

## 4-H for Central City Minorities

Interview with Joseph C. Paige

*Two years ago, Congressional legislation established the Federal City College in Washington, D.C. It's the only urban Land-Grant College and has been referred to as "an experiment in urban-oriented innovations in higher education." In this interview, Paige describes 4-H approaches with central city youth. Obtaining interest of black and brown youth in 4-H isn't a problem. "I've found youth extremely responsive to that which is relevant. And, as most of us will agree, they have a unique facility for turning off that which isn't."*

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**Journal:** Dr. Paige, you have a national reputation with respect to urban and minority problems, and especially working with children of economically poor ethnic groups. What specifically do you plan to do in 4-H work in the District of Columbia?

**Paige:** It's amazing how many people are shocked to learn that there's an interest in urban 4-H activities. Many see 4-H activities only in terms of cattle raising, gardening, forestry, and other rural programs. To be honest, I can't think of a youth program that wouldn't fit 4-H as I interpret the urban 4-H commitment. Here are some examples of 4-H urban activities.

*Youth Tutoring Youth (YTY)*

*activities. YTY's have been demonstrated as being extremely popular and successful with junior high-school and high-school youth. In fact, we've used youth to tutor adults as well. The YTY concept promotes the notion of youth with varying abilities, skills, or talents, helping each other in an organized way. I can cite many examples of YTY successes, with resultant indications of positive social change with respect to the tutor and tutored.*

*At the Urban Adult Education Institute in Detroit, job-upgrading students (students with records of conflict with the law, with apparent learning difficulty, or with adjustment problems) from the city's*

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most economically depressed neighborhood, were used as tutorial aides, working with other youths and adult participants in the program.

Under the supervision of a professional, adult paid aide, or adult volunteer, the young men were expected to wear ties and the young women, stockings and low heels. Also, they were expected to spend extra time with their supervisor preparing each day's assignment.

The results were incredible. There were immediate, noticeable improvements in class attendance, promptness, and social indicators of success as shown by personal grooming and reductions in use of critical words.

In Washington, D.C., our YTY efforts have been equally successful. Our on-going programs in the District are after school and include tutorial activities in most of the major subject-matter areas, in addition to speciality or enrichment tutoring in instrumental music, voice (pop, gospel, and small groups), and athletics.

*Short programs of informal interest groups.* These groups are generally formed to discuss issues of interest to youth. They may remain functional for one to four weeks, and then new groups are formed. The composition varies, depending on the issue being discussed.

For example, groups may be formed to discuss such topics or issues as: pros and cons of American forces in Vietnam, an analysis of differences in sexual behavior between youth and adults, what is relevant education, the treatment of ra-

cial minorities in America, racial prejudice in my city, equal housing opportunities in my city, equal job opportunities in my city, factors influencing the political potential of racial minorities in urban areas, everyday examples of parental abuse of common household drugs (pills, medicine, etc.), the campus drug scene—junior high, senior high, and college, variations in ethnic interpretations of law and order, positive use and examples of client abuse of local public welfare, how to improve the street and home safety in our neighborhood, and obstacles to clean streets in our neighborhood.

*Neighborhood and community projects.* Central city youngsters seem to be human service oriented at very early ages. Past neighborhood and community projects have included block and apartment building beautification, clean streets, park and playground cleanliness and rehabilitation, rat and pest control, safe streets, and citizens' information.

One of my youth projects, when I was with Howard University, undertook a block-by-block beautification and clean-streets project for a 10-block area. Under the supervision of a freshman student volunteer, 30 neighborhood youngsters convinced their otherwise apathetic parents that the project had merit, that it was to their mutual advantage not only to allow them to be a part of the neighborhood effort, but that the parents should also actively participate. I might add that while this project was successful under youth leadership, it had failed

a year earlier when the same thing was tried in the same neighborhood as a total adult project.

Pride, Inc., a local federally funded citizen-youth group, was perhaps first to demonstrate in the nation's capital some of the unique advantages of using neighborhood youth in rat and pest control projects. Now a viable parent organization for a wide range of youth corporations, business, and special programs, Pride's major projects, using hundreds of neighborhood youngsters, combines street cleanliness and pest control into an unusually successful summer operation.

In Detroit, neighborhood youth around the Herman Keifer Hospital complex were successfully organized by the staff of the Urban Adult Education Institute (UAEI) to provide a variety of citizen information services, including the monitoring of the quality of public neighborhood services (trash pickup, replacement of broken or burned-out street lights, and frequency of police patrol).

*Personalized services.* Human service projects might include service and enrichment activities for the aged, the physically ill, and the mentally retarded.

For example, all of the economically poor aged in a given neighborhood could be identified by name and place of residence. Teams of youth (two per team) could be organized and trained by an adult leader to provide specific services to the aged, on the basis of need. These services could include enrich-

ment companionship (being available at a designated time just to chat, or for sing-ins, sleep-ins, poetry readings, short-story reading, story telling, grocery and light shopping, doing weekly laundry, or making small repairs).

On the other hand, persons who are aged, but physically and mentally sound, could be encouraged to assist youth groups in helping others who are aged, but physically or mentally impaired.

These projects are equally applicable to the physically and mentally handicapped, depending on the degree of handicap.

*Work-training.* It seems to me that a major effort should be made in the central city to introduce youth to a variety of vocational opportunities by arranging for actual part-time employment with local business. In this way, we could assist the young early in life in developing responsibilities related to contractual obligations, in money management, in employer-employee relations, and in creating new, mutually beneficial relationships for the employer and the youngster.

**Journal:** Do you believe that 4-H membership and recruitment is more difficult in urban areas than in rural?

**Paige:** No. Effective 4-H membership recruitment in urban areas requires strategies different from those we usually employ in rural areas. This is natural and can be almost wholly attributed to the obvious variation in complexity between urban and rural life.

**Journal:** Is there any key element to effective 4-H program development in urban areas?

**Paige:** I think so. In addition to the necessity for soulful people-oriented leadership, I believe that the concept of "linkages" is important to effective program development in urban areas for all Cooperative Extension Service activities. This is an age when groups and individuals at all levels seem to be preoccupied with "doing their own thing." We have to encourage this while at the same time seek cooperative program linkages. My experience has been that if properly established, such linkages are to the mutual advantage of all participants.

By linkages, I mean establishing channels of cooperation, official and nonofficial, between other youth groups and agencies, in related program efforts. Of course, all too often, this requires a "sharing of the pie" or "glory," a concept that regrettably too many in leadership roles still find difficult to accept.

In the District, we require, as a matter of policy, some form of cooperative linkages with other programs and agencies for all program activities of the Cooperative Extension Service. We insist on a systems approach to program development, with special emphasis on linkages.

For example, we're developing cooperative program planning between the 4-H program leadership and: (1) the Boy Scouts, (2) the Girl Scouts, (3) the various youth groups of the Mayor's Committee, (4) the D.C. Department of Recre-

ation, (5) the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and (6) the organized youth groups at each school and church.

For maximum effectiveness, this should be accomplished at several operational levels: by a city-wide, area-wide, and neighborhood citizens volunteer youth activities committees. There are many reasons for this three-tier involvement. In addition to providing a machinery for effective program coordination at all levels, it provides for the creative inputs of many people with varying backgrounds in the development of programs and in implementation strategies.

**Journal:** Central city areas, especially those of the urban poor, are becoming increasingly black or brown. Many groups report difficulty in getting black and brown youth interested in the central city in 4-H activities. Why do you think this is so?

**Paige:** My initial impression, without additional facts, is that the problem, if one exists, is more characteristic of staff insensitivity or inadequacy, rather than lack of interest on the part of youth. I've found youth extremely responsive to that which is relevant. And, as most of us will agree, they have a unique facility for turning off that which isn't.

The sad thing about so many of today's otherwise good programs is that they're almost totally lacking in ethnic sensitivity. The situation could be corrected by involving minorities as professionals and volunteers on our staffs and by involving

youth in program planning and development. Again, I believe that most of today's programs for urban youth who are children of black and brown poor, have been miserable failures.

**Journal:** Why have the professional program leaders failed to respond to "gut-level" needs of children of the undereducated poor or racial minorities.

**Paige:** The majority group in charge, which, with few exceptions, in all parts of our country is a white majority, has basically been sincere. Based on its own standard, it has responded well to the needs of people, using innocently the misguided slogan, "What's good for middle-class white Americans is good for all Americans."

Or, translated in more earthy terms, what white middle-class Americans think black, brown, and poor white Americans need is what's best for them, irrespective of how the minority groups feel or what the current social and political realities are.

As a result, we still design programs and instructional strategies for young adults and their parents, teachers, and leaders without representatives of the undereducated poor actively participating in the planning and implementation of these strategies or programs. And then, some of us still wonder why our programs for "those people" don't work. Why, with all of the money we've spent, all our volunteer efforts, and all the Ph.D.'s we've involved in specific program development activities,

have we been unable to "make the difference?"

The irony of our situation is that not only have we failed to include the undereducated poor in program development and management, but with few exceptions, we have excluded minorities at all levels—the undereducated and the educated as well.

Our current system in dealing with the central city poor, especially with poor members of ethnic minorities is doomed for continued failure as long as we systematically exclude inputs of these minorities from our program design.

To continue excluding members of minority groups from making decisions about the day-to-day activities that directly effect these groups is to me criminal. However, I'm aware that such continued exclusion is due more to innocence and insensitivity than to design.

Today, programs with total white staffs serving totally brown and black populations just don't work in urban America.

**Journal:** Do you think then that in view of these strong sensitivities or minorities today, a policy of blacks serving blacks would be desirable in central city youth work?

**Paige:** I would be opposed to a policy of only blacks serving blacks or whites serving whites. I believe that the national policy of integration in employment should be honored and encouraged. I'd hate to ever have to admit that our country had deteriorated to the point where blacks and whites could only work

with their own ethnic groups. On the other hand, we're kidding ourselves if we fail to see the dynamics in providing ethnic minorities with positive success images within their own ethnic groups.

What I'm saying is we should develop conscience of ethnic balance in both staffing and program development in the central city.

**Journal:** Could you be more specific?

**Paige:** I believe that the continuing failure of so many groups in the development and administration of programs for urban children is because those responsible for designing and administering the programs lack an elementary understanding of the population we wish to reach. They mean well, they have strong commitments, but they lack both knowledge and appreciation of the life styles and basic chemistry of some of the young soulful inhabitants of our big cities. They can't seem to do creative things with this

population.

In the design of program development strategies for urban minorities, we should keep in mind that for the most part, urban youth are very much a part of the current social revolution. They are very much a part of the "aware" and "concerned" generation. Their frustrations, anxieties, joys, and sorrows are many.

Their energies seem to be directed to today. All too often relevancy has meaning only in terms of the "now" aspects of their life experiences. In this context, new dimensions and new considerations emerge, and our programs must touch such diversified areas as sex, love, war, peace, hunger, crime, religion, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, space, and all of the socioeconomic issues that make the news today. If a difference is to be made, urban youth development specialists must know as well as understand the confusing dynamics of ghetto life.