

Belonging



The *Wizard of Oz* is a 1939 United States fantasy film written by Noel Langley that centers on a young girl, Dorothy Gale, from Kansas. Transported to the imaginative world of Oz during a violent tornado, Dorothy experiences an amazing adventure through which she travels from Munchkin Land, to the enchanted orchard, to a haunted forest, and finally to the Emerald City, where she meets the great and powerful Wizard of Oz. After this tremendous adventure she ultimately found herself back in her bedroom in Kansas. It was there where she expressed those famous words, **“there is no place like home”**. She was referring to the deep sense of ownership and security she felt among her friends and family in a place brimming with warmth and comfort. Even after experiencing so many different and wonderful places, home is still where she felt most comfortable, as it is for many people as well--home is home because we belong.

Having a sense of belonging is an essential part of healthy youth development. It refers to the happiness experienced in a secure relationship. This relationship could be with friends, relatives, or teammates. It can also exist in context of place—for instance, that wonderful feeling of *ahhhh* that you experience when you are in a place that feels like home, wherever it might be. In this place, you are able to relax, be yourself, pursue an idea, and flourish as an individual.

Minnesota 4-H Youth Development has the ability to create this feeling of home within its youth programs. Our programs are built upon informal learning environments that allow youth to find camaraderie and explore their interests in a relaxed yet supportive environment that enables them to thrive in their development. These environments are rooted in belonging and help young people form meaningful relationships. Dorothy discovered the meaning of belonging throughout her adventure. How does your program foster belonging?