

Impact

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Measuring Life Skill Development in the Larimer County 4-H Program

Situation

Benefits of the 4-H program in Colorado have historically been communicated through anecdotal evidence and personal success stories. These typically reflected the quality of the programs through the gut feelings of those familiar with 4-H, but did not demonstrate the public value of the youth development program in quantifiable measures.

The purpose of this study was to gather and provide sound, research-based information to the public about the effect 4-H membership has on the lives of young people.

Extension's Response

In the summer of 2010, data were collected related to life skill development of Larimer County 4-H members in organized 4-H clubs. There were 90 surveys collected. Surveys were administered at the county fair and regular 4-H club meetings.

The life skills measured were:

1. Working out problems
2. Using resources wisely
3. Planning a project
4. Making good decisions
5. Using project tools
6. Using technology
7. Following instructions

Demographic data collected were:

1. Years in 4-H
2. Age
3. Gender

Responses to the seven life-skill-related questions were reported on a four-point Lickert scale of:

1. Yes – always
2. Usually
3. Not Often
4. No – never

Open-ended comments about their 4-H experience were also collected from those 4-H members who voluntarily provided that information.



The Bottom Line

- Larimer County has the largest 4-H club program in Colorado with 1,071 4-H members and 427 adult volunteer leaders.
- Each year more than 60 educational project workshops are made available to 4-H members, leaders and parents.
- 42 Larimer County youth have been 4-H members for more than 10 years.

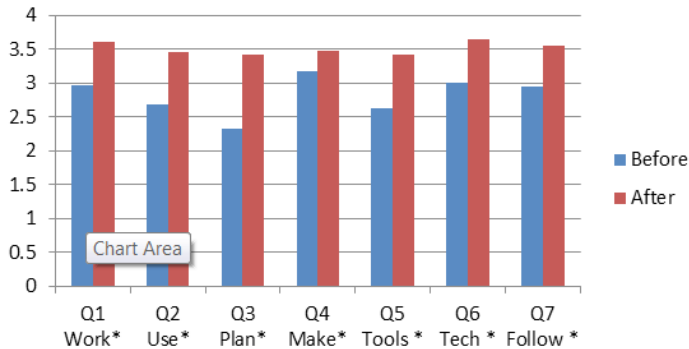
Results

A Chi Square statistical analysis was conducted comparing those new to 4-H (junior 4-H members, ages 8-11) with more experienced 4-H members (intermediate and senior 4-H members, ages 12-18). This comparison treated the less-experienced members as a quasi-control group.

There was a significant positive difference between pre-and post-scores when all the data were analyzed separately and also when grouped together as one experimental treatment group. Results of the pre- and post-responses are shown on the following graph.

Mean Responses for All Questions

*Significant Difference (P<.05)



While all mean responses show a significant difference between pre- and post-measures, the two questions with the greatest change between pre- and post-mean scores were Q3 – Planning a Project, and Q5 – Using Project Tools.

Change in Mean Scores Pre- and Post-test

	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
Q1 Work Out Problems	2.98	3.61	.63
Q2 Use Resources Wisely	2.68	3.46	.78
Q3 Plan a Project	2.33	3.43	1.10
Q4 Make Good Decisions	3.18	3.48	.30
Q5 Use Project Tools	2.64	3.43	.79
Q6 Use Technology	3.00	3.66	.66
Q7 Follow Instructions	2.95	3.56	.61

A statistical analysis was conducted on the responses of 90 Larimer County 4-H members. The seven questions that 4-H members responded to were retrospective life-skill-based questions gained in their 4-H experience. Members were asked to respond to those questions as they would have prior to their 4-H experience and after their 4-H experience.

4-H is a community of young people across Colorado learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills. One hundred years of research-based programs and experience bear significant results. Research shows that youth involved in 4-H are more likely to develop the “five C’s” (competence, confidence, character, caring and connection). Through participation in 4-H programs, youth are more likely to be at the highest level of contribution in their communities.

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“I’ve become a better listener, a better follower and a better leader. It’s helped me find some of my character.”

“I have gotten experience in working through mostly self-initiated long term projects, a skill that has been useful in high school. I have also gotten to explore many creative possibilities.”

“4-H has made me a more responsible person. It has made me more independent and has made me start solving problems by myself. 4-H has made me open up to new ideas and assistance.”

“4-H has taught me lessons that I can take with me for the rest of my life. I’ve learned leadership, cooperation, time management, communication, responsibility, the list goes on and on. Without 4-H I don’t know how I would have attained these skills.”

-All comments from Larimer County 4-H Members

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