LIFE SKILLS FROM 4-H & OTHER OST ACTIVITIES

Life Skills Gained from Involvement in

4-H & Other Out-of-School Time Activities

THESIS

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Dedication

This research project is dedicated to all of the Cottonwood County 4-H members and families. They are some of the most dedicated individuals I know. Also to Kathy, the Cottonwood County Office Manager, for her listening ear and sound advice.
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Abstract

McLaughlin (2000) states, “Young people with nothing to do during out-of-school hours miss valuable chances for growth and development” (p. 2). It is important that youth organizations utilize this time to strengthen the life skills of area adolescents.

In this quantitative study, life skills from Hendrick’s Targeting Life Skills Model (1998) were rated by youth involved in the 4-H program and other out-of-school time (OST) activities. Youth included in this research project were from Cottonwood County, which is located in southwestern Minnesota. The results allowed comparisons to be made on which life skills youth perceive to have gained the most and least.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"Early adolescence is a time of rapid change in young people, hence this is often an excellent opportunity to make a positive impact upon their development" (Fox, Schroeder, & Lodi, 2003, p. 1). Youth organizations have the opportunity to influence the positive development of adolescents (Fox et al., 2003). There are various out-of-school activities available to enhance the life skills of any youth.

Astroth and Haynes (2002) acknowledge that the greatest amount of free time for youth is out-of-school time. In fact, according to Quinn (1999), “the nation’s 25 major youth-serving organizations serve more than 30 million young people each year, making (them) second to the public schools” (p. 99). McLaughlin (2000) states, “Young people with nothing to do during out-of-school hours miss valuable chances for growth and development” (p. 2). Data from the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice (as cited by Astroth & Haynes, 2002) supports McLaughlin and “indicates that children unsupervised after school are at significantly higher risk of truancy, stress, receiving poor grades, early experimentation with sex, and substance abuse” (p. 2). However, McLaughlin (2000) believes that society also fails because it did not properly prepare the youth for a productive future.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative methods study was to identify and rate life skills that youth perceive they gain by being involved in 4-H and out-of-school time (OST) activities. This study was used to determine the importance and value of 4-H and OST
activities. It also provided information on the various reasons why the adolescent joined
the 4-H program.

The study covered four main topics: 1) Why they joined the 4-H program; 2) Which special 4-H events they have been involved in; 3) Which other OST they have been involved in; and 4) Which life skills they believe to have obtained through their involvement in 4-H and other OST activities. Hypotheses tested include: 1) Is there a dominant reason why youth joined the 4-H program; 2) Is there any correlation between age and years in 4-H; 3) Are older youth more involved in 4-H and other OST activities; 4) Which life skills do the youth believe to have gained the most of through participation; 5) Which life skills do the youth believe to have gained nothing of through participation; and 6) Are there any similarities between the life skills gained or not gained through involvement in 4-H and other OST activities.

By participating in the survey, youth in middle school through their freshman year in college rated 35 life skills found on Hendricks' Targeting Life Skills Model (1996). According to Norman and Jordan (2009), the 4-H program utilizes the Hendricks’ Targeting Life Skills Model (cf96) as the foundation of “the delivery of experiences that support the growth and development of youth.” Skills on the Targeting Life Skills Model include nurturing relationships, sharing, empathy, concern for others, accepting differences, conflict resolution, social skills, cooperation, communication, resiliency, keeping records, wise use of resources, planning/organizing, goal setting, service learning, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, learning to learn, personal safety, disease prevention, stress management, healthy lifestyle choices, self-discipline, managing feelings, character, self-responsibility, self-esteem, self-motivation, teamwork,
marketable skills, contributions to group effort, responsible citizenship, leadership and community service volunteering. These traits are sorted into subcategories including caring, relating, managing, thinking, living, being, working and giving that are tied to the four H's of the 4-H program, known as head, heart, hands and health.

Background

Few studies have been conducted on the importance and benefits of youth organizations. As the economy struggles, many programs for adolescents have been cut or decreased because of funding issues. Therefore, groups have found it necessary to document the successes of their programs by evaluating life skills. Thirty-five life skills outlined on the Targeting Life Skills Model that was introduced by Hendricks in 1998 (Fox et al., 2003) serve as subcategories of caring, relating, managing, thinking, living, being, working and giving. According to the Targeting Life Skills Model (1996), each one of the subcategories is then directly related to the four H’s of the 4-H program. According to this model, caring and relating are emphasized as traits of the heart, managing and thinking relate to the head, living and being are characteristics of health and giving and working are important to the hands.

By acknowledging that youth need both support and opportunities, programs can foster the development of life skills (Quinn, 1999). According to Quinn (1999), youth need to be offered quality educational opportunities, praised for their problem solving and decision making skills, need to feel appreciated, and want the ability to form positive relationships. According to the Harvard Family Research Project (2007), youth especially in middle school, can benefit developmentally through participation in OST programs.
With so many different youth organizations, Greenberg et al. (2003) stated that “through these collaborations, we can ensure that truly no child is left behind and that all young people have the chance to realize their full potential” (p. 473).

Although studies show there are many positive outcomes from involvement in 4-H and other OST activities, few articles mention limiting factors in providing such programs. With an ever-changing economy, it is important to know barriers preventing quality youth activities. Quinn (1999) notes that participation, access, funding, program effectiveness and coordination with other youth services can cause effectiveness issues amongst youth organizations.

Setting

The 4-H program includes youth in grades kindergarten through one year past high school. “In 2009, approximately 123,486 of 1.1 million youth across Minnesota participated in 4-H” (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2010, p. 1). 4-H members have the opportunity to participate in various club, county, regional, state, national, and international activities. Through service learning projects, 4-H members have the opportunity to sharpen many life skills while helping community members. Yet, many 4-H youth benefit from the life skills gained by being involved in multiple OST programs.

According to Maass (as cited by Maass, Wilken, Culen & Place, 2006), “4-H members concurrently participate in a variety of youth development organizations (i.e., vocational, church youth groups) that share a similar mission of life skill development” (p. 2). Thus, this study analyzes where youth in Cottonwood County feel they gained the most positive life skills.
This study involved compiling surveys completed by middle school youth, high school youth and college freshmen. Youth surveyed were all involved in the Cottonwood County 4-H program. Individuals came from rural, suburban and urban settings. Socio-economic status varies throughout Cottonwood County. Cottonwood County is located in southwestern Minnesota and has approximately 260 youth engaged in the program. Due to minimal diversity in Cottonwood County, all participants were Caucasian. Since there were more females than males in the current enrollment, more females completed the survey. A sample group consisted of thirty members that had participated on judging teams, project bowl, Ambassadors, Federation, camp, Shooting Sports, Extension committee, Building Leadership and Understanding camp (BLU), Youth Learning Leadership Out Loud camp (YELLO) or state activities. 4-H members that participated in these specific activities were the target audience of this study.

Assumptions

Adolescents have many opportunities to become involved in 4-H and other OST activities. As a 4-H program coordinator, the researcher has had the experience of working with several hundred youth through the 4-H program in Cottonwood County. As an alumnus of the South Dakota 4-H program, she believes that the 4-H program can teach many important lessons and skills through multiple educational and entertaining avenues. Throughout her 13-year career, she gained many valuable skills that are utilized daily. Like many other 4-H members, she was also an active participant in many other OST programs as well. However, the researcher credits many of her successes and positive youth development to her 4-H experiences.
Through the 4-H program and other OST activities, stakeholders, community members and county officials believe youth utilize service learning projects as a means to sharpen life skills while helping community members. Adults assume that youth learn a variety of life skills including teamwork, respect, leadership, decision-making, responsibility, cooperation, communication and many additional positive characteristics through youth organizations.

This study is also important because the funding for various youth organizations has become a target of multiple county stakeholders. Since 4-H is not a mandated program, it is vital to provide positive data to partners, county commissioners and other officials. The need to find positive data may be financially necessary to continue important programming. Any negative data could provide an ethical dilemma of not wanting to place that particular information forward. Providing data on life skills to stakeholders may ensure the continuation of the youth development programming for children into the future. However, the researcher will be as objective as possible when weighing the results to see if the data actually provides the information anticipated. Despite all of the researcher’s positive experiences, the research will be conducted with bias in check.

Limitations

Surveys were conducted through SurveyMonkey.com. Not all of the individuals in the group may have had access to the Internet so alternative routes consisted of mailings or hand deliveries. This may have influenced the number of completed surveys because not everyone had the Internet or they may not have checked their email. In
addition to that, results may have been skewed due to not knowing the specific
demographics of those that participated since the study was anonymous.

Although the exact number of OST programs a youth is involved in will be
analyzed, there may or may not be a correlation between positive life skills gained and
the benefits incurred.

Definitions

- Community-based organizations - Civil society non-profits that operate within a
  single local community.

- Experiential learning - Learning by doing, action learning, action science and
  reflection-in-action are all used to describe the mixture of doing and reflecting
  that constitutes experiential learning.

- Life skills - Hendricks defines life skills as “learned competencies known to
  assist individuals with leading constructive and rewarding lives and include
decision making, accepting differences, teamwork, self-responsibility,
cooperation, and communication” (as cited by Maass et al., 2006, p. 2).

- Out-of-school time (OST) activities - Activities held before or after school that
  benefit youth socially, emotionally, and academically and may have the most
positive effects for youth who are most at risk.

- Positive youth development - Pittman and Wright define positive youth
development as “an ongoing growth process in which all youths endeavor to meet
their basic needs for safety, caring relationships, and connection to the larger
community while striving to build academic, vocational, personal, and social
skills” (as cited by Quinn, 1999, p. 103).
• Service learning - Projects that offer youth opportunities to practice leadership skills and reflect on the experience to learn more about themselves. Skills such as brainstorming, decision making, setting goals, and working with others can be taught and practiced as youth plan and execute significant service projects.

• Targeting Life Skills Model - Model that encompasses 35 life skills. Developed by Patricia Hendricks in 1996. 4-H uses the Targeting Life Skills Model as a way to organize the delivery of experiences that support the growth and development of youth (Norman & Jordan, 2009).

• 4-H - Youth organization administered by the United State Department of Agriculture and land-grant universities. It is located in all 50 states and in more than 80 countries around the world. “In 4-H, youth design and participate in their own programs and activities. This unique, learn-by-doing model teaches kids essential, transferable skills that they’ll use throughout their lives, such as problem solving, decision making, coping, communicating and responding to the needs of others” (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2010, p. 1).

Summary

The purpose of this research project is to explore how middle school and high school youth and college freshmen rated the life skills they have obtained through participation in OST activities, including the 4-H program. The Targeting Life Skills Model that was introduced by Hendricks in 1996 helps identify key elements of prosocial engagements. Youth included in this study rated the skills listed on the Targeting Life Skills Model. The review of literature in the following chapter provides background information about the factors that influenced this study.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of literature that records the importance of providing quality youth programs. Many articles state that organizations need to be available to foster the advancement of life skills found in adolescents during out-of-school time (OST). According to Astroth and Haynes (2002), “what these children do in out-of-school hours can affect their development in both positive and negative ways” (p. 1). Yet, McLaughlin (2000) states, “Youth participating in these community-based organizations accomplish more than many in society would expect of them and, in fact, more than most citizens would ever think possible” (p. 4).

This chapter will provide an overview, describe out-of-school hour concerns, outline the importance of youth activities, highlight traits gained from involvement, discuss implementation issues, and summarize findings by comparing life skills gained through the 4-H program and other OST activities.

Introduction

Youth organizations have the opportunity to influence the positive development of adolescents (Fox et al., 2003). According to Quinn (1999), by acknowledging that youth need both support and opportunities, programs can foster the development of life skills. Quinn also theorizes that youth only participate in programs that are of interest and receptive to their needs.

There are many organizations that promote youth development and provide an avenue to enhance the life skills of adolescents. Pittman and Wright (as cited by Quinn, 1999) define positive youth development as “an ongoing growth process in which all
youths endeavor to meet their basic needs for safety, caring relationships, and
connections to the larger community while striving to build academic, vocational,
personal, and social skills” (p. 103).

Although there have been few studies conducted on the importance and benefits
of these organizations, many of these groups have found it necessary to document their
program’s success by evaluating life skills found on the Targeting Life Skills Model that
was introduced by Hendricks in 1998 (Fox et al., 2003). The Harvard Family Research
Project (2007) also found that there was minimal research that investigates who engages
in OST activities and why. Astroth and Haynes (2002) found that there has not been
“extensive research data indicating whether participation in well-designed out-of-school
programs provided significant benefits to the participants when they are compared to
peers who did not participate in such programs” (p. 1). This review analyzes the
development of positive life skills gained through youth organizations.

Youth organizations need to address and document how their programs positively
impact their target audience and benefit their surrounding communities in order to
adequately explain the need for further funding. McLaughlin (2000) believes that youth
organizations need to “document and share what you do specifically as it relates to
learning outcomes. This does not only mean expanding the academic supports you
provide, but studying and understanding how the work you already do with youth
contributes to their performance in school” (p. 29). To assist in the documentation
process of positive youth development through experiential learning and service learning,
the 4-H program utilizes the Targeting Life Skills Model that was introduced by
Hendricks in 1996.
In 1990, the National Center for Charitable Statistics reported there were around 17,000 youth development organizations in the United States (Quinn, 1999). Out-of-school time (OST) activities vary depending on location, age groups, competition with other agencies and cost. “What distinguishes youth development programs from the vast array of ameliorative services is their emphasis on supporting the normal socialization and healthy development of young people” (Quinn, 1999, p. 98). McLaughlin (2000) states, “One of the most appealing aspects of these community-based organizations is that they give young people the opportunity to engage in positive activities, to develop close and caring relationships, and to find value in themselves - even in the face of personal disruption, poor schools, and neighborhoods generally devoid of supports” (p. 3).

Out-of-School Time Concerns

Astroth and Haynes (2002) acknowledge that the greatest amount of free time for youth is out-of-school time. According to Lochner (2005), 42 percent of children in Minnesota between the ages 10-12 are home alone after school which is almost twice the national average. The 2001 Bureau of Labor Statistics (as cited by Lochner, 2005) claims Minnesota has “one of the highest percentages of working parents of school-aged children in the nation” (p. 1).

Since out-of-school hours are the greatest amount of unsupervised free time for youth, the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice (as cited by Astroth & Haynes, 2002) believe that those hours are cause for parental concern. “Research indicates that children unsupervised after school are at significantly higher risk of truancy, stress, receiving poor grades, early experimentation with sex, and substance abuse” (Astroth & Haynes, 2002, p. 2). Astroth and Haynes (2002) also note that
“juvenile crime increases by 300 percent in the hours immediately after school” and that “children are also at a much greater risk of being the victim of a violent crime during the hours after school” (p. 2).

To compound concerns, it appears that “there is a significant number of youth who are not engaged in any structured out-of-school activities” (Astroth & Haynes, 2002, p. 2). According to Quinn (1999), involvement in youth organizations has the tendency to drop during early adolescence. “The explanation for this phenomenon is probably multifaceted. Existing programs may not meet the developmental needs or interests of young teens; adolescents have more choice than younger children about how to spend their free time; and adult leaders may be more comfortable with younger children and so develop programs more suited to their interest” (Quinn, 1999, p. 105).

Importance of Youth Activities

“Early adolescence is a time of rapid change in young people, hence this is often an excellent opportunity to make a positive impact upon their development” (Fox et al., 2003, p. 1). According to Quinn (1999), youth need to be offered quality educational opportunities, praised for their problem solving and decision making skills, need to feel appreciated, and want the ability to form positive relationships. “The development of such skills through experiential learning is the cornerstone of 4-H youth programming,” (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992, p. 1).

Quinn (1999) adds that many parents believe programs need to focus on educational enrichment and community service and that public opinion polls show there is apprehension for the future of the nation’s youth and support organizations that cater to their needs. The Harvard Family Research Project (2007) sites that “participation in
various structured out-of-school time (OST) activities benefits youth socially, emotionally, and academically and may have the most positive effects for youth who are most at risk” (p. 1).

Seevers and Dormody (1995) believe that the major goal for many youth development programs is leadership development and that more youth programs are turning their attention towards effective leadership training. Yet, according to Ricketts and Rudd (2002), “the task at hand is to prepare youth with the kinds of skills and personal qualities that career and technical education professionals believe is important, but that seemingly is only offered to the few students who are active in our youth organizations” (p. 3).

According to the Harvard Family Research Project (2007), youth especially in middle school, can benefit developmentally through participation in OST programs. McLaughlin (2000) agrees and states, “Of greatest importance for society is the compelling evidence from the experiences of these youth that community-based organizations can play a critical role in meeting the needs of today’s young people. They can fill the gap left by families and schools that are stretched to capacity to provide support to young people” (p. 3).

With so many different youth organizations, Greenberg et al. (2003) state that “through these collaborations, we can ensure that truly no child is left behind and that all young people have the chance to realize their full potential” (p. 473). Although Maass et al. (2006) think youth organizations have the common goal of preparing youth for adulthood, they also believe that programs have varied strategies and techniques to meet
that goal. They also conclude that youth organizations can excel through collaborations with other youth programs.

Traits Gained from Involvement

Hendricks defines life skills as “learned competencies known to assist individuals with leading constructive and rewarding lives and include decision making, accepting differences, teamwork, self-responsibility, cooperation, and communication” (as cited by Maass et al., 2006, p. 2). Research conducted by Astroth and Haynes (2002) reveals that youth active in OST programs were more likely to succeed in school, be leaders in the school and community, be considered role models by others, and help others. According to McLaughlin (2000), “Community-based organizations offer a means for reaching youth and they can have a significant impact on the skills, attitudes, and experiences youth need to take their places as confident, contributing adults” (p. 3).

Groff (1992) notes that when adults serve as mentors to teens that teach youth, both teens and adults increase their leadership skills. Resnik and Gibbs (as cited by Groff, 1992) also state that “peer helper programs strive to: generate meaningful involvement and responsibilities for youth and encourage participation of youth in real-life decisions, channel peer pressure and normal energies and risk-taking tendencies toward constructive ends, and provide youth with skills through training in a peer-group context” (p. 2).

Plus, research done by Greenberg et al. (2003) shows an increase in interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, and academic achievement when adolescents are involved in youth programs. Lochner (2005) found a direct correlation...
between active participants in after-school programs and better school attendance, grades, test scores, work habits, interpersonal skills, and attitudes.

According to Wingenbach and Kahler (as cited by Ricketts & Rudd, 2002), “students at the secondary level could increase their leadership skills in communications, decision making, getting along with others, learning management of self, understanding self, and working in groups by participating in a combination of youth leadership organizations in school and/or community activities” (p. 3). In addition, Quinn (1999) also believes that in order to be successful adults, adolescents must be able to read and do math, have problem-solving skills, possess written and oral communication abilities, know how to work with various types of personalities, and be comfortable with technology.

Furthermore, according to a national longitudinal study of adolescent health (as cited by Lochner, 2005), “how youth spend their free time was found to be a more powerful predictor of risk than demographic variables like race or family resources” (p. 1).

Implementation Issues

According to Greenberg et al. (2003), guidance and encouragement are necessary for a thriving curriculum. McLaughlin (2000) finds that the most successful community-based organizations were youth-centered, knowledge-centered and assessment-centered. These organizations respond to diverse talents, skills, interests; build on strengths; choose appropriate materials; provide personal attention; reach out into the community; and feature youth leadership and voice. They also have a clear focus; quality content and instruction; embedded curriculum; multiple teachers; cycles of planning, practice, and
performance; and feedback and recognition. Yet, Quinn (1999) notes that participation, access, funding, program effectiveness, and coordination with other youth services can cause effectiveness and success issues among youth organizations.

Moreover, Greenberg et al. (2003) found that there can also be uncertainty about replication, program coordination, professional development and sustainability in all youth programs. Although there are boundless opportunities for alumni to volunteer in youth organizations, a 4-H study found that the majority of their respondents that were once involved as members never return to the organization as volunteers (Fox et al., 2003).

Fitzpatrick, Gagne, Jones, Lobley and Phelps (2005) note that the biggest implication to studies measuring the success of youth programs is that “the long-term impact often cannot be determined until the youth reach adulthood and can reflect back on how their 4-H experience has helped them” (p. 6).

Yet, the Harvard Family Research Project (2007) acknowledges that fundamental implementation issues for youth organizations include adolescents that are troubled, have disengaged parents, a negative neighborhood environment, and those that derive from a low-income family. According to McLaughlin (2000), community-based organizations that fail often lack leadership and passion; community contexts; opportunities for youth of different tastes, talents and peer affiliations; diverse expertise; youth voice; support for core activities; funding; establishment of meaningful measures of accomplishment; resources; and community youth development.

A study conducted by Greenberg et al. (2003) finds that today’s society expects the school systems to do more than in previous years; however, there are fewer resources
to utilize. McLaughlin (2000) faults community support, stating “These community-based environments for learning matter as much for youth as do schools and other institutions - in many cases, more so. Yet, communities generally do not provide sufficient support for their youth in nonschool hours” (p. 21).

Summary

In conclusion, youth organizations are an integral part of adolescence. By becoming involved in various programs, youth can develop multiple life skills necessary to become well-rounded adults. In many communities there is a plethora of activities in which youth can partake. Each organization has its own set of values and goals, but all strive to create an inviting atmosphere and a positive educational experience for all youth.

In order to continue successful youth offerings, programs need to share documentation showing their impact and effectiveness. “Programs that are designed to foster youth development build on the strengths of young people, recognizing their need for both ongoing support and challenging opportunities,” (Quinn, 1999, p. 103).
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative study is to document the perceived skills gained by youth involved in 4-H and OST activities and their motivation to join the 4-H program. It also tests the hypothesis that the more involved youth are in different activities, the more life skills they gain. It is also hypothesized that older youth are active in more organizations.

The study includes members of the Cottonwood County 4-H program who are active in special 4-H events and in other OST activities. In part, the study notes which activities the participants are involved in and documents the life skills these individuals think are strengthened by being involved in these organizations.

This chapter describes general information about the setting and participants studied, research procedures used, data gathering techniques and analysis of data with a brief summary.

Setting and Participants

Thirty youth in the Cottonwood County 4-H program participated in this study. 4-H members have varied backgrounds. 4-H is open to all youth, male and female, in grades kindergarten through one year post high school. Members attend various schools and some are attending college in neighboring states. Youth are scattered across Cottonwood County and a few surrounding counties in southwest Minnesota. They reside in rural, suburban and urban settings and come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. While 4-H youth across the nation are diverse and are of different race and
ethnicity, this study was conducted with only Caucasian participants, which is indicative of Cottonwood County.

The sample group of this study consists of thirty Cottonwood County 4-H members who participated in one or more of the following events: judging teams, project bowl, Ambassadors, Federation, camp, Shooting Sports, Extension committee, BLU, YELLO or state fair. These special events are open to all 4-H youth in grades seven to one year post high school. Members in this sample group have varied backgrounds, ages, grade levels and reside in different communities.

Letters of recruitment for this study were emailed, mailed or handed to a sampling of 50 out of 258 individuals that were active in various 4-H programming opportunities available in Cottonwood County. Those fifty individuals were selected based on their involvement in specific 4-H events. Although 4-H members were recognized by being involved in these events through newspaper articles and at an annual recognition banquet, survey data was gathered anonymously.

Thirty out of the fifty individuals returned their signed consent and assent forms, thus, allowing them to be included in the study. Each of the thirty participants in the study completed a brief survey between February and March 2010. Surveys took between five to fifteen minutes and were completed at the homes of the participants.

Of the thirty members in the sampling, seven were male and twenty-three were female. In the entire Cottonwood County 4-H program, there were 118 males and 140 females. Ages of the participants ranged from twelve to nineteen. Twenty-two of the youth had been enrolled in the 4-H program for eight or more years. Survey participants
were all involved in varied special 4-H events and OST activities. They also joined 4-H for their own personal reasons.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Potential participants were asked to return their signed consent and assent forms to the Cottonwood County Extension office by March 5, 2010.

According to Hoinville and Jowell (as cited by Cohen et al., 2007), a follow-up letter has shown to be the most productive factor in maximizing response rates. Therefore, a reminder email was sent about three weeks after the initial contact to all potential participants. The follow-up contact prompted potential subjects to sign and return the consent and assent forms.

Only results from those participants that had proper signatures were included in the findings for this project.

In February 2010, approval to start the study was granted by the IRB: Human Subjects Committee at the University of Minnesota. The approval letter from the IRB is included in Appendix A. A copy of the recruitment letter and the consent and assent forms sent to participants are included in Appendices B, C and D respectively. A copy of the survey is also included in Appendix E.

Research Design

A quantitative survey was selected using close-ended questions and Likert scales. By using a survey, youth were able to rank skills acquired in 4-H and other OST activities. Since expectant answers can be adequately answered by choosing a response or ranking, it is appropriate to use a quantitative survey. According to Weisberg et al. (as cited by Cohen et al., 2007) surveys “are useful for gathering factual information, data on
attitudes and preferences, beliefs and predictions, behaviour and experiences - both past and present” (p. 207).

As Cohen et al. (2007) recommended, the survey began with factual, non-threatening questions and progressed into more thought-provoking questions. Survey questions included gender, grade, age, years in 4-H and why they joined the program. Other questions asked participants to check all the 4-H and other OST activities in which they have been involved.

A four-point Likert scale was used to rate skills based on how much was gained by their involvement in 4-H and other OST activities. Since each youth has been involved in different capacities for a varied amount of time, it was important that a Likert scale was used to capture the participant’s overall perception of life skills gained.

The survey included two Likert scales. One scale was specifically for 4-H and one specifically for other OST activities. Each scale included options of gained a lot, gained some, gained a little and gained nothing.

Skills rated by participants are included on Hendricks’ 1996 Targeting Life Skills Model. All thirty-five skills listed on the model were selected for rating. Skills stem from the Head, Heart, Hands and Health categories, which represent the four H’s of 4-H.

Some skills included in the model are communication, goal setting, leadership, organization, responsibility and teamwork. The rest of the life skills gained can be viewed in the survey in Appendix E.

Data Gathering

A short cover letter that recapped the purpose of this study accompanied the consent and assent forms and was sent to fifty potential participants. The initial email was
sent to the potential participants’ email addresses provided by the Cottonwood County Extension Office in February 2010. A return date of March 5, 2010 was recommended. Based on what Hoinville and Jowell (as cited by Cohen et al., 2007) found, a successful reminder email was sent to all participants three weeks following the initial mailing.

Data gathered from the survey was submitted by thirty youth across the county. Youth who participated in this survey had been involved as members of judging teams, project bowl, Ambassadors, Federation, camp, Shooting Sports, Extension committee, BLU, YELLO or state fair have varied backgrounds, ages, grade levels and live in different communities.

Analysis of Data

When analyzing the data gathered, descriptive statistics helped summarize the population data. Inferential statistics such as age, grade level and number of activities youth were involved in provided correlation between the skills gained in 4-H versus skills obtained in other OST activities.

Correlation was also studied between the age of the participant and the amount of participation in special 4-H activities and OST programs. The hypothesis that older students are typically involved in more organizations was also tested. Correlation was also analyzed regarding the number of events and the ratings given for the thirty-five life skills ranked.

Summary

Review of material collected through the survey revealed general themes related to the life skills youth gained by being involved in 4-H and other OST programs. Those topics will be presented in narrative form and discussed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

This chapter examines the data gathered from the 4-H and other OST activities survey administered to a sample of thirty participants in February - March of 2010. The purpose of this study was to identify life skills gained through participation in 4-H and other OST activities. Thirty youth in Cottonwood County were surveyed to determine their perception of life skills gained through involvement in 4-H and other OST activities. Participants were selected based on their involvement in ten special 4-H activities at the county and state levels. Those thirty members were involved in one or more of the following: judging teams, project bowl, Ambassadors, Federation, camp, Shooting Sports, Extension committee, BLU, YELLO or state fair. Findings will be presented in the ensuing pages of this chapter.

Response Rate

Parental permission was obtained from thirty of the fifty original 4-H members that were emailed the survey. Those thirty members were involved in judging teams, project bowl, Ambassadors, Federation, camp, Shooting Sports, Extension committee, BLU, YELLO or state fair were all eligible to complete the survey. The response rate was 60 percent.

The initial group of fifty individuals was selected based on their involvement in the special 4-H events that happen on the county and state levels. These activities are open and available to all 4-H members in grades seven and above. All individuals were in grades seven to one year post high school.
4-H and OST Activities Survey Results

Question one asked 4-H members to identify whether they were male or female. This question garnered a 100 percent response rate and found that there were seven males (23.1 percent) and twenty-three females (76.9 percent) for a total of thirty responses.

Figure 1 The ratio of male vs. female survey participants.

The next question asked each member to specify his/her current grade level in school. Of the thirty individuals responding, it was determined that six were college freshmen (20 percent), two were high school seniors (6.7 percent), nine were high school juniors (30 percent), five were high school sophomores (16.7 percent), four were high school freshmen (13.3 percent), three were eighth graders (10 percent) and one was a seventh grader (3.3 percent).
The third question asked participants to designate their current ages. There was no significant information determined from the data gathered except that there was a greater number of 16-year-olds that participated in the studies. Five individuals were nineteen (16.7 percent), two were eighteen (6.7 percent), three were seventeen (10 percent), twelve were sixteen (40 percent), three were fifteen (10 percent), three were fourteen (10 percent), one was thirteen (3.3 percent) and one was twelve (3.3 percent).
Question four asked all 4-H participants to indicate their years of involvement in the 4-H program. One respondent has been involved for fourteen years, three for twelve years, three for eleven years, seven for ten years, two for nine years, six for eight years, one for seven years, one for six years, two for five years, two for four years, one for three years and one for two years.
One hypothesis that appears indicated through this study is that the older the individual is, the more years of involvement. In only a couple situations, this hypothesis was untrue. Typically, older members joined as Cloverbud members in either kindergarten or first grade. Very few 4-H members join later in their adolescent life.

Figure 4a shows the comparison between the age and years of 4-H involvement of each respondent.
The fifth question asked 4-H members to share why they joined the 4-H program. This question sought to identify what the main factors for enrollment were for these
members. Since youth have many various reasons for joining organizations, participants were encouraged to check all that applied to them. Results highlight that there was a tie for the top reason why respondents joined the 4-H program. Eighteen noted that they joined because they wanted to exhibit at the county fair, eighteen also noted that it was because of parental encouragement, fourteen joined because they were interested in activities, twelve wanted to gain life skills, one wanted to travel, eleven joined because their siblings were already involved, five joined because their friends were members, one joined because their cousins were members and one thought that it was a good family program. Figure 5 shows that exhibiting at county fair, parental encouragement, and other 4-H activities were the top reasons youth joined the 4-H program.

Figure 5 Reasons youth joined 4-H program.

Question six inquired what extra 4-H activities the participants are currently or have been involved in on the county level. Members could select judging teams, project bowl, Ambassadors, Federation, camp counselor, Shooting Sports, Extension committee, BLU, YELLO, state fair, state horse, state dog, state shoot or other. None of the
participants noted that they have ever been a state dog show participant. The other activity specified was the Arts In program. Participation in the state fair with twenty-eight out of thirty individuals (93.3 percent) exhibiting was the number one activity.

Ambassadors (53.3 percent), judging teams (43.3 percent), Federation (43.3 percent) and BLU (30 percent) round out the top five activities respondents have been involved in.

Figure 6 Youth involvement in various 4-H activities on the county or state level.

The seventh question asked respondents to check all of the Out-of-School Time activities that they are either currently or have been previously involved in. Members could select from FFA (former known as the Future Farmers of America); church youth group; National Honor Society; band (including pep, concert, jazz, marching, etc.); chorus (including swing, 50's, etc.); Family, Career and Community Leaders of America
(FCCLA); athletics; Knowledge Bowl; Sunday school instructor; Start Noticing Coalition; school play/musical; speech; debate; job; or other. None of the respondents noted they have ever been involved in debate. Others listed include piano and voice lessons, student senate and YES!. Athletics (70 percent), church youth group (66.7 percent), FFA (63.3 percent), band (60 percent) and chorus (43.3 percent) had the greatest amount of involvement from respondents.

Figure 7a Involvement in other OST activities.

Another hypothesis that appears indicated through this study is that the older the individual is, the more activities they are involved in. This hypothesis varied for individuals, but involvement tended to increase once the participant reached sixteen years
of age. Figure 7b shows the comparison between the age and number of 4-H and other
OST activities of each respondent.
Figure 7b Age of participants vs. number of 4-H and other OST activities.

Ages of participants vs. number of 4-H and other OST activities.
Questions eight and nine asked the respondents to rate life skills gained through their involvement in the 4-H program and other OST activities. Life skills included in this question are featured on the Hendrick’s Targeting Life Skills Model (1996). The rating system included gained a lot, gained some, gained a little and gained nothing.

Figures 8a and 8b show the ratings from the gained a lot column. Figure 8a denotes the life skills that participants believe to have had the greatest impact. Figure 8b documents the life skills that had a few respondents mark that they gained a lot.

When rating life skills gained through involvement in 4-H and other OST activities, respondents had a variety of answers. The top six skills respondents noted that they gained a lot through 4-H participation include leadership (22), responsibility (20), public speaking (19), teamwork (19), contributions to group effort (18) and communication (17). The top six skills respondents noted that they gained a lot through other OST activities include teamwork (20), responsibility (19), cooperation (17), communication (16), contributions to group effort (16) and leadership (16).
Life Skills that youth noted they gained a lot by participating in 4-H and other OST activities

Figure 8a Comparison of life skills that youth perceived to have gained a lot of.
Figure 8b Comparison of life skills that youth perceived they gained a lot of.

Life Skills that youth noted they gained a lot by participating in 4-H and other OST activities

- Wise use of Resources
- Stress Management
- Resiliency
- Personal Safety
- Money Management
- Marketable Skills
- Managing Feelings
- Learning to Learn
- Healthy Lifestyle Choices
- Empathy
- Disease Prevention
- Critical Thinking
- Conflict Resolution
- Accepting Differences

Figure 9 denotes the life skills that participants believed to have least impact from their involvement in 4-H and other OST activities. The five life skills that respondents marked as gaining nothing by being involved in 4-H include disease prevention (6), resiliency (6), marketable skills (4), stress management (4) and conflict resolution (3).

The six life skills that respondents marked as gaining nothing by being involved in other OST activities include disease prevention (9), managing feelings (3), marketable skills (3), record keeping (3), resiliency (3) and self-esteem (3).

The life skills that zero respondents marked as gaining nothing from through participation in either 4-H or other OST activities include communication, contributions to group effort, cooperation, decision making, goal setting, leadership, positive self-esteem, responsibility and teamwork.
Figure 9 Comparison of respondents that marked “gained nothing” for each life skill.

Life Skills youth noted they gained nothing by participating in 4-H and other OST activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Skill</th>
<th>OST activities</th>
<th>4-H</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Safety</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Accepting Differences</td>
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Discussion

The findings gathered from this study are intended to show the importance of youth organizations. Results of this study will be shared with members and families of the Cottonwood County 4-H program, Cottonwood County Extension Committee members, Cottonwood County Commissioners and University of Minnesota Youth Development Educators. By conducting this study, results will help document the life skills gained through participation in 4-H and other OST activities. When budgets are discussed, it is important for youth organizations to showcase their successes and the lessons learned through participation.

The purpose of this study was to determine:

• Why youth enrolled in the 4-H program.

• Which 4-H and other OST activities respondents were currently or had been involved in throughout their life.

• What life skills youth perceived to have gained through their involvement in 4-H and other OST activities.

• What life skills youth perceived to have gained nothing through their involvement in 4-H and other OST activities.

• If there were any significant comparisons in the life skills gained through 4-H and other OST activities.

• If involvement in 4-H and other OST activities increased with the age of the member.
More females than males participated in the survey, which was anticipated since there were 140 females and 118 males in the Cottonwood County 4-H program. Most of the respondents were 16-years-old and, therefore, most of the group was in 11th grade. In the Cottonwood County 4-H program, sixth grade has the most enrolled youth at twenty-six members. Most of the participants have been enrolled in the 4-H program for eight or more years. This confirms the hypothesis that most high school youth enrolled in the 4-H program have been since they were kindergarteners in the Cloverbud program.

There were a variety of reasons why youth chose to enroll in the 4-H program. Exhibiting at county fair and parental encouragement were the top two choices. 4-H is often associated with the county fair since that is the biggest activity of the program. Many parents that were in 4-H encourage their children to participate in the program.

Most of the respondents exhibited at the Minnesota State Fair. Youth must have completed at least sixth grade in order to be eligible to compete at state fair. Since this study included older youth, many of them have had the opportunity to compete on the state level. Some have even continued on to the national level. These results are consistent with research completed by the Harvard Family Research Project in 2007. According to the Harvard Family Research Project (2007), youth especially in middle school, can benefit developmentally through participation in OST programs.

All respondents were active in at least one OST activity. Athletics and FFA were the top OST activities in this study. Many people tie FFA and 4-H together because they are both agriculturally based organizations. However, some of the respondents were not involved in both.
When rating life skills gained through involvement in 4-H and other OST activities, respondents had a variety of answers. The top six skills respondents noted that they gained a lot through 4-H participation include leadership (22), responsibility (20), public speaking (19), teamwork (19), contributions to group effort (18) and communication (17). The top six skills respondents noted that they gained a lot through other OST activities include teamwork (20), responsibility (19), cooperation (17), communication (16), contributions to group effort (16) and leadership (16).

The results from research conducted by Wingenbach and Kahler (as cited by Ricketts & Rudd, 2002) support the above findings. According to Wingenbach and Kahler, “students at the secondary level could increase their leadership skills in communications, decision making, getting along with others, learning management of self, understanding self, and working in groups by participating in a combination of youth leadership organizations in school and/or community activities” (p. 3).

The five life skills that respondents marked as gaining nothing by being involved in 4-H include disease prevention (6), resiliency (6), marketable skills (4), stress management (4) and conflict resolution (3). The six life skills that respondents marked as gaining nothing by being involved in other OST activities include disease prevention (9), managing feelings (3), marketable skills (3), record keeping (3), resiliency (3) and self-esteem (3).

This rating comparison shows that youth surveyed feel they obtain valuable life skills through youth organizations. Many of the youth marked that they gained at least a little through their participation in 4-H and other OST activities. However, youth organizations need to analyze the life skills that are perceived to have the lowest impact.
from youth involvement. 4-H and other OST activities may need to find a way to include
these life skills in their programming.

These results support the importance of youth organizations and activities as
documented in several studies conducted throughout the past decades. Furthermore, the
results agree with statements made in McLaughlin’s (2000) research in which he states,
“Of greatest importance for society is the compelling evidence from the experiences of
these youth that community-based organizations can play a critical role in meeting the
needs of today’s young people. They can fill the gap left by families and schools that are
stretched to capacity to provide support to young people” (p. 3).

Limitations

With only thirty of 258 participants, it would be beneficial to survey a larger
sample to determine its reliability or generalizability. The initial fifty were invited to
participate in the survey based on their involvement in special 4-H programs. This could
potentially skew the results if a member is more active in events, then they typically get
more out of the program.

Surveys were conducted through SurveyMonkey.com. This may have influenced
the number of completed surveys because not everyone had the Internet or may not have
checked their email. In addition to that, results may have been skewed due to not
knowing the demographics of those that participated since data questions related to that
factor were not asked.

The sampling was derived from a listing of Cottonwood County 4-H members so
all participants were involved in the 4-H program. Results could vary if the sampling was
only youth involved in other OST activities.
Summary

Youth organizations have the opportunity to influence the positive development of adolescents (Fox et al., 2003). The study results show that youth surveyed feel they were gaining life skills through their involvement in 4-H and other OST activities. Additional research supports this theory and promotes participation in youth organizations.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Introduction

The goal of this study was to identify the degree to which life skills are gained through involvement in 4-H and other OST activities. Thirty Cottonwood County youth in grades seven through one year post high school were surveyed to determine their perceived life skills through their involvement in various youth organizations.

The findings gathered from this study are intended to show the importance of youth organizations. Results of this study will be shared with members and families of the Cottonwood County 4-H program, Cottonwood County Extension Committee members, Cottonwood County Commissioners and University of Minnesota Youth Development Educators. By conducting this study, results will help document the life skills gained through participation in 4-H and other OST activities. When budgets are discussed, it is important for youth organizations to showcase their successes and the lessons learned through participation.

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss educational implications and recommendations for future research revolving around youth organizations and positive youth development as well as a brief conclusion.

Major Findings

Major findings from this study include:

- More females than males participated in the study, which is a reflection of the ratio enrolled in the Cottonwood County 4-H program.
• Exhibiting at county fair and parental encouragement were the top two reasons why respondents joined the 4-H program.

• Most of the respondents (93.3 percent) have exhibited at the Minnesota State Fair.

• All respondents were active in at least one OST activity. Athletics and FFA were the top OST activities in this study.

• Involvement in 4-H and other OST activities increased for many of the members older than sixteen years of age.

• The top six skills respondents noted that they gained a lot through 4-H participation include leadership (22), responsibility (20), public speaking (19), teamwork (19), contributions to group effort (18) and communication (17).

  The top six skills respondents noted that they gained a lot through other OST activities include teamwork (20), responsibility (19), cooperation (17), communication (16), contributions to group effort (16) and leadership (16).

• The five life skills that respondents marked as gaining nothing by being involved in 4-H include disease prevention (6), resiliency (6), marketable skills (4), stress management (4) and conflict resolution (3). The six life skills that respondents marked as gaining nothing by being involved in other OST activities include disease prevention (9), managing feelings (3), marketable skills (3), record keeping (3), resiliency (3) and self-esteem (3).

• The rating comparison shows that youth are obtaining valuable life skills through youth organizations. Many of the youth marked that they gained at least a little through their participation in 4-H and other OST activities.
These results support the importance of youth organizations and activities as documented in several studies conducted throughout the past decades. Findings from this study support the importance of adolescents perceived from being involved in various youth organizations. Through their participation in 4-H and other OST activities, participants felt they gained many life skills.

Educational Implications

Findings from this study document the importance of adolescent involvement in various youth organizations. Through their participation, youth gain vital life skills that help mold them into well-rounded individuals and responsible citizens.

Throughout the past few years, the economy has not been favorable for many organizations that require funding through schools and governments. Many programs have faced budget cuts or even reduced staff time over the years so it is extremely crucial to convey the importance of these programs. Although youth organizations provide countless skills and positive youth development, officials may only view them as a way to balance the budget.

Youth programs offer a variety of educational experiences in conjunction with building life skills and community service. As cities, counties and states determine the need for youth organizations, it is essential that programs detail their achievements and be a voice for the adolescents they represent.

As other researchers have documented, this project also shows students perceived leadership, responsibility, contributing to the group effort, communication, problem solving, teamwork, and cooperation were gained through participation in 4-H and other OST activities. According to McLaughling (2000), “Young people with nothing to do
during out-of-school hours miss valuable chances for growth and development,” (p. 2).

Information from the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice (as cited by Astroth & Haynes, 2002) also “indicates that children unsupervised after school are at significantly higher risk of truancy, stress, receiving poor grades, early experimentation with sex, and substance abuse” (p. 2).

If communities understand the value and impact that youth organizations have on the future citizens, maybe officials would be able to see past the financial obligations.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research. The first recommendation would be to ask the respondents to provide their current grade point average (GPA). By asking for their GPA, future research could determine if there is any correlation between the amount of OST activities youth are involved in and their academic success. In this type of research, it would be necessary to sample individuals that are involved in multiple OST activities and those that are not involved in any OST programs.

Another recommendation would be to compare life skills gained from those involved in youth organizations and those that are not involved in any OST program. By conducting a survey with this information, research could inquire where adolescents that are not involved in youth organizations gain life skills.

A third recommendation would be to survey individuals who are currently in the program and then survey them again later in life to see if they credit youth organizations for life skills gained. Some youth might not recognize that they are gaining specific life skills through programs until after the fact.
Another recommendation would be to see how many 4-H volunteers were involved in the 4-H program as youth. Volunteers are a vital part of any organization and many volunteers are alumni of that particular program. It would also be interesting to find out why volunteers choose to do so and what benefits they gain by volunteering. A study could also be conducted to see how many 4-H parents were once active 4-H members.

A final recommendation would be to compare youth in different counties, states or countries to see if they place a lower or higher value on the life skills gained through youth programs. Youth programs have different aspects across the country or even the globe. What one organization might do in one state or country may not be the same in another region of the world.

Conclusion

The findings from this study show the need for and importance of youth organizations. With the valuable life skills gained through involvement, all adolescents should have the opportunity to participate in local youth programs.

By acknowledging that youth need both support and opportunities, programs can foster the development of life skills. Youth need to be offered quality educational opportunities, praised for their problem solving and decision making skills, need to feel appreciated, and want the ability to form positive relationships (Quinn, 1999).

In this study, participants in the Cottonwood County 4-H program measured life skills gained through their participation in 4-H and other OST activities. The researcher’s intent was to document that youth organizations provide opportunities for adolescents to obtain positive youth development while sharpening their life skills. These results are
specific to Cottonwood County, but could potentially be applied to other regions.
References


Appendix A

IRB Approval

February 01, 2010

Crystal M Reith
UM Ext Cottonwood CntyZCCOT
N71 County Ofc Bldg Ste 1
41385 US Hwy 71
Windom, MN 56101-3197  

RE: "Importance of 4-H and other Out-of-School Activities"
IRB Code Number: 0911P74214

Dear Dr. Reith

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your response to its stipulations. Since this information satisfies the federal criteria for approval at 45CFR46.111 and the requirements set by the IRB, final approval for the project is noted in our files. Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research.

IRB approval of this study includes the consent and assent forms received January 27, 010 and recruitment materials received January 27, 2010.

The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 25 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

For your records and for grant certification purposes, the approval date for the referenced project is November 25, 2009 and the Assurance of Compliance number is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA0000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003). Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal; approval will expire one year from that date. You will receive a report form two months before the expiration date. If you would like us to send certification of approval to a funding agency, please tell us the name and address of your contact person at the agency.

As Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to:
* Inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects, changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received.
* Report to the IRB subject complaints and unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others as they occur.
* Respond to notices for continuing review prior to the study's expiration date.
* Cooperate with post-approval monitoring activities.

Driven to Discover™
Information on the IRB process is available in the form of a guide for researchers entitled, What Every Researcher Needs to Know, found at http://www.research.umn.edu/irb/WERNK/index.cfm

The IRB wishes you success with this research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at 612-626-5654.

We have created a short survey that will only take a couple of minutes to complete. The questions are basic, but will give us guidance on what areas are showing improvement and what areas we need to focus on:


Sincerely,

Felicia Mroczkowski, CIP
Research Compliance Supervisor
FM/pm
CC: Kim Riordan
Hello,
My IRB Code Number is 0911P74214. My IRB application has been approved, but I would like to increase the number of approved subjects. Originally, I submitted 25 for my number of subjects, but I've decided to include another 25 subjects to my sampling. Please let me know if I am approved for 50 subjects or if there is anything else I need to do to increase this.
Thanks!
Crystal Reith
Crystal Reith
Cottonwood County 4-H Program Coordinator
41385 US Hwy 71
Windom, MN 56101
507-831-4022
Appendix B

Letter to 4-H families

Dear 4-H member and parents,

I am currently working on my master’s degree in Education from the University of Minnesota Duluth. I have elected to conduct a survey regarding the life skills gained through 4-H and other out-of-school time activities. As part of my research, I am seeking 4-H members who are involved in an array of extracurricular activities to complete a short survey. I would like you to consider participating in this study.

If you would like to participate, you will need to do the following:

- Have your parent or guardian sign the attached consent form granting you permission to participate (if you are a minor)
- Sign the attached assent form
- Return the consent and assent forms to:
  
  Crystal Reith  
  Cottonwood County Extension Office  
  41385 US Hwy 71  
  Windom, MN 56101

- Once these forms are received, I will email you a link to the survey
- Complete a simple survey that takes 5 minutes

Your participation is completely voluntary and all information you provide will be kept confidential.

If you do not wish to participate, your current or future relations with Cottonwood County 4-H or the University of Minnesota will not be affected. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Sincerely,

Crystal Reith  
Cottonwood County 4-H Program Coordinator
Appendix C

CONSENT FORM
Life Skills Gained Through 4-H and Other Out-of-School Activities

You and your child are invited to be in a research study of the importance of 4-H and other out-of-school activities. Your child was selected as a possible participant because of their involvement in special 4-H events (i.e. judging teams, Ambassadors, project bowl, etc.) and extracurricular activities. We ask that you and your child read this form and ask any questions you or your child may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Crystal Reith, University of Minnesota Duluth graduate student researcher.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is: The objective of this quantitative study will be to rate and identify life skills that youth perceive they gain by being involved in 4-H and out-of-school time (OST) activities. Research on youth leadership will be conducted with cooperating 4-H youth in Cottonwood County in Minnesota. Youth in grades 7 to post high school that are involved in additional activities in the 4-H program (i.e. judging teams, ambassadors, project bowl, etc.) will complete the survey. These surveys will cover three main areas: 1) number of OST activities participated in/hours involved in OST activities, 2) rating their perceived skills gained by being involved and 3) comparing those perceived skills between 4-H and other OST activities.

Procedures:

If you and your child agree to be in this study, I would ask you and your child to do the following things:

- Sign the consent form

If your child agrees to be in this study, I ask that they do the following things:

- Sign the consent form and assent form
- Provide honest answers on a survey regarding 4-H and OST activities

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

There are no risks related to participation in this study.

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study.
Compensation: There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You and your child’s decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Cottonwood County 4-H or the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, your child is free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Crystal Reith. You and your child may ask any questions you have now. If you or your child has questions later, you are encouraged to contact them at the Cottonwood County Extension Office, 507-831-4022, mohrh002@umn.edu.

If you or your child has any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects’ Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:__________________________________________ Date:_________________

Signature of parent or guardian:__________________________________________ Date:_________________
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator:__________________________________________ Date:_________________
Crystal Reith, University of Minnesota Duluth graduate student researcher, is asking if you are willing to participate in a survey that outlines your thoughts and perceptions about 4-H and other out-of-school time activities. I am hoping to learn more about what life skills you believe you gain by being involved in extra-curricular activities and why you joined these organizations.

Because you are involved in special 4-H events like judging teams, Ambassadors, project bowl, etc., I am asking if you would like to be included in the study.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you fill out a brief survey.

If you change your mind during the study and don’t want to participate, you don’t have to. Being in this study is totally up to you, and no one will be mad at you if you don’t want to do it. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Cottonwood County 4-H or the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn’t think of now, you can ask us next time. Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don’t want to be in this study, don’t sign. Remember, being in this study is up to you, and no one will be mad at you if you don’t sign this or even if you change your mind later.

Signature of participant_______________________________________________________

Signature of person explaining study____________________________________________

Date____________________________________
Appendix E
Survey

1. Gender
Female
Male

2. Current Grade Level

3. Age

4. Years in 4-H

5. Why did you join the 4-H program? (check all that apply)
   ___ I wanted to exhibit at the fair
   ___ I was interested in the activities
   ___ I wanted to gain life skills
   ___ I wanted to travel
   ___ My siblings were/are already members
   ___ My friends were in it
   ___ My parents encouraged me to
   ___ Other (Please specify) ________________________________

6. Check all of the extra 4-H activities that you are currently or have been involved in (please do not list club specific activities)
   ___ Judging Teams
   ___ Project Bowl
   ___ Ambassadors
   ___ Federation
   ___ Camp Counselor
   ___ Shooting Sports
   ___ Extension Committee
   ___ BLU participant
   ___ YELLO participant
   ___ State Fair Exhibitor
   ___ State Horse Show Exhibitor
   ___ State Dog Show Exhibitor
   ___ State Shoot Exhibitor
   ___ Other (Please specify) ________________________________

7. Check all of the extra-curricular and Out-of-School Time (OST) activities that you are currently or have been involved in
   ___ Athletics
   ___ Band (pep, concert, jazz, marching, etc.)
___ Chorus (swing, 50’s, etc.)
___ Church youth group
___ National Honor Society
___ FCCLA
___ FFA
___ Job
___ Knowledge Bowl
___ Math Busters
___ School Play/Musical
___ Speech
___ Start Noticing Coalition
___ Sunday school instructor
___ Other (please specify)______________________

8. Please rate the following skills based on how much you have gained by being involved in 4-H.

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<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Gained a lot by being in 4-H</th>
<th>Gained some by being in 4-H</th>
<th>Gained a little by being in 4-H</th>
<th>Gained nothing by being in 4-H</th>
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9. Please rate the following skills based on how much you have gained by being involved in other Out-of-School Time activities.

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