



# 4-H Afterschool Demonstration Sites:

## Dramatic Impacts through Collaboration with After-School Programs

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Poster Presentation at the  
Ohio State University Extension  
Urban Conversation

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## Introduction

This report outlines key issues of concern to Ohio citizens and how they were addressed through a 4-H Afterschool Demonstration Project implemented between November 2004-July 2005. The report provides program highlights and lessons learned, particularly as they relate to working in collaboration with community partners. Project profiles for each of the 16 demonstration sites can be found at [www.ohio4h.org/fferrari](http://www.ohio4h.org/fferrari) under the 4-H Afterschool heading.

### **The Issues: Childhood Obesity and Science Literacy**

Since the Surgeon General declared childhood obesity a national epidemic in 2002, much attention has focused on the unhealthy situation created by increasing rates of obesity, poor eating habits, and sedentary lifestyles (Afterschool Alliance, 2005; U.S. Department of Health & Human Service, 1999). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 16% of U.S. children and adolescents ages 6 to 19 are overweight and physical activity declines in adolescence (CDC, 2005). Although the new federal 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* stress the importance of a balanced diet and recommend at least 60 minutes of physical activity for children, studies show that students are increasingly less likely to get adequate exercise and eat healthfully. The CDC found that 61.5% of children aged 9 to 13 years do not participate in any organized physical activity during their nonschool hours (CDC, 2003). The CDC also found that less than 10% of the elementary, junior high, middle, and high schools that were surveyed provided daily physical education or an equivalent at the time of the study. Less than half of schools offered any out-of-school time intramural activities or physical activity clubs for students. Because poor eating habits and a sedentary lifestyle are risk factors for disease, it is essential for young people to develop habits for a healthy lifestyle.

Scientific literacy is critical to a well-prepared workforce in any technology-oriented society. However, concerns have been raised about poor science achievement (Collins, 1997). There appears to be a gap between what students are learning in schools and the skills required to be successful in the workplace. According to the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2005), U.S. students place in the bottom third on assessments of applying scientific knowledge to solving problems in real-life contexts. Additionally, there appears to be declining interest in science as students get older. Science enrichment programs that use an experiential model of learning have been promoted as one way to counteract these trends (Stake & Mares, 2005).

### **The Issue: After-School Programs**

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 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association, 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.

## **The Opportunity: Extension's Response**

After-school programs can promote healthy lifestyles for youth by serving healthy snacks, building in daily physical activities, and providing fun ways to enhance nutrition knowledge and learn about making good food choices. Additionally, after-school programs can actively engage students' in learning and heighten their interest in science by providing opportunities to engage in hands-on projects. The learning involved in such projects complements and extends what is accomplished in the school day.

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. This team, composed of state and county OSU Extension personnel, is focused on addressing issues through the after-school delivery mode.

As a result of special funding from the "Youth – Our Future: The OSU Extension 4-H Program" initiative, funded by Gov. Bob Taft, OSU Extension designated funds specifically to support the 4-H Afterschool Priority area with a focus on target issues. A total of 22 counties responded to a Request for Proposals to engage youth in after-school learning experiences that promoted healthy lifestyles and enhanced science literacy. One curriculum was selected as the core for each area: *Jump Into Food and Fitness* (Baird, Branta, Mark, & Seremba, 2003) was selected for healthy lifestyles and *Go Plants!* (a school enrichment project from Ohio 4-H by Horton et al.) was selected for science literacy. Counties had the option to include one or both in their programming. Sixteen OSU Extension after-school grants of \$5,000 each were awarded in February 2005.

Demonstration sites included programmatic efforts that maintained sustained contact with youth in after-school settings and were delivered through existing community organization staff and local Extension professionals. All counties elected to conduct healthy lifestyles programming (with all but one using the *JIFF* curriculum) and six counties conducted programming on science literacy. Counties receiving grants were: Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Fairfield, Franklin, Greene, Hancock, Highland, Holmes, Knox, Morrow, Ottawa, Portage, Sandusky, Seneca, Trumbull, and Vinton.

### **More specifically, these grants:**

- ✓ Invested \$100,000 in communities to sustain and improve the quality of after-school programming for youth through OSU Extension's 4-H Youth Development program.
- ✓ Developed model after-school partnerships that promoted positive youth development using a multidisciplinary approach.
- ✓ Resulted in new and enriched community partnerships that supported after-school programs.
- ✓ Increased OSU Extension's organizational capacity to address the needs of Ohio's after-school programs (Professional Development; Partnerships; Evaluation).
- ✓ Demonstrated collaboration of multiple programming areas (4-H and FCS) drawing from multiple disciplines (nutrition, plant science, experiential learning, and positive youth development) in support of OSU Extension's themes of Enhancing Food and Health and Enhancing Ohio's Educational Capacity.

## **Highlights of 2005 Project**

### **Building Organizational and Human Capacity**

As a research-based institution with an educational mission, OSU Extension is in a position to improve the quality of after-school programs by offering training and curriculum to address youth development and after-school program needs. Staff from demonstration sites participated in a two-day training on March 2-3, 2005. Adventure Central, a 4-H urban education center in Dayton, was used as the training site in order to showcase an established after-school program managed by OSU Extension. This unique setting allowed participants to experience a quality after-school program firsthand and to meet with youth program participants as part of the training. A team of 4-H and FCS professionals, in concert with the Adventure Central staff, facilitated the training.

The focus of the training was to prepare program staff with knowledge and techniques to implement healthy lifestyle and science literacy curriculum in after-school programs. The *Jump Into Food and Fitness* (JIFF) curriculum was used to support children in achieving good health by showing the connection between good nutrition choices and physical activity. Attendees also learned about teaching science through experiential learning with the *Go Plants!* curriculum. Sixty-two Extension Educators and partners from 17 community organizations attended the training. Participants reported that these sessions were highly successful in providing both the concepts and the confidence needed to go back to their communities and use the activities with youth. All of the ratings for post-training related to the two curricula were 4.5 or above (on a 5-point scale).

The value of this training was borne out by comments made in the final project reports. Because of the relatively short preparation time between receiving the funding and program start up, the training was instrumental in getting projects “jump started.” Project directors indicated that after-school sites welcomed the established curricula that focused on experiential learning. Opportunities to interact with other sites at the training and as the project progressed were also appreciated by the project directors. Several community partners have indicated that they would like additional training through OSU Extension.

### **Addressing the Issues: Improving the Quality and Quantity of After-School Programming**

The after-school programs were conducted during Spring 2005 and met with participants between 8 to 19 weeks, with most meeting between 10-12 weeks. The number of sessions was limited to some extent because the project was conducted during the later part of the school year. Length of sessions varied from ½ hour to 4 hours. Based on a conservative estimate, because not every youth attended every session, there were approximately 20,000 program contact hours over the course of the project. Approximately 1,900 youth in 16 counties were reached. There were slightly more females (54%) than males who participated. Most of the counties (14 of 16) had at least 50% of the youth eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch; some had all or nearly all participants in this category. The vast majority of the youth participants (84%) were new to OSU Extension/4-H experiences. In several cases, the after-school activities were supplemented with gardening, intergenerational programs, field trips, and family nights to extend the learning.

### **Addressing the Issues - Healthy Lifestyles and Science Literacy**

Overall, the experiential nature of the activities seemed to be an important aspect of the curriculum. Preparing and eating nutritious snacks were highlights of the *Jump Into Food and Fitness* (JIFF) activities. For many youth it was the first time that they had tried certain foods (e.g., kiwi, cantaloupe, dried fruit). The JIFF curriculum stressed ways to build exercise into their daily activities. Program staff reported that children enjoyed the activities because they were fast-paced, fun, and interesting. As reported by program staff, there were indications of knowledge and behavior changes regarding knowledge of food groups, exercise, handwashing, and making wise food choices and eating healthy snacks at home. For some, learning about plants was entirely new content, while for others it reinforced what was learned during the school day school. Growing gardens accompanied some of the sites that used the *Go Plants!* curriculum. This further developed participants’ knowledge and appreciation for plants.

### **What the program leaders said...**

- “Students have taken a large step toward learning to help their family support themselves. One student said it sure felt better taking onions to the food pantry than taking them from there.”
- “We had some parents working in the garden with their student. One of the students said that was the first time he and his father had worked together. He said he liked that it gave him a chance to teach his father something.”
- “...the Guidance Counselor ... where the Homework Central children attend said that she has overheard the Homework Central children identifying the food groups in their school lunches in the cafeteria.”

- “The JIFF curriculum provided an opportunity for the children to learn while having fun. By observing the children daily, it was obvious that the children mastered new knowledge about nutrition and fitness.”

### **Building Partnerships to Meet Local Needs**

The project created opportunities to work with existing and new community partners. Collaborative relationships were built with after-school program sponsors including schools; community-based organizations, such as Recreation and Parks Departments and YMCA; and faith-based organizations. While Extension provided funding, curriculum, materials, and program support, community partners contributed in a variety of ways. This included providing program staff to teach or assist with the activities, physical facilities, snacks, recruitment of participants, supplies, and volunteers. They worked jointly with OSU Extension staff to determine the scope of projects and to make programming decisions.

### **Building Sustainability**

Overall, OSU Extension staff who served as project directors reported that community partners were pleased to be cooperating with Extension/4-H and looked forward to future programming opportunities. Many have expressed interest in not only repeating, but expanding the programs, and are actively looking for ways to continue what was started. Expansion ideas include both expanding curriculum options offered as well as expanding to additional after-school sites. At least one site has already obtained some additional funding, while others are currently exploring additional funding opportunities.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Overall, this initiative demonstrated that OSU Extension can successfully develop and implement a project that responds to current needs within a relatively short period of time (nine months from start to finish). The programming efforts reached a new audience with positive youth development experiences, focused on current issues, through the 4-H Afterschool delivery method. The recent report from Batelle (2005) indicates the critical role 4-H plays in encouraging educational achievement and discouraging risky behaviors. The Batelle study also documents the positive impact the economy of Ohio should see from Extension programming with youth targeted by this project.

The following section outlines lessons learned and recommendations for OSU Extension based on experiences with this project.

### **Promising Practices/Lessons Learned**

- ✓ **Building Capacity**
  - The two-day training and core curriculum offered at the beginning of the project was mentioned as essential, motivating, and extremely helpful.
  - Adventure Central was consciously chosen as the site for training in order to take advantage of the opportunity to showcase a program in action. This strategy appeared to work well, as there were numerous positive comments in the training evaluation.
  - The opportunity to come together to hear about other sites’ successes and challenges was also helpful. Both local OSU Extension staff and community partners expressed an unmet need for training in both after-school program management and specific curricula on a statewide or regional level. One request has specifically asked for staff at Adventure Central to conduct training.
  - To address identified issues, two specific curricula were chosen for the project; these curricula worked well for some age groups but were not well suited for the entire age range involved in after-school programs. A need was also identified for adapting curriculum to be more developmentally appropriate for use with different age groups (specifically, middle school), as well as for Spanish-speaking clientele. Educators in Cuyahoga and Franklin counties indicated a need for curricula or supporting materials that could be used with Spanish-speaking youth. See recommendations for additional information.

- ✓ **Addressing the Issues**
  - In addition to being national concerns, the issues selected (healthy lifestyles and science literacy) were consistent with locally-identified priorities. This aspect is important to consider in future programming efforts.
  - The project demonstrated the effectiveness of issue-focused programming to enable OSU Extension to work across program areas to address important issues (e.g., 4-H Youth Development, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Agriculture/Natural Resources professionals and volunteers working together to address the issues of healthy lifestyles and science literacy).
  - After-school program can be viewed as a delivery method for other OSU Extension programs.
  
- ✓ **Building Partnerships to Meet Local Needs**
  - OSU Extension was successful in a variety of different after-school settings with a diverse group of partners. Nearly every county participating reported increased or improved partnerships and significant opportunities to reach new audiences.
  - The strength of the relationship between OSU Extension and the community partner was important to the success of the projects. When OSU Extension is not the direct service provider, there is a potential challenge due to loss of day-to-day control of the program. This can be remedied by building strong relationships and obtaining buy-in, not only with agency directors, but with direct service providers.
  - The opportunity to apply for funding to support issue-focused programming was instrumental in initiating discussions with local partners. Reports from local sites indicated that funding for this project resulted in exposure for OSU Extension that will dramatically expand program opportunities in multiple program areas. Many counties indicated that their community partners were interested in continuing their relationship and exploring ways to expand their programming (e.g., Master Gardener program in Portage County will begin offering programs at a local recreation center as a result of this project; OSU Extension in Vinton County will be expanding involvement with after-school programming in 2006; Esperanza, Inc. and OSU Extension in Cuyahoga County are exploring joint programming in the areas of leadership and teen careers.).
  - Connecting with after-school programs is an excellent way for OSU Extension to increase visibility and utilize its expertise and capacity to address needs of Ohio's youth and families.
  
- ✓ **Building Sustainability**
  - Sites reported that the funding was crucial to making the programs possible. Providing funding from the state level helped to leverage other resources at the local level.
  - Additional funding at the state or regional level will be critical in building sustainability and support for after-school programming as a vehicle to address current youth and family issues.
  - Ongoing funding is key to sustaining programs past start up. Programs that start and disband within a short period of time are counter to the consistency and long-term contact needed for positive youth development.

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