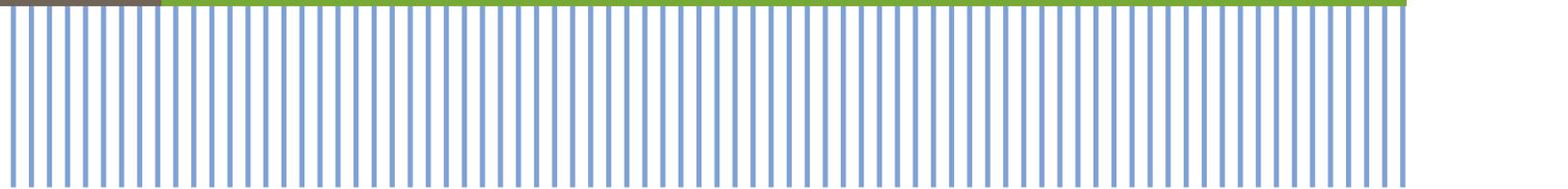


- The Minnesota CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AT RISK Project

Impact 2009 Report



Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Program



Through an annual Congressional appropriation for the National Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program, the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service allocates funding to community-based programs for at-risk children and their families via the land-grant university extension services. Since 1991, CYFAR has supported programs in more than 600 communities in all US states and territories. The CYFAR program is based on research on effective programs for at-risk youth and families and on the human ecological principle of working across the lifespan in the context of the family and community. To assure that critical needs of children and families are met, CYFAR supports comprehensive, intensive, community-based programs developed with active citizen participation in all phases. CYFAR promotes building resiliency and protective factors in youth, families, and communities. The CYFAR program highlighted in this report is funded by a grant cycle entitled Sustainable Communities Project, which aims to build long-term programs and partnerships with a five-year grant.

Minnesota 4-H Youth Development



The Minnesota CYFAR program is led by Minnesota 4-H Youth Development, which is a part of the University of Minnesota Extension and its Center for Youth Development, in collaboration with other University and community partners. The mission of Minnesota 4-H Youth Development is to engage youth, in partnership with adults, in high-quality learning opportunities that enable them to shape and reach their full potential as active citizens in a global community.



From the Director

For more than 18 years, the National Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program has extended Extension youth development programs into all US states and territories.

The CYFAR grant cycle, entitled “Sustainable Communities Project,” operates from 2008 to 2013 and funds our Minnesota CYFAR project, which is focused on strengthening the ability of middle school age youth (grades 6-8 and ages approximately 11-14) to set and achieve short — and long-term educational goals by using an innovative after-school program model that is highly experiential. Our aim is to help youth own their learning by igniting their interest in education. The project also works with parents and guardians to support them in their role as their child’s first educator. Over the five-year grant cycle, we aim to reach youth and their parents with intensive programming that offers duration and a breadth of learning experiences.

Our project started organically, with a statewide needs and assets assessment that asked youth, parents, guardians, youth-serving organizations, and youth development professionals what they would like to see in a youth program. It was from those results that we developed the program model. We also conducted a literature review to ensure that we used research-based best practices to design our program. We know from research that middle school youth, especially those who are uninvolved in youth programs, have strong desire to pursue interest-based activities in small-group, flexible, and informal educational settings. This pliable youth group structure became our program design where youth learn about science, engineering, technology, culture, arts, and leadership while parents are involved in empowerment sessions so they can be engaged with their children around learning and education. We are grateful for the participation of our program partners (listed on page 14) and look forward to adding more partners as the program expands.

This impact report describes our program model and the educational resources we used to develop it. It also highlights some of our promising early results, along with the resources we have developed during the project’s first year. You will also find descriptions of the communities, youth, and parents this project serves.

Sincerely,

Jennifer A. Skuza, PhD

State CYFAR Project Director

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The Organic Middle School Youth Program Model



Our program model is designed to meet middle school youth where they are, in terms of age, culture, gender, education level, language base, and socio-economic status, and enable them to achieve educational success. The model is organic – it develops from the community up rather than from the program down. This design provides a structure conducive to middle school youth development and learning and the fluidity needed to engage youth as individuals in an inclusive group setting over time. The model will help youth own their learning by igniting their interest in education while facilitating a process to craft long-term educational plans. It also involves parents and guardians through home visits,

orientations, and empowerment sessions using Parenting For School Success resources. These strength-based, culturally relevant educational resources help parents and guardians actively support their children's education by recognizing and reinforcing that parents are a child's first educator.

The model is implemented in three community sites: Willmar, Winona County, and St. Paul. Each site will implement three separate youth programs (each lasting three years) and one parent program over a five-year timeframe. Approximately 15 middle school youth and 15 parents/guardians will participate in each program, totaling 135 youth and 135 adult participants.

Throughout the three-year duration of each youth group, the program will progress through three increasingly challenging phases.

- Phase I “Getting into Learning,” establishes the learning environment and ignites energy around education.
- In Phase II, “Specialized Learning,” science, engineering, technology, culture, arts, and leadership content become more intensive, focused, and driven by youth interests.
- In Phase III, “Deepened Learning,” youth will continue their specialized track or challenge themselves with another subject.

Youth meet weekly throughout the year and also participate in field trips, campus visits, and leadership retreats. Parents meet quarterly throughout the year in parent empowerment sessions that are driven by parent interest areas and are intended to support their educational role.

The program model design reflects middle school youth and parent perspectives and interests. Each community site has access to a computer lab as technology is woven in

throughout the model as a tool to enhance youth learning. The use of technology and curricula offer manageable challenges to keep this age group engaged in their learning. As the youth progress through the learning phases, so will the parents in their program component. Ultimately, the desired outcome is for middle school youth to learn how to set and achieve educational and life goals so they are in the position of owning their learning.



Setting and Reaching Educational Goals

Our project is guided by three long-term goals for participating youth and their parents:

- 1 • Youth will set long-term personal education goals in the context of higher education and careers,
- 2 • Youth will exhibit mastery in a topic area of their choice, and
- 3 • Parents will be engaged with their children on setting and meeting educational goals.

Promising Early Results



Forty youth participants completed an online survey before the start of the program to gather baseline data on their experiences and feelings toward education and learning. Then, the youth completed mid-year and year-end online surveys to find out whether and how the program had affected their lives. Parents completed a needs assessment to help us design the parent empowerment sessions with their input. The project is only in its first year; however, the early results are promising.

We learned that in regard to the overall youth

- Are satisfied with the program activities, feel safe in the program, and possess a sense of program ownership. They believe that program leaders are interested in all participants' learning.
- Understand the importance of education for success in later life and feel that in the program, they can have fun and improve their grades at the same time.

- Plan to participate in the program next year (67%) while some indicated they probably will (17%).

Youth also showed progress toward reaching mastery in a topic area that interests them. For instance, some youth became engaged in science, engineering, and technology.

- Community sites incorporated the use of technology into 62% of the program sessions.
- Willmar and Winona project sites combined hands-on, science-themed lessons, with learning, leadership, and career-oriented exploration and participated in geocaching (high-tech treasure hunting game) activities.
- Some participants participated in high-interest field trips including visits to the University of Minnesota departments and centers, and the University of Wisconsin planetarium.

Some youth delved into learning about culture and art. For instance, St. Paul youth explored leadership and learning in an American Indian cultural context by exploring

- Cultural identity through artistic mask-making
- History and contemporary issues with creative murals

Community sites incorporated many of the best practices of positive youth development identified by research, such as, self-directed learning, cooperative learning, and experiential education with real world applications, and played active roles in the decision-making within the individual programs.

Parents made progress in supporting their children in educational goal-setting.

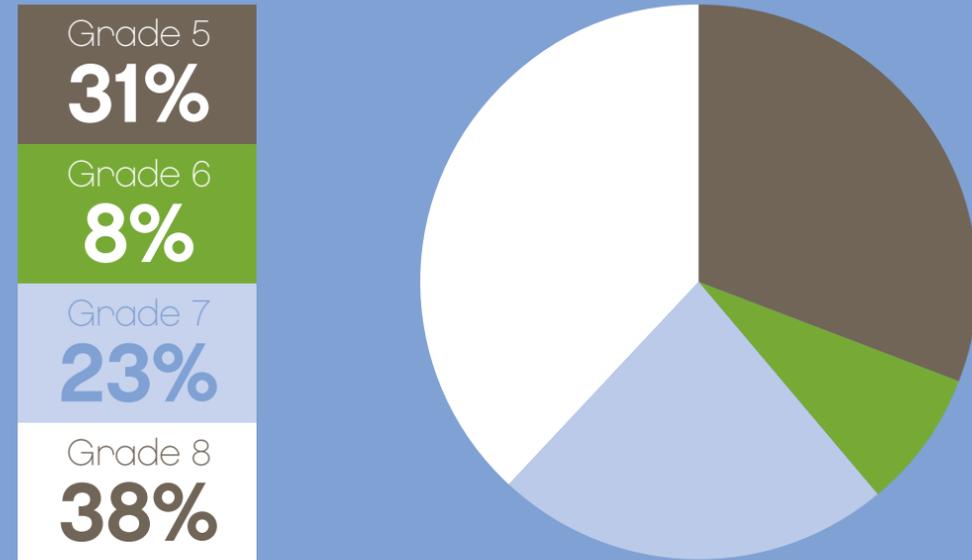
Topics that Interest Parents the Most

- Teaching responsibility to their children
- Reinforcing their children's ability to be respectful
- Learning how to set limits to best support their children's growth and development
- Establishing night-time sleep routines at home
- Creating manageable household schedules
- Helping their children strengthen study skills
- Learning how to motivate their children to do well in school

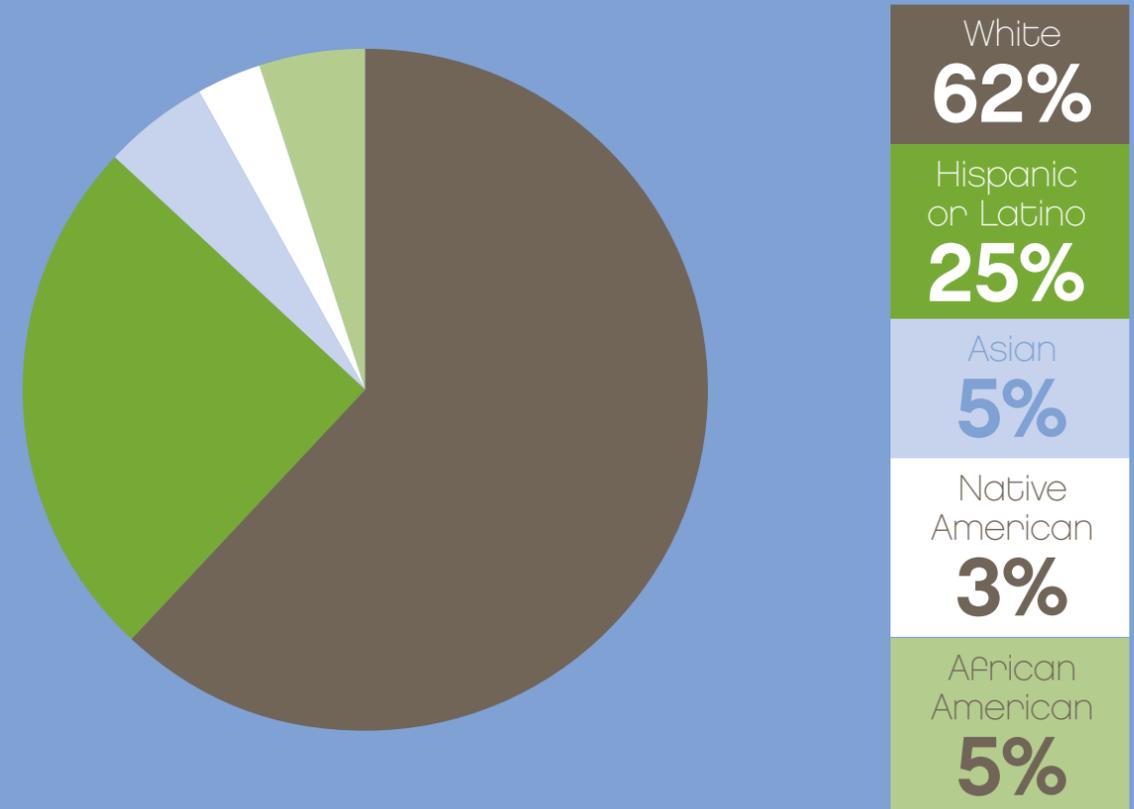


Our organic model allows for a variety of content, depending on youth interests. For a fuller description of each site's activities, see pages 10-12.

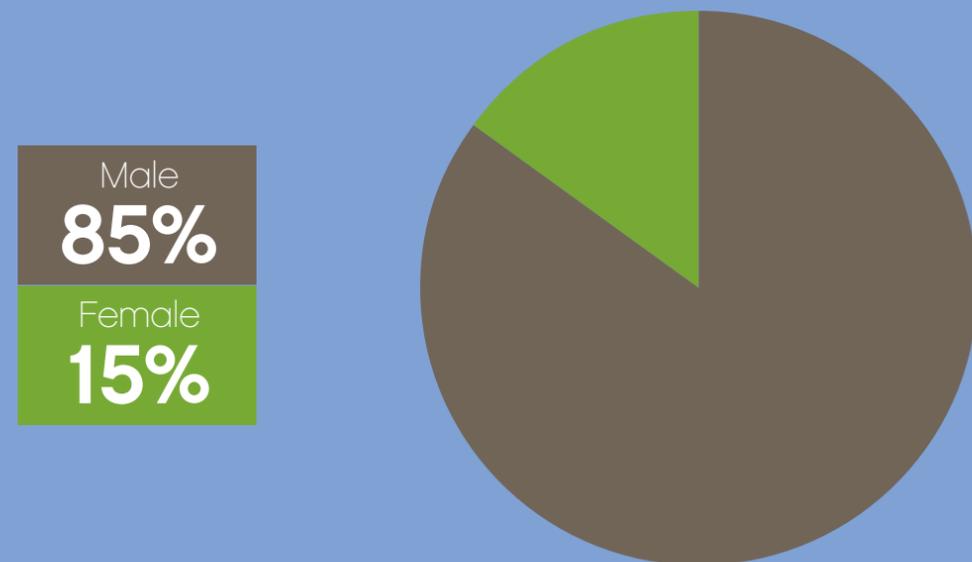
Grade of Youth Participants



Race/Ethnicity of Youth



Gender of Youth



Our Three Sites



Willmar



Settled in the mid-1800s by Scandinavian Farmers, the west central Minnesota prairie town of Willmar was built on agriculture and food processing.

In the past two decades its population has become more diverse and today numbers are about 18,000, including a significant number of immigrant and refugee families who come from places such as Somalia, Mexico and Honduras. Currently, 573 students in Willmar Public Schools receive English Language Learner services. The district has a very high mobility rate of 35 percent.

In the first year, the 22 seventh-graders have delved into their expressed science interests – building model bridges, bottle rockets and roller coasters to learn physics concepts; creating videos in the computer

lab to learn communications skills and navigating the outdoors using GPS (Global Positioning System). In addition, leadership skills are always folded in to science, engineering, and technology activities, and presentation skills are reinforced with presentations to parents. The project site is Roosevelt Junior High School.

Willmar Community Education and Recreation, the project's main collaborative partner, provides technical assistance and facilities. Two interns from nearby Ridgewater College work directly with the youth and parents in the program. The middle school youth are primarily Latino and European American and include 14 boys and eight girls.

Parents completed a needs assessment and selected parenting topics they would like to explore throughout the project.

Winona



Winona County, on the Mississippi River in southeastern Minnesota includes the city of Winona and surrounding towns and has a growing population totaling about 50,000. A significant number are immigrants and refugee families including Latino, African American and Southeast Asian.

The program takes place at the Winona Area Learning Center (WALC), the main community partner. WALC is known as a second chance at learning for students who for many reasons were unable to achieve

in the traditional grade 6-12 setting. An intern from Winona State University supports the delivery of the program. The youth group is primarily European American and includes 8 middle school boys and 3 girls.

The parents completed a needs assessment to identify topics for their parent empowerment sessions. In the parent sessions, they learned how to improve parent-child communication and how to bolster the household structures with rules and monitoring that work for the whole family.



Winona youth identified the following topics for their program and presented their work to parents at the end of the year:

- Geocaching, GPS and building rollercoaster models
- Science experiments such as making goo from disposable diapers
- Social networking — creating a group on Ning to extend their “real world” relationships
- Leadership

St. Paul



The St. Paul CYFAR project is located at the American Indian Magnet School (AIMS), and World Cultures Magnet School (WCMS), which are housed in one building on St. Paul's east side.

Enrollment of each school is predominantly non-white, with the majority of AIMS students of Native American background and the majority of WCMS students of Asian or African American background. About 90% of students at both schools qualify for free or reduced lunch. AIMS has 35% and WCMS 55% of their respective populations receiving English Language Learning services. Each of them has a unique mission related to cultural understanding. AIMS gives students the opportunity for in-depth study of the rich culture and history of American Indian nations. The mission of WCMS is to prepare children to be confident and productive global citizens.

In the past 10 years, east side neighborhood groups have formed to work with police to combat gang activity and other crime in St. Paul, and organizations have formed collaborations to enhance out-of-school time opportunities for east side youth. One of these collaborations is the East Side Learning Collaborative (ESLC). The ESLC is an integral partner in our efforts to build sustainable programs on the east side. St. Paul's main partner, Evergreen Community Partners, is a part of the ESLC. Evergreen works with underserved youth toward educational opportunity. Two interns from the University of Minnesota

support the delivery of the program. The program had a small but committed youth audience in year one – seven youth from diverse cultural backgrounds (three boys and four girls).

Parents participated in weekly parent empowerment sessions. Parents at this site had a particular interest in literacy, so each week they were given a children's book (on culture) to add to their home libraries. Both the youth and the parents read the book and were encouraged to discuss it at home.



WeConnect: Bringing Cultures Together and Urban Youth Lead: Becoming the Authors of Their Lives curricula supported the program content. Youth selected the following topics to serve as program themes

- Mask-making to discuss cultural and self identity
- Career exploration with a field trip to the University of Minnesota campus to learn about college life and admissions
- Mural creations

Educational Resources Used to Develop this Project



Tools, Studies, and Methods

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1991). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Freire, P. (1988). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 28 (2), 235-260.
- Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Marczak, M., Dworkin, J., Skuza, J. & Beyer, J. (Winter 2006). *What's Up? What young teens and their parents want from youth programs. Rethinking Program for Youth in their Middle Years. New Directions for Youth Development*, 112.
- Rosner, B. (1995). *Fundamentals of Biostatistics*. (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Duxbury Press.
- SAS Institute Inc, (c) 2002-2003. SAS 9.1, Cary, NC.

Curriculum and Educational Materials

- 4-H National Science Day curriculum https://www.4-h.org/NYSD/Acres_of_Adventures_Aerospace_4-H_Curriculum_and_Geospatial_4-H_Curriculum From the National 4-H Directory of Materials. (2005). http://www.n4hccs.org/documents/4H_CurriculumCatalog.pdf.
- Higgins, S., Kesselheim, A., & Robinson, G., (1995). *Project WET*. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.
- Skuza, J., Cogshell, N., & Russo, J. (2007). *Urban youth learn: Developing effective out-of-school time programs*. St. Paul, Minnesota: University of Minnesota.
- Skuza, J., Russo, J. Gates, E., & Kawase, M. (2007). *Urban youth lead: Becoming the authors of their lives*. St. Paul, Minnesota: University of Minnesota.
- Skuza, J.A., Russo, J.P. & Hurtado, G.A. (in press). *WECONNECT: Bringing Cultures Together*. St. Paul: University of Minnesota.
- University of Minnesota Extension. (2008). *Parenting for School Success* (educational materials). St. Paul: University of Minnesota.
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. (2006). *Project WILD*. Council of Environmental Education.

Resources Developed As a Result of this Project

Evaluation Instruments

- Online Youth Surveys (pre-program, mid-year, year-end surveys)
- Parent/Guardian Needs Assessment Survey in English and Spanish
- Parent/Guardian Survey

Partnerships

To implement this project, the University of Minnesota Extension 4-H Youth Development has formed partnerships with the following organizations:

- University of Minnesota Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement
- University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development
- Project FINE (Focusing on Integrating Newcomers through Education)
- Winona Area Learning Center — Winona Public School District
- American Indian/Mounds Park School - St. Paul Public School District
- Willmar Community Education and Recreation — Willmar Public School District

The Minnesota CYFAR Team



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