

Adapting 4-H to Urban Situations

**Even though 4-H is generally viewed favorably
by urban people, it is seen primarily as
a program for rural youth**

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THE ADAPTATION of Extension to urban society has received a great deal of thought and discussion in recent years. Perhaps more effort has been devoted to 4-H Club work in the urban situation than any other aspect of Extension. In order to help clarify some of the present concerns about the nature and effectiveness of 4-H in urban areas, a study¹ was undertaken in six urbanized areas in the United States.

The study was designed to provide information about two basic questions: (1) What is the scope and nature of the 4-H program in urban areas? (2) How do professional staffs and local people appraise the program? The purpose of this article is to summarize in a general way the findings of this study by (1) describing what the researchers found as they examined the programs being conducted, (2) summarizing attitudes of professional staff and others toward the program, and (3) indicating interpretations of the importance of the findings to the Extension Service and the 4-H program.

Included for study were (1) Kalamazoo County, Michigan, (2) Denver County, Colorado, (3) Jefferson County, Colorado, (4)

¹This study was initiated by an Ad Hoc Committee (4-H Club Work in Non-Farm Areas) of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy. This committee served in an advisory capacity throughout the entire study. Members included Russell Mawby, Michigan, Chairman; Marvin Anderson, Iowa; Emory Brown, Pennsylvania; Mylo Downey and Mrs. Laurel K. Sabrosky, F.E.S.; and Grant Shrum, National 4-H Club Foundation. A \$25,000 grant made to the National 4-H Club Foundation by the Ford Foundation financed the project. The authors of this article served as the research team.

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Multnomah County, Oregon, (5) City of Portland, Oregon, (6) Jackson County, Missouri, (7) DeKalb County, Georgia, and (8) Nassau County, New York. It is not assumed that these programs are representative of all 4-H in "urbanized areas." In a sense, they are more representative of programs which have been established in urban areas for a considerable length of time.²

PARTICIPATION

The number of 4-H Club members residing in the urbanized parts of the counties in the study ranged from 676 in Kalamazoo to 3813 in Nassau.³ The percentage of eligible boys and girls in these areas enrolled in 4-H ranged from 0.9 per cent in Jackson County, Missouri, to 5.6 per cent in Jefferson County, Colorado. Minimum age for enrollment varied from 7 to 10 (see Table 1). The number of 4-H leaders in these areas ranged from 52 in DeKalb County to 771 in Nassau County.

Characteristics

Even though the age of members ranged from 7 to 19, there was a definite concentration in the lower age groups. Approximately

Table 1. Number of 4-H members and per cent of potential by urbanized areas

Area	Membership age range	Total youth in 4-H age range in area	No. of members in area	Per cent of potential
Jefferson	9-19	21,180*	1,195	5.6
DeKalb	10-19	34,234*	1,801	5.3
Kalamazoo	10-19	20,124	676	3.4
Portland	9-19	65,353	1,908	2.9
Multnomah	9-19	22,327*	635	2.8
Denver	9-19	88,939	1,982	2.2
Nassau	7-17	294,651	3,813	1.3
Jackson	8-19	100,962	891	0.9

* Estimated by assuming same proportion of 4-H age range youth in "urbanized" portion as in total county.

² Selection of these areas was based on a nation-wide survey which revealed that 89% of the large urbanized areas have 4-H members. See Laurel K. Sabrosky, *A Survey of Urban 4-H Club Work in the United States, 1962*, Extension Service Circular 542 (Washington: Federal Extension Service, USDA, April, 1963).

In personal visits to areas included, the authors collected data from 59 selected state administrators and supervisors, 61 county personnel, 75 Extension advisory committee members, 29 government officials, 88 school administrators, a sample of households, 4-H members, and leaders, and the staffs of several national youth organizations and agencies.

³ In addition, Nassau had about 13,000 young people in a bicycle safety project.

half of the members were 10 or under and 10 per cent or fewer were 15 or older. Membership was predominately female (from about 70 to 80 percent). Nationwide, 57 per cent of the membership is girls.

The major reasons given for joining 4-H was that they expected 4-H to be fun or that they were interested in learning about specific projects. Opportunities for educational and social activities were highest. Opportunities to earn additional money or to travel were generally rated low. However, the economic aspects of project work were rated higher as an opportunity by members and leaders in the lower socio-economic areas.

Leaders A majority of the leaders interviewed⁴ had lived on a farm at some time in their life, usually in their youth. However, a minority had been 4-H members. Except for teachers who assumed responsibility for 4-H in classroom situations, most leaders had children of 4-H age (about 15 per cent of the leaders were men). Relatively few leaders had served more than five years; about half had one year experience or less.

Leaders considered 4-H more practical and educational than other youth organizations. Projects (and the skills developed through carrying out the projects) were seen as the core of 4-H. The educational opportunities (i.e., making and learning new and different things) and group experiences were regarded as most valuable to the members. Opportunities to travel, participate in games or sports, or earn prizes and money were considered relatively less important. A large proportion of these leaders felt that their friends had a favorable image of 4-H and that youth in the community would rate 4-H relatively high in prestige as a youth group.

Projects A trend toward increasing the number of projects offered in urban areas was observed. This was being done, according to state 4-H staffs and agents, in an effort to attract larger numbers of young people. Projects which were cited as having been recently added included knitting, leathercraft, ceramics, geology, wildlife, gun safety, and personal development. However, almost half of the total project enrollment was in foods and clothing. Efforts toward redefining or reorienting projects in existing or traditional subjects in order to more nearly comply with the demands of the urban situation were limited.

The 59 Extension administrators interviewed in the six states generally had favorable attitudes toward serving urban people with an Extension youth program—state 4-H staff members were the

⁴Of the 270 leaders interviewed the proportion ranged from 4 to 25 per cent of the total in each urban area.

most enthusiastic. However, administrators felt that resources should not be shifted from the rural program to serve the urban population. Most were aware of the need to adapt the traditional youth program to the urban areas.

APPRAISAL⁵

Administrators rated the 4-H program in urban areas as being only fairly successful in terms of the numbers being reached, but generally considered it of a high quality. Some administrators in two of the states felt the youth agent working in urban areas should provide resources of the university to all youth organizations; the agent would be playing two roles, that of an agent serving the 4-H program as well as a professional youth person to all youth groups. State 4-H staffs rated 4-H in urban areas as more successful than did other state staff personnel.

Most administrators were optimistic that a program could be developed for urban youth if adequate financial resources were available. Major difficulties mentioned by the state staff included: (1) the rural image of 4-H, (2) lack of projects to interest urban youth (especially boys), (3) lack of staff with experience in urban areas, (4) lack of effective procedures for working through and identification with local groups and organizations, (5) a need for personnel and subject-matter resources outside the colleges of agriculture and home economics, and (6) inadequate funds.

County Agents Agents differed considerably in appraising how successful they have been in developing a 4-H program in the urban areas. Almost half felt that they were fairly successful; however, there was general concern about the small proportion of youth being reached. Agents were fairly critical of the assistance received from the state level. Over half felt that the assistance from specialists and supervisors and the materials available (such as project bulletins and organizational and publicity bulletins) was not adequate.

The greatest handicap to a successful program was identified by agents as the lack of county, state, and national staffs trained and committed to work in urban areas. Also, more urban-oriented teaching and publicity materials were considered mandatory. In general, it was felt that the organization must become much more dynamic and adjustable to the urban environment—that is, that the

⁵ Findings as presented in this section are summary statements resulting from analyses of specific data. Detailed analyses and interpretations will be available in a report being prepared for distribution through the National 4-H Clearinghouse Foundation.

entire Extension Service must become identified more closely with urban society.

Local School Administrators The school administrators interviewed varied considerably in their knowledge of 4-H. Several were well informed, but many knew very little about the program. Before being interviewed, several principals were not aware of having 4-H members in their schools. About half of them interpreted 4-H as being an organization for rural youth. All Extension personnel considered relationships with the school administrators to be extremely important, but the extent to which school personnel were informed about 4-H differed from one area to another.

School administrators defined the purpose of 4-H primarily as leadership and citizenship development or training in manual and social skills. About half of them saw a need for 4-H in the city; however, those who did not, questioned the need because of other youth organizations, the wide range of school activities, and recreational programs sponsored by local governments. Those who felt 4-H was needed in cities supported their stand by citing the practical value of 4-H projects and the way in which projects supplement the school curriculum. Some principals were of the opinion that teachers, being trained in educational methods, were much more competent to develop an educational program for youth than were voluntary leaders. School administrators saw no sharp or distinct differences between 4-H and other youth groups; none mentioned the organizational relationship between 4-H and the Land Grant College. Their schools cooperated with 4-H in much the same manner they do with any youth group—by providing meeting places and a channel for publicity and recruitment. They expressed a willingness to cooperate as long as 4-H doesn't interfere to any great extent with managing the school system.

Local Officials About three-fourths of the local government officials interviewed⁶ considered the major purpose of 4-H as that of teaching practical skills not provided by the school. Several said 4-H provides an opportunity for boys and girls to learn about agriculture and homemaking. These officials differed on whether or not there is a need for 4-H in urban areas; about half felt it is needed and the other half felt that it is not. Those favoring 4-H said it is needed because urban youth have considerable leisure which should be used constructively; they also indicated that urban youth should become acquainted with agriculture, homemaking, and rural life in general.

⁶ Of the 29 local government officials interviewed, 23 were county officials, the others were city.

Those opposed to 4-H in urban areas said that it is excellent for rural youth, but does not fit the needs of the city youth. There was a relationship between the background of the government officials and their perception of a need for 4-H. Those with rural backgrounds tended to feel that 4-H could be fitted into the urban environment. Those with an urban background generally saw no need for 4-H in urban areas.

Attitudes regarding local government financing of 4-H were related to perceptions of the need for the program. Those who felt 4-H was needed in the urban area more generally favored local government providing additional funds and personnel to strengthen and enlarge the program. Those who felt 4-H was not needed in urban areas were generally opposed to increasing local appropriations. City officials residing in counties where the county government now appropriates funds for Extension opposed the city initiating funds to support 4-H.

IMPLICATIONS

The following implications are based on the findings from this and related studies and from observations made by the researchers. These statements and questions should be viewed as tentative and should be subjected to more rigorous study and research.

1. The extent of commitment of the organization to develop and implement 4-H in urban areas, with reasons for such action, should be communicated to all personnel so that no doubt exists as to the intent or direction of the program. Presently there is a great deal of confusion about goals and purposes. Such questions as these need to be answered: (1) Are organizational policies clear at national, state, and local levels about serving urban youth? (2) What are the needs of youth in the urban area? (3) What can 4-H offer in satisfying these needs? (4) What should be the "target" youth in urban areas—the "disadvantaged" youth or the type now generally being served?

2. An attempt is being made to broaden the scope of 4-H in order to satisfy a wide variety of subject-matter interests. Is this the desired direction or should projects be limited to agriculture and home economics even in urban areas? If limited, what kind of agricultural projects will be of interest to city boys? If the program is broader than agriculture and home economics, are resources available to provide the needed content?

3. The image that people have of an organization will determine, to a great extent, their participation. The image of 4-H is generally favorable, but it is seen as a program for boys and girls in rural

areas. Extension staff attempts to portray a non-farm image have not been very successful. Is it possible to change the image of 4-H? Does Extension want to broaden or change the image? If so, what changes are necessary in both the organizational structure and programs? What would be the consequences of an image change in terms of traditional or new supporting publics? Should there be two separate programs—one for rural youth and one for urban youth? Should requirements for membership be the same for rural and urban young people?

4. The 4-H organization has been closely associated with farm people and has tended to reflect rural values which are sometimes different from urban values. If the organization is sincerely interested in the needs and interests of youth in urbanized areas, will the value orientation need to be changed? Is it organizationally possible to assign priority to a program for rural young people and still develop an effective program in urban areas?

5. To work effectively in an urban area, personnel must have the needed skills and competencies, must understand the social and power structures of urban society, the types of programs needed, and so on. The successful agent in rural areas is credited with having become an inherent part of the cultural milieu in which he works. In the same manner, is it necessary for the agent in an urban area to become part of urban society?

6. Financial support is necessary for maintenance and growth of an effective youth organization. Representatives from local government with a rural orientation have given strong support to 4-H. Obtaining financial support from county governments that do not have this rural orientation may be more difficult. It appears that, in urban areas where rural influence still predominates, the need for 4-H will not be questioned. However, in counties with an urban power structure, will the need for 4-H be more critically evaluated?

7. The success of 4-H in the areas studied has been largely dependent upon the support and assistance received from the school. What should be the relationship between the school and 4-H in urban areas? To what extent will voluntary leaders be acceptable within the urban school system if 4-H is conducted on school time? Can other organizations be persuaded to sponsor 4-H?

CONCLUSION

The extent to which adaptations have been made in order to serve urban clientele seem to have depended on the following conditions: (1) the skills, interests, and attitudes of the staff, (2) extent to which resources are provided by local government, (3) the pro-

portion of rural to urban clientele in the area, (4) the extent to which the director or chairman of the county office is committed to serving an urban clientele, (5) the extent to which staff members are involved with influentials in the urban power structure, (6) the skills, interests, and attitudes of the publics involved in assisting with the program, and (7) the support and encouragement of state personnel in trying new approaches.

EDUCATION is a companion which no misfortune decreases, no crime can destroy, no enemy alienate, no desperation enslave; at home a friend, abroad an introduction, in solitude a solace, and in society an ornament. It chastens vice, guides the virtue, and gives grace and government to genius. Education can cost financial sacrifice and mental pain; but, in both money and life values, it will repay every cost one hundredfold.

—from ORVILLE G. BENTLEY, "An Open Door to Excellence."

SO MANY professional journals have not taken care to classify articles in the manner that one can easily select articles which are of particular interest. Most journals contain such a volume of material that it is almost impossible for members to read even a substantial part of each issue. I hope we can keep the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* from getting too large and I hope you people as editors will be able to maintain the quality of material that is contained in Volume 1, No. 1.

—from LAUREN H. BROWN, Extension Specialist in Agricultural Economics, Michigan.

I SHARE . . . the belief that the major mission of Cooperative Extension is to use its educational competency to help people achieve their goals related to a revitalized rural America. And this, of course, includes a strengthening of the family farm, the development of expanded opportunity, and the conservation and development of all our resources.

—from LLOYD H. DAVIS, Administrator, Federal Extension Service, as quoted in *Extension Service Review*, XXXIV (November, 1963), 216.