

What Factors Contribute To

Older Youth Retention

In 4-H?


by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify what factors could help retain older youth in the 4-H program and identify what topics and activities teens want included in an older youth program. Three focus groups were held in Summer 2008. The first focus group was held at the Wisconsin State 4-H & Youth Conference. The second and third focus groups had participants from County 4-H programs.

The discussions were coded by themes, analyzed and presented as major and additional findings. Three major factors affecting older youth retention in 4-H include: a) taking into consideration other time commitments and barriers older youth may face when planning and implementing 4-H events, b) improve the quality of the 4-H club and c) focus on specific communication with older youth on activities and opportunities available in 4-H.

Many of the teens wanted to see an increase in the number of fun leadership activities for youth. Suggested activities included: a county-wide dance, city adventure trips, movie nights and a 4-H summer camp specifically for older youth.

By implementing and taking into consideration the suggestions from the focus groups participants, 4-H staff and volunteers could possibly increase retention and participation of older youth in the Wisconsin 4-H program.

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Chapter I: Introduction

4-H youth development programs in Wisconsin have a long practice of encouraging young people to take on challenges and to learn by hands on activities (Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development (WI 4-H YD); Values and Philosophy, 2004). WI 4-H YD; Noteworthy Dates in Wisconsin History found that “the 4-H program was founded in 1902. 4-H originally started as corn clubs for boys and canning tomato clubs for girls” (p. 1). Today 4-H still maintains its strong agricultural traditions, but has expanded into a wide range of projects like computers, science, shooting sports and many others. The 4-H program has several different activities available for youth at different levels; club, county and state. Each member in the 4-H program participates in activities at their own discretion.

WI 4-H YD; Frequently Asked Questions About 4-H (n.d.) defines 4-H as “a volunteer-led organization that reaches boys and girls through small groups called clubs and sometimes in classrooms. 4-H members decide for themselves which projects they want to learn more about. Most projects use hands-on learning experiences to teach subject matter and life skills. 4-H clubs are at the core of the 4-H community club program” (p. 1). The 4-H program also consists of after school programs; WI 4-H YD; Values and Philosophies (2004) state there are approximately 200,000 youth in non-club activities.

The 4-H Youth Development program, has been faced with an enrollment decline in youth ages 13 and over. After the school bell rings at the end of the day, there are many options for teens. Some of the options for teens today include youth group/recreation programs, arts lessons, sports lessons, school extracurricular activities and scouting. Quinn (1999) found that “participation in youth development programs (religious youth programs, sports programs, Scouts, Y’s, 4-H, Camp Fire, and Others) tend to decline during early adolescence” (p.105).

Statement of the Problem

The Applied Population Laboratory; Wisconsin 4-H Profile identified 36.8% of youth in the State of Wisconsin are between the ages of fourteen to eighteen. Of this 36.8% only 2.5% of ninth through twelfth graders participate in the 4-H program. In 2007 the Wisconsin 4-H program had 10,030 participants in grades ninth through twelfth. 4-H members in grades ninth through twelfth represent 27.8% of the total Wisconsin 4-H youth membership in 2007.

The Applied Population Laboratory; Wisconsin 4-H Profile shows that 21.6% of youth in the State of Wisconsin are between the ages of eleven and thirteen. Of this 21.6% only 4.3% of the total population of youth in grades sixth through eighth participates in the 4-H program. 4-H members in grades sixth through eighth represent 28.3% of the total Wisconsin 4-H youth membership in 2007.

Over the last three years the Wisconsin 4-H program has seen a decrease in participation in the 4-H program with youth of all ages. Participation rates of youth in grades sixth through twelfth has fluctuated and decreased over the last three years. From 2005 to 2007 the Wisconsin 4-H program lost 494 youth in grades sixth through eighth. Youth in grades ninth through twelfth saw a decrease of 192 youth from 2005 to 2007.

Harder, Lamm, Lamm, Rose, and Rask (2005) found that “there is a steady decline in the member population that begins at age 12 and continues on through age 18. This decline supports the perceptions by 4-H agents that senior members are difficult to retain in the program” (p. 21). Youth organizations have activities and experiences designed for children and other experiences designed for adolescents. However, teen dropout continues to be a fact of life for 4-H, Boy and Girl Scouts, and similar programs (Heinsohn & Lewis, 1995). There are many factors as to why older youth chose to participate in the 4-H program, but these factors need to be thoroughly examined to help increase teen retention and recruitment.

Purpose of the Study

There are two purposes of this study. The first is to identify what factors can help retain older youth in the 4-H program. Harder et al. (2005) found from age 13 through age 18, 4-H increasingly lost more members than it recruited. Secondly, this research project will identify what topics teens want in an older youth program. Designing programs to meet “felt needs” of clientele is definitely the key to maintaining involvement and may help keep youth at risk from leaving 4-H (Acosta & Holt, 1991).

This research project focuses on older youth retention in the 4-H program. It is important to understand what factors contribute to older youth retention. This can help increase retention of 4-H older youth members, the design of a 4-H older youth program and what factors are appealing when recruiting teens. Harder et al. (2005) states for many years, 4-H has struggled with the complex problems of membership recruitment and retention, especially with older youth. Clearly, youth development professionals are interested in how to attract and retain program participants (Ferrari & Turner, 2006).

Assumptions of the Study

It was assumed that the youth who participated in this study would be truthful in the focus group discussions. The youth were asked questions to provide insights as to older youth needs in the Wisconsin 4-H program.

Definition of Terms

4-H. A volunteer-led organization that reaches boys and girls through small groups called clubs and sometimes in classrooms. 4-H members decide for themselves which projects they want to learn more about. Most projects use hands-on learning experiences to teach subject matter and life skills. (p. 1) WI 4-H YD; Frequently Asked Questions About 4-H

4-H Club. 4-H clubs are a group of five or more youth and at least one certified caring adult leader who takes part in the ongoing 4-H program. Clubs meet regularly

throughout the year and are run by youth and have adult interaction and family involvement. (p. 12) Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide

4-H Club Meeting. 4-H clubs usually meet once per month. At a meeting clubs conduct business, have recreation or social activities, participate in project work, give talks and demonstrations, do community service or hold special interest programs. (p. 12) Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide 2007

4-H Member. “Any youth in grades five year-old Kindergarten through one year beyond 12th grade (13th grade) is a member” (p. 5). Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide, 2007

General Leader. “A volunteer who takes the lead in organizing club meetings, communicating between the club and county, assisting in delegating club responsibilities, and supporting and assisting club officers in running the local 4-H club” (p. 5). Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide, 2007

4-H Project Leader. “A volunteer who helps 4-H members as they learn, make and create within their project areas. This person can be an adult or youth leader. They assist 4-H members in their clubs with exhibiting and special events” (p. 5). Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide, 2007

Volunteer. “A volunteer is anyone who gives time and expertise without monetary compensation. Volunteers contribute their skills, talents and experiences to strengthen all aspects of the program and support its mission” (p. 13). Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide, 2007

4-H Youth Development Agent. “The professional who guides, teaches and administers the 4-H program” (p. 6). Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide, 2007

4-H Project. “A 4-H project is what a 4-H member chooses to learn about, make, create or do. There are over 70 projects to choose from” (p. 13). Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide, 2007

Cloverbud. “Members in Kindergarten through second grade. Cloverbuds explore the scope of 4-H project areas” (p. 12). Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide, 2007

Wisconsin 4-H & Youth Conference. Participants take part in educational seminars and assemblies and meet people from across the state of Wisconsin. Approximately 650 youth, grades eight through tenth, attend the conference located on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus (WI 4-H YD; 2009 Wisconsin State & National 4-H Trips, 2008).

Cooperative Youth Educational Summit (CO-OP Y.E.S.). Participants, youth grades tenth through twelfth, will learn the purpose, operation and scope of cooperative business and economy in a fun and educational environment. Participants also explore career possibilities and meet youth from across Wisconsin and Minnesota. (WI 4-H YD; 2009 Wisconsin State & National 4-H Trips, 2008).

Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF). Participants learn the importance of civic and social responsibilities as they relate to the development of better citizens and leaders. The week consists of participatory workshops, speakers, committee work, field trips and social events. Approximately 200 Wisconsin 4-H youth, grades tenth through twelfth, are selected to attend this leadership program held at the National 4-H Center in Maryland (WI 4-H YD; 2009 Wisconsin State & National 4-H Trips, 2008).

National 4-H Congress. Participants gather in Atlanta, Georgia to take part in self-development seminars, tours, and a service project, while exchanging ideas with youth from across the country. Participants are youth in grades tenth through twelfth throughout the nation (WI 4-H YD; 2009 Wisconsin State & National 4-H Trips, 2008).

National 4-H Conference. Six youth from the State of Wisconsin, in grades tenth through twelfth, are selected to attend this working conference held at the National 4-H Center. Each participant selects an issue and works with other youth from across the country to develop plans that help direct future 4-H programming (WI 4-H YD; 2009 Wisconsin State & National 4-H Trips, 2008).

National 4-H Dairy Conference. Around 200 youth from 4-H dairy projects around the U.S. and Canada congregate in Madison for the National 4-H Dairy Conference held annually in conjunction with World Dairy Expo. The conference consists of participatory workshops on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, speakers, tours and visiting the World Dairy Expo (WI 4-H YD; 2009 Wisconsin State & National 4-H Trips, 2008).

U.S. Space Camp. Participants, youth in grades sixth through eighth) gather in Huntsville, Alabama to participate in hands-on mock space missions and other activities in this NASA program while exchanging ideas with youth from across Wisconsin (WI 4-H YD; 2009 Wisconsin State & National 4-H Trips, 2008).

Key Award. “The Key Award is the highest award given to a Wisconsin youth member in 4-H. It recognizes leadership, service, and citizenship in youth leaders” (p. 11). Jefferson County 4-H Youth Development; Family Guide, 2007

State 4-H Youth Leader Council. Wisconsin 4-H Youth Leader Council (YLC) are youth leaders representing districts throughout Wisconsin with the purpose to strengthen 4-H Youth Development programs by promoting 4-H, providing leadership at the Wisconsin 4-H & Youth Conference, and communicating needs between local and state levels (WI 4-H YD; State 4-H Youth Groups, 2008).

Showcase Singers. Since 1987 the Wisconsin 4-H Showcase Singers have been dazzling audiences at the Wisconsin 4-H & Youth Conference, The Wisconsin State fair

and more. The group is comprised of 4-H members, high school age and older who perform show choir material (WI 4-H YD; State 4-H Youth Groups).

Photo Team. The State 4-H Photo Team of 10 – 12 youth photographers take digital photos of the Wisconsin 4-H & Youth Conference events and groups, and prepares a Conference PowerPoint presentation (WI 4-H YD; State 4-H Youth Groups).

Drama Company. Drama Company is an exciting opportunity for high school youth to serve as theatre ambassadors. At the WI 4-H & Youth Conference, youth will share their skills through a performance and teaching seminars (WI 4-H YD; State 4-H Youth Groups).

Art Team. State Art Team creates artwork around a theme for the WI 4-H & Youth Conference. They design and organize the WI 4-H & Youth Conference Art Exhibit, reception, and provide guided exhibit tours. They teach seminars and train to be peer leaders for county and regional events including the Wisconsin State Fair (WI 4-H YD; State 4-H Youth Groups).

Arts Camp. A camp for middle school 4-H youth taught by older youth. Sessions are taught in photography, music, drama, communications and visual arts (WI 4-H YD; State 4-H Youth Groups).

Arts Lab. Arts lab is an exciting weekend of going in-depth with your favorite arts topic. Sessions include painting & drawing, theatre, choreography, photography, culinary arts, leather craft, clowning, fiber art and many more (WI 4-H YD; State 4-H Youth Groups).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Relevant information on older youth retention in youth development programs has not been difficult to locate; however to locate 4-H specific older youth retention studies has been challenging. Previous 4-H specific studies focused on a variety of different research groups such as Cloverbud retention, retention of middle school students and overall member retention, but few studies included older youth retention and no studies were not specific to a state or county. This literature review will include the following six areas dealing with older youth retention in 4-H and the Wisconsin 4-H program:

1. Wisconsin 4-H Overview
2. Older Youth Opportunities in Wisconsin 4-H
3. Reasons Teens Participate
4. What Teens Want From Programs
5. Reasons Teens Do Not Participate
6. Peers Perceptions of 4-H

Wisconsin 4-H Overview

The mission of 4-H guides past practices of encouraging young people to take on challenges and to learn by hands on activities. The mission as stated in WI 4-H YD; Values and Philosophy (2004) is “UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development integrates research, education, and community based partnerships, enabling youth to learn and practice skills to be productive citizens” (p. 1). 4-H is unique because it combines the strength of community based youth organization with the knowledge from university research into youth development. The four H’s stand for “Head, Heart, Hands and Health.” The four H’s are best explained through the 4-H pledge. WI 4-H YD; 4-H Traditions stated the following:

I pledge...My Head to clearer thinking...My Heart to greater loyalty...My Hands to larger service...My Health to better living...For my club, my community, my country and my world. (p. 2)

WI 4-H YD; 4-H Community Clubs (2004) stated that there are around 2,000 4-H Clubs that provide opportunities for 50,000 Wisconsin youth to participate in one of the largest and oldest youth development and out-of-school education programs. 4-H membership is open to youth in Kindergarten through 13 grade; one year out of high school.

All 72 counties in Wisconsin have a local 4-H program. These local county programs are run by the county 4-H Youth Development educator. (Otherwise known as the county 4-H Agent.) The 4-H Youth Development educator designs leadership, educational and citizenship experiences for young people. The 4-H Youth Development Educator develops the programs with the knowledge and research base of the University of Wisconsin. The county 4-H agent advises the county Leader's Association, which is made up of youth and adult volunteers who help oversee the county programs. The programs are delivered through volunteers. Volunteers help implement the community club program in each county. WI 4-H YD; Values and Philosophy (2004) found there are approximately 20,000 adult volunteers giving their time to the 4-H program. Volunteers implement the programs delivered through the 4-H program. Volunteers must complete a volunteer orientation, child protection training and a background check every four years.

In 2004 over 250,000 young people had the opportunity to learn new skills, gain self-confidence and contribute to their communities by being members of the Wisconsin 4-H program. WI 4-H YD; Values and Philosophy (2004) states the following about the advantages and importance of youth participating in a youth development program:

Research shows that involving young people in experiences that promote healthy development is the surest way to prevent problem behaviors. 4-H provides

opportunities for youth to learn through their own experiences and accomplishments, to learn problem solving and decision-making skills in real world settings, to take leadership in their peer groups, and participate in community and civic work as full partners with adults. Research shows that young people who get involved in civic affairs and volunteerism stay involved as adults, and the 4-H youth development prepares and places youth in these civic roles. (p. 4)

WI 4-H YD; 4-H Community Clubs (2004) following about the advantages and importance of youth participating in 4-H Clubs:

Because 4-H clubs are lead by youth, members learn about citizenship, leadership, cooperation, compromise and teamwork. 4-H Club participation also instills important lessons about setting goals and priorities, taking responsibility, and being timely and accountable. 4-H clubs also provide fertile ground for youth to grow and learn. In 4-H Clubs, kids can develop and test practical living skills in a safe and supportive “real world” environment, become actively engaged in their communities and better informed about local issues, prepare for the world of work through direct experiences with projects and activities that correspond to future career opportunities, experience success in a non-formal learning environment and develop communication and problem solving skills through public presentations and group work. (p. 1)

Participation in the Wisconsin 4-H program and community clubs members can gain life skills and experiences that can help participants throughout their life.

Older Youth Opportunities in Wisconsin 4-H

There are several opportunities for older youth at the club, county, state, national and international levels. At the club level teens can be a club officer; such as the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, reporter, photographer, historian, sunshine committee or various other offices that may be club specific. Teens can also choose to be

a youth project leader, Cloverbud Fair Judge, Cloverbud leader or serve on various club committees. At the county level youth can serve as youth project leaders, participate in, 4-H older youth groups, serve on various county project committees, 4-H Summer Camp, ME process, 4-H Trips and Awards, and also 4-H older youth activities and participate in many county wide 4-H events such as county fair. Many projects provide various activities for older youth at the club, county and state level.

Participating at the state, national and international levels require a greater commitment and demand of time from members as compared to those at the local levels of county and club. Usually these activities and events require significant travel and several planning meetings prior to the event; the meetings being face-to-face or through a teleconference. More planning time is usually needed when preparing for state, national and international events and activities.

At the state level teens can participate in the many “fun” youth activities; such as the 4-H Trips and Awards programs. Teens have a chance of completing a ME process. The names of these programs may vary county by county; for example in one county it is called the Leadership Resume Process. From these processes the teens can be awarded trips and awards at the state and national levels. The ME process is a real-life experience of an application and interview process. The Trips and Awards teens can participate in are very rewarding and important part of youth development. WI 4-H YD; 2009 Wisconsin State & National 4-H Trips (2008) states the following about the purpose of the Wisconsin 4-H Trip Program:

The purpose of the Wisconsin 4-H Trip Program is to recognize the accomplishments of outstanding 4-H members in projects, activities, community contributions, and leadership; to encourage youth participation in high quality educational programs; and to demonstrate publicly the quality of the 4-H Program. (p. 1)

These trips provide youth with the opportunity to network, meet youth from different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status all while having a fun hands-on learning experience. The trips include the Wisconsin 4-H and Youth Conference and Cooperatives Youth Educational Summit. Teens may also participate in state teams such as YLC, Showcase Singers, Photo Team, Drama Company and Art Team. Other state wide activities youth may participate in is project activities, the Wisconsin State Fair, volunteer forums and several State Arts and Communication Program events (such as an Arts Camp Counselor or Arts Lab participant) just to name a few.

At the national level youth can participate in many trips and awards through the ME process such as CWF, National 4-H Congress, National 4-H Conference, National 4-H Dairy Conference and Space Camp. Teens may also participate in inter-state exchange programs or intra-state exchange programs. At the international level youth may be involved in international exchange programs; either hosting or traveling and living in another country. Teens may choose between programs that range in duration from one month to one year. Teens can apply to participate in an international exchange experience with countries including Korea, Japan, Norway, Mexico, Finland, Costa Rico and Australia.

Many of these opportunities are made available to youth by the local county 4-H program website or the Wisconsin State 4-H Website; <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4-H/>. The information can also be distributed by the county 4-H newsletter, from a General Leader, Project Leader or at a 4-H Club meeting.

Reasons Teens Participate

This section analyzes the literature on why teens participate in older youth programs. Teens may be attracted to an organization's activities because they are fun, challenging, even exciting, and because they are different from the experiences they have participated in as children (Heinsohn & Lewis, 1995). Youth may be motivated to

participate in programs for a variety of reasons. According to Ferrari, Anderson-Butcher, and Jackson (2003), older youth have noted factors such as fun and enjoyment, wanting to learn and improve skills, and future usefulness (as cited in Ferrari & Turner, 2006).

Ferrari and Turner (2006) identified many reasons why adolescents joined and continued to participate in youth programs. Themes of caring adults, homework assistance, program environment, program opportunities, fun, learning, friends, character development, and life skills emerged from the data. While the reasons that adolescents join and remain in youth programs may seem to be self-evident, recruitment and retention continue to remain as issues for youth development professionals because low attendance is the norm (Little & Lauver, 2005). Miller (2003) found that programs, however, must be “compelling enough to compete with the lure of ‘hanging out’ with friends and other opportunities available in the community” (p. 5).

What Teens Want From Programs

Experience suggests that teens desire more flexible program options. Given the importance of regular participation, research about what attracts youth and what keeps them coming back is needed (Ferrari & Turner, 2006). A variety of activities are needed to maintain youth’s interest (Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996).

Quinn (1999) stated the following:

Young people themselves report similar views about what they want and need from programs during the nonschool hours. In a series of focus groups held near Washington D.C., young people explained that they want constructive activities to engage their bodies, hearts, and minds during the time they are not in school.

They want very much to prepare for their futures. They want safe places to go, grow, learn, work, and “just hang out.” They want structure balanced with choice. They want a voice in determining the programs, services, and opportunities. They want to learn and practice new skills. They want to spend more quality time with

caring adults and with other young people. They want to contribute to the work of the larger society. And-yes-they want to have fun. (p. 97)

Often, fun is an overlooked dimension in youth programming. Fun can be the “hook” that brings youth into an activity (Wolfe & Carroll, 2003). According to Wynn (2003) opportunities to have fun allow adolescents to broaden and deepen their interests (as cited in Ferrari & Turner, 2006).

Acosta and Holt (1991) found that topics that have been the mainstays of 4-H programming for years-health, safety, nutrition, and consumerism-are no longer primary interest to teens. A needs assessment conducted by one rural parish in Louisiana asked teens in seventh through twelfth grades to identify topics of interest. The topics of high interest included: suicide, pregnancy, dating, teen years, fashion, careers and options after high school. They also found there were several topics of no interest to teens: stress management, nutrition, study skills, safety, health, communication, time management, grooming, family breakups, unemployment, consumerism, goal setting, citizenship and first aid. Goal setting was of no interest to teens in this parish, but careers and what to do after high school were of high interest. The possibility of using career ladders or life planning as tools may help create the idea of goal setting from another viewpoint.

Reasons Teens Do Not Participate

Harder et al. (2005) stated that “unlike younger youth, adolescents are given more autonomy in choosing their activities and often opt to leave a program chosen by their parents in favor of one of their own choosing” (p. 22). Heisohn and Lewis (February 1995) state “adolescence is a time for exploring and experimenting with new interests or refining and expanding ongoing activities or interest” (p. 4). Many youth are leaving youth programs and organizations not because of a programming glitch, but rather as a part of the developmental process.

The Forum for Youth Investment (2003) discovered between work, school and family responsibilities, many teens have a full schedule. The Forum for Youth Investment also identified the following five barriers to engagement: supply, access, opportunity costs, program costs and age-appropriateness. As a child ages, there is a decrease in available opportunities. Along with a decrease in available activities, there are often problems accessing what is available.

The Forum of Youth Investment (2003) found once teens discover what is available, transportation becomes the next hurdle; this is more common in teens from rural areas. Many teens have family responsibilities or work a job after school; this is more common in teens that come from low-income families. Many out-of-school activities require money to join or the activities have a fee. Lastly, most programs use the same basic inputs that support young children in older youth programming, but the key to making this a success is keeping the programming developmentally appropriate.

A study by Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) looked at adolescents' negative experiences in organized youth activities. The authors noted, in general, organized youth activities lead to positive development, but a smaller portion proposes that sometimes these experiences are negative and can lead to youth dropping out or hinder learning. This study used 10 focus groups, with a total of 55 adolescents, to collect data. Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) found five categories as the source of the adolescents' negative experiences: peers, adult leaders, themselves, parents and community members.

Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) found that "the largest number of negative experiences was attributed to peers and to peer group dynamics within this activity" (p. 19). The students negative experiences with peers were sorted into five categories: encounters with aversive peer behavior, formation of cliques and exclusive friendship groups, poor cooperation, negative peer influences, and being ridiculed for belonging to the activity or for the performance of the team or group.

The second category identified as the source of the adolescents' negative experiences is adult leaders (Dworkin & Larson, 2006-2007). The students negative experiences' with adults was sorted into six categories: leaders favored certain youth over others, leaders who were disrespectful or demeaning, leaders placing unreasonable demands on them, unknowledgeable or poor leaders, leaders tried to be more of a friend than a leader, and inappropriate and unethical adult behavior. Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) stated "the wide variety of negative experiences reported by our students reflects different ways in which adult leaders failed to provide, or undermined, different features of a positive and facilitative environment" (p. 31). It is widely recognized that relationships with caring adults are essential for youth to achieve their fullest potential (Tierny, Grossman, & Resch, 1995).

The third category identified as the source of the adolescents' negative experiences is oneself and other parts of one's life (Dworkin & Larson, 2006-2007). The students' negative experiences with the adolescents themselves were sorted into four categories: performance anxiety, stress which students reported after they did not perform as well as they expected, encountering one's own negative behavior or traits, and stress related to competition between organized activities and the demands from other parts of their lives.

Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) found that the third source of adolescents' negative experiences is parents. Parents were found to be a smaller source of negative experiences. The most common form of these negative experiences with parents was feeling parental pressure. Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) stated "this pressure included pressure to join an activity, pressure to quit an activity, pressure to stay in an activity, and pressure to perform better in an activity" (p. 38).

The last category of persons identified as the source of the adolescents' negative experiences is community members. These experiences were sorted into one category;

inappropriate or unappreciated community member behavior. Dworkin and Larson

(2006-2007) found the following:

Negative experiences are important to understand because they disrupt youth's process of engagement in the developmental systems are provided by youth programs. They can interfere with attention to activities, reduce engagement in the relationships through which youth development occurs, lead to burn out or drop out, and – in some cases – can provide the seeds of learning and growth.

(p. 52)

In a study by Ritchie and Resler (Spring 1993) they found three reasons youth gave as to why they dropped out of 4-H. The reasons are as follows: first, the most often reason youth dropped out was because they were not satisfied with 4-H Clubs; secondly, youth said they were too busy with sports; and lastly, the youth were too busy with a job.

Peers Perceptions of 4-H

Norland and Bennett (1993) stated peer pressure has been lamented as a great deterrent to participation. Friends and peers are often the most important people in adolescents' lives, so teens are very sensitive to how peers act and what they think (Brown, 2004).

In a previously mentioned study by Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) student's negative experiences with peers was the largest out of the five categories of sources of negative experiences. One type of negative experience was being ridiculed for belonging to the activity or for the performance of the team or group. Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) found the following:

A boy in Future Farmers of America reported being taunted that their initials stood for "Future Fags of America." A girl reported that their dance group had performed a really hard routine during half time of a basketball game, but "everyone in the crowd is like, 'You guys suck'." These comments from non-

members often stung. Someone on a losing sports team said, "Sometimes the reputation that we have kind of pulls our self-esteem down." (p. 22)

Dworkin and Larson (2006-2007) found that it is hard for youth to manage interpersonal relationships with their friends, let alone youth they meet at activities.

A study by Homan et al. (2007) looked at youth perceptions of the Ohio 4-H program. Youth in grades 4, 7, and 10 completed a questionnaire specifically designed and given to youth for past 4-H members, current 4-H members and youth who have never joined 4-H. A total of 1,462 students from nine different schools in five northwest Ohio counties provided usable data. The research found that Ohio 4-H is viewed not as positive as age increased in the studies' participants. Homan et al. (2007) found the following:

Older youth are less likely to find 4-H as appealing. As youth age, they are less likely to agree that 4-H is "fun" and "cool," and are more likely to agree that 4-H is "boring". Older youth are less likely to report that they intend to remain involved in 4-H and also indicate that their parents and friends are less likely to encourage them to remain involved in 4-H. (p. 12)

If a youth has been a member of 4-H they were more likely to perceive 4-H positively than those youth who have never been a 4-H member (Homan et al., August 2007). 4-H programs must keep youths' perceptions in mind when designing and planning activities. If an activity is not viewed as "fun" and "cool" it is less likely youth will be attracted to the 4-H program.

Summary

One theme that does appear in most of the research is there are many factors that affect a youth's participation in a out-of-school-time activities, but that fun is of major importance in an older member's participation in out of school time activities. It may not

be the main reason a youth continues participating in an activity, but fun does play an important role in an older youth's initial interest or participation in an activity.

A second theme in past research is as youth age they developmentally have different needs from a program and also take more ownership over their decisions. If the activity is not developmentally age appropriate it may no longer be perceived as fun by the older youth. Since youth are taking more ownership over decisions at this age, they may choose to leave or limit their involvement for many reasons. These reasons have stayed very consistent across the research.

Over the past decades practitioners have been challenged with a decline in older youth participation in youth development programs. This research will help to understand what factors can help increase older youth retention in the 4-H program. Also, it will explore what topics older youth desire from the 4-H program.

Chapter III: Methodology

Focus groups are a useful technique for collecting qualitative information because people's attitudes and opinions are formed through interaction with others and their environment. Morgan and Krueger (1998) stated "focus groups are frequently used to learn about either topics or groups of people that are poorly understood" (p.12). A focus group setting provides participants with the chance to listen to others before forming opinions. Focus groups provide an opportunity for candid feedback and often result in the divulging of emotions that do not emerge in other forms of questioning. The focus group format provides opportunities for richness in feedback that is not obtained through direct surveys or interviews of individuals.

A series of three focus groups were used to collect qualitative data. Morgan and Krueger (1998) stated that focus groups use guided group discussions to generate a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs (p.11). Qualitative research was used to gain a strong sense of the wants and needs of older youth in the 4-H program. Three focus groups were held in the Summer 2008 with a total of eleven participants. The first focus group was held at the WI State 4-H & Youth Conference and had six older youth members participate. The second focus group had four participants from a Wisconsin County 4-H program. The third focus group turned into a personal interview since only one older youth member from a Wisconsin County 4-H program participated.

This project, "What Factors Contribute To Older Youth Retention In 4-H?" was approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Wisconsin – Stout (Appendix A). This ensures appropriate measures were utilized to protect human subjects; this protected everyone involved, including subjects and researchers.

Focus Group Participant Selection

Participants from the focus groups consisted of participants in the Wisconsin State 4-H & Youth Conference and older youth members from two Wisconsin county 4-H

programs. Participants were specifically selected to participate in the groups. The participants were specifically target based on their level of involvement in the 4-H program; being involved at the club, county or state levels. In order to assure the most objectivity, the assistance of county 4-H Agents was used in identifying specific participants based on members participation levels. Letters were sent out to encourage members to participate in the session at the conference

For participant selection for the second focus group, the county 4-H Agent helped select two 4-H clubs that had higher numbers of older youth members. The county 4-H Agent provided a list of the older youth in the club. Participants were selected from the club level for the second focus group to ensure youth of all participation levels were invited to participate in the focus groups. With participant selection for the third focus group, another local county 4-H agent was utilized. The county 4-H agent provided a list of older youth who were members of the county older youth organization. The county 4-H agent helped to select youth with different participation levels in the organization.

All three focus groups were invited to the focus group from a mailing sent through the United States Postal Service. The letter contained a consent form (Appendix B), a cover letter (Appendix C) and a self addressed stamped envelope. Since the participants were minors, parents/guardians were encouraged to ask questions. The parent/guardian and youth had to return the signed consent form prior to the focus group. Food, beverage and an incentive was offered to participants who attended the focus groups. The first focus group participants were offered a 4-H memento as an incentive. The second and third focus group participants were offered one ten dollar gas card as an incentive to participate.

To get a sample of youth from around the state with different participation levels, a seminar was conducted at the WI State 4-H & Youth Conference. The conference was held June 16-19, 2008 on the University of Wisconsin-Madison Campus in Madison, WI.

Delegates of the conference were approximately 500 4-H members and youth from around the State of Wisconsin. Conference delegates ranked seminar choices. The seminars were selected for delegates. The seminar delegates were asked to participate in the first focus group. Six youth were signed up for the seminar and six youth participated in the focus group.

Participants invited to the second and third focus groups were involved in a Wisconsin county 4-H program. For the second focus group 30 older youth members were invited to participate in the focus group. The focus group was held in Sturtevant, WI on June 25, 2008. The participants were offered a pizza dinner and one ten dollar gas card as an incentive to participate. Four of the thirty older youth receiving letters participated in the focus group. One of the invitations was returned back to the researcher by postal mail as a "return to sender".

For the third focus group 30 older youth members from another Wisconsin county 4-H program were invited. The focus group was held in Menomonie, WI on July 11, 2008. The participants were offered a pizza dinner and ten dollar gas card as an incentive to participate. One of the thirty older youth receiving invitations participated in the focus group. The third focus group, since only having one participant, was a personal interview.

Focus Group Question Development

Standard protocol for focus group interviews was used in the design and implementation of the groups. The Focus Group Script (Appendix D) was designed around the purposes of this study. The focus group questions were reviewed by an expert in focus group research. The expert suggested modifying questions so three main areas were covered; vision, strategies to move toward vision and description of the desired future conditions. After changes were made the questions were piloted to two groups of 4-H older youth. The expert made sure the questions included the following types of questions; intro, transitions, three or four key issue questions and strategies for future

visions and changes to the program. The older youth felt the questions addressed the topic and were easy to understand. The older youth did suggest alternate words in two of the questions. The youth felt the words were better suited for them.

The focus group questions were developed with the desired length of the focus group taken into consideration. The desired duration of the focus group was two hours. The questions were designed to flow from intro to key issues and then strategies for improvement. There were follow up questions asked to many of the main questions. One question also had cues to help participants.

The aspects of the focus groups were guided by Richard A. Kruger's book *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (1994) and *The Focus Group Kit* (1998) by David L. Morgan and Richard A. Krueger. *The Focus Group Kit* is a series of six books: *The Focus Group Guidebook*, *Planning Focus Groups*, *Developing Questions for Focus Groups*, *Moderating Focus Groups*, *Involving Community Members in Focus Groups*, and *Analyzing & Reporting Focus Group Results*.

Focus Group Implementation

Three focus groups were held in Summer 2008 with a total of eleven participants. The first focus group was held at the WI State 4-H & Youth Conference and had six older youth members participate. The second focus group had four participants from a Wisconsin County 4-H program. The third focus group turned into a personal interview since only one older youth member from a Wisconsin County 4-H program participated.

The three focus groups were audiotaped and a technical assistant was used. The technical assistant assisted with the audiotaping, food preparation, room set-up and note taking. The technical assistant has completed the IRB Human Subjects Training.

Data Analysis

The analysis strategy utilized was transcript-based analysis. To analyze data using this method tapes are transcribed and the analyst uses the transcription, along with field

notes and the discussion from the debriefing (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Analysis begins during the first focus group. During the focus group discussions the analyst listened for inconsistent and vague comments and probed for a better understanding, took careful notes on flip charts, offered a key summary question and verified understanding of participant's statements. The technical assistant took notes, observed non verbal communication, and drew a diagram of the seating arrangements for each focus group. The technical assistant and moderator had a debriefing session after each focus group.

All focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed. The tapes were transcribed by an outside party. The outside party used a transcription machine. To address validity, two peer reviewers read the transcripts to ensure an accurate interpretation. The transcripts were spotted checked at several random locations. The reviewer started at the beginning of the tape recording to match the words to the transcript. The reviewer then skipped ahead to several random places in the tape and again matched the transcript to the actual words. When background noise was a problem, it was noted in the transcriptions. In the recording of the first and second focus groups, background noises made it hard to get an exact wording throughout the whole tape. Notes were taken during the discussion by the facilitator and the technical assistance. The notes filled in the gaps in the tape and what was missed because of background noise.

Data was analyzed using the sixth book in *The Focus Group Tool Kit: Analyzing & Reporting Focus Group Results*. The transcriptions were read and coding identified. Classic tools for analysis and standard methods of content analysis were used. Morgan and Krueger (1998) discussed how a long table, scissors, and colored marking pens are classic tools for analysis. This low technology option has been used in countless analysis projects, and it allows the analyst to identify themes and categorize results (p. 57). The analyst used a long table, scissors, colored marking pens and sticky notes, and flip chart sheets.

The author gathered all of the transcripts and flip chart sheets. Two copies of the transcriptions were used; one to stay intact and one to cut up. The transcripts were reviewed to give the analyst a refresher of the material. This reminded the analyst as to the whole scope and to refresh the memory of where the information was located, what information occurred in abundance and what information was missing.

The transcripts were arranged in the order in which the focus groups were conducted. Sheets of flip chart paper were laid out on the long table; a theme/category was identified and written on the top of flip chart paper. The themes/categories written on the flip chart paper were club issues, communication, factors affecting participation, topics, activities, experiences, perception of 4-H and why joined. Specified quotes were cut out of the transcriptions and taped to the flip chart sheet of the theme/category it supported. Before the quotes were cut out, each was labeled using a number based on the question the quote was found under and the date of the focus group. An example of this would be (4, June 25). Not every quote fit directly into the categories. The categories rearranged as the transcripts were analyzed. From the rearranging of categories and since everything does not fit neatly into a category major findings and additional findings emerged. The colored paper, colored markers and sticky notes were also utilized to aide in keeping track of themes during the cutting, sorting and arrangement of the data.

As the author was the moderator of the focus groups and analyst of the data. The author used the sixth book in *The Focus Group Tool Kit: Analyzing & Reporting Focus Group Results* as a guide. The author has previously been an assistant moderator in qualitative focus group research. When coding and reviewing the data the author tried to be as objective as possible by taking out identifiers of focus group participants.

Chapter IV: Results

There were two purposes of this study. The first was to identify what factors can help retain older youth in the 4-H program. Harder et al. (2005) found “from age 13 through age 18, 4-H increasingly lost more members than it recruited” (p. 13). Secondly, this research project identified what topics teens want in an older youth program. Designing programs to meet “felt needs” of clientele is definitely the key to maintaining involvement and may help keep youth at risk from leaving 4-H (Acosta & Holt, 1991).

This research project focused on older youth retention in the 4-H program. It is important to understand what factors contribute to older youth retention. This can help increase retention of 4-H older youth members, the design of a 4-H older youth program and what factors are appealing when recruiting teens. Harder et al. (2005) states for many years, 4-H has struggled with the complex problems of membership recruitment and retention, especially with older youth. Clearly, youth development professionals are interested in how to attract and retain program participants (Ferrari & Turner, 2006).

Three focus groups were held Summer 2008 with a total of eleven participants. The first focus group was held at the WI State 4-H & Youth Conference and had six older youth members participate. The second focus group had four participants from a Wisconsin County 4-H program. The third focus group turned into a personal interview since only one older youth member from a Wisconsin County 4-H program participated. The results of the focus groups were coded by themes.

Three specific themes emerged from the three discussions, which then formed the basis for key findings regarding what factors can help retain older youth in the 4-H program. Two themes emerged from the three discussions, which then formed the basis for key findings regarding what topics older youth members want in an older youth program. Additional themes were present in one or two of the three discussions and provide additional findings that should be researched in the future. The findings below

represent the themes identified without specific attribution to any individual in order to preserve the participant's identity and further enhance the reliability of the data.

What Factors Can Help Retain Older Youth in 4-H?

Three specific themes emerged from the three discussions, which then formed the basis for key findings regarding what factors can help retain older youth in the 4-H program. The first major finding focuses on the planning and implementation of 4-H events.

4-H programs could improve on taking into consideration other time commitments and barriers older youth may face when planning and implementing 4-H events. This would have an impact on retaining older youth in the 4-H program.

Older youths' other time commitments and transportation arrangements were the most often mentioned and agreed upon factor affecting youth participating in 4-H events. The focus group participants came up with several different strategies and ideas 4-H agents and volunteers could implement in programs. The youth also shared other time commitments they may have.

Specific representative comments are:

- Maybe try having the event in a different part of the county each time it is held.
- This past year I have not been able to be as active as normal. I live a ways away from where most things are held. Gas is so expensive my mom and dad would not make a "special trip" just for a 4-H event.
- Try looking at a school activities calendar when picking out dates for activities or meetings.
- When we have Jr. Leader meetings will hold them at different times and locations every time.

- I am really big into sports and it is hard trying to decide which one I want to do a lot of times so I try to even it out. Other than that, I mean I have a couple of jobs so sometimes it is hard to do that. Other than that I am involved with 4-H as much as I can be.
- We could try arranging some sort of car pool or ride system.
- Maybe try having more district events than state events. Or try having more activities with just a few surrounding counties. I mean this would give us a chance to leave the area, but maybe not have to go so far away.

The second major finding focuses on improving the quality of the 4-H club. 4-H clubs need to improve the quality of their meetings and activities. There was agreement among all three sets of focus group participants that their 4-H club could be improved. The challenge posed to 4-H clubs is the breadth and scope of the ideas suggested. Suggestions were made which ranged from giving the older youth more leadership roles to finding a better way to incorporate Cloverbuds into club meetings.

Specific representative comments are:

- Cloverbuds should go do a project during half of the business meeting
- Clubs need to follow their by-laws and county by-laws. Clubs should make a copy of the by-laws available to all members
- Like it is really focused on getting little kids to come in and new members, but we are not focusing on the older youth at all
- Youth should be able to lead a project meeting or be in charge if there is no project leader; especially if they are 18. I know there are limitations, but there is no one in some counties that are leading projects. In my county kids would show up at the fair with chickens that were not tested, but none of the kids knew because there was not a leader. I cannot do anything about it because some adult needs to take the leadership role and no one will.

- The adults try to take over the event too much. We have great ideas and want to carry them out.
- Maybe have a county wide event where clubs compete. Just kind of have your club form a team to bring to the event. It would be fun and we could work on team building things.

The third major finding focuses on communication in the 4-H program. The 4-H program could improve their communication with older youth on activities and opportunities. There was agreement among all three sets of focus group participants that older youth events need to be advertised better and different types of communication should be used when trying to inform older youth of opportunities. The youth had many suggestions ranging from sharing more details to building relationships with other teens outside of the event, to help improve communication overall.

Specific representative comments are:

- I kind of feel there is not much offered at the older youth activities, they only do one lock-in in my county.
- Put reminders about club meetings in the county newsletter or send out post cards to help increase older youth at club events.
- I think we should start a Facebook or My Space page. Many youth communicate via internet. If we communicated more that way it might help.
- I think we should go into schools and have skits about 4-H. Oh yeah, and we could maybe do a PowerPoint or show pictures and things from the trips and activities we have done.
- We could try sending out postcards or giving phone calls to remind. We could also try sending out e-mail reminders.
- If we build friendships outside of the activities it might make people feel more comfortable and able to ask questions about events.

- I think we should include more detail of the event in the newsletter. I know when I first started to want to get more involved, I would see an event in the newsletter, but there was not a lot of detail. I know there are other places you can find the description, but if we tried putting it in the newsletter it might help.

What Topics Do Older Youth Want?

Two themes emerged from the three discussions, which then formed the basis for key findings regarding what topics older youth members want in an older youth program. The first major finding focuses on the older youth being satisfied with the topics and projects available to them.

The 4-H program is doing a good job with the projects and topics they are making available to older youth. There was an overall agreement among all three sets of focus group participants that the 4-H program is meeting older youth's needs regarding topics and project material. Each county program is unique in what the program emphasizes, but overall the youth were satisfied with projects to choose from.

Specific representative comments are:

- I do not know, I mean they have a lot already.
- I know technology is the theme for 4-H this year across the U.S., but we do like almost nothing with those projects.
- I fell pretty good with what is available.
- There are so many projects to choose from already, I cannot think of anything else I would add.
- I think we could focus more on community service in this county, but I really like being able to choose from so many projects.
- I think 4-H is fine.

The second major finding regarding topics for older youth was providing the older youth an opportunity for more fun events specifically for older youth. The 4-H program must provide more fun activities targeted specifically for older youth. There was agreement among all three sets of focus group participants that the 4-H program is doing a good job providing fun activities at the state level.

The older youth really enjoyed the opportunities available to them at the state and national level through the Wisconsin 4-H trips program. This includes the WI 4-H and Youth Conference, CWF, and National Congress to name a few. The older youth felt that more could be done to specifically target older youth at a more local level. Many participants felt that Cloverbuds and young members were receiving the focus of the programming. The older youth felt that they were doing a lot of leadership to help with fun events for other age groups, but were not offered many opportunities to have fun without being a leadership role. The older youth offered many suggestions of activities they would be interested in.

Specific representative comments are:

- Maybe some type of city adventure trip. We just took a Twin Cities adventure trip, like 10 of us went for the weekend. The whole trip was planned for us and given as an award from the county.
- I know we offer a Summer Camp, but it is for little kids. I know in our county I can only be a counselor or director. I wish we had a camp that was just for older youth so we could hang out and do activities without having to watch and lead the little kids.
- Maybe like a state trip, like every year there is a different destination, a bunch of people sign up and they all get to go. Every year it should be a different city, so it is not the same every year.

- Something like a fun big group activity and maybe try having it in different spots around the county.
- I want to make more trips for like kids in middle school. I have noticed with a lot of kids in our club we do not have a lot of older members. They drop out in middle school when there is not a lot to do and so they need a lot more opportunities.
- We should try setting up a sports tournament or league; maybe volleyball, basketball or softball.

Additional Findings

From the focus group discussions there were three additional findings; others need to have more education on the 4-H program and the reasons why the participants joined 4-H. The first additional finding is education of others on 4-H.

The 4-H program needs to do a better job of promoting and changing the perception of the 4-H program. In two of the focus groups the participants talked a lot about what their friends and communities think of 4-H. Many of the older youth felt that their friends had incorrect perceptions on 4-H. Even if the older youth's friends said negative comments about the 4-H program, the older youth said it did not affect their participation.

Specific representative comments are:

- A lot of people think 4-H is all about cows and cooking, it is the slogan that people like to use.
- 4-Her's are hicks. You have to be a farmer to be in 4-H.
- My friends tell me 4-H is dumb.
- I get a lot of "what is 4-H?" or that in general they have no idea what 4-H is. They are clueless on what 4-H is about.
- Dumb, waste of time, what is it really, do you have to be a farmer?

The second additional finding focused on reasons why participants joined the 4-H program. In all of the discussions many of the participants had family members who were in 4-H. The older youth spent a lot of time talking about why they joined 4-H and how either their family or friends had an influence.

Specific representative comments are:

- I think I joined when I was in second grade, like Cloverbuds, but anyways my mom was in 4-H as a kid and all my brothers and sisters were in 4-H and it was kind of natural thing to go into 4-H. They were having fun in it and so I do not know, I guess I just naturally went into 4-H with them.
- I joined in second grade. I joined because my older brothers were in it and I thought what they were doing was fun so I wanted to be in it too.
- I joined in eighth grade; a buddy got me involved.
- I joined when I was in second grade. All my older sisters joined and they all had a lot of fun and I wanted to get involved in it.
- I joined when I was 13; my friends and family told me it was something I should do.
- I joined when I was six because both of my parents were in it.
- I joined in like second grade. My family was in it and my mom wanted me to join some clubs.
- I was six, a Cloverbud. My parents, their siblings and my siblings were in it.

The third additional finding focused on negative experiences that changed an older youth's participation in the 4-H program. There are many different experiences a youth might have that may change their participation in the 4-H program.

Specific representative comments are:

- At summer camp, I was in the third grade and many boys made fun of me and the counselors did nothing about it. I spent most of my time at camp not having fun. I had such a bad time, I have never been back.
- One person who works with the 4-H program once told me the wrong date and time of an event. It was something I thought would be a lot of fun. I guess I cannot trust that person anymore. I know to ask the other person in the office.
- My mom kept wanting me to do all of the things she did in 4-H. The more and more she talked about the less and less interested I was in it. I was not interested in it, but she kept pushing it.
- I wanted to be on the Dairy Judging team. I went to the meetings, but had to miss one because I did not have a ride. I called the night before to let coach know I could not make it and asked what I would miss. I guess at the meeting I missed the team was selected. No one ever told me that when the team was being picked and that you had to be there. I am still upset about it and do not plan on being a judging team again or working with the coach.

Harder et al. (2005) state that “one observes the steady decline in the member population begins at age 12 and continues on through age 18. This decline supports the perceptions by 4-H agents that senior members are difficult to retain in the program” (p. 21). Youth organizations have activities and experiences designed for children and other experiences designed for adolescents. However, teen dropout continues to be a fact of life for 4-H, Scouts, and similar programs (Heinsohn & Lewis, 1995). There are many factors as to why older youth chose to participate in the 4-H program, but these factors need to be thoroughly examined to help increase teen retention and recruitment.

This research will help to understand what factors can help increase older youth retention in the 4-H program. Also, it will explore what topics older youth desire from the 4-H program. Qualitative research was used to gain a strong sense of the wants and needs of older youth in the 4-H program. Three focus groups were held in the Summer 2008 with a total of eleven participants. The first focus group was held at the WI State 4-H & Youth Conference and had six older youth members participate. The second focus group had four participants from a Wisconsin County 4-H program. The third focus group turned into a personal interview since only one older youth member from a Wisconsin County 4-H program participated.

Three specific themes emerged from the three discussions, which then formed the basis for key findings regarding what factors can help retain older youth in the 4-H program. Two themes emerged from the three discussions, which then formed the basis for key findings regarding what topics older youth members want in an older youth program. Additional themes were present in one or two of the three discussions and provide additional findings that should be researched in the future.

The study supports the literature findings. One theme that appeared in most of the research, Wolfe & Carroll (2003) and Quinn (1999), is there are many factors that affect

a youth's participation in out-of-school-time activities, but that fun is of major importance in an older member's participation in out of school time activities. It may not be the main reason a youth continues participating in an activity, but fun does play an important role in an older youth's initial interest or participation in an activity.

A major finding of the study was that older youth want more fun activities targeted specifically at their age group. The older youth want activities that are specifically designed for their age groups' developmental needs. This too was supported by previous studies; Heisohn and Lewis (February 1995) and Forum for Youth Investment (2003). Many of the reasons why youth leave a program and what youth need from a program is developmentally appropriateness in the planning. Many programs use the same basic inputs that support young children in older youth programming.

Another area where the literature supported the findings was regarding barriers and other activities that limit a youth's participation in out-of-school-time activities. The studies were Forum for Youth Investment (2003), Ferrari and Turner (August 2006) and Little and Lauver (2005). One major finding from this study was there are many barriers and other activities that can affect whether a youth's participation in the 4-H program. This positively correlates with past studies. Many of the studies, Ferrari and Turner (August 2006) and Little and Lauver (2005), found that transportation plays a role in whether youth can attend activities. Many of the participants in the focus group discussions had been unable to attend events because they did not have a ride or the distance was too far to travel.

One more area where this study positively supports the literature is in the improvement of 4-H clubs. In one specific study, Ritchie and Resler (Spring 1993) members left the 4-H program because they were dissatisfied with the 4-H club they belonged to. One of the major findings of this study was improving the quality of 4-H club. The focus group participants discussed how the quality of meetings could be

improved and clubs overall. 4-H club meeting quality could be improved and then lead to retaining older youth.

One major finding of this study was the 4-H program could improve communication with older youth on activities and opportunities. There was agreement among all three sets of focus group participants that older youth events need to be advertised better and different types of communication should be used when trying to inform older youth of opportunities. This supports previous studies. The literature, Homan et al. (2007), shows that if an activity is not perceived to be fun and cool youth are less likely to be attracted to the program.

In the area of topics teens want from programs this study does not support the literature. The literature, Acosta and Holt (1991), discussed how topics that have been the mainstays of 4-H programming for years-health, safety, nutrition, and consumerism-are no longer primary interest to teens. One of the findings of this study was older youth are satisfied with the topics available for them in 4-H. As stated earlier, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all older youth members in the 4-H program.

The assumption is that building programs around felt needs of older youth, the time and place of the program and friends' perceptions on the 4-H program are all significant factors in retaining older youth in 4-H. Homan, Dick, and Hedrick, (2007, August) stated it is vital for 4-H to consider youth perceptions in program planning and adapting to the needs of new audiences and older youth.

Limitations

Focus groups are a useful technique for gathering qualitative information because people's thoughts and feelings are formed through interaction with others and their environment. Focus groups provide a chance for participants to use each other as sounding boards. Participants are provided the opportunity to listen to others before

forming an opinion and focus groups also allow participants to influence others opinions or be influenced by others through their comments and discussion.

One limitation of this study was the low participation rates in the second and third focus groups. This is a risk that is taken when using focus groups; many participants may be invited, but not until the focus group is held is it known how many participants will show. It was difficult establishing and maintaining communication with the 4-H agents and volunteers to aid with focus group participant selection. Since only one older youth member participated in the third focus group, it became a personal interview. This limited the study because the one older youth participant did not have the same environment to share and discuss ideas as the participants in the first and second focus groups. However, the personal interview themes can still be related to the findings from the first and second focus groups.

Specifically, with this topic, it was a risk using focus groups to collect data on older youth retention. Based on the literature review older youth have very little free time. By asking the older youth to attend a focus group with their already busy schedule it was taking a chance. To get a true sense of older youth participants in the 4-H program, focus group research was the best method. The focus group format provides opportunities for richness in feedback that is not obtained through direct surveys or interviews of individuals. Qualitative research was used to gain a strong sense of the wants and needs of older youth in the 4-H program.

The responses, conclusions and findings of this study should be viewed through the limitations. This study contains information from a small sample of older youth 4-H members from around the State of Wisconsin who are at least locally involved in the 4-H program. This study is not representative of the opinions of all 4-H older youth members. However, this study does shed significant light on the opinions of these older youth 4-H

members and forms a basis of understanding for practitioners to better retain and recruit older youth 4-H members.

Recommendations

Derived from the findings of the study, there are a few areas in which practitioners should further explore. One area of focus should be on the negative experiences of youth in the 4-H program. Negative experiences of members should be more closely examined to see how much these experiences factor into retention of older youth in the 4-H program. One specific area to study more is if there is a correlation between at what age peer perceptions has the greatest affect on a youth's participation in 4-H.

Further exploration of why youth join 4-H is needed. In the additional findings many youth talked about having family ties to the program as the reason they joined. To help better assess member recruitment and retention further research should be done on how many 4-H members have family members that have ties to the 4-H program. Also, 4-H members who do not have family ties to 4-H should be further questioned as to why they joined and why they joined 4-H instead of the several other youth development programs available.

Another area that needs further exploration is improving the quality of 4-H clubs. One of the major findings of this study was that older youth feel the quality of 4-H club could be improved. Since each 4-H club is unique, it will be hard to generalize data collected on a sample of 4-H clubs. The strengths and weaknesses of club meetings may vary greatly from club to club. Each club should be individually evaluated.

Practitioners should pay careful attention to how older youth events are advertised. It is important to make the events are perceived as cool and exciting. This could help increase older youth participation in the 4-H program. Also, it is important for practitioners to explain the details of the event. Older youth who are not aware of the opportunities available might not have an understanding of what the event is. By

advertising the event with many details may make older youth feel more comfortable to attend the event.

Many youth are leaving youth programs and organizations not because of a programming glitch, but rather as a part of the developmental process. This is important for practitioner's to keep in mind when focusing on older youth retention in the 4-H program. Overall, the youth participating in the focus groups were satisfied with the 4-H program. Many of the youth talked about how they really have fun in 4-H and how it is more of a way of life than just a youth development program. One participant stated, "I think 4-H is a lifestyle to some degree, you really get involved and it seems like there is always a 4-H activity to do."

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Research Approval



152 Voc Rehab Building

University of Wisconsin-Stout
P.O. Box 790
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790

715/232-1128
715/232-1749 (fax)
<http://www.uwstout.edu/rs>

To: Bonnie Nutt

Cc: Dine Klemme

From: Sue Foxwell, Research Administrator and Human
Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional
Review Board for the Protection of Human
Subjects in Research (IRB)

Subject: Protection of Human Subjects

Your project, “**What Factors Contribute To Older Youth Retention In 4-H?**” has been approved by the IRB through the expedited review process. The measures you have taken to protect human subjects are adequate to protect everyone involved, including subjects and researchers.

Please copy and paste the following message to the top of your survey form before dissemination:

<p>This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.</p>
--

This project is approved through May 19, 2009. Modifications to this approved protocol need to be approved by the IRB. Research not completed by this date must be submitted again outlining changes, expansions, etc. Federal guidelines require annual review and approval by the IRB.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and best wishes with your project.

***NOTE: This is the only notice you will receive – no paper copy will be sent.**

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Consent Form for Participating in Older Youth Retention Focus Groups

Title: "What factors contribute to older youth retention in 4-H?"

Investigator: Bonnie Nutt, 4-H Youth Program Assistant, Jefferson County UW-Extension, 864 Collins Rd, Jefferson, WI 53549, (920) 674-7298
bonnie.nutt@ces.uwex.edu

Research Sponsor: Dr. Diane Klemme, Associate Professor, 120 Home Economics Bldg. UW-Stout Menomonie, WI 54751 (715) 232-2546 klemmed@uwstout.edu

Description: I am interested in learning why you are involved in 4-H and what areas of 4-H you are most involved with. I am also interested in learning what topics you would be most interested in and your vision for the future older youth in 4-H.

Risks and Benefits: The risk is that your name and address appeared in a mailing list and the consent form was sent through the mail. All reasonable measures have been and will continue to be taken to keep your identity anonymous. Your responses will be combined with the responses of all the focus group participants. The benefits include that the information will be shared with the respondents, stakeholders and others involved in youth development programming.

Time commitment: It will take you approximately 2 hours to complete the focus group discussion.

Confidentiality: All responses will be combined to tell the story. Participants will not be individually identified on any report prepared. The taped recordings will be transcribed and then the tapes destroyed.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

IRB Approval: This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator: Bonnie Nutt, (920) 674-7298, bonnie.nutt@ces.uwex.edu

Research Sponsor: Dr. Diane Klemme, (715) 232-2546, klemmed@uwstout.edu

IRB Administrator: Sue Foxwell, Director, Research Services 152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg. UW-Stout Menomonie WI 54751 (715) 232-2477
foxwells@uwstout.edu

Statement of Consent: By signing this consent form you agree to participate in the project entitled, "What factors contribute to older youth retention in 4-H?"

Signature..... Date

Signature of parent or guardian:..... Date

Appendix C: Cover Letter Sent To Focus Group Participants

Date

Dear 4-H Older Youth and Parent/Guardian,

My name is Bonnie Nutt. I am the 4-H Youth Program Assistant for Jefferson County. I received your name from the 4-H Youth Development Agent from your county. Currently, I am attending UW-Stout to obtain my Master's Degree in Family Studies and Human Development. As part of my required research for my Plan B I'm conducting focus groups on "What factors contribute to older youth retention in 4-H?"

I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group at place, date and time yet to be determined. The focus groups will be conducted in late June. Pizza, pop and water will be provided for participants.

As a thank you for participating in the focus group you will receive a gas card/4-H memento.

Enclosed you will find a consent form and a self addressed stamped envelope. Please take the time to read the consent form, sign it and return it by date to be determined. Please RSVP by date to be determined. To RSVP please return your signed consent form in the self addressed stamped envelope provided.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (920) 674-7298 or bonnie.nutt@ces.uwex.edu

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Nutt
4-H Youth Program Assistant

Enclosures

Appendix D: Focus Group Script

Introduction: Hello, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to meet with us. My name is Bonnie Nutt and I am a graduate student at UW-Stout. I am interested in learning why you are involved in 4-H and what areas of 4-H you are most involved with. I am also interested in learning what topics you would be most interested in and your vision for the future older youth in 4-H. There are two purposes of this study. The first is to identify what factors can help retain older youth in the 4-H program. Secondly, this research project will identify what topics teens want in an older youth program. There is pizza, pop and water for your enjoyment. Please feel free to get up and use the restroom or whatever you may need to do to be comfortable.

The comments you make today will be audio taped so I ask that you please speak one at a time. I want to assure you that what you say is for our information gathering purposes only. Your comments will be part of a larger report so you need not worry that your name will be attached to your comments. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this discussion and may withdraw from this process and discussion at any time. As a token of our appreciation, you receive a gas card/4-H memento.

Before we start I would like to go over a few ground rules for the focus group. They are as follows: be respectful, only one person speaks at a time, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers, everyone is entitled to their opinion and written feedback is ok. You’ve been provided sheets of paper for that purpose. Please hand me your written feedback, if any, prior to leaving today. Are there any other ground rules you would like to add?

Are there any questions before we begin?

1. Let’s begin by going around the table and introducing ourselves. Tell us your name and a 4-H activity or project that you enjoy?
2. Next I would like us to share with the group at what age you joined 4-H and why you joined?
3. Now I would like to ask what your friends think of 4-H?
4. Next I would like you to describe your involvement in 4-H?
 CUES: Describe any trips, state teams, 4-H older youth group, county committees or other 4-H activities you have been involved with?
 Tell me what officer position, if any, you have held in 4-H?
5. Once again, think about your involvement in 4-H. What are the main reasons why you stay active in 4-H?
 - a. Have there been any factors limiting your participation in 4-H activities?
 - b. What are your main reasons why you stay active in 4-H?
 - c. Since you joined 4-H, have the reasons why you’ve stayed or limited your involvement changed?
6. What topics, for older youth, would you like to see included in 4-H programming?
7. What would your ideal 4-H program for older youth look like?
 CUES: Describe what type of activities you would participate in?
 What would be the topic of your ideal activities?

8. What recommended actions could the 4-H community take to move toward the ideal 4-H program for older youth?
9. I will now summarize the key points from today's discussion.
 - a. Does this sound complete?
 - b. Are there any changes or additions?
10. Have we missed anything?

I thank you for your time. Please be sure to receive your gas card before leaving.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

name cards

food – pizza, soda, water, napkins, cups, plates, silverware

tape recorder and microphone (extra tape and batteries?)

flip chart/paper and markers

easel for flip chart

gas cards/4-H mementos