



# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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## Fact Sheet 01-63

### Life Skills Learned in 4-H: An Assessment in Las Vegas, Clark County

Molly Latham, Area Extension Specialist, Southern Area  
Loretta Singletary, Extension Educator, Central Area  
Marilyn Smith, Northeast Area Youth Development Specialist  
William Evans, State Youth Development Specialist

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#### Introduction

As 4-H approaches its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2002, land grant universities have an opportunity to reflect upon the role of 4H in community-based youth development in the 21st century. As one of the first youth development clubs in the US, expectations for 4-H are high. Since 4-H has weathered the test of time, so to speak, it is likely considered a successful youth development program. The anniversary of 4H provides Cooperative Extension an opportunity to objectively assess how successful 4-H is in reaching, teaching, and effectively developing youth.

In January 2001, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension embarked on a process to assess the success of 4H in youth development. In January the survey was piloted in Lyon County. Based on the success and valuable information gathered in Lyon County, the survey was administered in the Las Vegas area in June 2001. Assessment at the county level is necessary because 4-H programs in Nevada are managed at the county level. The Las Vegas area was surveyed separately from northeast Clark County because the programs are managed out of separate offices.

#### Designing and Conducting the Assessment

In designing a tool to assess 4-H, there are many models of youth development with which 4-H can be compared. One model that has been compared with 4-H is based upon six outcomes to expect from successful youth development. These outcomes are confidence, competence, caring, connection, contributing, and character.

Successful youth development helps children become: *confident* they can make a difference; *competent* through their ability, skills, and knowledge, and; able to work with people in a way that develops and promotes *caring* relationships. These youth *connect* beneficially with people and organizations, *contribute* their services to make a difference in their personal development as well as in their community, and demonstrate responsible and honest *character*, or a sense of who they are.

Another model for youth development programming focuses on "core concepts" established in 1990 by University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Youth Development staff. The core concepts provide a basis for successful statewide youth development programs. Such programs produce youth who:

- ✓ learn and practice *self-responsibility and social responsibility* to feel accountable and in control of their lives;
- ✓ recognize when and how to *make informed decisions and implement decisions* to solve a problem or achieve goals;

- ✓ *communicate* effectively in both verbal and written form, to share thoughts and feelings which increase social competence, and;
- ✓ obtain career and occupational information to help *prepare for the world of work*.

Questions asked for this assessment are based partly upon the six descriptors discussed above and partly upon Nevada’s “core concepts” for teaching life skills. Combining aspects of both models resulted in fifteen questions to assess how well 4-H is effectively teaching life skills to its members. Opportunity was provided for survey participants to comment about what they “like best”, “like least”, and “would like to change” about 4-H in the Las Vegas area of Clark County.

Participants in the assessment included all adult volunteer 4H leaders and the parents of all 4H members currently enrolled in the Las Vegas, North Las Vegas and Boulder City areas of Clark County. These participants were selected based on the rationale that parents of 4-Hers and 4-H leaders have the most frequent opportunity to observe any changes that occur among youth members participating in 4-H programs.

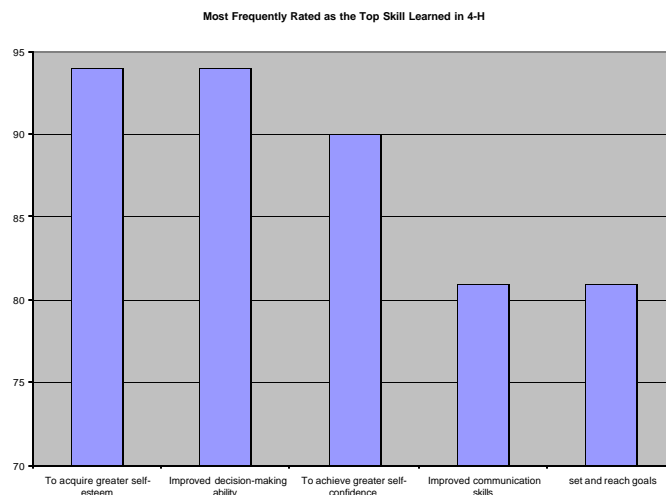
Each individual was mailed a two-page questionnaire with instructions, and a self-addressed and stamped return envelope. Also included was a cover letter that explained the purpose of the survey, ensured confidentiality to participants, and thanked them for their participation. Of the 181 surveys sent, 48 were returned resulting in a 26% response rate.

### Results of the Assessment

On a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” being “very little” and “5” being “very much,” respondents were asked to circle the number that best indicates how much their child is learning as a result of 4-H. Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate that they “didn’t know.” The results were sorted into two groups by combining highest ratings into the top group and the lowest ratings into a second group.

The top life skills are those for which the majority of respondents had indicated their child had learned “much” or “very much.” These are illustrated in Table 1. Life skills for which the majority of respondents indicated that their child had learned “little” or “very little” were combined into a second group illustrated in Table 2. The fifteen individual questions are listed below each bar graph to illustrate the percentage responses for each question.

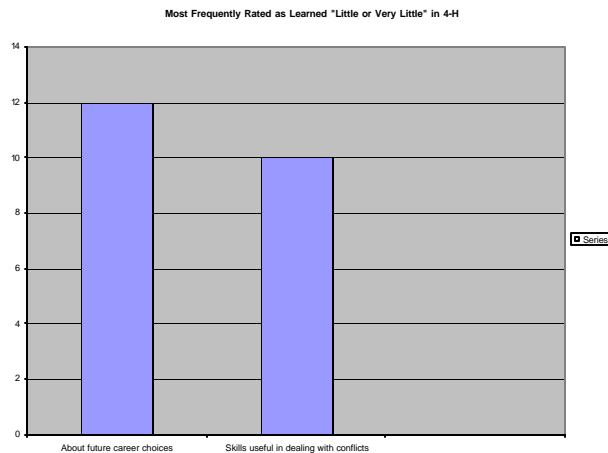
According to the assessment results the top skills learned are: *to acquire greater self-esteem and improved decision making* . Other top rated skills are: *to achieve greater self-confidence around others, improved communication skills and to set and reach goals*. Assessment results indicate that life skills targeted for improvement in Las Vegas area 4-H include teaching youth about *future career choices and skills useful in dealing with conflicts*.



## Percent indicating "much" or "very much"

## Percent Much & Very Much

To acquire greater self esteem	94
Improved decision-making ability	94
To achieve greater self-confidence around others	90
Improved communication skills	81
To set and reach goals	81
Relationship building skills	77
Knowledge about the project(s) in which s/he participates	77
Improved skills to lead peers	75
About future career choices	73
Improved public speaking skills	73
To value service to the community	71
Improved organizational skills	62
Self-responsibility	62
To trust others and be trustworthy	62
Skills useful in dealing with conflicts	50



## Percent indicating "little" or "very little"

## Percent Little & Very Little

About future career choices	12
Skills useful in dealing with conflicts	10
Improved communication skills	6
Relationship-building skills	6
Improved organizational skills	6
Improved public-speaking skills	6
Improved skills to lead peers	6
Self-responsibility	6
To trust others and be trustworthy	6
Knowledge about the project(s) in which s/he participates	4
To acquire greater self-esteem	0
Improved decision-making ability	0
To achieve greater self-confidence around others	0
To set and reach goals	0
To value service to the community	0

When asked "whose responsibility is it to see to it that your child gets the most out of 4-H", the most frequent response (42%) indicated it is the parents' responsibility followed by the child (35%). The same amount of respondents (10%) thought that leaders and extension staff had the responsibility.

In the Las Vegas area of Clark County, the majority of respondents indicated that they reside in an urban area (52%) followed by rural (29%). The majority (73%) indicated that they were white. One third reported that as a child, s/he had been a member of 4-H. Over half (60%) of the respondents had never served as a volunteer 4-H leader. Of those respondents who answered this question the average length of time served as a volunteer 4-H leader was 3 years.

### **Selected Comments**

With regards to teaching effectiveness, the following quotes indicate **what respondents liked best about 4-H**:

- *It helps my daughter achieve her goals in becoming a veterinarian*
- *The children like having a tool by which they can show what they have learned*
- *The kids are not too competitive and help each other*
- *The responsibilities it teaches children*
- *Subject my child is learning and the sense of community from meeting other kids involved in same things*
- *Allowing kids to take creative approaches to new projects*
- *My child learns about science by doing hands on experiments*
- *Learning, socialization and community service*

In contrast, quotes that indicate **what respondents liked least about 4-H** include:

- *Inner city kids get more funding and get the least out of it*
- *Need more appropriate activities for younger children*
- *There doesn't seem to be enough focus on record keeping*
- *Some club activities seem to teach kids to be unorganized because everything is done at the last minute*
- *Not enough emphasis on community service in some clubs*

When asked **if you could change anything about 4-H what would you change**, selected quotes include:

- *I would make it more flexible when it comes to choosing the methods the kids use to reach their goals. Each child can have a different end in mind, even with the same project. We can only expose them to the different methods and hope we find one that works for them.*
- *Promote record books and have them judged.*
- *Use uniforms.*
- *Use of record books*
- *Encourage additional planning by kids so they'll learn to plan and have more interest.*
- *More community service – that's what 4-H is for.*

### **Conclusions**

To summarize, an initial assessment of 4-H life skills teaching effectiveness in the Las Vegas area of Clark County indicated that 4-H is strong in teaching life skills that develop self-esteem, decision-making ability, self-confidence and communication. Life skills that need attention include future career choices and conflict resolution skills.

Volunteer leaders and 4-H parents indicate that there are many aspects about 4-H that are well liked including, the variety of activities, hands on/experiential learning and opportunities for socialization in a positive environment. Structural changes that 4H should investigate include greater emphasis on record keeping, organization of clubs and county efforts, examination of funding goals, and expanded programming for a wide age group .

A statistical test for content validity and reliability of the pilot questionnaire was very high (97%). This indicates the questionnaire is a reliable and useful assessment tool. Efforts are currently underway to replicate this assessment using this same questionnaire in other counties in Nevada. Once additional data are gathered, Cooperative Extension can further assess 4H programs' effectiveness, including for example, recognizing similarities or differences between urban and rural counties for life skills learned and changes needed. Any changes contemplated for the 4H program as a result of the assessment must be discussed thoroughly, involving 4-H staff statewide and at the county level. The results of county assessments can be used to begin this process in a positive, objective manner, and to brainstorm ways in which 4-H can *make the best better*.

### References

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