

4-H International Exchanges: New Directions After the Cold War

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There has never been a time when the *4-H Global Education Curriculum* and the *Global Connections Cross-Cultural 4-H International Exchange Programs* have been more important. Our school systems, community youth educational institutions, and global corporate business leaders are looking for benchmarks of how our youth are meeting global standards. Minnesota youth must be prepared to compete in a global workforce and to be active, productive, contributing global citizens.

Early Ambassadors of Goodwill

4-H International (IFYE) Programs

The first 4-H cross-cultural international exchange program—International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE), later changed to International Four-H Youth Exchange (IFYE)—started almost 50 years ago, after the end of World War II. The programs developed from Edward W. Aiton's belief in the power of youth to improve world conditions. Aiton (1910-1997) was a member of the Minnesota state 4-H staff and later served as the first executive director of the National 4-H Club Foundation of America. He is called "the Father of IFYE."

Aiton believed that understanding, friendship, and acceptance would result from youth living with host families, assisting with their farm work, participating in the community life, and learning their customs, culture, and traditions. Thus the idea of a two-way exchange of

rural young people, living overseas with rural families for three to six months, came into being.

The concept of *learning another way of life by living it* became the hallmark of the IFYE program. In 1948, 17 American 4-Hers (ages 19-25) traveled to Europe as IFYE's first delegation. The size of the group was limited only by space on the ship, not by interest.

In the early years of IFYE, the young people from Europe and America were often called "ambassadors of goodwill." Although World War II was over, there was still a great deal of mistrust, doubt, and fear about what was happening in Europe. It was a time of military threat, revolutions, and the beginning of the spread of communism that would later form the Eastern Bloc countries, the Cold War, and the Berlin Wall. The positive impact of this two-way home stay/host family program, and the personal experience of the exchangees, delegates, and rural host families with whom they lived, was immediate and overwhelming.

IFYE participants, both while in their host countries or states and upon their return home, shared their experiences and impressions with local groups and communities. They immediately became "ambassadors of goodwill" for the people and their host countries. This process helped ease the tensions and stress caused by governments, ideological differences, and the threat of military take-over and war. It furthered the possibility of world peace.

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The concept of the two-way 4-H International Exchange was one of the main reasons the National 4-H Club Foundation of America was founded (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). The foundation trained individuals from both the United States and abroad, and conducted programs of international education to encourage and spread the 4-H principles. Furthermore, there was a need to have a nongovernmental agency handle the funding and solicitation of funds from corporations, businesses, and foundations such as the Ford Foundation, International Harvester, Olin-Mathieson, Sears Roebuck, and The Rockefeller Foundations (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

Exporting 4-H Around the World

What started as a very modest exchange of farm youth during the postwar years grew into a program of two-way exchanges of young adults from more than 50 nations in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America.

In 1965, the National 4-H Foundation realized that IFYE programs were not meeting the needs of younger 4-Hers interested in international educational exchanges. The self-financed *Teen Caravan Program* was established to extend these experiences to teenagers active in 4-H (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

In the 1960s and 1970s, The *Professional Rural Youth Leader Exchange* (PRYLE) program was an important addition for the inbound international programs. PRYLE was designed for youth workers and agriculture or home economics specialists to establish a 4-H-type youth organization or help administrator an existing 4-H-type program. The participants came from around the world, including the Eastern Bloc countries. The National 4-H Foundation in the mid-1970s conducted an exchange training program with Poland and in 1975 started a work study program with young farmers from the former Soviet Union and the United States.

In 1969, the *Youth Development Program* (YDP) was created and designed for American assistance to developing countries (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). The American participants worked closely with professional counterparts in the host country in a variety of tasks. These tasks usually helped develop and adapt a 4-H-type program to meet the needs of the youth and their community (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

IFYE and the Peace Corps

While debate continues on whether IFYE was a model for the Peace Corps, there is no doubt that 4-H has been intimately involved with the training of Peace Corps volunteers. There was a critical need and interest for economic and community development in the rural areas of many of the developing nations where IFYE programs took place, and IFYE exchangees were often recruited by the organization.



A global perspective is needed to meet the responsibilities and challenges of the 21st century.

As we enter the global phase of human evolution, it becomes obvious that each man has two countries, his own and planet earth.

—Rene Dubois

The experience IFYE exchangees gained from international programming in the postwar years placed them in a unique position to take advantage of Peace Corps opportunities. My first work experience after graduation from college was to serve as the assistant director for training for the first Peace Corps group sent to

Uruguay, where I had lived as an IFYE exchangee with seven host families for six months. Harold Sponberg, formerly of the National 4-H Foundation and vice president of Northern Michigan College, said, “From these experiences you become wiser—more knowledgeable—more sensitive and even a little somber and serious” (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

The goal of IFYE participants becoming “ambassadors of goodwill” and promoting world peace and understanding had been achieved by 1965. The first World IFYE (alumni) conference was held in Switzerland during the summer of 1965 to recognize these accomplishments. The IFYE program’s new challenge was to assist in the transfer of technical knowledge and youth development skills.

Minnesota has provided technical and youth development assistance for several countries, including extended involvement with the African country of Botswana. Over several years, five young Minnesotan professionals aided in the development or maintenance of the 4-B (Boitshwaro, Boikanyo, Bonatla, Botswana) organizations and the development of educational materials for 4-B Club members and advisers. Minnesota 4-H and the Agricultural Extension Service hosted and programmed several 4-B advisers and professionals from Botswana for PRYLE. After 25 years, the 4-B Clubs of Botswana are still strong and meeting the needs of youth and families.

they developed and further expanded their 4-H-type educational programs. The 4-H motto of “learn by doing” was often one of the concepts easily adapted by other nations and the majority of these nations were partners in the two-way youth exchange. The IFYE program has been, and still is, an original U.S. export that has made a tremendous difference in the lives of youth and families internationally (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

Post Cold War Potential Global Learning Experiences and International Youth Exchanges

Today’s critical issues are more complex and universal than those addressed by IFYE programs following World War II. There is still the need for global peace, “ambassadors of goodwill,” technology transfer, youth development, economic and community development, and sustainability. Additional needs include the development of democratic social and economic systems, new infrastructures, civic education, and civic participation programs and community service.

We are exposed daily to other cultures, languages, dress, and food. Until recently, media reported there were more Hmong people in the city of St. Paul than any other urban area in the world. Students in the Rochester, Minnesota, school system combined speak 52 different languages (Rochester School District statistics 1996/1997). Even once-isolated rural communities are experiencing new cultures as more Hmong and Hispanic families leave the metro area for work in smaller towns.

Each day we are made aware of new communication technology. Fiber optics allow information to span continents and link communities. Global corporations, businesses, and world financial centers are in touch with each other 24 hours a day. We are informed immedi-

From space, there are no boundary lines.

The earth appears as one country, one people.

—Ellison S. Onizuka, former 4-Her and one of the seven astronauts who lost their lives in the Challenger space shuttle explosion

In the 1970s, more than 80 nations had adapted 4-H youth development concepts as

ately of global events—natural disasters, famine, nations winning or losing their struggle for freedom and independence.

Today's crises include global warming, natural resource depletion, pollution, food and water shortages, and global health problems. They all point to a need for global understanding and for youth to possess the skills necessary to act responsibly as global citizens.

The Center for 4-H Youth Development must partner with local school districts and other educational youth development organizations as our Minnesota youth prepare educationally, socially, economically, politically, and culturally for shared leadership responsibilities to meet these and still other challenges in the 21st century.

Beginning at Home

Minnesota needs to first address the issues that affect us at home—issues of race discrimination, social and economic conditions of inner cities and isolated rural communities, access to education, low graduation rates and student performance, gender discrimination, under-employment and unemployment, housing, stereotypes, disabilities, and many others plaguing our communities. Many educational materials and activities in the 4-H Youth Development curriculum support this.

... *And My World* is a 4-H curriculum in international and cross-cultural education. These leader-led materials are written for the informal hands-on setting of 4-H small groups and are easily adaptable to a classroom setting.

... *And My World* comprises three units:

- *The World Around Me* provides information about both the physical properties of the world and the people who live here. It stresses the importance of knowing about other countries and cultures, and explores



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the physical world of earth, water, and the environment.

- *The People and Customs of the World* provides information about family relationships and cultures around the world. This unit points out the similarities and differences among families around the world, covering their customs, lifestyles, food, and clothing, and instills positive cross-cultural attitudes and skills that enhance mutual understanding and acceptance.
- *What's Happening in Our World* explores the world challenge of interdependence and the complexity of issues such as the environment, economics, hunger, and health. It also helps young people realize the importance of assuming global citizenship responsibilities and being of service in today's interdependent world.

Another useful resource is *Many Faces—One People*, a multicultural training guide that addresses racial and ethnic stereotypes and issues. It is designed to help people build on differences.



The international exchange experience leaves a lasting impression on the children, the parents, and the community. They often result in lifelong friendships.

Intrastate and Interstate Exchanges

Exchange visits by small groups of youth to other parts of Minnesota or to another state add value to their learning experience. Youth enjoy sharing new experiences with their peers, especially when traveling to new destinations. The intrastate and interstate exchange experiences are usually 7- to 10-day visits to another county with planned activities by the 4-H clubs in the area, including a home stay with a 4-H family. These visits enhance the youth's sense of exploration and provide first-hand experience of how youth and families live and work in other com-

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munities. In some cases, they may experience for the first time the differences and similarities in America and Americans—both geographic and ethnic.

Citizenship Washington Focus, a week-long program in Washington, D.C., is a study of citizenship and democracy using the nation's capital as the laboratory and classroom. It is an excellent example of how youth with many similarities (being a teenager, being in 4-H, being a U.S. citizen, etc.) can learn more about our country's diversity by interacting with youth from other states and regions of the United States.

The Internet is another great resource. Schools, local libraries, and community centers all have Web sites appropriate for young people.

International Cross-cultural Exchanges

Hosting an international student is an entry-level activity that helps host families realize the importance of thinking globally as a family and as individuals. Suddenly a country on a distant continent becomes a location where real families are living, working, watching the same television programs, eating the same fast foods, and playing the same video games. These experiences leave a lasting impression on the children, the parents, and the community. They often result in lifelong friendships.

The Labo Foundation of Tokyo, Japan, helped us *realize again* the significance and importance of encouraging families to provide a short-term home stay for an international participant.

Labo is now in its 26th year of conducting two-way exchanges between Japan and primarily 4-H families in the United States and Canada. The one-month home stay/host family experi-

ence for youth ages 12 to 15 years has grown to include some 20 to 25 states annually. The program has had a tremendous impact on tens of thousands of Japanese and American youth and their families, clubs, and communities.

Since 1974, 4-H has expanded its partnerships in Japan to include two cooperating organizations, Lex and Utrek. In addition to the one-month program, Minnesota has, for the last five years, hosted high school students for year-long stays. An Anoka County 4-H family was the first in the state to send their children as the second generation to be part of the Japan/Labo 4-H/USA exchange. In the last three years, two of the children have been part of the

Minnesota delegation. Their mother was a delegate in 1974, the first year Minnesota 4-H sent a delegation to Japan. The family is currently hosting a Labo high school exchange student. One host family says, "It just has become a way of life."

Options for Minnesota 4-H host families and 4-H teens are listed in the brochure *Are You Ready to Go International With 4-H?* Although the number of youth who travel is limited because the experience is self-financed, we are able to provide 4-Hers as well as other youth a variety of possibilities, including two-way exchange programs with Norway, Finland, Russia, Japan, and Australia.

The ideal situation would be for all interested youth in Minnesota to have this or a similar global experience.

Bibliography

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