



Harvard Family Research Project

## A Profile of the Evaluation of Adventure Central

### Program Description

**Overview:** Adventure Central (AC) provides out-of-school time programming services to youth in Dayton, Ohio. Its mission is to promote academic and leadership skills in a welcoming, safe, fun, and active setting that utilizes volunteers and community resources with adult and youth interaction.

**Start Date:** 2000

**Scope:** local

**Type:** after school, summer

**Location:** urban

**Setting:** community-based organization

**Participants:** kindergarten through high school students (ages 5 to 19)

**Number of Sites/Grantees:** one

**Number Served:** 239 youth and 35,000 contact hours in 2004

**Components:** Located at Wesleyan MetroPark in Dayton, Ohio, AC serves youth and their families from the surrounding neighborhood during after school and summer hours. Drawing from the combined resources of Five Rivers MetroParks (a park district located in Greater Dayton, Ohio) and Ohio State University Extension 4-H Youth Development, program activities focus on science, nature, and technology and include after school programming, day camps, subject area clubs, a youth board, a workforce prep program, overnight camps, and family-focused programs.

**Funding Level:** approximately \$350,000 annually

**Funding Sources:** Five Rivers MetroParks; Ohio State University Extension; Ohio 4-H Foundation; Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) through the U.S. Department of Agriculture; Centers for Disease Control; 4-H initiatives at the state level (4-H

R.O.C.K.S. [Reading Out of Class Kids Succeed]) and the national level (Health Rocks!); and private businesses/donors (e.g., Sam's Club)

## Evaluation

**Overview:** Evaluations have been conducted to examine youth's motivations for program participation and the relationships between youth participants and adults both inside and outside of the program.

### **Evaluators:**

Theresa M. Ferrari and Jessica E. Paisley, Ohio State University Extension

Cassie L. Turner, Black Swamp Council, Boy Scouts of America

### **Evaluations Profiled:**

*An Exploratory Study of Adolescents' Motivations for Joining and Continued Participation in a 4-H Afterschool Program*

*Extent of Positive Youth-Adult Relationships in a 4-H Afterschool Program*

**Evaluations Planned:** An evaluation is currently in progress (fall 2005); some results should be available by the end of 2005.

### **Reports Available:**

Ferrari, T. M., & Turner, C. L. (2005). An exploratory study of adolescents' motivations for joining and continued participation in a 4-H afterschool program. Manuscript accepted for publication. *Journal of Extension*. Available at [www.ohio4h.org/fferrari/afterschool\\_resources.html](http://www.ohio4h.org/fferrari/afterschool_resources.html).

Paisley, J. E., & Ferrari, T. M. (2005). Extent of positive youth-adult relationships in a 4-H afterschool program. *Journal of Extension*, 43(2). Available at [www.joe.org/joe/2005april/rb4.shtml](http://www.joe.org/joe/2005april/rb4.shtml) or [www.ohio4h.org/fferrari/afterschool\\_resources.html](http://www.ohio4h.org/fferrari/afterschool_resources.html).

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**Profile Updated:** September 27, 2005

## Evaluation 1

### *An Exploratory Study of Adolescents' Motivations for Joining and Continued Participation in a 4-H Afterschool Program*

**Evaluation Purpose:** To examine adolescents' motivations for joining and continuing to participate in AC.

**Evaluation Design: *Non-Experimental:*** Data were collected through open-ended interviews with adolescent participants who met the following criteria for study inclusion: (a) had completed a program survey earlier in the year, (b) were still enrolled in AC, and (c) were a member of one particular site at AC. Based on these criteria, 7 of the 50 AC participants qualified as study participants. There were five girls and two boys, ages 11–13 years (in Grades 6–8). All seven were African American and had been attending AC for at least 1 year.

#### **Data Collection Methods:**

***Interviews/Focus Groups:*** Youth interviews included questions about why youth joined, why they still participated, and what they wanted in an ideal youth program. Youth participated in a focus group after the interviews were completed to check the accuracy of conclusions and to further expand on their interview responses.

**Data Collection Timeframe:** Data were collected during the 2001–2002 program year.

#### ***Findings:***

##### Formative/Process Findings

#### **Recruitment/Participation:**

Five youth discussed how an adult (either a family member or a program staff member) encouraged them to join AC. Additionally, three youth reported that staff members were a reason they continued to participate, saying that they were “helpful,” “respectful,” and “nice;” that they “let you do stuff” and “trust you;” and that program staff were different from school staff because “here you can pull to the side and talk to them.” However, there was some discussion in the focus group that adults could be “mean,” which appeared to be related to discipline situations. All respondents agreed that adults at the program cared for them (e.g., “Oh, they love us”).

All seven youth reported some sort of academic support as a necessary part of their ideal program. They noted how academic supports in an after school program could one day lead to attending college and becoming a successful person. However, they did not want to do what they considered busy work. One youth reported that homework assistance was the reason she joined AC. She would tell others to join because “they stay on you about homework,” while two youth also mentioned homework assistance as a factor in

continuing to participate. Two youth each noted issues related to learning as a reason they continued to participate at AC. They discussed specific activities focused on nature.

Three participants noted that the program's environment affected their decision to continue to participate, and all seven noted it as a feature of their ideal program, especially in terms of safety issues. As one participant stated, "It keeps us away from the streets, so you wouldn't get caught up in anything." In addition, the youth wanted a large space to house the program and basic supplies such as books, food, and suitable furniture.

Three youth discussed some aspect of belonging as a reason they continued to participate. They reported feeling "connected" and "comfortable."

Two youth mentioned issues related to program opportunities as a reason for joining and three mentioned it as a reason for continuing to participate. For example, attending the summer camp encouraged one youth to join. After previously participating as a camper, this youth anticipated the opportunity to be a teen assistant. He viewed this opportunity as a chance at "having my first job" and to "help kids if they don't understand things like I didn't." Another youth described participating on the youth board as an opportunity to "not be just a youth talking but [to] feel like I'm an important businesswoman."

Three youth cited fun as a reason they continued to participate. When probed regarding what fun meant, each youth listed different activities, including computers, arts and crafts, social games, and recreational games (e.g., kickball). In addition, six youth reported fun as important for an ideal program. Mentioning activities similar to those reported as reasons for continued participation, they described athletic, social, and educational games as ways to have fun.

Two youth said the friends they made at AC were a reason they continued to participate.

The theme of character development emerged in two youth's reasons for continuing to participate in AC. One youth stated that learning respect for others was important and another discussed how the program helped her become more mature.

Two youth mentioned life skills as an important program element in their ideal after school program.

## Evaluation 2

### *Extent of Positive Youth–Adult Relationships in a 4-H Afterschool Program*

**Evaluation Purpose:** To address the following questions:

1. To what extent are participants experiencing positive youth–adult relationships?
2. What factors contribute to the development of these relationships?
3. How do participant’s relationships with adults at AC compare to those with adults in other contexts?

**Evaluation Design: *Non-Experimental:*** A youth survey was administered to examine the extent of relationships between youth and adults and to compare these relationships across contexts. Observations were conducted to learn more about the processes that contribute to youth–adult relationships. Lastly, attendance records were tracked for individuals to determine whether there was an association between attendance and youth’s relationships with adults at AC. Youth were grouped into high and low attendees, split at the median for all participants at 76 hours of attendance during the 5-month study period.

All 60 youth attending AC during fall 2001 were invited to participate in the evaluation. Forty-eight received parental permission and completed the survey (80%). Of these 48 youth, 54% were female, and 46% were male. Twenty-three percent were 4–6 years old, 25% were 7–8, 23% were 9–10, and 29% were 11–13. The majority were African American (88%), with the remainder of mixed racial backgrounds (12%). Of the 45 youth for whom data were available, 42% had changed homes in the past year. Of the 46 youth for whom data were available, 48% lived in single parent households, 30% lived with two parents (including step-parents), 13% lived with non-parents (e.g., grandparents, guardian), and 9% lived with parent(s) and grandparent(s).

#### **Data Collection Methods:**

***Observation:*** Ten program observation periods totaling 5 hours were conducted (two observations each for five groups) using the event sampling method (Beaty, 1994). The observer recorded the date, time, type of activity, and child–staff ratio within the group. Event sampling was conducted for 25-minute periods, followed by 5 minutes of additional notation. Evaluators attempted to conduct the two observations on different days of the week and at different times of day. Interactions between youth and adults were categorized as emotional support (e.g., listens to a child), instrumental support (e.g., gives a child clear directions), or negative interactions (e.g., criticizes a child).

***Secondary Source/Data Review:*** Attendance data were obtained from program records and measured by the quantity of contact hours during the 5-month study period.

***Surveys/Questionnaires:*** Youth surveys measured participants’ relationships with adults (AC adults, teachers, adults in the home, and adults in the neighborhood).

**Tests/Assessments:** Youth surveys included a series of four scales. The items measured youth's views of adults as caring, encouraging, approachable, and trustworthy. Youth were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements on a 4-point scale of *NO!* (coded as 0), *no* (coded as 1), *yes* (coded as 2), and *YES!* (coded as 3). This scale was modeled after Arthur, Pollard, Hawkins, and Catalano (1997).

To record observations, evaluators modified a checklist for observing staff interactions in school-age childcare programs (Ohio Hunger Task Force, 1999). They created additional items based on the literature (Dungan-Seaver, 1999; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002; National School-Age Care Alliance, 1998; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996). Three broad categories of behaviors were identified: communication (e.g., uses supportive language), teaching (e.g., assists a child with homework), and conflict or discipline (e.g., handles conflict, disciplines a child).

### **References:**

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- Beatty, J. J. (1994). *Observing development of the young child* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Merrill.
- Dungan-Seaver, D. (1999). *After-school programs: An analysis of research about the characteristics of effectiveness*. Minneapolis: McKnight Foundation.
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- Rosenthal, R., & Vandell, D. L. (1996). Quality of care at school-aged child care programs: Regulatable features, observed experiences, child perspectives, and parent perspectives. *Child Development*, 67, 2434–2445.

**Data Collection Timeframe:** Data were collected November 2001–March 2002.

## *Findings:*

### Formative/Process Findings

#### **Recruitment/Participation:**

Youth attended AC between 4 hours and 246.5 hours during the 5-month study period, with a mean of 98.9 hours and a median of 76 hours.

Youth who attended for more program hours were significantly more likely than those who attended for fewer program hours to have positive relationships with AC adults ( $p < .01$ ) and to report more positive relationships on 4 of the 6 scale items: adults at AC care about me ( $p < .05$ ), I can tell adults at AC about my problems ( $p < .01$ ), adults at AC tell me “good job” ( $p < .05$ ), and adults at AC encourage me ( $p < .05$ ). In addition, when attendance was measured according to the median split, high attendees’ responses were significantly more positive than those of low attendees for 3 of the 6 scale items: trust adults at AC, adults at AC tell me “good job,” and can tell adults at AC about my problems ( $p < .05$  for each).

#### **Staffing/Training:**

For the survey scale measuring the extent of youth’s positive relationships with AC adults, the mean rating across items was 2.71 on a scale of 0–3, ranging from 2.63 (can tell adults at AC about my problems) to 2.79 (trust adults at AC) for individual scale items. Analysis found no significant gender differences in responses. Youth’s relationships with AC adults had significantly higher survey ratings on average than those with neighborhood adults or teachers ( $p < .01$  for each), but did not significantly differ from those with adults in the home. Youth relationships also rated significantly higher for adults in the home than for adults in the neighborhood ( $p < .05$ ).

Youth–adult interactions observed at AC were primarily one on one (84%), with considerably fewer being whole group (9%) or small group (7%). The ratio of AC adults to youth was at least 1:6 during the observation times.

The frequencies of emotional support interactions observed between AC adults and children were as follows: talks to a child in a positive tone ( $n = 99$ ), listens to a child ( $n = 56$ ), uses a child’s name when talking to him/her ( $n = 55$ ), uses supportive language with a child ( $n = 30$ ), encourages a child to participate ( $n = 12$ ), acknowledges a child’s arrival or departure ( $n = 2$ ), remains calm/patient with an angry/upset child ( $n = 2$ ), and comforts/consols a hurt/upset/disappointed child ( $n = 1$ ). Evaluators did not observe any instances of AC adults asking a child about his/her day.

The frequencies of instrumental support interactions observed between AC adults and children were as follows: gives a child clear directions ( $n = 75$ ), disciplines a child ( $n = 47$ ), assists a child with homework ( $n = 34$ ), teaches a child ( $n = 14$ ), answers a child’s question ( $n = 13$ ), handles conflict ( $n = 3$ ), and teaches how to work through conflict ( $n =$

1). Evaluators did not observe any instances of AC adults talking to a child about his/her future plans.

The frequencies of negative interactions observed between AC adults and children were as follows: talks to a child in a negative tone (n = 9) and criticizes a child (n = 5). Evaluators did not observe any instances of AC adults yelling at a child.