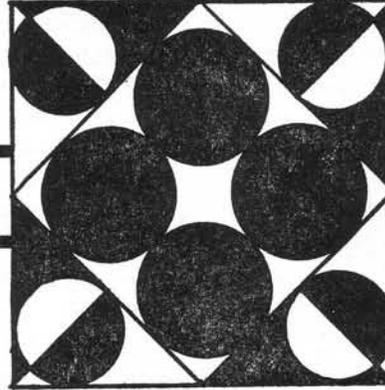


Idea Corner



Grass, Gravel, and Grins

"Chick-a-boom, chick-a-boom, don't you just love it," sings out the psychedelic painted van truck as it rolls to a stop in a gravel and grass vacant lot. Children bike riding, walking, running, brought by mom in the car, even riding lawn mowers are drawn by the sound of the modern pied piper, the Whitley County Fun Time truck. As the truck bumps to a stop, Cheryl, a university work-study assistant, throws balls, misshapen hoola-hoops, and Frisbees out to the waiting children. Another Fun Time session is beginning.

The idea of taking playgrounds to the children isn't new. But Whitley County, Indiana, an interesting mixture of rural farm, rural non-farm, lake resort, and small towns with a population of 23,000, has no county park or recreation activity. Fun Time was created by the Cooperative Extension Service to provide the needed recreational activities in rural areas. The unique feature of Whitley County Fun Time is the nu-

trition education program and free snacks, all proving the motto painted on the truck, "4-H—We Care."

Using play areas owned by schools, city parks, a volunteer fire department, social clubs, and private individuals, the Fun Time truck brings in trained recreational leaders and equipment for two hours of loosely structured recreation led by 4-H junior leaders and the college work-study assistants. Some of the children play softball, or touch (hard) football; others happily play with Frizbees or quietly work a puzzle. Some even like writing graffiti on the chalkboard painted on the side of the truck.

At the end of the play period, Fun Timers receive a short nutrition lesson taught by USDA program assistants. Then a snack of milk and cookies, or even hand-cranked ice cream, or peanut butter sandwiches with homemade bread follows.

Cookies, cookies, more cookies, bread, and ice cream were all prepared from commodity foods by 4-H junior leaders with adult super-

vision. When the ice cream was being hand cranked, the children were amazed that ice cream could come out of anything but a paraffin-coated paper box. The fresh milk was paid for through the USDA Special Food Service for Children summer program.

During the summer, the USDA Special Food Server Fund ran out of money. Local organizations and individuals donated funds for Fun Time. Now Fun Time has a pledge of \$1,000 from 33 women's clubs in the county to be used to maintain and expand the program next year.

Whitley County Fun Time under the supervision of Art Hadley, area Extension agent, has reached 680 children in its 7 weeks of operation. "One thing we learned," Hadley says, "is that 85 percent of the children in our area have milk deficient diets. During the school year the school lunch program helps, but in the summer no one seemed to care. We served 2,400 glasses of milk."

After the children have had their milk and cookies, they help the leaders put the waste paper into trash containers, gather up the games, balls, and even an old parachute, close up the truck, and Fun Time is over until another day.

As the Fun Time truck pulls out of the grass and gravel playground, there's something new added—grins.

ART HADLEY
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Teens Need More Community Involvement

Why aren't more teen-agers participating in community activities?

Adult 4-H leaders think the type of community, the teens' interests, adult resistance, and individual self-confidence are the major factors that determine teen involvement or noninvolvement in the community.

Adult leaders interviewed and observed 4-Hers at the recent Minnesota State 4-H Junior Leadership Conference to learn if teens are involved in community affairs and decision making. The general finding is that most of the teens they interviewed aren't participating in community affairs.

"This is a particularly important conclusion because these 4-Hers have shown their interest in group cooperation by joining 4-H and have also shown their leadership ability by becoming junior leaders," says Ron Pitzer, Extension specialist in family life at the University of Minnesota. "If these teen leaders aren't very active in the community, a cross section of all teens probably would show even less community participation."

The degree of teen involvement depends on many factors, the 4-H leaders said. The community itself often determines whether a teen can become involved. A small rural community can't afford a well-stocked and staffed teen center that carries on many community projects. These small communities also

have a shortage of jobs for youth, so they're forced to find work in other towns.

Some teens have a self-centered attitude toward life that excludes their interest in community involvement. They're concerned with school, dating, jobs, and recreation. "They often fail to see the problems that other age groups have, yet expect the 'older generation' to always understand the teen's problems," Pitzer says.

Yet some teens who are genuinely interested in improving community relations are blocked by adult resistance, according to the adult 4-H leaders. Some adults think teens are irresponsible and refuse to give them a voice on the community policy-making committees. Some parents also block teens by discouraging community participation or just ignoring any work the teen-ager does in the town.

The adult leaders also found that self-confidence is an important influence on the teen's participation. A more outgoing person readily accepts a leadership position. While working with others, he develops more self-confidence that helps him cope with decision-making situations the rest of his life. On the other hand, the shy teen finds it hard to talk with his peers and especially adults, thus avoiding any leadership position.

This is why adults must make a special effort to reach the shy individuals in an attempt to develop their potential, according to the 4-H leaders. Adult interest and leader-

ship responsibilities give the teen more confidence, self-worth, and a feeling of competence in a responsible position.

"Despite the apparent lack of community involvement by teens, there's a higher proportion of concerned young people today than ever before," says Pitzer. "Adults and teens must work together to solve communication problems and improve the community."

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION
AND AGRICULTURAL JOURNALISM
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*University of Minnesota
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Staff Development in Practice

The total Cooperative Extension agent staff of Dutchess County, New York, review an article from the *Journal of Extension* at the regular monthly staff meetings. The agents take turns selecting an article and giving the total staff ample time to read and prepare before the meeting.

The agent in charge uses visuals, charts, drawings, or any other method to explain the article—as he or she sees it. The balance of the hour devoted to this program is used by the total agent staff to critique the article and apply it to Dutchess County.

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