

Communicating the Outcomes and Impacts of 4-H¹

Lisa A. Guion²

It is important that we, as 4-H youth development professionals, are able to communicate the difference that 4-H makes in the lives of young people. Whether we are writing the significance section of our Plan of Work, presenting before county commissioners or promoting our 4-H program to potential leaders and parents, it is paramount that we share information on the life skills and developmental assets that are being developed in youth through 4-H programs, projects and activities.

This paper provides summaries of some research on the benefits of 4-H and other closely related youth programs. Also, included in this paper are the main findings of the studies that will help you communicate the benefits of 4-H.

Affecting Environmental Attitudes through Camping

Description: This 4-H study examines attitude changes as a result of camping experiences.

Authors: Clinton L. Shepard and Larry R. Speelman

Year Published: Not listed

Findings:

- There is a relationship between program length and conservation attitude development;

- An initial acclimation period for urban campers is desirable before implementing conceptual activities; and,
- There is a greater opportunity to develop positive conservation attitudes in first-time campers.

To get a copy of the study results: See: Shepard, Clinton L. and Speelman, Larry R. *Affecting Environmental Attitudes Through Outdoor Camping*. The Journal of Environmental Education. A 4-H study.

Assessing Leadership Life Skills Gained Through 4-H

Description: The goal of the study was to determine whether 4-Hers gain leadership skills through 4-H activities and examine which skills are developed. 125 youth responded.

Year Published: 1998

Authors: Charlie Clark, Carol Wilcoxon, Cheryl Geitner, Dianne White, Sarah Anderson, and Diane Baker, Illinois Extension Service

Findings:

- 69 to 86% gained moderate to many leadership skills during their involvement in a 4-H Club.
- 45 to 49% improved much of their leadership skills in getting along with others, having a friendly personality, respecting others and setting goals.

1. This document is PE059, one of a series of the Department of Family Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, IFAS, University of Florida. Publication: March 2001. Revised November 2005. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>
2. Lisa A. Guion, Ed.D., associate professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, IFAS, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. 32611.

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- 45 to 61% improved moderately in determining needs, using information to solve problems, showing responsible attitudes, and being tactful.
- 40 to 44% improved much of their skills in trusting other people and using logical thinking.
- 40 to 44% improved their skills in considering alternatives, solving problems, considering input from all group members, being flexible, selecting alternatives, handling mistakes, listening effectively, having positive self-concept, clarifying values, and having good manners.
- 50% obtained leadership skills from animal projects, 11% from arts, 8% from special events and the remainder obtained leadership skills from other activities such as child care, safety and citizenship.

To get a copy of study results: Contact any of the authors.

4-H Youth Voice Survey

Description: The national 4-H Youth Directions Council conducted the study. Four hundred and forty youth staff, and program leaders from 44 states responded to a survey examining youth voices within the 4-H system.

Authors: National 4-H Youth Directions Council team.

Year Published: 2000

Findings:

- 76% of youth ages 18 and under have input in fair board issues.
- 62% of counties have a youth council.
- 45% of youth play an active role in planning and leading state events and programs.
- 19% of youth have an equal voice in state advisory boards.
- 18% of youth are involved in the selection process for 4-H staff.
- 6% of youth have a voice in the selection process of state 4-H staff and faculty.

To get a copy of study results: Check www.fourhcouncil.edu

National 4-H Impact Assessment

Description: A national survey of 1,300 youth and 195 adults associated with 4-H Youth Development Programs examined perceptions about the benefits of 4-H.

Authors: University of Arizona Cooperative Extension provided leadership to this multi-state effort.

Year Published: Preliminary results in 2000, more comprehensive results became available in 2001.

Findings:

- Both youth and adults feel very positive about their experiences in 4-H.
- Youth in 4-H have a strong sense of belonging.
- Adults and youth form strong relationships in 4H programs.
- Adults were more glowing than youth in their responses.
- Youth in 4-H would like greater involvement in decision-making.
- 4-H dropouts may be due in part to best friends not being involved in 4-H.

To get a copy of the study results: Check <http://ag.arizona.edu/icyf/evaluation/4himpact.htm> or email Alison Titcomb atitcomb@ag.arizona.edu

The Cornell Study

Description: A two-year, multi-method study by Cornell Cooperative Extension on the impact of 4-H club membership in 50 counties— resulting in 3,198 youth respondents.

Year Published: 1999

Authors: June Mead, Eunice Rodriguez, Thomas Hirschl, and Stephen Gogan, Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Findings: Controlling for the influences of age, gender, family structure, and father's education, comparisons were made of all Search Institute survey respondents who did and did not participate in other clubs with youth in 4-H clubs.

4-H club youth in New York scored higher than both the Search Institute's youth with club participation and without club participation on all (significantly higher on most) developmental assets tested including: educational aspiration, achievement motivation, desire to help others, school grades, self-esteem, decision-making, having a value system, interaction with adults, and ability to make friends.

To get a copy of the study report: Go to the Florida 4-H News and Info Research Findings Website at

<http://4h.ifas.ufl.edu/newsandinfo/researchfindings.htm>

The 4-H Great Lakes Natural Resources Camp Study

Description: This particular study is a follow-up to the original study of the same name.

Authors: Murari Suvedi and Shari L. Dann

Year Published: 1992

Findings: The camp increased participants' level of awareness of environmental problems, interest in the outdoors, developed leadership skills and influenced career decisions.

To obtain a copy of the study results: See: Suvedi, Murari and Dann, Shari L. *The 4-H Great Lakes Natural Resources Camp: A Follow-up Study*. AEE Center for Evaluative Studies. 1992.

Identifying 4-H Camping Outcomes Using a Standardized Evaluation Process Across Multiple 4-H Educational Centers

Description: The purpose of this study is two fold. The first purpose was to develop a standardized evaluation process by:

- Generating buy-in through an open discussion of the benefits and limitations of a standardized process,

- Identify the desired life skills targeted by the Virginia 4-H camping program,
- Creating standardized survey instruments that would provide consistency yet also allow programs directors to add site-specific questions or items, and
- Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the State 4-H Office and the 4-H Centers in the evaluation process.

The second purpose was to evaluate camping participants' outcomes using standardized instruments to:

- Identify 4-H camping benefits as perceived by youth campers and
- Identify 4-H camping benefits as perceived by youth campers' parents/guardians.

Year Published: 2003

Findings:

1. Youth attending camp indicated that 4-H camp primarily helped them:

- Make new friends,
- Develop new skills in an area that they enjoy,
- Be more independent and take care of their self,
- Learn about different subjects,
- Develop closer friendships with people they already knew, and
- Improved their self-confidence.

2. Parents/guardians were asked to rate their child both before and after camp on 24 different life skill items on a scale of 1-5, where 1 = "almost never" and 5 = "almost always". Three hundred and sixty-three parents returned the survey. The most gains were found for the following items:

- "Takes care of his/her own things,"
- "Shares work responsibilities,"
- "Takes initiative and is a self-starter,"
- "Handles success and failures,"

- “Has a good mental attitude”
- “Adapts to change”

To get a copy of the study report: Please visit

<http://www.joe.org/joe/2003june/rb2.shtml>

The Montana Study

Description: A statewide study conducted in 21 randomly selected counties with approximately 2,500 youth to examine students out-of-school time.

Year Published: 2001

Authors: Kirk Astroth and George Haynes of Montana State University.

Findings: Compared to other youth, 4-H youth are *more* likely to:

- Succeed in school, getting more As than other kids;
- Be involved as leaders in their school and the community;
- Be looked up to as role models by other kids; and
- Help others in the community.

Also, 4-H youth reported that they are *less* likely than other youth to:

- Shoplift or steal,
- Use illegal drugs of any kind to get high,
- Ride in a car with someone who has been drinking,
- Smoke cigarettes,
- Damage property for the fun of it, or
- Skip school or cut class without permission.

To get a copy of the study report: Go to the Florida 4-H News and Info Research Findings Website at <http://4h.ifas.ufl.edu/newsandinfo/researchfindings.htm>.

The Texas 4-H Impact Assessment

Description: A study conducted in 1999, with 52 counties and 1,313 youth respondents, examined the impact that Texas 4-H has on its youth participants. Of the 1,313 youth participating in the study, 545 were community club members. Forty percent of the respondents reside in a non-rural setting.

Year Published: 2000

Authors: Texas 4-H Youth Research Unit, Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Findings:

- 88% indicated that 4-H teaches them to work out differences peacefully.
- 86% indicated that 4-H has taught them problem-solving skills.
- 89% indicated that 4-H has taught them decision-making skills.
- 91% indicated that 4-H has helped teach them how to develop a plan to reach their goals.
- 94% felt that 4-H has helped them accept differences in others.
- 91% felt that 4-H helped teach them skills to be a leader.

To get a copy of the study report: Go to the Florida 4-H News and Info Research Findings Website at <http://4h.ifas.ufl.edu/newsandinfo/researchfindings.htm>.

Research Studies on the Outcomes and Impacts of Youth Programs Similar to 4-H

An Environmental Education Survey

Description Educators in the field of Environmental Education within the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service were surveyed to produce these findings, among others.

Author: N. J. Smith-Sebasto

Year Published: 1998

Findings: 88.2% of the surveyed environmental educators perceived that their programming contributed to the development of environmentally literate citizens.

To get a copy of the study results: See: Smith-Sebasto, N.J. *Environmental Education in the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service: An Educator Survey*. The Journal of Environmental Education, 1998, Vol. 29, No. 2, 21-30

A Study on Camping

Description A study of the benefits of youth camping.

Authors: James C. Stone

Year Published: 1986

Findings: Campers made a statistically significant gain overall, and increases in the following characteristics:

- *Responsibility*. Skill in being accountable for one's own behavior.
- *Decision Making*. Skill in thinking for one's self.
- *Self-concept*. Skill in getting along with others.
- *Interpersonal Relations*. Skill in making friends and being accepted.
- *Citizenship*. Skill in respecting the rights of others.
- *Environmental concern*. Skill in appreciating one's natural surroundings.

To get a copy of the study results: Not Provided

Note: Even though this study dates from 1986, the results continue to be validated in other studies and this study is viewed by some as the original source.

Building Vibrant Youth Groups

Description: The author studied two research questions: Why are some youth groups more effective than others? What are the distinguishing characteristics of highly effective youth groups?

Five youth groups were studied for a total of 163 youth.

Author: Kirk Astroth, Montana State University

Year Published: 1996

Findings: Vibrant youth groups have ten essential characteristics. Vibrant youth groups:

- Concerned with weaning, not winning (i.e., help youth have ownership of the group).
- Change how they do things, but not what they do. (i.e., firm yet flexible).
- Work hard and play hard.
- Empower young people (i.e., authorize, delegate meaningful responsibilities).
- Communicate with and listen to young people.
- Balance chaos with rigidity (i.e., can change with and respond to changing times and circumstances).
- Affirm and support one another.
- Use mentoring system to socialize newcomers into the club.
- Value and practice service to others.
- Take time for training.
- Recognize that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (i.e., each individual brings skills, talents, etc. that can work together to achieve the larger goal of the group).

To get a copy of the study results: Contact the author at Montana State University, 210 Taylor Hall, Bozeman, MT 59717-0358

Moral and Ego Development Study

Description This study was intended to serve as a program evaluation checklist for peer-helping activities.

Author: N.A. Sprinthall

Year Published: written in 1997

Findings: Programs that effectively demonstrate impact on the moral and ego development of participants have five common elements. Young people who take leadership in helping/service programs benefit greatly when these five conditions are present. The five elements are:

1. Role-taking experience in real-life helping
2. Guided reflection
3. Continuity
4. Balance of reflection and activity
5. Blend of support and challenge for the young

Study of Community Youth Programs

Description: The authors studied community youth programs offering developmentally appropriate adult monitored activities.

Authors: S.B. Heath and M.W. McLaughlin

Year Published: 1991

Findings: The successful organizations had these things in common:

- A positive hopeful vision of the future.
- A clear, focused mission.
- A dedicated staff who value youth and are dedicated to their success.
- An identification not linked to social institutions or social problems (i.e., an after-school or pregnancy-prevention program).
- They provide diverse opportunities for activities, varied rhythms of work and play, opportunities to value different

talents and ages, and approaches that are firm and flexible.

- They create a sense that members belong to an intimate group.
- They give power to young people rather than treat them like infants.
- They have clear goals and rules of membership.
- Their range of developmentally appropriate activities are overseen by consistent and reliable adults who send the message that everyone involved is responsible for enforcing the rules and taking leadership for pieces of the program.

To get a copy of the study results: See: Heath, S.B. & McLaughlin, M.W. 1991. "Community Organizations as Family: Endeavors that Engage and Support Adolescents". *Phi Delta Kappan*. April, 1991, 623-627

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Jerry Culen, Ph.D, acting Program Director and associate professor, Youth Development, Family, Youth and Community Sciences department, for the camping studies.