

Letter from the Director

Casey Boerner's beautiful butterfly on the cover symbolizes our aspiration at the Center for 4-H Youth Development, after a period of change and growth, to spread our wings and take off! This issue of *The Center* reflects both our current work priorities and our commitment to serve as a critical resource, catalyst, and advocate for positive youth development. The new publication format incorporates a mix of research and practice perspectives, addressing our belief that it takes both sound research and wise practice to create first-class learning and development experiences for young people.

In the United States, formal education is a given for most families and youth. Some of the biggest opportunities—and greatest challenges—young people and families face today are in their choices for out-of-school time use. It is during these hours outside school—42% of an average youth's week—that choices can have major positive or negative consequences. If youth, families, organizations, and communities choose well, our young people experience exciting ways to have fun, build caring relationships, learn by doing, and become engaged in their own development and in their local communities. If people ignore the potential of out-of-school time in our rapidly changing

world, our young people have limited positive options and may make unhealthy choices.

The University of Minnesota Extension Service recognizes that out-of-school time is a critical issue facing the youth, families, and communities of Minnesota. The Center for 4-H

Youth Development believes that the increasing amount of research and educational materials for people working with youth can make a difference if they are used well. For this reason, the University of Minnesota Extension Service has dedicated the youth development efforts and resources of nearly 60 staff across the state to *make a measurable difference in the Quality, Quantity, Accessibility and Impact of positive out-of-school time opportunities for young people. The goal is to ensure that all*

Minnesota youth are fully, positively engaged in their own learning and development.

The University will work on this goal in two ways. First, we will continue to create a wide range of 4-H youth development opportunities around the state—opportunities to learn, lead, and serve. Over a quarter of a million youth in Minnesota already experience 4-H and its opportunities to shape a lifetime. The hands-on learning in 4-H excites youth and offers them more than 400 different types of projects and events in which they can participate, have fun, and experience caring relationships with adults and other youth.



Dale Blyth, Director, Center for 4-H Youth Development



Second, and just as important, we will work with communities, organizations, youth, families, youth professionals, and volunteers so that we all become more intentional and creative in the way we think about, design, offer, evaluate, and use out-of-school time. We want to partner with the many organizations and professionals statewide who care about these issues. Research shows that opportunities are not equally available to all youth. It is essential to help youth and families learn to identify and access quality opportunities while assisting organizations to make existing and new opportunities more accessible to the diversity of youth in Minnesota today. We will provide tools to help communities understand and build the types of opportunities youth want and need. This publication is one such tool. It summarizes much of what is known about why out-of-school time matters, and it highlights some of the critical issues in the field.

Now is the time to act. Now is the time to make the most of out-of-school time so that all young people experience both the excitement of learning and the healthy development they deserve. The University for Minnesota Extension Service stands ready and able to help. I hope this special issue of *The Center* encourages you to join us in our ongoing efforts and offers you practical tools for today.

Best Wishes,

Dale Blyth, Ph.D.

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Extension Service, and Director, Center for
4-H Youth Development*