

Inner-City Youth Programs: Guidelines

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For several years now, Extension has groped for approaches to reach inner-city youth. Parsons suggests program and organizational guidelines for the professional youth leader to use in developing and implementing educational programs in the inner city. "The present 4-H and Youth Programs can't be transferred to the inner city," he says. But present Extension youth programs provide ". . . a sound philosophical basis for developing programs for inner-city youth." Extension could become a leader here, the author feels.

Currently the 4-H and Youth Program is changing and adjusting to more adequately meet the needs of today's youth. During the past decade, emphasis was placed on reaching rural and nonfarm young people. Now, emphasis is on reaching the disadvantaged youth.

One group facing the critical problems of personal growth and development is the youth living in the inner city. The many diverse, complex, and interdependent problems facing him emphasize the need for youth education based on personal growth and development. The 4-H and Youth Program—the youth educational arm of the Cooperative Extension Service—has the experience and expertise to develop and implement educational programs that will foster individual growth and development.

This article identifies program and organizational guidelines for the professional youth staff member to use in developing and implementing an educational program for inner-city youth. The professional staff member must be flexible and creative to develop a program that meets the specific needs of the youth they're trying to reach.

These guidelines provide a starting point for program development. Each guideline can be implemented in the current structure of Extension.

The following are definitions of two terms used in the guidelines:

Inner city: An area in the city made up of people who are denied minimal levels of health, housing facilities, food, education, and who are excluded from taking advantage of new opportunities; where over-

crowding, congestion, and a concentration of multiproblem families, low-income levels, minority groups, and the aged abound. The inner-city conditions are relative to the rest of the community and society.

Neighborhood: An area delineated by geographic, social, and ethnic boundaries. The people living in the area identify with it and have mutual concerns. Feelings of identity vary in intensity from very slight to very strong. Some neighborhoods exist in the inner city, while others need to be developed. An inner-city area is usually made up of several neighborhoods.

Organizational Guidelines

The organizational framework for an inner-city youth program must be flexible. No one organizational pattern can be used in all cities or even in all neighborhoods within a city.

The traditional 4-H framework limits professional and volunteer youth leaders as they develop programs for inner-city youth. Here are 10 guidelines for developing the inner-city structure.

1. *The 4-H and Youth Programs should be family-centered.*

Family involvement in 4-H has been a significant part of the program. In the inner city, the apathy of parents, incomplete family units, working parents, and the lack of supervision of children makes working with the family unit difficult.

Traditionally, one way of involving families in 4-H has been to have the local meeting in members' homes. *But* in the inner city, living conditions are so marginal that club meetings in homes may neither be desirable nor feasible.

A community center, church, or other public building may be a better meeting place. However, meeting in the home at special times or for special situations should be encouraged.

Many inner-city parents have been deprived of their growing-up experiences and, therefore, their ability to meet the demands of child rearing may be limited.¹ Enlarging the horizons of inner-city families through carefully planned parent activities is important. Helping parents move into their larger community through parent-child tours, trips, recreational activities, and educational programs can positively affect parents and children.

Since inner-city parents are interested in their children (perhaps not always in the same way and for the same purposes as middle-class parents), parental activities can be planned to supplement and complement programs for youth.

2. *The 4-H and Youth Program should be people-oriented rather than organization- or task-oriented.*

A people-oriented program emphasizes the uniqueness of each individual and plans activities to help the youth discover within himself his talents and abilities. The

goal is to make it possible for him to assume responsibility for his life. It isn't to develop the youth, but to let him grow and develop at his own rate. This is done by providing experiences that facilitate individual growth and development. This helping relationship permits the leader to be a flexible authoritarian at the beginning and gradually move to a more democratic role of letting the youth make his own decisions.

A wide range of abilities are found in the inner city. Because of deprivation, chronological age is a poor indicator of ability. Although age and experience may vary, the sequence of growth doesn't. The youth is constantly integrating his environment and his biological growth. An opportunity for a constant interplay or reorganization of the thought process based on current experiences is needed. Rules and regulations must be flexible so the program can be focused on significant learning experiences. The desire for quality programs and high standards, numerical reports, and the expectations of the bureaucracy can be limiting.

3. *The 4-H and Youth Program will be more effective if the youth is reached early in his life.*

The inner-city youth, when he enters school, often lacks the skills necessary for succeeding in school. Early stimulating experiences are critical if he's to develop his full capabilities. Research and experience show that an enriched environment

can affect achievement.² The preschool years are critical. The lack of early environmental stimulation retards cognitive, locomotor, and social development. Youth and 4-H staff members should actively support and work toward implementing preschool programs.

A club is an opportunity to introduce order and structure into the lives of young people. In the first, second, and third grade, they need to be involved in club experiences. While 4-H Clubs continue to be for 9- to 19-year olds, other clubs could be organized. Some groups may elect officers and have formal meetings. Some groups may never get to this stage. During preadolescence, more formally organized groups have more meaning for inner-city youth.

The size of groups can vary with the experience of the leader. However, groups of more than 10 will have limited opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships.

Although the recommendation to have groups divided by age or grade in school is still a valid one for inner-city youth, it's important to recognize the wide variation in the abilities and experiences of the young people. There must be flexibility when forming groups.

4. *4-H and Youth Programs should be organized on a neighborhood basis so activities can be conveniently located for inner-city youth.*

Services must be close to the people because those in the inner

city don't travel far from their homes. Although public transportation is generally available, most inner-city youth and their parents don't use it. Often, they can't afford it. However, expanded contact outside the immediate neighborhood should be available for the youth ready for these experiences.

5. *Trained, indigenous leadership—volunteer and paid—is an essential part of a 4-H and Youth Program in the inner city.*

Just as the traditional 4-H program has been built on local leaders, so must the inner-city program, with Extension personnel serving as catalysts for group action, program development, and leader development.

The use of indigenous leaders is essential to an inner-city youth program. Indigenous leaders are neighborhood adults hired and trained to work in their own neighborhood. These full-time, trained, nonprofessional workers can be a real entree into the local community and can keep the program attuned to local needs and interests.³

A combination of volunteer and full-time and part-time paid leadership is needed for an efficient, effective, inner-city youth program. Leaders can be brought into the community to work with indigenous leaders in team assignments. Older youth from within and outside the community could also be leaders.

A strong leader-training program is needed to help the indigenous leader develop leadership

skills, understand himself and others, learn how to work with young people, and improve his communication and human relations skills. The training must be readily accessible to the leader, preferably in his own neighborhood. It should be structured so he can integrate his new knowledge, skills, and understandings with practical experiences soon after the training.

The level of education, background, and experiences of the indigenous leaders will require major adjustments in most of the current 4-H leader training. Past school experiences have generally been unsatisfactory; therefore, adults will hesitate to become involved in a "school-type" situation. Transportation, babysitting services, and help in defraying the cost of teaching materials may be a necessity for leaders to participate in training.

One of the greatest contributions that can be made to the inner city is the development of the self-confidence and abilities of the adults involved in the 4-H and Youth Program.

6. *A 4-H and Youth Program in the inner city should have continuity of methods, resources, personnel, and program efforts.*

Inner-city programs have a history of being transitional, short-lived, fluctuating, and unstable. Inner-city residents often say, "But that group came in, got things going, and left." Inner-city social workers also comment that groups come in,

recruit members, identify leaders, set up the program, and then leave. It must be recognized that most inner-city people don't have enough experience with groups to continue programs without professional help.

When Extension starts youth programs in the inner city, it must plan for program continuity. This is essential to maintain participation, develop community responsibility, and achieve personal growth.

Year-round activities with special emphasis on weekends, holidays, and summer vacation periods are vital. To serve the needs of youth, the program must be involved when the needs are greatest.

7. *4-H and youth staff members should become familiar with other agencies, programs, and personnel serving the inner-city youth, and work with and through them.*

There's much concern over the duplication of services for the inner city. It can't afford to have agencies and personnel who don't know and understand other inner-city programs and activities. The personnel must know and be able to work with each other. Extension should work with, but not be limited by, other agencies to achieve maximum results for inner-city youth. When an agency or organization has established a program in a neighborhood, Extension should concentrate on working with that organization.

8. *New 4-H and Youth Programs in the inner city should*

be started where there's a higher probability for success.

Inner-city youth and adults have known failure often. They have failed in jobs, school, marriage, interpersonal relationships, securing adequate housing, community groups. Therefore, it's doubly important to carefully select the starting point in the inner city. As staff gain experience and have demonstrated the ability to effectively reach young people, the program can become more comprehensive and involve harder-to-reach youth and neighborhoods.

A good starting point could be where the residents expect to improve their situation, see an opportunity for advancing, are recent migrants, and are generally employable. These areas may be the least attractive because the residents see this location as temporary. These people and the area are most likely to change. Identifying inner-city people that are upward bound will provide more positive factors on which to start programs.⁴

9. *Publications for 4-H and Youth Programs in the inner city must be carefully prepared and used only as a follow-up to teaching.*

Inner-city residents aren't verbally oriented. Their homes have few reading materials . . . newspapers and magazines are seldom available. The lack of printed material in the home may be a clue that the family values written material

differently than middle-class people.

A great need exists for these materials to be more attuned to the experiences and problems of lower socioeconomic groups. Textbooks used in inner-city schools often have illustrations related to the middle class only. They rarely concern themselves with problems or heroes of the disadvantaged.

10. *Teaching materials for 4-H and Youth Programs in the inner city must be provided; however, participants should help pay expenses.*

Professionals working in the inner city disagree on the financial involvement of participants. Some advocate that the youth pay "something" toward the cost of the materials. Others say he can't and shouldn't be expected to pay to participate.

It's important not to lose any youth or his family because he can't pay for the activity or program. A way should be found for the youth to earn or work for his fee.

Program Guidelines

The content of programs for inner-city youth must provide freedom and flexibility for the professional staff member. No one program can meet the needs of inner-city youth. The following are guidelines for determining the content of youth educational programs.

1. *Learning experiences should be based on the expressed or*

felt needs and interests of the inner-city youth.

Historically, Extension and the 4-H and Youth Program have developed learning experiences based on the needs of the people. In the inner city, it's even more relevant that the youth staff members start with the needs as expressed by the young people or the inner-city residents.

Inner-city youth are pragmatic. It's the end that counts with them. They prefer to deal with what they can see and feel. The subject matter learned must be immediately applicable. Because they see school as impractical and irrelevant to their present situation, they don't participate in anything that sounds or looks like school.

It's important to build on the strengths of the inner-city youth. Too often inner-city youth programs haven't considered the range of the young people's abilities and interests. The program must grow and change with those involved in it. Therefore, staff members leading inner-city programs must be able to develop programs with the young people rather than using programs designed at the state level. Youth need to have a part in developing a program based on their interests, needs, and desires.

2. *Exploratory experiences are critically needed by inner-city youth.*

Educational programs that will awaken curiosity and develop creativity and self-expression should be

developed and implemented. Inner-city youth live within the reaches of many cultural, social, and educational facilities. Yet, they make little use of these facilities. Recreational facilities in the inner city, however, are often extremely limited.

Young people and their families make very limited use of the available facilities because they lack money, transportation, know-how, and personal security to venture out for new experiences. Once taken to a museum, for example, they're more apt to return.

Occupational information is another area of limited understanding and experience. Inner-city youth have a limited view of occupations available to them. Their knowledge of occupations is limited to those their family and friends are involved in. In the inner city, this is a very limited range. Most frequently they know only about the unskilled and operative occupations.

3. *Teaching skills and knowledge is a way of helping youth grow and develop and isn't an end in itself.*

New skills and new information can help inner-city youth in everyday living. And learning new skills can become an effective way of working with young people. One caution: Careful thought must be given to the specific skills and knowledge needed.

Often inner-city people have problems with the processes involved in living in an urbanized society. They may not know how to

fill out application forms, contact their government, apply or interview for a job, and a whole list of other activities normally accepted as routine by middle-class people.

Educational programs that include procedures for filling out application forms, methods for contacting city officials, and information about services available would be an important aid to these residents.

Informal educational programs such as 4-H and Youth can help inner-city youth learn "school know-how." Often these youth don't know how to ask or answer questions, how to study, how to relate to teachers or other adults, or how to check on financial help for advanced training. They want to learn these procedures, if someone will take time to help them.

One of the most significantly overlooked positives of the disadvantaged is that they're physical learners. They think through a problem better if they can work with it physically. They do well manipulating or using objects in the learning process. They're apt to want to clap their hands and sing along with the music. Learning by doing is an important learning method.

However, physical learners are often slow learners. Our culture rewards speed and as a result we underestimate the ability of the disadvantaged child. Slowness of learning doesn't mean a child can't learn—he may just have a different style of learning. When a child is treated as a poor learner, he becomes a poor

learner even though he may have the ability to learn faster.

The 4-H and Youth Program is built on the concept of teaching through the demonstration and project methods. Both methods give the youth an opportunity to work with his hands in learning skills. This pattern should be continued in the inner city. Craft and other recreational activities are appropriate learning experiences for inner-city youth. But remember, equipment and work space or facilities and the opportunities to practice skills are limited at home. Simple equipment such as measuring cups, saws, paint brushes aren't always available.

4. Personal development experiences should receive high priority.

Riessman describes the inner-city home as:

... a crowded, busy, active, noisy place where no one child is focused upon. There are too many children for this, and the parents have too little time. Consequently, the children spend more time in each other's company and with the relatives. Individualism and self-concern on the part of the children is much less likely to emerge and is, in fact, discouraged in this more family centered home.⁵

The inner-city child desperately needs an opportunity to develop a basic understanding of himself. He needs to learn to accept other people and accept the right of others to be the kind of persons they

are. He needs to learn that he's never just his successes and his failures, but that he has a unique individuality, not to be repeated in another to be the kind of persons they is of utmost importance.

Here lies a complicated, perplexing, and highly relevant problem for the professional youth educator. Inner-city youth are basically not introspective and not concerned about the self. Dealing with abstract concepts isn't looked on with excitement and enthusiasm. This doesn't mean the inner-city youth is incapable of thoughts and feelings. He simply responds more readily to the outside or external forces and concrete situations.

Because personal development learning experiences are abstract and introspective, the inner-city youth doesn't readily participate. He feels the experiences aren't relevant. The professional youth educator must use his skill and imagination to develop ways of effectively teaching personal development.

Two ways to help young people understand the concepts of personal development are role playing and the games approach. Through actual problems and situations, they make the concepts and ideas seem real.

If presented in a realistic way, recreation, city or community exploration, personal grooming, career awareness, and sex education are experiences significant to inner-city youth.

At first an inner-city staff member may look at the litter, dirt,

rundown condition of the homes and businesses, and the general condition of the neighborhood and want to start a community beautification project. Although community beautification is needed, the individuals within the group must interact with one another and develop a positive concept of self before they're ready to undertake service projects.

5. *Learning experiences should be organized into easy and quickly completed segments.*

Inner-city youth have little experience in receiving approval for tasks well done. They live in a community where adults have had little success. Immediate gratification is a way of life for them.

Although inner-city youth are unwilling to wait for the completion of long-term projects, their interest spans can be increased. It's important to recognize the progress, effort, and accomplishment made by the youth and at the time the learning takes place.

An appropriate teaching strategy involves:

- a. Selection of learning material geared to the learner's stage of readiness.
- b. Emphasis of mastery of tasks presently taught before moving on to the next task to be learned.
- c. Careful structuring of materials to facilitate efficient sequential learning.

Attention devoted to these factors will help build or restore the youth's

morale and confidence in his ability to learn.

6. *Inner-city youth need opportunities to relate to adults.*

Special emphasis should be given to providing young men (especially black youth) with opportunities to relate to men. Helping inner-city boys and men overcome the feeling that they're dominated by women is a complex problem. The inner-city man is faced with the fact that women can get a job when he can't. Another example of female domination of men is when he is unemployed, the welfare worker is usually a woman. As a result, he develops the feeling that he has limited personal worth as a man. These feelings and attitudes are passed on to his children.

With a high percentage of working women, large families, and limited living facilities, it's difficult for parents to devote much time to their children. Inner-city youth have little opportunity for individual experiences with an adult.

The 4-H and Youth Program can provide an opportunity for another adult to enter the picture. A small club group is an excellent setting for the youth to relate to an adult. In small groups, individual attention is possible.

Summary

To work in the inner city, Extension must be bold, dynamic, and willing to explore new methods and ideas for effective programing. The

present 4-H and Youth Program *can't* be transferred directly to the inner city. It does, however, have a sound philosophical basis for developing programs for inner-city youth. With increased understanding of the inner city and its people, Extension can use its practical experience, technical knowledge, and professional staff resources to develop dynamic, effective programs.

Perhaps no other agency is better able to provide the resources and framework for developing programs to meet the needs of inner-city youth. An additional strength is that Extension has demonstrated its willingness to work with and through other agencies and groups. With a historical record of working with the rural disadvantaged, the ability to help people to help themselves has been demonstrated. If Extension is willing to serve as the ini-

tiator, compromiser, facilitator, or catalyst, young people in the inner city can be helped to become creative and productive citizens.

Footnotes

1. Catherine S. Chilman, "Social Work Practice with Very Poor Families," *Welfare in Review*, IV (January, 1966), 13-21.
2. Joe L. Frost and Glenn R. Hawkes, *The Disadvantaged Child* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), p. 143.
3. Frank Riessman, *The Culturally Deprived Child* (New York, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), pp. 123-29.
4. Marshall B. Clinard, *Slums and Community Development* (New York, New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 43.
5. Riessman, *Culturally Deprived Child*, p. 37.