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Focus On Youth

A Statement
of Direction and Priorities
for Minnesota Extension Service

4-H Youth Development



Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota

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Extension 4-H is youth development through programs that

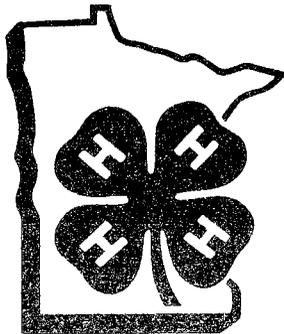
Promote **self-protection** and encourage healthy lifestyles among adolescents

Emphasize **global awareness** and international citizenship in a world community

Help build **career development** skills through inter-generational sharing and community participation

Expand **youth connectedness** by helping young people form vital links with others

Empower volunteers with the information and skills necessary to address the needs of local youth



Focus on the Future



Minnesota 4-H focuses on the future—the youth of Minnesota. For more than 80 years 4-H has provided 9- to 19-year-olds with a wide variety of educational programs based on University research. 4-H has been a unique youth serving agency because of its ties to the Land Grant University and because of the experiential learning methods employed by its programs.

In 1987 Minnesota 4-H initiated a new venture in response to the Minnesota Extension Service strategic plan, **Focus On People**, which calls for programs designed specifically to address critical needs of Minnesota citizens. For 4-H this means identifying critical, current issues facing youth, and developing programs that address them at state, county, and community levels.

4-H Issues

The first issues identified by 4-H are:

- Global Awareness
- Self-Protection
- Career Development
- Youth Connectedness

Along with two organizational priorities, Volunteer Empowerment and Participation Expansion, these issues will determine our direction and the service we offer.

■ **Global Awareness** addresses the need for young people to understand how interdependent global systems affect their lives.

■ **Self-Protection** is a response to self-destructive behavior that threatens health and well-being of adolescents.

■ **Career Development** deals with the complexity of variables that impact future career decisions—expanding technology, family relationships, work-styles, and training needs.

■ **Youth Connectedness** is a response to the need to help young people form links with the people and things that support and contribute to the quality of their lives and the lives of the people around them.

The 4-H programs designed to address these issues will provide information about the issues, build “life skills” to help youth make responsible decisions, employ networks of community and youth agencies, and involve youths as both providers and recipients of information and skills. The programs will also use a variety of delivery methods and will, whenever possible, be integrated into existing 4-H projects and activities.

A Challenge to Serve

A vital and responsive educational program cannot accurately predict where it will be in 15 to 25 years. But if we're to succeed in developing a program that serves its community well, we need to articulate a direction, and a plan of action, so that we can measure our progress. Our goal is that the people of Minnesota will recognize 4-H as an educational leader in addressing the practical, daily issues of young people and their families. We are prepared for that challenge.



Byron Schneider
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4-H Youth Development
Minnesota Extension Service

Minnesota Extension Service



There are four program areas within Minnesota Extension Service: Agriculture, Home Economics, 4-H Youth Development, and Community and Natural Resources Development. The booklet **Focus on People** outlines the overall goals for all these areas. If you read the booklet, you know that Minnesota Extension Service has a new name and a new direction. Formerly called Agricultural Extension Service, the new name reflects a commitment not only to agriculture, but also to the families, youth, and communities of Minnesota.

Regardless of the name, the purpose is to educate people in a very practical way where they live and work. The new direction is to focus programs and priorities around current critical issues, rather than around location, subject matter, or organizational boundaries.

Things will be done because they **need** doing. There will be increased ability to respond quickly as issues emerge. Team efforts across program areas will produce practical, timely educational programs.

Minnesota Extension Service will continue to concentrate efforts on rural Minnesota. However, the new focus means that non-farm and urban people will also benefit. Extension cannot be “all things to all people.” But it seeks to be **some** things to **most** people in Minnesota.

The focus will be on those issues of greatest concern to Minnesotans—on issues where Extension has competence and can make a significant contribution.

Central Issues of Extension



The Minnesota Extension Service defines its focus in terms of four central issues that affect the lives of state residents. Within each issue, Extension deals with immediate concerns of people in their day-to-day living. It also strives to develop people's leadership abilities and to shape public policy.

Each program area within Extension, including 4-H Youth Development, will focus its resources on these central issues:

I. Economic Development

Programs will focus on the improvement of the agricultural system, and on other related areas of economic development: forestry, recreation, rural businesses, tourism, and energy production.

II. Environment and Natural Resources

The issue is balancing natural resource management and economic activity with conservation, productivity, and environmental concerns.

III. Human Development

A rapidly changing social and economic structure calls for programs addressing the needs of people: career and life changes, family resources, communication, housing and energy use, nutrition and health, safety, and vital needs of youth.

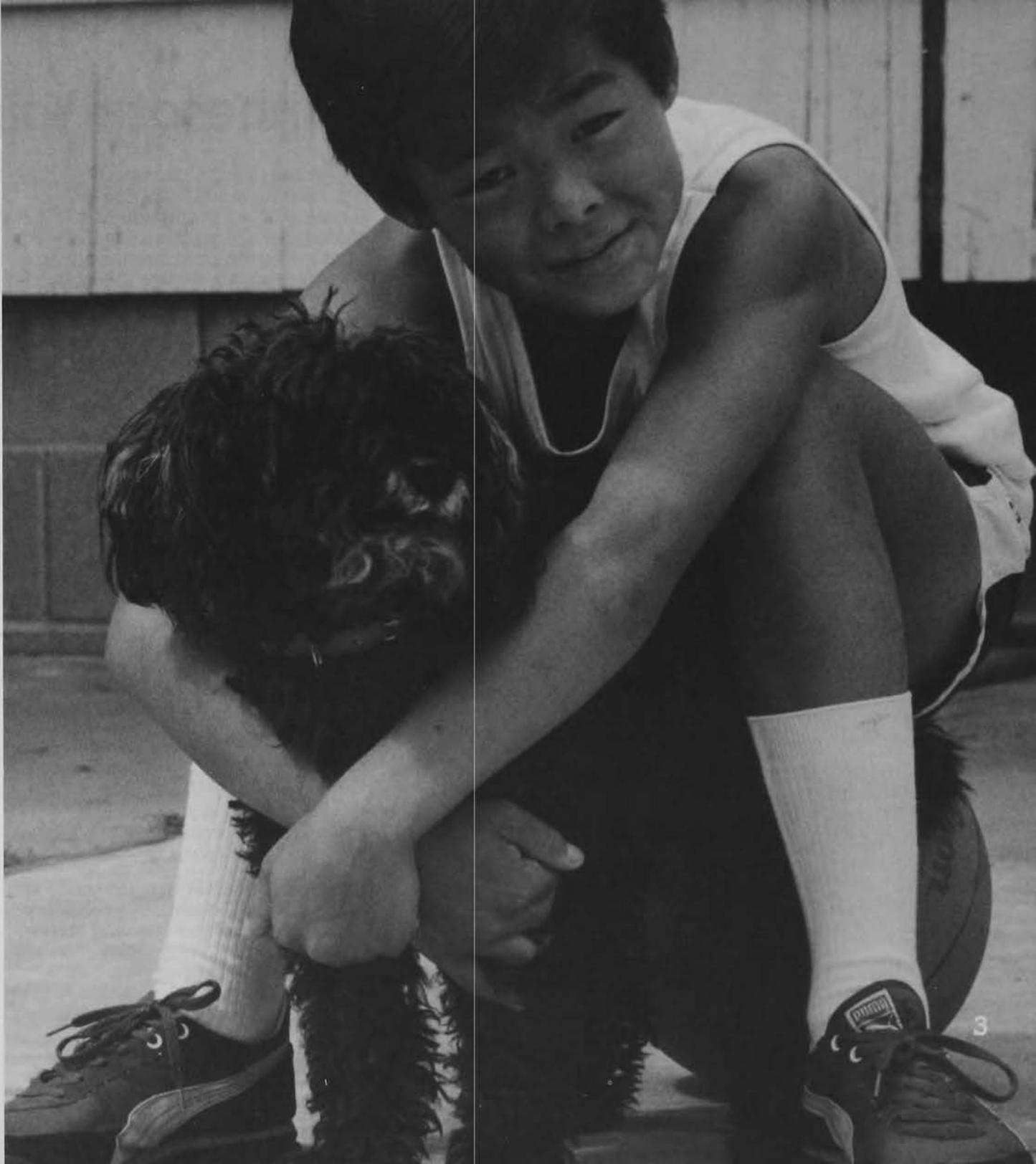
IV. Community Leadership

In the complex society of tomorrow, there is an increasing need for programs to develop community leadership: participation in government, public decision making, emerging leadership, rural restructuring, and youth as a resource.

Mission of 4-H Youth Development

 The mission of Minnesota 4-H is to help youth 9 to 19 years of age acquire knowledge, develop life skills, and form attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive, and contributing members of society. The positive development of young people through direct involvement of youth, adults, and community is key to having this happen.

4-H is a non-formal educational organization whose programs are developed and delivered to youth through a system of state specialists, county agents, and adult and youth volunteers in all 87 Minnesota counties. Research findings at the University of Minnesota are used extensively in the development of these programs.





Minnesota Youth

 In the recently completed Minnesota Adolescent Health Survey, 36,284 7th through 12th graders from throughout the state reported having good health and average or above average school performance. Ninety percent say their parents care about them; 70% say that adults in general care for them; 42% say that school people care; and 44% say that church people care for them. Eighty percent like school at least "somewhat"; 20% don't like school. About 1/4 of metro youth and 1/3 of youth from greater Minnesota reported feeling bored much of the time. Eighty percent reported that their families have high expectations for them and 46% "have fun with" their families.

Survey responses also show that a portion of Minnesota youths are involved in delinquent activities such as stealing, fighting, and vandalism, and that others are victims of physical and sexual abuse. Youth vary in their abilities to find help with health and relationship problems. They most often report "friends," "parents," or "no one" as sources of help.

Minority youth in Minnesota are at greater risk than white youth. Black youth unemployment is double that for white youths. Dropout rates for American Indians, Blacks, and Hispanics are disproportionately high in Minnesota. Poverty rates are higher for minorities than for whites.

Minnesota Youth Today

- Youth 17 and under make up 27% (1,128,000) of Minnesota's population.
- 45% (513,000) of youth 14 and under live in the seven-county metropolitan area.
- 5% live on farms.
- Minnesota youth are:
 - White—95.2%
 - Black—1.9%
 - Hispanic—1.1%
 - Indian—1.0%
 - Asian—0.8%
- 88% of children live in married couple families.
- 40% of 8- to 13-year-olds are in self-care after school.
- Approximately 80% of juniors and seniors work—mostly at low-skill, low-pay jobs.

The survey showed the following common worries and concerns of youth (in decreasing order):

1. appearance
2. school performance
3. being liked by others
4. losing a best friend
5. death of a parent
6. how friends treat them
7. getting a job in the future

Farm youth also expressed concern about financial problems on their farms and losing their farms.

The survey indicates that the youth are engaging in self-destructive behaviors including: alcohol and chemical abuse; too early sexual activity; depression and suicide; and eating disorders.



- 80% of Minnesotans in poverty are women and children.
- Over 17,000 youth drop out of high school each year in Minnesota.
- Traffic accidents are #1 cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds; homicides #2; suicides #3.
- There are 5,000 teen pregnancies each year in Minnesota.
- 2.8% of males, 5.8% of females attempted suicide in 1987.
- 75% of males, 50% of females exercise three times a week.
- 64% use alcohol.
- Average age at which youth begin sexual activity is 14 to 14-1/2 years.

Youth Issues in the Future

- Poverty
- Self-care
- Mental health
- Alcohol and chemical use
- Teen pregnancies
- AIDS and STD's
- Violence—crime, suicide, accidents, abuse
- Population shifts: concentration of poor in cities and vacancies on farms and in small towns
- Environmental deterioration—water quality, pollution, congestion, resource conservation
- Access to quality education for all Minnesota youth
- Peace/nuclear disarmament
- Jobs/unemployment

Who We Will Serve in the Future

Minnesota 4-H will respond to the educational needs of Minnesota youth by developing programs around their MOST critical issues and delivering those programs to youth wherever they live. This will mean a focus on programs especially for urban, minority youths and for those rural and farm youths whose lives are changing due to economic factors in families and their communities.

It will mean serving self-care children, children of working parents, children of single parents, and children of unemployed and low-income parents.

It will mean adding "futuring" to the 4-H repertoire of "life skills" so that young people can project the impact of technology, the media, the environment, the economy and various other factors on the education and career options that will be available to them. It will mean developing programs to assist youth to maximize their potential by developing the skills necessary to survive in a complex world.





Goals



Major goals for 4-H Youth Development during the next ten years are:

1. Identify priority youth development issues within the context of the four Minnesota Extension Service thrusts and develop educational programs consistent with our mission to address these issues.
2. Use subject matter content as a means to teach life skills necessary to effectively function in a rapidly changing world.
3. Educate thru experiential methods: instruction thru modeling and inquiry,

active youth involvement, child-centered techniques, practical experimentation.

4. Maximize youth participation in all educational programs.
5. Disseminate the knowledge and expertise of the Land Grant University to adults who function as teachers, leaders, and role models for young people in the communities across the state.
6. Serve as the "youth development" expert in Minnesota communities.
7. Expand links with other agencies providing education and services to youth.

Strategies



Youth Development is a term that describes the philosophy and view of young people upon which 4-H builds its programs and activities. In contrast to a philosophy that sees children as "small, empty vessels" to be filled with knowledge and values imparted by all-knowing adults, youth development sees young people as growing, changing persons who are developing mastery of the outer world within a context of ever-changing intellectual and emotional consciousness.

The task of a youth development program is to provide a supportive structure and safe environment in which young people can explore, inquire, and test themselves physically, emotionally, and socially. 4-H is a scaffold with many cross-beams which

challenge young people to try varied and increasingly difficult tasks so that when the scaffold is no longer there they can participate positively, intelligently, and actively in personal, family, and community life.

A youth development professional—a 4-H staff member—is responsible for designing and carrying out programs that recognize the diversity of need and the variety of stages that young people go through. A youth development professional applies knowledge and research about adolescents to existing community needs to create programs that stimulate positive learning. The foremost goal is the development of the individual child, the second goal is the imparting of specific content knowledge.

Program Priorities



The programs that have high priority for Minnesota 4-H are designed to address the critical issues facing today's youth. These program priorities all fit within the four central issues of Minnesota Extension described on page 2.

I. Economic Development

■ Career Development Education

The goal is education for life planning. It assumes that the individual is in charge of the process of fitting work into the planned activities of a lifetime. It recognizes the element of change inherent in the individual, the society, and the work force. It also will help youth learn to cope with or manage the random factors or unplanned events that occur in a lifetime. This is particularly appropriate for the targeted rural audience perplexed and frustrated by the stress of unanticipated worker dislocation and lifestyle disruption.

II. Environment

■ Global Awareness

There are critical reasons for Minnesota youth to understand their larger environment—the international environment in which they live and the important issues of food/hunger, trade, energy, migration, world economics, cultural/racial religious differences and similarities, human rights, conflict/peace. To function as informed citizens in an international community, Minnesota youth must develop an increased understanding of the way interdependent global systems/ environments impact on their life, community, nation, and world.

III. Human Development

■ Self-Protection

There is a need to develop comprehensive and intensive educational programs that address self-destructive behavior of youth:

- 1) reduce drunk driving accidents and fatalities,
- 2) reduce teen pregnancies,
- 3) reduce numbers of teen suicides,
- 4) reduce incidence of eating disorders,
- 5) provide programs for adolescents that prevent self-destructive behavior by equipping youth to make healthy choices, and
- 6) utilize teens in the solutions to the problems by training them to teach and model responsible decision-making for younger children.

IV. Community Leadership

■ Youth Connectedness

Minnesota youth will develop skills that enable them to feel connected with the important resources in their lives, with their families and with individuals and institutions within their community. Minnesota youth need experiences that teach skills in improving communication, encouraging participation and community service, and contributing positively to the lives of others.

■ Volunteer Empowerment

Provide leadership education for teens and adult volunteer leaders' capabilities; increase leadership learning opportunities; develop and test a set of 4-H program quality indicators; and increase the numbers of volunteer leaders in the 4-H youth development program.



Benefits

 Minnesota 4-H was founded in 1903 in recognition of the need for relevant hands-on learning and social development for rural youth. A central purpose of the early program was to encourage technology transfer from the University to the farm by encouraging youth to demonstrate the effectiveness of new practices to their parents. The success of those efforts is now legendary.

Since 1912, 4-H has been a part of the Minnesota Extension Service of the University of Minnesota. This linkage confers a powerful mutual advantage to both systems. Access to current, research-generated knowledge provides 4-H with a solid information base unique among youth-oriented organizations, and 4-H and Extension as a whole provide the University with an unparalleled mechanism for extending

that search for knowledge to Minnesota's public.

4-H today continues to demonstrate that learning occurs best through direct experience. Rural youth remain a significant audience for 4-H, but the program's benefits have been constructively extended to young people wherever they live: on farms, in small communities, or in central cities of major metropolitan areas. While the 4-H approach to learning remains the same, the issues that 4-H programs address have changed. As the 21st century approaches, 4-H is focusing its programs on helping young people develop a set of life skills that characterize adults who are responsible and informed citizens, productive providers, and thoughtful human beings.

The Future

 4-H encourages the very best of its participants whether they are youth, adult volunteers, or others who share their resources to the benefit of tomorrow's citizens and leaders.

4-H is a rare partnership of public and private resources working together to serve Minnesota's youth. Research has affirmed that the 4-H learning-by-doing educational method is sound and that its programs meet the basic needs of youth to be challenged, to be

stimulated, to be given responsibility, and to be recognized for their achievements. Proud of its past successes, 4-H looks to the future with confidence.

There is no more important challenge on any agenda than to prepare our young people to accept responsibility for the world they will inherit. 4-H will continue to play a central role in meeting this challenge.

Minnesota Youth in the Next Decade

Time: 1990

Location: A large city

Fourteen-year-old Sheila has completed her school day. She gathers her coat and books eagerly as she heads for her neighborhood after-school 4-H project club at the local community center.

Sheila is proud because today is the day for the video-teleconference from the University of Minnesota Hospital. It was her project, and she arranged it. She wants to be a doctor some day and wants to know how to prepare for it. Her 4-H agent arranged to set up the conference with the help of the Minnesota Extension Service and the U of M Telecommunications Development Center. Sheila is enrolled in the 4-H project for career awareness called "I'll Take Charge."

Sheila's 4-H group will hear doctors talk about their motivations to enter the field of medicine, what subjects they had to study in school, and how they applied to colleges. One of the doctors plans to take the group on a video "tour" of different departments in the hospital and explain the kinds of jobs in each. Sheila's project group plans to volunteer to work in the hospital soon.

Time: 1990

Location: A rural area

John, a high school junior, wants to help teach 5th graders about alcohol and what happens when you drink and drive. Some of his friends on the football team want to help teach and organize the activities.

The 4-H agent in John's county has encouraged them and agreed to give them special training in peer group teaching and counseling. The agent will give them materials and information they will need and will act as their liaison with principals in the district to set up plans to allow the high school boys to enter a classroom and teach the program a few hours a week for three weeks.

The chief of police has agreed to provide the boys with transportation from school to school. She has also agreed to provide police officers to explain to the classes what happens when someone is arrested for driving while intoxicated.

Later John plans to condense his program for a short presentation to local civics clubs and the city council.

Time: 1990

Location: A suburban area

A group of teenagers is boarding a plane to Japan. They have earned the money for their trip to compare Japanese farming techniques, forestry, and aquaculture to that of Minnesota's. Through their 4-H project club and involvement in 4-H junior leadership programs, these suburban youth formed an entrepreneurial enterprise for forming a job cooperative. Their goal: to assist farmers with daily tasks and to learn more about agriculture.

4-H agents in several counties assisted the youth by training them to set up their own business, research farm operations, and develop marketing plans. The agents provided the specialized training and information they needed and monitored their progress. The 4-H agents were able to select and arrange for volunteers to act as mentors for their project.

The students provided a contract listing their services and charged a fee for their work. In exchange the farmers received help needed to run the farm and harvest the crops, and were able to contribute to youth development.

Minnesota Extension Service 4-H Youth Development



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