



Internal Document
Ohio 4-H Afterschool Overview
September 20, 2006



The Need/Situation

After-school programs have attracted considerable attention as a way to enhance positive youth development. Although after-school programs have been in existence for many years, they have experienced an unprecedented surge of interest since the turn of the 21st century. While after-school programs reach over 75,000 young people and families in Ohio on a daily basis, there is still a need to improve both quality and quantity of such opportunities for youth. Every indication is that the demand for after-school programs will remain high, and OSU Extension is in a unique position with potential to serve as a key partner across Ohio with organizations that sponsor after-school programming.

Recent research has noted areas that could be strengthened related to after-school program quality. For example, of the 78 programs observed in the Massachusetts After-School Research Study (Miller, 2005), there were very few observations of staff facilitating youth engagement in learning, little use of facilitative questioning and group reflection, few opportunities for youth leadership, and little evidence of prior planning and intentionality. These factors contributed to overall program quality, and program quality is necessary to produce positive outcomes for youth.

What are the components of a high quality after-school program? According to *Getting It Right: Strategies for After-School Success* (Raley, Grossman, & Walker, 2005), having “well-organized activities staffed by attentive adults are essential to retaining youth” (p. 5). The activities need to be “interesting to participants and doable at participant’s current level of skill or knowledge but intentionally and incrementally challenging to help them grow” (p. 4). These conditions are related to youth participation, which is important because “evaluations suggest that the longer a young person participates in a variety of activities, the better the outcomes” (p. 4). In Ohio, we have structured our Extension-managed after-school programs to reflect these components by utilizing experiential learning-focused 4-H curriculum to keep youth coming back regularly, with the intent on keeping them engaged year after year.

In response to the need for high quality after-school programming and the opportunity to address specific youth-related issues during the after-school hours, Ohio 4-H Youth Development identified after-school programming as a priority area and established the 4-H Afterschool Priority Team in 2005. This team, composed of state and county OSU Extension personnel, is focused on addressing issues through the after-school delivery mode. As a leader in experiential learning models, OSU Extension can be at the forefront promoting the enriched, intentional learning needed in after-school environments. Thus, providing training for after-school staff in components of program quality, including 4-H curriculum designed on an experiential learning model, is a niche for Ohio 4-H Youth Development.

Our Goal

The Ohio 4-H Afterschool priority team will improve the quantity and quality of after-school programs in Ohio through the use of research-based curriculum and offering practical training for professional staff utilizing industry best practices based on our lessons learned.

Foundations for a Successful 4-H After-School Program

- Research-based curriculum that incorporates life skills and experiential activities with a focus on communication and leadership, along with interesting subject matter.
- 8 Key Elements of Positive Youth Development-the underlying foundation
- Partnerships that capitalize on the strengths and resources of partners
- Program management practices that promote quality
 - People-professional role models and caring adults engaged with youth
 - Place-welcoming and safe environment (Looks Good, Feels Good)
 - Program-activities consistent with program themes, designed on an experiential learning model that includes time for reflection
- Program that engages youth participation for sufficient frequency, intensity, and duration to achieve desired outcomes

Strategies

1. Provide training and technical assistance for after-school professionals related to (a) components of program quality and (b) curriculum (subject matter and life skills-based).
 - Making presentations at existing conferences for after-school professionals
 - Providing training at Extension-managed applied research sites
2. Identify and market research-based curriculum to after-school professionals. Target areas include components of program quality and subject matter (e.g., leadership/workforce prep, science literacy, healthy lifestyles).
3. Support Extension-managed after-school programs to serve as a foundation for modeling best practices and serving as applied research sites to gain lessons learned.
4. Serve as a resource for Extension professionals by providing customized training and consultation in regards to starting and managing 4-H Afterschool programs.

References

- Miller, B. M. (2005). *Pathways to success: What counts in after-school* (A report of the Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study). Wellesley, MA: Intercultural Center for Research in Education and National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Retrieved from <http://www.wcwoonline.org/mars/MARSfull.pdf>
- Raley, R., Grossman, J., & Walker, K. E. (2005). *Getting it right: Strategies for after-school success*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. Retrieved from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/190_publication.pdf