

- The Minnesota CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AT RISK Project

Impact 2011 Report

Children, Youth, and Families At Risk Program



Through an annual congressional appropriation for the National Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) program, NIFA allocates funding to community-based projects for children and their families who are at risk for not meeting basic needs via the land-grant university extension services. The CYFAR project 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 project is led by Minnesota 4-H Youth Development, which is a part of the University of Minnesota Extension 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.

The Participants

The Minnesota CYFAR project reached 131 middle school aged youth and 42 parents and guardians with an educational program model. The participants come from a variety of racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Focusing on the youth, 40% were white, 22% were black or African-American, 17% were American Indian, 15% were Latino or Hispanic, and 6% were Asian.

Our Methods

We carried out a variety of evaluation methods this past year for two core reasons—to help youth participants reflect on their experiences and learning and to help us understand the impact of the project. Young people completed an **online pre-survey** at the beginning of the year and then a **post survey** at the end of the year. Midway through the year, youth participated in **facilitated group discussions** with their cohorts to express the impact the program was having on them. Finally, youth cohorts who were in their third year of the program delivered **public capstone presentations** that demonstrated the culmination of their learning and mastery, their education and career aspirations, and how they have worked in partnership with caring adults to craft their education plans. Parents and guardians participated in a **needs assessment** to help shape the content of their empowerment sessions held throughout the year.

The pages that follow present our evaluation results and demonstrate the impact that the Minnesota CYFAR Sustainable Communities Project has had on youth participants during its third year.





From the Director

The Minnesota CYFAR Sustainable Communities Project builds youth programs that are integrated into local communities, infused with technology to leverage learning, and sustained through community partnerships and family involvement.

By igniting youth interest in learning, our hope is that the young people involved in this project will own their education and begin to think of it as a possession they can take wherever they go. We define education to include the learning that happens in and beyond school.

In this project, the education happens in an afterschool program setting. This past year, we worked with cohorts of youth to spark their passion for learning by exploring challenging subject matter and weaving in technology to enhance the experience. The parents and guardians participated in sessions that empowered them in their role as their child's first educator. College students and school personnel worked directly with youth and created family access to education and community resources. Throughout the year, youth completed questionnaires and participated in discussion groups to help them reflect on their learning and education goals. At the end of the program year, youth delivered public capstone presentations that demonstrated their learning, mastery, education and career aspirations, and how they have worked in partnership with caring adults to craft their education plans. Data collected from those activities helped shape the evaluation of this project and fueled the content provided in this report.

This five-year project takes place in three Minnesota locations — Willmar, Winona, and St. Paul. This report presents evaluation results from 2011, reaching 131 youth and 42 parents and guardians during this third year of the project. You will see how youth described their experiences, the impact the project has made on how they think about their learning and future education, and the difference that family and community collaboration has made on their learning experiences.

Sincerely,

Jennifer A. Skuza, Ph.D.

State CYFAR Project Director

Making a Difference through Education

In an afterschool educational program setting, we work with cohorts of youth to ignite their curiosity about topics they identify, weaving technology throughout the project. We use the word *organic* to describe the project, because it grows from the community up rather than from a curriculum down, with youth and adults working together to co-create a learning

environment. The project is also embedded in communities through partnerships with institutions, organizations, school personnel, and college students from local campuses. To reinforce youth learning, parents and guardians participate in empowerment sessions that support them in their role as their child's first educator.

The project takes place across three community locations over a five-year cycle totaling eight youth afterschool cohorts and three parent groups. Each cohort is in place for three years, with each of these years presenting a new learning phase that offers increasingly challenging educational experiences.



Phase I

"Getting into Learning" establishes the learning environment and ignites energy around education.



Phase II

"Specialized Learning" content becomes more intensive, focused, and driven by youth interests.



Phase III

"Deepened Learning" occurs with a specialized track or the challenge of another subject matter.

Long-Term Goals

Three long-term goals steer our efforts in building focused learning environments and making a difference in the lives of youth and their families. These goals were informed by data gathered from youth and adults living in targeted community settings.

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.

3

Parents will be engaged with their children on setting and meeting education goals.

GOAL 1:

Youth Crafted Long-Term Education Plans with Careers in Mind

In their afterschool programs, youth expressed career aspirations and made education plans to achieve their goals.

Participating in the program prompted youth to think about professions they wanted to pursue.

- I'd like to be an engineer.
- I want to practice nursing.
- I am interested in studying marine biology.
- I want to join the military.
- I will be a game designer.
- I like Film production and animation.
- I'd like to be a head chef.

86% of the youth who responded to our survey indicated that they worked on a plan to achieve their education goals.

77% of the youth said that they learned things in the program that will help them later in life.

Youth described their plans in capstone presentations.

"I wish to major in the medical field and take eight years of college in training to become a veterinarian. All I need to do is push toward my goals and stick with it and pursue my dreams."

"I will go to college for four years and work and study as hard as I can to try to become a teacher at Jefferson elementary third grade, and graduate from Winona State University and to live on North Baker Street."

"I want to stay on the "red road." It's like studying the language and staying traditional [with American Indian cultural traditions]. And I want to go to the University of Minnesota and study that... I like to think about what my future is going to be. Like to push forward and think about what I can do when I grow up."

GOAL 2:

Youth Became Masters

The design of this project helped youth identify a topic of interest they wanted to master.

So as not to place limits on learning, we worked with youth to help them discover their interests, delve deeper towards mastery, and connect them to resources that helped them explore options for careers and higher education related to those subjects.



Youth developed skills through program activities.

"I enjoyed learning science topics the most. I feel the most proud of my progress in crafts because I had no skill before and now have some."

"I learned the most from the dinosaur dig, because I learned hand-eye coordination."

"Making airplanes [showed my talents and skills]. It helped me to be more creative."

Examples of topics and interests youth mastered

- Being a better student with great study habits
- Building and operating robots
- Learning the art of drawing wildlife
- Designing roller coasters
- Creating animated videos and digital story boards
- Planting trees in urban green spaces
- Paleontology
- Designing air crafts
- Cooking healthy meals
- Making medicine for healing and natural power
- Refining athletic skills
- Conducting science experiments

GOAL 3:

Parents Worked With Their Children on Education Plans

Adults make a difference.

Parent and guardian involvement is key to the success of the project. Through empowerment sessions, parents wrestled together with common issues and learned to strengthen their role as their child's first educator. On family nights they saw firsthand what their children were learning and worked with them to set education goals.

80% of youth responding to our survey indicated that their parents, guardians, or other caring adults worked directly with them to plan and achieve their education goals.

This significant milestone of the project demonstrates the powerful difference youth and their caring adults can make together.



Excerpts from youth capstones demonstrate the power of relationships.

"My family wants me to have a good future by staying in school and respect my other family members. They want me to have great grades and respect my teachers."

"My mom brings me to school, started saving for my college fund and puts high importance on education."

"Every adult I know has helped me. My mom helps me all the time. My grandma taught me how to sew. My teacher teaches me arithmetic, reading and writing."

"My mother helps me with homework and supports any choice I make that increases my chance to learn."

"My dad...always tells me to set goals and to improve my skills and other things. He always tells me before I get to college to figure out what I want to do in the future."

Youth Are Leading Their Lives

Project achievements surpassed our expectations.

Beyond gaining basic skills and knowledge around a specific topic, **the young people have transformed themselves into vibrant and motivated leaders.**

They emerged as leaders among peers.

"I've learned so far that it's very important to be a leader because you can encourage people and bring people together by working in groups and all working on the same work."

"I have learned to be more social with people, which makes the atmosphere better for learning and opens my world to people who can help when I need it."

"I learned that it's important to be a good leader because most leaders are great and set good examples to some of the bad followers. Also, it will help the bad followers follow the good leaders."

"Leadership will help me in the future. [I will be] able to lead other engineers. [It will] help me be a boss for a company."

They gained personal leadership skills, which allows them to take ownership of their lives in a way that leads to happy, successful futures.

"I learned I work better by myself than with partners."

"Don't cheat at life because you will wreck the surprise."

"[I learned] It takes time for stuff to grow and happen!"

"[I learned] that it's funner learning things by actually working than reading out of a book. Here you get to do everything like...free-minded, practical...still doing the same experiment we're supposed to, but doing it our way."

Participants ranged from 4th to 9th grade.

Our Programs



St. Paul

Who: Two cohorts of youth

Where: Emma's Place (an affordable housing unit) in Maplewood, MN, and American Indian Magnet School (AIMS), in St. Paul, MN

What: Emma's Place focused on family development, science, and performing arts. Parents, high school aged mentors, and 4-H staff co-led the program sessions.

Youth at AIMS, who called themselves the Big Urban Woods 4-H Club, explored nature in the context of Ojibwe & Lakota cultures and raised public awareness of the Woods, an urban green space on the East Side of St. Paul. Youth became masters in wildlife identification, environmental preservation, and journaling.

Impact: Emma's Place participants addressed major issues that arose in program activities by giving and attending youth presentations on bullying, mentoring younger youth, and combating stereotypes. Parents deepened their relationships with their children and developed life skills of their own through the effort of co-facilitation. The youth at AIMS became engaged citizens, playing an integral role in lobbying with Ramsey County and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to preserve the Woods, which happens to be located in one of the most economically stressed neighborhoods of the city. Skyler, a sixth grader in the program, relished the opportunity to connect with nature and said,

"I don't really have the opportunity to connect to nature all the time. [I've learned] how important it is to take care of Mother Earth, like not to litter and to plant."





Willmar

Who: Three cohorts of middle school aged youth self-named CHAOS (Crazy Humans Attempting Outrageous Stuff)

Where: Willmar Middle School in Willmar, MN

What: Youth experienced the scientific process through activities that required observation, prediction, experimentation and data collection.

These activities included orienteering, cooking, and building model bridges and roller coasters. They presented their learning to their families on “parent nights” and participated in science-related field trips to campuses and science conventions.

Impact: Youth learned to think like scientists by asking relevant questions and designing processes to answer those questions. Program activities inspired youth to explore science-related careers. For instance, after creating an anti-acne cream for a CHAOS project, a sixth-grade participant named Ashley discovered cosmetic chemistry as a career possibility. She said,

“Since CHAOS, I want to be more of a scientist than a lawyer. I think I would like to do something with science since there isn’t [sic] very many females in science things.”



Ashley



Winona

Who: Three cohorts of middle school aged youth

Where: Winona Area Learning Center, Winona Middle School, and Kids First/ Winona Housing Development, in Winona County, MN

What: Science activities included making mousetraps and rockets, and excavating fossils. The three cohorts often joined together for leadership retreats.

Impact: Youth gained a deeper understanding of scientific inquiry and leadership skills, among many other triumphs. Some youth developed relationships with peers that cut across ethnic and racial lines through engagement in conversations about race and stereotypes. Other youth earned a sense of pride in their ability to conquer challenging physics and engineering projects. Angel, a sixth grader at Winona Middle school, explained how program activities sparked his interest in science and helped improve his grades. He said,

“I kinda want to be a scientist. I got an A in science last trimester. I like how all the earth works. The gravity.”



Angel



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