vulnerable kids, camp remains out of reach.

If 4-H and our partners are to continue preparing youth to reach their full potential and contribute to our nation’s prosperity, we must build the capacity of our youth, volunteers, communities and staff to work in the context of diversity and to build programs that are welcoming and inclusive of all youth, regardless of gender, race, culture, language, differing ability, national origin, sexual orientation or socio-economic status.

For more information on how you can help to ensure that ALL young people have the opportunity to benefit from transformative experiences at camp, please visit 4-H.org/camps.

A 4-H experience can equip a young person for success in school and career, and that investment in a young person can translate into economic health for whole communities.

CITATIONS
1Brookings Institution, 2017
2The Nature Conservancy, 2014
3The Nature Conservancy, 2014
4The Nature Conservancy, 2014
I pledge my **HEAD** to clearer thinking,

my **HEART** to greater loyalty,

my **HANDS** to larger service,

and my **HEALTH** to better living,

for my club, my community, my country

and my world.