

- The Minnesota CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AT RISK Project

# Impact 2010 Report



## Children, Youth, and Families At Risk Program

### CYFAR 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 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 5-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.

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# From the Director

The Minnesota 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 5-year Federal grant operating from 2008 to 2013.

The Minnesota CYFAR Sustainable Communities Project is focused on strengthening the ability of middle school aged youth to set and achieve short and long-term educational goals by using an innovative and organic afterschool program model that is highly experiential. Our aim is to *help youth own their learning* by igniting their interest in education and to work with parents and guardians to support them in their role as their child's first educator. Due to the inclusive nature of this project, some youth participants are somewhat younger or older than middle school age. In these cases, we have made programmatic adaptations to suit their learning needs.

This project takes place in four community sites: Willmar, Winona County, Minneapolis, and St. Paul. This report features the impact from our second year of this project whereby sixty-nine youth and seventy-one parents and guardians participated.

Sincerely,

**Jennifer A. Skuza, Ph.D.**

State CYFAR Project Director

# The Organic Middle School Youth Program Model



Our program model is organic – it develops from the community up rather than from the program down, providing an engaging and flexible structure that is suited for middle school youth and their parents and guardians in group settings. In cases where youth participants are younger or older than middle school age, we made programmatic adaptations to suit their learning needs. A priority is to be as inclusive as possible without losing focus of our intended outcomes. The model aims to help youth own their learning by igniting their interest in education while helping them to craft long-term educational plans. It involves parents and

guardians through home visits, orientations, and empowerment sessions using Partnering For School Success educational resources.

This model is implemented in four Minnesota community sites: Willmar, Winona County, Minneapolis, and St. Paul. Throughout the 5-year grant cycle, each site will carry out three separate youth groups and at least one parent group. The hope is that after three years each youth group will spin off from the grant and sustain itself in the community with the help of youth leaders, parents, adult volunteers, and community partners.

Statewide, youth participated in three public events that showcased their mastery.

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.



### 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.

As the youth progress through the learning phases, so do the parents and guardians. Ultimately, the desired outcome is for youth

to learn how to set and achieve educational and life goals so they own their learning and thrive in their education.

## Long-Term Project 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
3. Parents will be engaged with their children on setting and meeting educational goals

# Impact



Sixty-nine youth participated in Year 2. Fifty-three youth completed an online survey before the start of the program year in September 2009 and almost half of the regular participants, 33 of 69, completed the post survey in May or June 2010. Each youth group also participated in Facilitated group discussions halfway through the year to help gauge the impact of the program.

Parents and guardians were engaged in group discussions about which topics they would like to cover in the parenting sessions and about their satisfaction with the program. The impacts offered here reflect our short-term goals focused on strengthening youth learning and their ability to set educational goals, developing personal leadership skills, and raising their technological competencies.

69 youth participated in the CYFAR project in Year 2.

# Through our evaluation, the following findings were revealed in Year 2:

## Learning and Setting Educational Goals

- The statewide project offered over 260 program hours during 130 educational sessions on science, engineering, technology, environment, and cultural enrichment to youth participants.
- Youth indicated that they see participation in this program as a learning opportunity. Eighty-one percent believe the skills and knowledge they learned help them improve their grades, set educational goals, and will serve them later in life.
- Ninety-seven percent indicated that they enjoyed the program and felt a sense of belonging. By the end of the year, 81% of respondents indicated that they had become friends with someone they did not know at the beginning of the year.
- Participant attachment to the program may also be related to youth perceptions that they are involved in program decision-making. Even when taking into consideration the participants who are aging out of the program, over 80% say they will, or will likely continue in 2010-2011.

### Youth are setting goals

“I suppose I never thought about what I’d want to be as a career. But now I think I want to go to college and get a doctorate and become a surgeon.”

“Because most of the time we’re building, measuring, constructing, and stuff like that, it helps me learn. I’m going to be some kind of engineer that uses measuring and graphs and stuff like that.”



## Personal Leadership

- Ninety-three percent of respondents indicated that programming is helping them become better leaders, while 81% indicated that participation is helping them learn how to speak in front of groups.
- Ninety percent indicated that they are able to set and achieve goals in regard to their futures.
- Based on the survey responses, these perceptions are at least partly attributable to the perceptions of the youth who believe that the adults in the program care about all youth participants (90%), that their ideas about the programming count (81%), and that they play an active role in the decision-making process of the program (87%). Additionally, 78% of youth reported that they received support from community members.

### Youth are cultivating personal leadership

“I think it’s nice because there are other age groups. There are high-schoolers and younger kids and when everyone’s ideas come together it’s fun. I think that when we’re teaching everyone is engaged. You learn something from everybody.”

“I hope that I’ll be able to accept failure as more of a step than an ending. Almost nothing works the first time, and that’s okay.”

“This kind of stuff changes the way you look at things.”

Technology was used in  
80 youth group sessions.



## Technology

- In this project, technology broadly includes the use of computers, digital cameras, web page development, social networking tools, sewing machines, electronic portfolios, and scientific instrumentation.
- The project aimed to infuse technology into fifty percent of the sessions. We met this goal, by using technology in 80 of the 130 sessions (62% of the time).
- Youth enjoyed the incorporation of technology into programming with about two-thirds reporting that the amount of time spent on computers was too short.

### Youth are building technological skills

“I liked roller coasters, because if you didn’t get the loop-d-loop quite right you kept rearranging it until you finally did. It might take you ten times to do it, but it just felt really good once you finally got it. And then when you got the whole track to go, it was a really good feeling.”

“You don’t do all the basic stuff like math, reading, writing, you actually get to learn how to do stuff like dancing, making a regalia, doing projects.”

## Parents and Guardians: Topics in Parent Sessions

- 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
- Creating manageable household schedules
- Helping their children strengthen study skills
- Learning how to motivate their children to do well in school
- Setting goals together
- Voicing their hopes and aspirations for their children
- Discussing the maintenance of "structure" in the home
- Youth shared their progress and accomplishments with their parents/guardians

### Youth articulate their parents' aspirations

"My mom wants me off the screens."

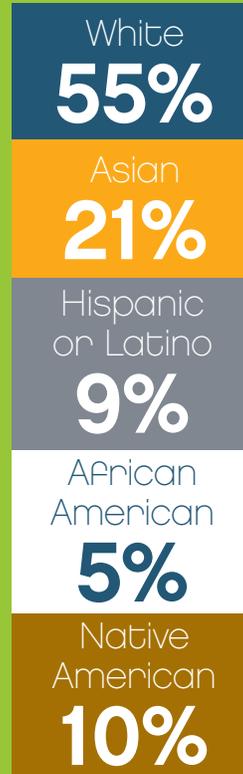
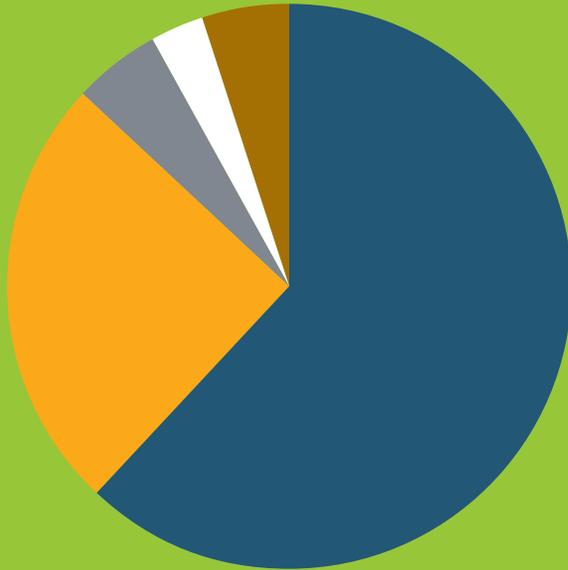
"I think my mom thinks I'm anti-social, but she doesn't want to offend me by saying it, so I get to come here".

"Parents all want us to go to college, become doctors, nurses, something that has to do with medical stuff."

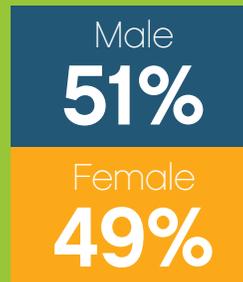
In Minneapolis and St. Paul, the youth groups had an intergenerational flair as parents and grandparents were instrumentally involved in the sessions serving as mentors, volunteers, and co-learners. Parents opted not to meet separately in parent sessions but rather preferred working alongside the youth.

In Willmar and Winona, parents met separately from the youth. The parents also thoroughly enjoyed participating in family nights where youth had an opportunity to showcase their learning.

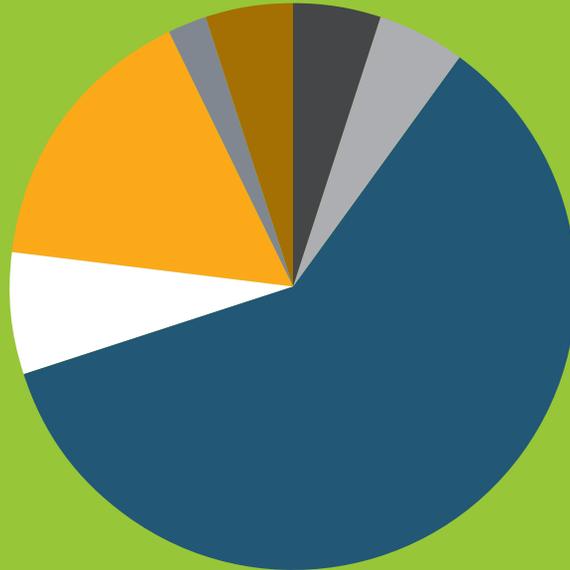
## ||||||| Race/Ethnicity of Youth



## ||||||| Gender of Youth



## Grade of Youth Participants



Grade 4

**5%**

Grade 5

**5%**

Grade 6

**60%**

Grade 7

**7%**

Grade 8

**16%**

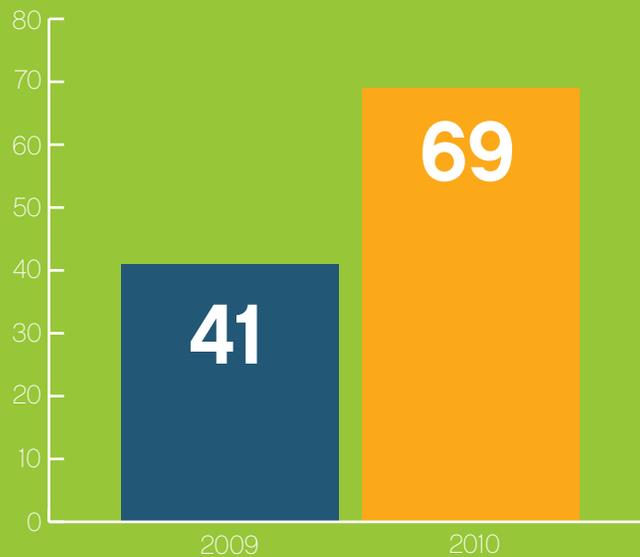
Grade 10

**2%**

Grade 12

**5%**

## Increase in Number of Youth Participants



2009

2010

# Our Community Sites



## Willmar



Willmar Middle School is the site for two afterschool youth groups and one parent group.

Both youth groups focused on science and technology and refer to themselves as clubs. The newest club, HAVOC, (Hardcore And Very Over-the-Top Club) started meeting in September 2009 and is comprised of 23 sixth grade youth from low and middle income families. The youth are Latino, Somali and European American. The youth are enthusiastic about exploring uses of technology. They worked with robotics, designed web pages, and built mousetrap cars.

CHAOS club (Crazy Humans Attempting Outrageous Stuff) started meeting in October 2008 and has completed two years of programming. The club is made up of eight 8th grade youth from low and middle income families. There are two girls and six boys in this group who all have a strong desire to be there and are committed to the subject matters. This group engineered the

construction of roller coasters, learning about measurement, speed, distance, and materials.

The parents met quarterly throughout the year learning about how they can support their children's education. One special event was held at which the youth showcased their learning by providing demonstrations. The event was enjoyed by all.

Both clubs are facilitated by extremely capable teachers at Willmar Middle School. One of the facilitators is a 6th grade science teacher and the other teaches 8th grade social studies. Our community partner is Willmar Community Education and Recreation (WCER). Through this partnership we have been able to work with another school staff member, a child guide, who has been a tremendous asset by providing recruitment of young people and communication with families. CYFAR and WCER both have goals of providing a quality educational experience for the young people involved in the clubs.

# Winona County



Winona Area Learning Center (ALC) and Winona Middle School host two afterschool youth groups and two parent groups.

The Winona Area Learning Center youth group has met for two years starting in September 2008. The group is comprised of nine 12-14 year old youth from low income households. The group is facilitated by a college intern from Winona State University who brings a special spark to the programming at this site by modeling her enthusiasm for higher education. The programming has helped the youth to think more broadly about science, themselves and their worlds. The youth also began crafting educational and career goals for themselves.

The youth group at Winona Middle School started meeting in September 2009. The group is made up of nine middle school students from Latino and Hmong cultural backgrounds that are eligible for free or reduced lunch and is facilitated by a talented college intern from Winona State University. This group focused on creating educational goals, developing personal leadership skills, and sharpening life skills necessary to help them do better in school.

Throughout the year, youth from both groups were engaged in hands-on science experiments dealing with water, participated in leadership and team challenges, and participated in a field trip to the Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium.

Parents participated in two separate groups that met quarterly throughout the year about supporting their children's education. Our school partners have indicated that these parent groups have played a significant role in connecting parents to schools – especially given that parent-school connections were basically absent prior.

In addition to our partners from the Winona Area Public Schools, Project FINE, a local organization that helps newcomers become better integrated into the community by providing foreign language interpreters and translators as well as opportunities for education and services for immigrants and refugees, serves as a community liaison to the youth and families participating in the groups.

Science experiments and water quality testing were conducted in Winona.

Willmar youth engineered the construction of roller coasters.

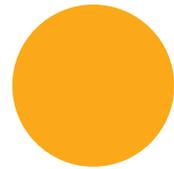
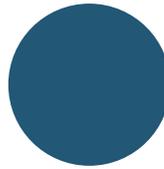
## Minneapolis & St. Paul



The American Indian Magnet School of St. Paul Public Schools hosts one youth group and a second group is hosted at Lao Cultural Center by Lao Advancement Organization of

America in north Minneapolis. Inspiring college interns from the University of Minnesota helped facilitate each group and have modeled the importance of education.

The American Indian Magnet School youth group started in September 2008 and has completed its second year of programming. The group is comprised of nine youth in grades 4-6. All of the participants qualify for free or reduced lunch and are American Indian. Youth and adults participate in this group and together they worked on a project whereby the girls learned native dances and boys learned how to drum. Both boys and girls worked with adults to sew regalia and later performed drumming and dance at an Urban 4-H Youth Development event and school pow wow. A focus has also been placed on developing leadership skills and cultural



understanding. The group has been positive and excited about what they are doing. Strong support from the school, parents, and grandparents is evident and has helped make this group sustainable.

The youth group meeting at the Lao Cultural Center started in October 2009. Six of the eleven youth participants are in grades 6-8, while the remaining five youth are in high school. Parents regularly participate in the group as volunteers. All youth are Southeast Asian primarily of Hmong and Lao descent and are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Activities throughout the past year focused on personal leadership development and exploring themselves through cultural identity exercises as well as connecting personal interests with future educational or career possibilities. Once a month, the girls in the program participated in Lao dance as a part of their cultural education. Activities have also included photography and creating digital magazines and videos. This group of young people is excited about learning and sharing their culture with others.

Minneapolis youth explored their Lao cultural identity.

St. Paul youth participated in American Indian drumming and dancing.

# The Minnesota CYFAR Team



## State Team

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