5.2 Positive Youth Development Including Life Skill Development FY10

Brief Summary of Program

Youth development is defined as an ongoing process through which young people meet their needs and develop the competencies they perceive as necessary for survival and transition to adulthood. Youth development refers to the development of the whole person and is not focused on a single attribute, skill, or characteristic, but rather the mastery of competencies needed for happy and productive adulthood. Positive Youth Development is development that is positive and productive for both youth and their communities and occurs form an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, choices, relationships, and the support necessary for youth to fully participate. In 4-H, we talk about this intentional process in relationship to the essential elements that are necessary to ensure optimum development. Those essential elements that are critical to youth development and central to the 4-H experience are:

- The opportunity to experience independence.
- The opportunity to experience belonging.
- The opportunity to experience generosity.
- The opportunity to experience mastery.

On-going research encompasses human judgment and decision making, focusing on risky decision making in adolescents, on risk communication in genetics, cancer, and AIDS prevention, and on criteria for rationality in decision making. The faculty seek to 1) define the relation between mental representations and decision making that has been widely applied in law, medicine, and public health; 2) examine behavioral and experienced domains of self-esteem and adolescent friendships; 3) understand the interplay of adolescent development and education and the interaction of school, community, and work during the transition from to adulthood, especially in the contexts of work experience, experiential learning, community service, and mentoring relationships.

Situation and Priorities Statement

The development of life skills through experiential learning is the foundation of 4-H programming. Healthy youth development strives to help young people develop the inner resources and skills they need to cope with pressures that might lead them to unhealthy and antisocial behaviors. To successfully grow into mature, productive, and contributing citizens, young people need to acquire:

- Health/physical skills – having the appropriate knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that will ensure current and future health
- Personal/social skills – personal skills such as an ability to understand one’s emotions and practice self discipline; and interpersonal skills such as working with others and developing and sustaining friendships
- Cognitive/creative skills – a broad base of knowledge, knowledge application skills, life long learning skills and an ability to appreciate and demonstrate creative expression.
- Vocational skills – understanding and awareness of life options and the steps necessary to accomplish them. Adequate preparation for work and family life.
- Citizenship skills: understanding of the history and values of one’s nation, community, race, ethnic and cultural heritage. Desire to be ethical and to be involved in contributing to the broader good.

The 4-H youth development program is unique among youth-serving organizations because it combines the strength of community based youth organization with the knowledge gleaned from university research to provide positive youth development opportunities. It is critical that demonstrated elements of positive youth development and building life skills remain the foundation to all 4-H youth development programs (clubs, camp programs, special interest groups, 4-H Afterschool, etc.).

One of the most important issues facing the 4-H youth development program is how to best support youth in becoming productive, contributing individuals of society. Leffert, Saito, Blyth, and Kroenke (1996) found the experiences young people have during early adolescence provide the foundation on which they develop their personalities and life skills. Early adolescence is a time of rapid change in young people, providing an opportune time to make a positive impact on their development.

The importance of reaching youth in early adolescence is well documented in a number of studies. The NYS 4-H Club study results show that the process of youth development is positively influenced in multiple ways by 4-H Club membership. The majority of Club members felt they had gained multiple life skills, including public speaking, problem solving, goal setting, leadership and planning skills, self-confidence, citizenship, communication skills, academic gains,
expanded horizons, organizational skills, respect for (and from) others, patience, tolerance, and "real world" experience from hands-on projects. (Mead, June, Hirschl, Thomas, Rodriguez, Eunice, and Goggin, Steve, 1999).

Youth who are unsupervised after school are much more likely to engage in activities that place them at risk (Galambos & Maggs, 1991; Steinberg, 1986). Participation in high quality after-school programs is linked with a lower incidence of problem behaviors, such as decreased academic failure, substance use, and delinquency (Newsome, & Ferrari, 2003). Youth who attend these programs have demonstrated improved academic behaviors (better school attendance, more positive school attitudes, and better grades) and improved personal and social skills (positive relationships with adults, opportunity to make new friends; greater self-concept & self-esteem. (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). 52% of teens in a survey conducted by the YMCA say they wish there were more after school activities in their neighborhood or community (YMCA of the USA, 2001). 67% of the teens surveyed in this study also said they would be likely to participate in after school programs that would help them get better grades, develop leadership skills, and be more involved in their community while having fun with other teens.

Assumptions
- Program educators and volunteers who work with youth need training and support in how to incorporate research findings and process into program design at the local level with a focus on how to meet the needs of youth at various stages of their development.
- Opportunities are needed for youth that focus on specific aspects of life skill development.
- Curriculum design should incorporate best practices for building life skill competencies and recognize how different delivery methods may impact life skill development.
- Youth have different interests and needs and therefore respond differently to the same opportunities. They should have choices about which activities they participate in and they should have a chance to help shape those activities.

Description of Target Audiences
There are four distinct audiences. The youth development educator is professional or paraprofessional staff employed by Cornell Cooperative Extension. The adult volunteer / leader accepts a role defined by a written volunteer position, does not receive compensation for work, and works directly with young people. The 4-H participant is a young person between the ages of 5 and 19 who chooses to participate in the program. The youth development educator / worker within the community works directly with young people and may or may not have formal training in the area of education or youth development.

Youth development educators must understand and be able to apply the intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing support, relationships, and opportunities. Additionally, it is necessary for educators to have training and support in how to incorporate research findings process into program design. The adult volunteer leader must be trained in youth development principles and practices to ensure that the program creates positive opportunities for young people to reach their full potential. Young people must have an active voice in program determination, implementation, evaluation, and policy development. The front line youth worker is provided training in the core concepts of a youth development approach and its implications for youth work practice.

Ultimate Goal(s) of the program
- Youth lead healthy, satisfying, productive lives.
- Youth become caring and contributing members of society enhancing the quality of life for themselves, their families, and their communities.
- Youth become life-long learners.
Note: Only highlighted outcomes are collected in annual reporting.

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<tr>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Near-Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Mid-Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Long-Term Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(5.2.1a) # of youth program educators and adult volunteers participating in programs on positive youth development. (no target)</td>
<td>(5.2.1c) # of youth participants who demonstrate gains in vocational/citizenship skills – knowledge, attitudes, and/or behaviors. (no target)</td>
<td>(5.2.1f) # of youth participants who demonstrate ability to express their ideas confidently and competently. (30,000)</td>
<td>(5.3.1i) # of youth organizations/programs documented as reflecting youth needs, interests, and excitement for learning. (450)</td>
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<td>(5.2.1b) # of youth participating in projects related to vocational skills and/or citizenship. (no target)</td>
<td>(5.2.1d) # of youth participants who learn to set goals, make plans and identify resources to achieve goals. (no target)</td>
<td>(5.2.1g) # of adult volunteers documented to mentor and advise youth and other adult volunteers in an effective and positive manner. (16,000)</td>
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<td>(5.2.1e) # of youth program educators and adult volunteers who demonstrate knowledge and/or skill gains in meeting the needs of youth at various stages of development. (no target)</td>
<td>(5.2.1h) # of youth participants documented as serving in age-appropriate leadership roles. (2,500)</td>
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