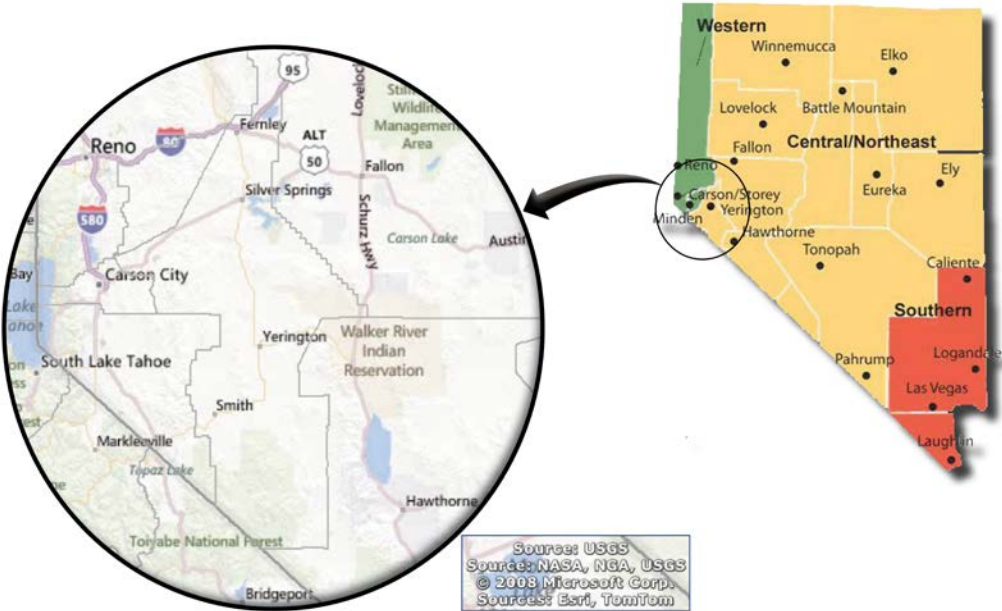




# Youth Development in Lyon County: A Needs Assessment

Amy Lucas, Interim Extension Educator

Loretta Singletary, work conducted as Central/Northeast Area Director



The purpose of “Youth Development in Lyon County: A Needs Assessment” is to determine ways in which to improve and strengthen youth programs that provide positive environments to enhance developmental and social skills.

## Introduction

Lyon County is located in northwestern Nevada. It is 2,001 square miles in area with a population of 51,327 (2012). The cities (and unincorporated towns) in Lyon County include Yerington (Mason), Smith (Wellington), Dayton (Silver City, Mound House and Mark Twain), Silver Springs (Stagecoach) and Fernley. The median household income in 2011 was \$46,598, compared to \$55,553 statewide, with 13.6 percent living below the poverty level. The mean income was \$56,440 compared to \$72,457 statewide. As of June 2013, the Lyon County unemployment rate was 13 percent, compared to 9 percent statewide. There are 8,252 school-aged youth (K-12) in the county (Lyon County School District, 2013).

Over the past two years, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Lyon County 4-H partnered with Lyon County Health and Human Services and the Mason Valley Boys and Girls Club to conduct an assessment of existing youth programs in Lyon County. The purpose of this assessment was to determine the effectiveness of existing youth development programs in providing positive environments in which child development and social skills are enhanced and to target areas for improvement.

## Methods and Analysis

A 50-question survey was developed and implemented, via online and postal mail, to assess the perceptions of Lyon County residents that are either youth development workers and/or parents of youth participating in youth development programs. All evaluation instruments and research procedures were approved through the University of Nevada, Reno Institutional Review Board to ensure that correct investigative protocols were maintained throughout the entire process to protect respondents' confidentiality.

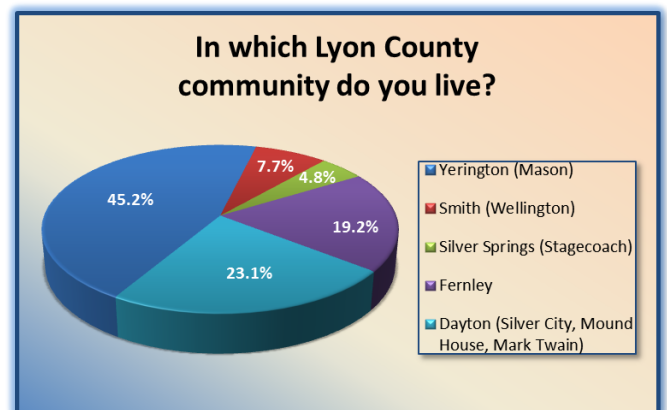
The survey featured 10 demographic questions, 12 questions specifically about Lyon County youth programs and 28 Likert-type questions pertaining to the existing youth development programs. The 28 Likert-type scale questions asked participants to indicate how much they thought youth were learning as

a result of participating in Lyon County's youth programs. The Likert-type scale featured a five-point scale with 1 being "very little," and 5 being "very much." In addition, each item included the choice "Don't Know."

## Results

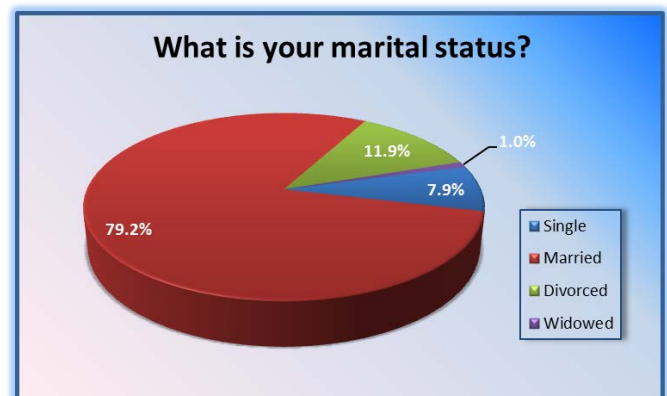
In total, 118 individuals completed the survey. Approximately 45 percent of the survey respondents lived in Yerington (Mason), 8 percent in Smith (Wellington), 23 percent in Dayton (Silver City, Mound House and Mark Twain), 19 percent in Fernley, and 5 percent in Silver Springs (Stagecoach) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Lyon County community.**



Approximately 78 percent of the respondents were female, and 22 percent were male; 79.2 percent were married, 11.9 percent were divorced, 7.9 percent were single and 1 percent were widowed (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Marital status.**



The ethnic origin of the children associated with the 118 adult respondents were 79.4 percent white, 6.9 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native, 6.9 percent more than one

race, 4.9 percent Hispanic or Latino and 1 percent African American (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Child's ethnicity.**



When conducting research, accuracy of data is highly important. One way to test accuracy is to look at reliability in data. Survey data can be tested for internal reliability by calculating Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). Cronbach's alpha tests how consistent the responses to the individual questions are to each other in a multiple question survey. The

alpha can fall anywhere between 0 and 1, with higher values equating to higher reliability. A value of 0.7 or higher is acceptable (Nunnally, 1978).

A Cronbach's alpha test of reliability was calculated for the 28 rank-based questions and found to be high ( $\alpha = .975$ ). The high score indicates that the items measured were found to be consistent and, as a group, closely related.

Data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software (IBM SPSS Statistics 20).

The mean (M), or average, score was calculated and ranked in order of highest to lowest in terms of what the respondents thought were the most important skills and developmental-related attributes gained from current youth programs. These results are listed in Table 1 along with the number of respondents per question (N).

**Table 1. Ranked mean scores for participation in Lyon County youth development programs.**

As a result of participation in Lyon County youth development programs, my child(ren) is learning:	N	Ranked M
To follow instructions	103	3.97
To acquire greater self-esteem	105	3.95
Self-responsibility (accountable for his/her actions)	106	3.94
Relationship-building skills	106	3.92
To work well with others	105	3.86
To achieve greater self-confidence around others	106	3.84
Improved communication skills	104	3.83
To tolerate and respect differences	105	3.82
To set and reach goals	101	3.78
Skills needed to do well in school	95	3.76
To value community service	101	3.74
To make positive, healthy choices	104	3.73
Improved decision-making skills	104	3.70
To trust others and to be trustworthy	104	3.55
Improved leadership skills	101	3.50
Improved public speaking skills	101	3.48
To recognize and deal with peer pressure	100	3.45
Skills useful in dealing with conflicts	102	3.40
Improved organizational skills	95	3.33
Record keeping skills	92	3.32
To manage stress	99	3.24
Skills needed to become effective employees	87	3.22
About additional educational topics	83	2.96
About the consequences of illegal drug use	88	2.88
About the consequences of underage drinking	88	2.80
About future career choices and training required	82	2.76
How to choose and apply to colleges	82	2.56
About the consequences of sexual activity	80	2.51

Of the 28 questions, 15 items received ratings of 3.5 and above. These results indicate that parents and youth professionals who responded to the survey believe youth are learning important skills as a result of participation in Lyon County youth development programs. The five highest rated skill items are:

- To follow instructions
- To acquire greater self-esteem
- Self-responsibility/accountability
- Relationship-building skills
- To work well with others

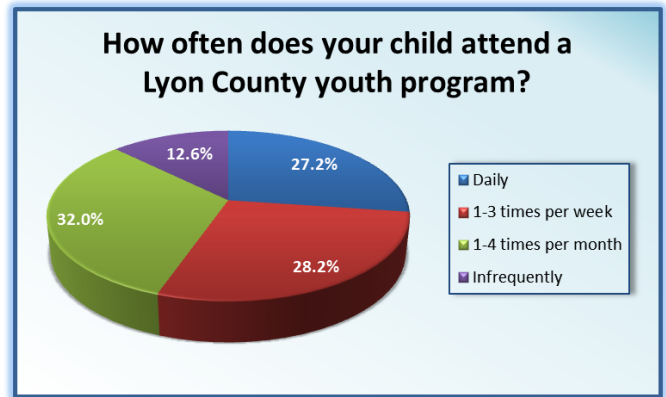
The five topics that the respondents believed that their youth or youths were learning the least about in youth programs were:

- The consequences of illegal drug use
- The consequences of underage drinking
- Future career choices and the training required
- How to choose and apply to colleges
- Consequences of sexual activity

Additional questions were asked about Lyon County youth programs to assess details about who uses the programs and why.

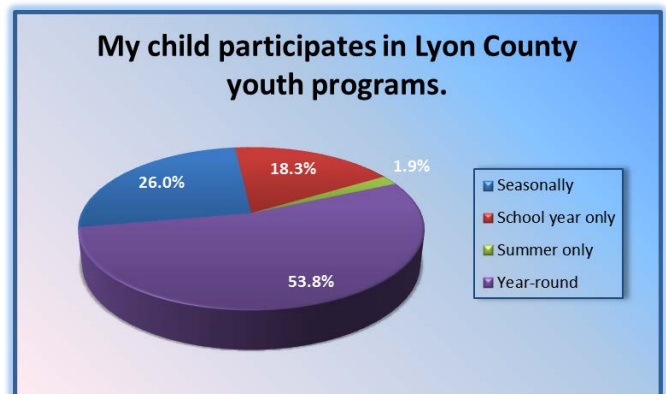
When asked how frequently youth attend a Lyon County program, 32 percent of respondents reported one to four times per month, 28.2 percent reported one to three times per week, 27.2 percent reported daily, and 12.6 percent reported infrequently (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Frequency of child’s participation in Lyon County youth programs.**



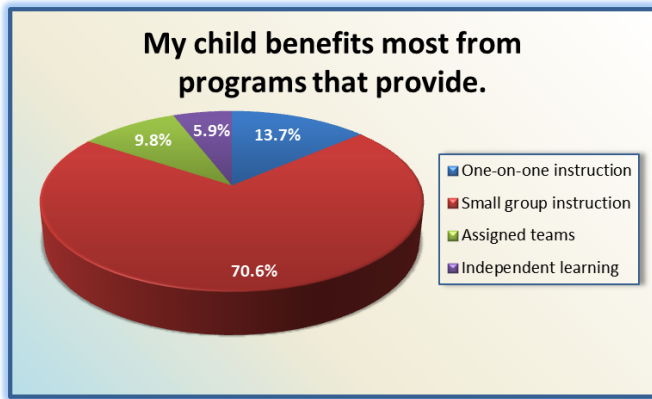
The survey also looked at what times of the year youth participate in a Lyon County program. The majority (or approximately 54 percent) of the respondents reported that youth participate year-round, 26 percent participate seasonally, 18 percent participate during the school year only, and 2 percent participate in the summer months only (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Child’s participation in Lyon County youth programs.**



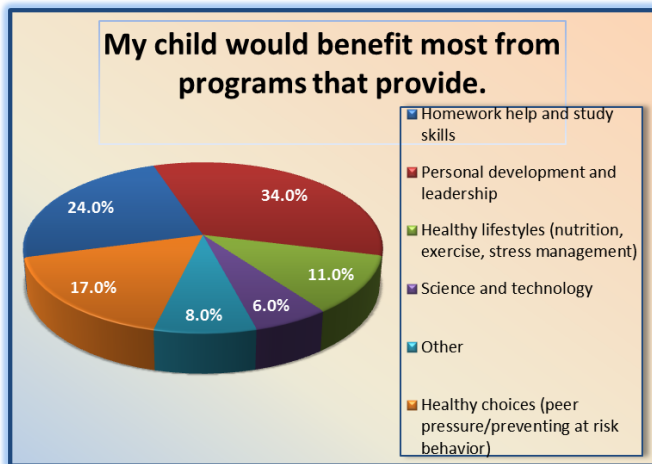
When asked what type of program structure youth benefit from the most, the majority (70.6 percent) reported small group instruction. Nearly 14 percent reported that one-on-one instruction was the most beneficial, 9.8 percent favored small team instruction, and 5.9 percent reported working independently (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Program structure child benefits from the most.**



The survey intended to assess the effectiveness of existing youth programs to isolate ways to improve and/or provide future programs. When asked what type of programs were most beneficial to youth, 34 percent of respondents indicated programs focusing on personal development and leadership; 24 percent indicated homework help and study skills; 17 percent indicated healthy choices such as peer pressure /preventing risk behavior; 11 percent indicated healthy lifestyles such as exercise and stress management; 8 percent chose “other”; and 6 percent indicated technology (Figure 7).

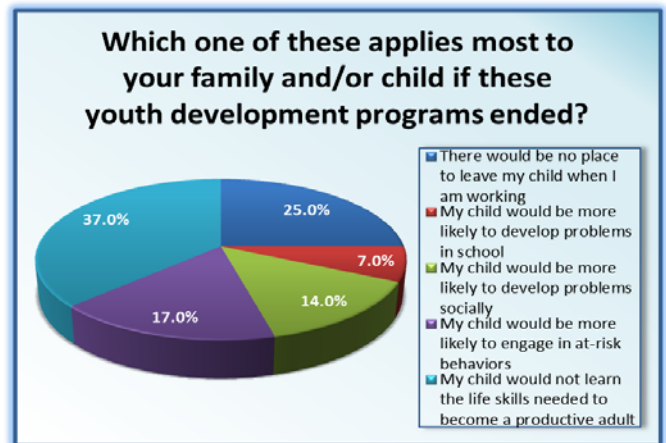
**Figure 7. Programs most beneficial to youth.**



One important survey question asked what would happen if youth programs ended or ceased to exist. This question yields valuable insight on why parents have their children attend the youth programs and what they believe the programs provide. Approximately 37 percent stated that without youth programs their child(ren) would not learn the life skills needed to become productive adults, 25

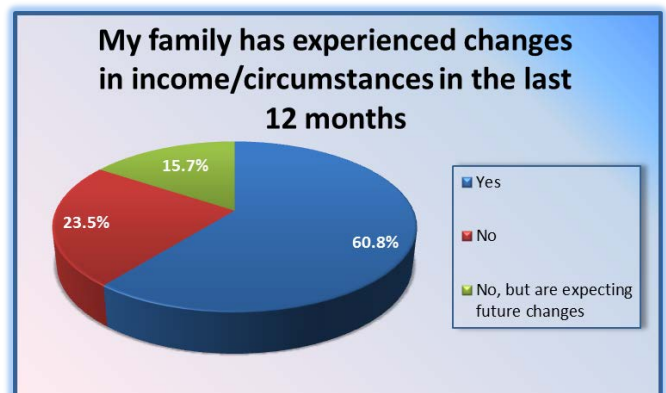
percent believed that there would be no place to leave their child(ren) when they were working, 17 percent stated that their child(ren) would be more likely to engage in risky behaviors, 14 percent believed their child(ren) would be more likely to develop problems socially, and 7 percent stated their child(ren) would be more likely to develop problems in school (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Consequences of youth development program termination.**



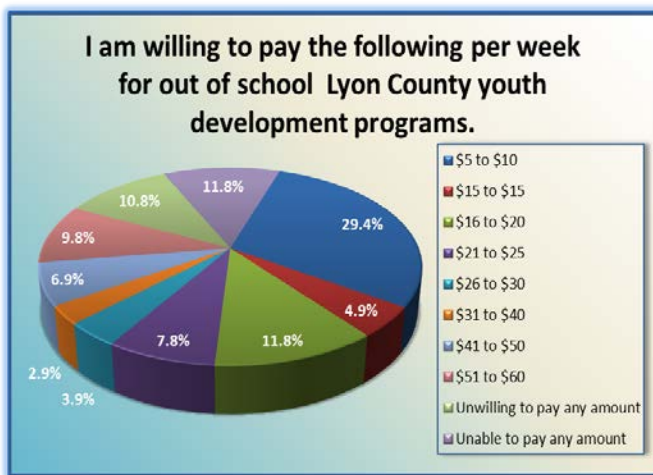
Since the unemployment rate in Lyon County remains comparatively high, and both the median and mean incomes are below the statewide average, asking questions about circumstances can yield important data about how best to manage youth programs. Approximately 61 percent of respondents reported that their family had experienced changes in income or circumstances in the last 12 months, and 15.7 percent had not experienced changes but expect changes in the future (Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Family changes in income or circumstances.**



Approximately 12 percent of respondents stated that they are unable to pay any dollar amount per week for their youth to participate in Lyon County youth development programs and 10.8 percent of respondents were unwilling to pay any amount. The remaining 77.4 percent were willing to pay for the programs; prices reported for this willingness to pay factor ranged from \$5 per week to \$60 per week. The most common response (29.4 percent) was willingness to pay between \$5 and \$10 per week (Figure 10).

**Figure 10. Family’s willingness to pay for Lyon County youth development programs.**



## Discussion

This assessment provided insight with regard to skills parents in Lyon County perceived youth are learning in existing programs; what types and structures of programs most benefit children; how often and when children participate in youth programs; and why parents use youth programs. The assessment revealed that youth are learning a wide range of skills, such as developing high self-esteem and self-responsibility, how to follow instructions, relationship-building skills and how to work well with others. While not as high on the list, parents perceive that youth are learning tolerance, respect and trust; and valuable skills such as leadership, public speaking and communication skills; and how to set and reach goals.

However, the assessment also revealed that parents perceive that youth are learning very little in existing programs about how to reduce

or prevent at-risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use, and sexual activity. Parents also reported that existing programs do not teach youth skills to help them prepare for college and careers.

## Emerging Youth Programs

The skills and behaviors that ranked high on the list are certainly positive and important in youth development. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Lyon County 4-H is addressing many of the skills and topics from the youth development survey through a variety of programs. An example is the USDA SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education)-funded Youth 4 Health Program. This program educates Yerington Elementary schoolchildren about MyPlate (USDA, 2012) food groups, smart beverages and snacks, and how to make healthy lifestyle and nutrition choices. The Youth 4 Health Program helps address the type of program respondents (11 percent) perceive to be the most beneficial to youth; that is, a program focused on educating youth about healthy lifestyles to include nutrition, exercise and stress management (Figure 7).

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension-Lyon County was awarded an Engaging Youth Serving Community grant through the National 4-H Council. The grant awards rural communities \$2,000 to use on projects that help youth gain life and leadership skills while focusing on improving their community. Three communities in Lyon County receiving funds through the grant are Yerington, Silver Springs and Smith.

The first step in each community was to identify youth needs that were not being met in the community. (University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Lyon County surveyed youth and parents).

Survey results indicated that Yerington youth and adults reported a lack of nonsporting activities for teens. Through further exploration, youth and adults decided to pursue activities related to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education. In response, University of Nevada Cooperative

Extension Lyon County 4-H staff worked with volunteer leaders to create a Lego Robotics Club in Yerington in 2012. The grant provides funds to purchase supplies necessary to conduct Lego Robotics Club activities.

As part of the club activities, youth and adults design, create and participate in a robotics competition. They also participate in educational STEM-based career exploration opportunities offered by nearby companies and organizations. Additionally, Lyon County 4-H, through this grant-funded program, provided high school youth tours of the University of Nevada, Reno campus, College of Science. As part of the tour, youth learned about various science majors offered at the University and STEM careers. The creation of the Lego Robotics Club helps address the type of program that respondents (6 percent) believe were most beneficial to youth in the science- and technology-based fields (Figure 7). In addition, the tour was beneficial in addressing concerns respondents identified were lacking in existing programs.

In the communities of Smith and Wellington, the Smith Valley Community Leadership Team identified the need to educate youth about various professions. They found that because they live in an isolated rural community, there was little opportunity for youth to job shadow various career fields. The Lyon County 4-H instructor worked with the Smith Valley Community Leadership Team to invite professionals to talk with youth about careers during the 2012 Smith Valley 4-H and FFA Career Exploration Summit.

The Summit provided youth with four structured days filled with guest speakers, including government officials, school board members, engineers, photographers, a juvenile probation officer, a cosmetologist, natural resource specialists, land surveyors, land-use planners and an astronomer. The youth were able to ask direct questions to career professionals and interact with government officials during the mock congressional session at the Summit. This program helps address the type of program respondents (34 percent) believed was the most beneficial to their youth, a program that focused on personal

development and leadership (Figure 7). It also addresses future career choices and training required, a topic that respondents ranked low regarding what they thought youth were learning in Lyon County youth programs.

Silver Springs and Stagecoach created a food pantry and a backpack program through the grant. The Silver Springs Community Leadership Team interviewed students and staff to help them identify unmet needs in their community. They found that there was several high school students that were hungry while at school.

The Lyon County School District, Nevada Report Card indicates that 54.8 percent of Silver Stage High School students participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program; this does not include youth that may not participate and as a result go hungry. In fact, Silver Stage High School has the highest percentage of Lyon County youth in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

Through various fundraisers, Silver Springs youth and adults were able to stock the food pantry with necessary supplies, as well as get the word out to the community. One of the fundraisers was Family Game Night, in which the community was invited to play board games, learn about the program, and develop relationships with one another. Additionally, the leadership team put together the Pennies for Pantry fundraiser, in which all the Silver Springs schools were involved, raising more than \$1,100. The youth felt a sense of accomplishment with this successful project and were more confident in their ability to make positive changes in their community. The school administration and community leaders were informed of the positive change that the leadership team accomplished and have become more open and supportive of their projects.

The grant-funded program in Silver Springs also helps address the type of program that respondents (34 percent) perceive to be the most beneficial to youth, a program that focuses on personal and leadership development (Figure 7).

The youth feel more confident in working with adults, and the adults and community leaders are more accepting of youth helping with community events. The backpack program provides Silver Springs students with important essential items such as deodorant, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste and emergency food kits. In summer 2012, the youth participated in the Summer Youth Leadership Summit, which was held at the University of Nevada, Reno.

### **Existing Youth Programs**

Another program that addresses a wide variety of survey topics is traditional 4-H. Lyon County 4-H has approximately 619 members enrolled in 44 different clubs. Traditional 4-H clubs include: Livestock, Ski and Snowboard, Horsemanship and Shooting Sports. Lyon County 4-H Program instructors ensure that all clubs are led by trained volunteers utilizing research-based curricula. Goodwin et. al (2005) concluded, based on 3,601 surveys from 53 schools in Idaho, that youth who have participated in 4-H for two years or more, compared to their non 4-H peers, are far less likely to participate in risky behaviors such as alcohol consumption, drug or tobacco use, property damage or shoplifting. Traditional 4-H addresses several topics rated lower by respondents on perception about what youth were learning the least about in existing youth programs; these include underage drinking and drug use.

Lyon County 4-H has strong livestock clubs. A study by Rusk et. al (2003) found that 4-H youth members who raise and exhibit livestock learn self-responsibility and apply these skills to daily tasks, such as homework completion, being timely and caring for siblings. More than half of the respondents reported that youth in programs demonstrate increases in self-confidence, communication skills and decision-making skills.

In 2010, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Lyon County received a grant from National 4-H Council through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to initiate a 4-H Mentoring Program. The 4-H Mentoring Program is designed to pair adult mentors with youth in order to provide positive

environments in which youth can flourish. Youth and adults participate in organized community activities, such as sporting events, ice-cream socials and Family Night Out. Youth who participated in the same mentoring program in Utah were reported to demonstrate increased levels of academic achievement, social competency, community attachment and family bonds (Riggs et. al 2006). Studies consistently report that youth in mentoring programs realize improvement in academic achievements, social relationships and self-esteem (Grossman and Rhodes 2002).

### **Conclusion**

Youth Development in Lyon County: A Needs Assessment was created to identify the strengths and weaknesses in Lyon County youth programs. By analyzing the completed surveys, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Lyon County staff can better meet the needs of youth by creating new programs and by strengthening existing programs.

### **References**

- Cronbach, L. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, 16:297-334.
- Goodwin, J., Barnett, C.C., Pike, M., Peutz, J., Lanting, R., & Ward, A. (2005). Idaho 4-H impact study. *Journal of Extension*, 43(4).
- Grossman, J.B., and Rhodes, J.E. (2002). The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2).
- Nunnally, J.C. (1978). *Psychometric theory*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Riggs, K., Lee, T., Marshall, J.P., Serfustini, E., and Bunnell, J. (2006). Mentoring: A promising approach for involving at-risk youth in 4-H. *Journal of Extension*, 44(3).



Rusk, C.P., Summerlot-Early, J.M., Machtmes, K.L., Talbert, B.A., and Balschweid, M.A. (2003). The Impact of raising and exhibiting selected 4-H livestock projects on the development of life and project skills. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 44(3).