Recommendations for Practice
Findings reported here can be applied to the Indiana 4-H Youth Development Program as it works to improve youth programming and to educate its staff members and volunteers. 4-H volunteers, 4-H Youth Development Extension educators, and state specialists should maintain a focus on lower-rated life skills such as health and wellness as they plan and conduct programs for youth audiences. For example, an Extension educator conducting a sheep project workshop may begin a discussion on ringworm, a parasitic fungal infection, to help youth learn more about the health and well-being of livestock as well as the contagious nature of a disease that may also be transmitted to humans. Health applications may also occur, for example, as an Extension educator or 4-H volunteer leads a personality project workshop in which youth are educated about how people handle stress and effective ways to lead a stress-free lifestyle.

The county-specific life skill development fact sheets created for the 92 Indiana counties as a part of this research effort can be utilized in all the counties to demonstrate impact and to serve as a guide for future practice. The county-specific fact sheets provide testimony to the work of the county’s contractual employees and volunteers and the effect of programs implemented with young people within each respective Indiana county.

References


Indiana 4-H Youth Development Mission: To provide real-life educational opportunities that enable young people who positively impact their community and world.

For more information regarding 4-H Youth Development Programs in Indiana, contact the Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education at Purdue University, 765-494-8422, or e-mail: http://www.four-h.purdue.edu/contactus.cfm

Life Skill Development of Indiana 4-H Members

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Introduction
A considerable number of America’s youth are exhibiting problem behaviors that could jeopardize their ability to succeed in adulthood. Adulthood demands a variety of skills for everyday living, and many youth-serving organizations attempt to develop and build these skills in hopes of preparing young people to face the challenges of adulthood. 4-H aims to promote life skill development and self-sufficiency for youth in grades 3-12 via experiential learning and positive youth development.

This fact sheet highlights some of the key findings from recent research that examined Indiana 4-H members’ perceptions of life skill development as a result of participation in the 4-H program. The study served as a checkpoint for the Indiana 4-H Program as youth commented and reflected upon their 4-H experience. These findings will be helpful to Extension educators and state specialists in planning and implementing future youth programs.

Heavily influenced by the methods used in Barkman’s (2003) study, Life Skill Development of Tenure 4-H members in Indiana, this study utilized Hendricks’ (2006) Targeting Life Skills Model. 4-H members were asked to assess how their involvement in 4-H helped build 35 important life skills.

About This Study
Indiana’s county 4-H Youth Development Extension Educators played a key role in collecting data for this study. Participating Extension Educators mailed a two-page questionnaire to all final-year 4-H members in their respective counties. Completed questionnaires were then forwarded to Purdue University for data analysis.

More than 1300 youth submitted usable surveys.
Response Rate: 43%
Males: 487
Females: 811
Average Years in 4-H: 9.48
Average Age: 18.1
*Each of Indiana’s 92 counties participated in the study.
Funding made possible by each participating Indiana county and state 4-H Program funds.
Findings

Results showed that Indiana 4-H members perceive they are acquiring multiple life skills through their participation in the 4-H Program. The five most highly rated life skills were self-responsibility, self-motivation, communication, social skills, and leadership. The youth who participated in this study reported that 4-H involvement had a moderate to major influence on the development of 13 of the 35 life skills listed. The 13 life skills included planning and organizing, cooperation, responsible citizenship, character, goal setting, self-discipline, self-esteem, and decision making.

Lower-rated life skills among the 35 assessed included disease prevention, stress management, personal safety, and healthy lifestyle choices. While these life skills were not rated as highly as others, it is important to note that all were perceived to have been somewhat influenced by 4-H involvement.

Differences Based on Gender

One of the goals of this research was to determine whether youth perceptions of the 4-H experience varied among males and females, as well as among youth who held various leadership positions.

When males were compared to females, results showed that there were significantly different ratings for 26 of the 35 life skills assessed. In all these cases, females rated their perceived life skill acquisition higher than males, which supports Barkman's (2003) findings.

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Differences Based on 4-H Offices Held

This research indicates the 4-H program had greater influence on the development of leadership and community service life skills for those 4-H members who reported having served in an office (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and/or committee chair) than on development of those skills for youth who had not held an office. Skills reported as being the most developed among those who had held an office were leadership and community service. Those who had served as president, vice president, secretary, or treasurer more often indicated leadership as a developed life skill, while those youth who had served as chairpersons of committees reported that the community service/volunteering life skill was the most developed through 4-H Program participation.

Career Plans Following High School Graduation

Continuing education was most commonly selected as the future career path for 4-H members in their final year of 4-H eligibility. Nearly all (94 percent) of the survey respondents plan to continue their education following graduation from high school. Nearly one-third plan to enter the workforce following high school graduation by working full- or part-time.

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