

ISSUE BRIEF >

center for **youth development** research and innovation

THIS BRIEF SPOTLIGHTS TRENDS FOUND IN THE 2006 4-H ES-237 REPORT:



The school-age population in the United States is growing and shifting in ways that pose significant challenges and offer unrivaled opportunities. In the technological and socio-economic reality of the 21st century, both formal and nonformal education programs must do more than focus on basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. They must provide work competencies and life skills that will help every youth

fulfill their potential. Every North Carolina youth needs to acquire 21st Century Literacy . . . the ability to read, write, and compute with confidence, think analytically, adapt to change, work in teams, and use technology.¹

4-H: A 21st Century Solution

The world in which our youth live is significantly different from that of yesterday! Today’s youth use laptops, pagers, instant messaging, chat-rooms, and cell-phones to connect to family, friends, experts, and others in their community and are bombarded with visual messages from the media – targeted to tap into the billions of discretionary spending dollars they control or influence. Experts at the U.S. Department of Labor stated it best: “We are living in a new economy powered by technology, fueled by information, and driven by knowledge.” 4-H programs provide opportunities for youth to develop essential life skills, learn about the breadth of career paths available in our global economy and participate in civic engagement and volunteer programs that reinforce a link to their community, exposing youth to positive morals, values and social norms.



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A Youth Development Framework – That’s More than “Graham Crackers”

Researchers note that effective non-formal education programs are not simply replications of the regular school-day curricula. Youth who are not successful in school are not likely to be successful in an afterschool club/program that provides more of the same.² Today’s research posits something that 4-H has believed for a century - that programs adhering to a youth-development framework are more likely to promote positive youth outcomes.³ For almost a century, 4-H programs have been more than the traditional babysitting and “graham cracker” programs. 4-H programs embody the characteristics of a dynamic youth development framework that includes opportunities for youth to: 1) experience supportive relationships and receive emotional and moral support; 2) feel a sense of belonging; 3) be exposed to positive morals, values, and positive social norms; 4) be efficacious, to do things that make a real difference, and play an active role in the program, and 5) develop academic and social skills, including learning how to form close relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors, as well as



acquire the skills necessary for school success and a successful transition to adulthood.



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“Extracurricular” is Quickly Becoming . . . “Essential-Curricular”

Although school is a critically important learning environment for school-age youth, in reality they spend only 20% of their waking hours in classrooms. The majority of their time is spent at home with family members, interacting with peers, taking part in non-formal education programs, pursuing individual interests, or engaging in community or recreational activities. The choices youth make about how they spend their time outside of school can reap important benefits or result in serious negative consequences that may reverberate for a lifetime. Research has shown that spending 1 to 4 hours in extracurricular clubs/programs per week is associated with a 49% lower likelihood of using drugs and a 37% lower likelihood of becoming a teen parent.⁴

Opportunities for positive experiences in their nonschool hours are important for all North Carolina youth. In 2006, 4-H involved over 208,286 youth, an increase of over 4.25% from 2005, and 21,453 volunteers in local programs supported by the resources of the Cooperative Extension System at NC State University and NC A&T State University.

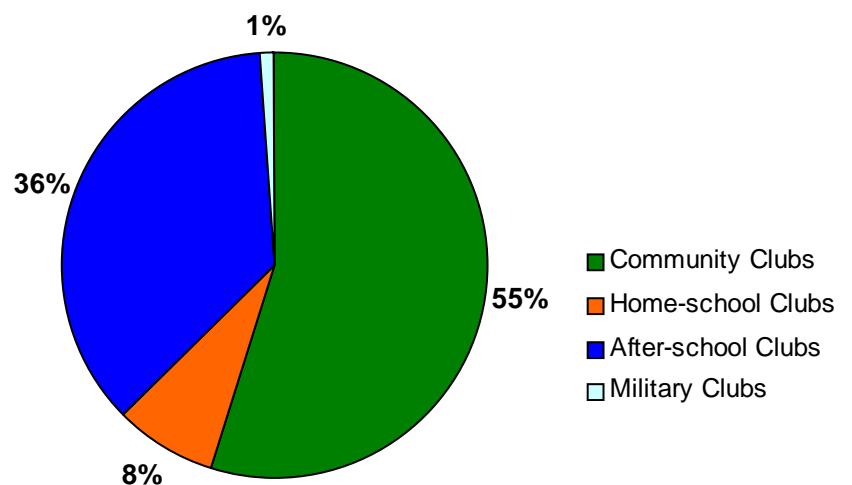


4-H Clubs – Green & Growing

In 2006, North Carolina 4-H experienced a 17% increase in the number of youth participating in our 4-H Club Program. 40,830 youth, ages 5 to 19, participated in community-based, afterschool, home school and military 4-H clubs. While the majority of youth participate in 4-H clubs located in their community (55%) or at their school, during after-school hours (36%), the fastest growing club delivery mode was – home school clubs. In 2006, North Carolina’s 4-H Home School Club program grew by an astonishing 74%. Today, we have over 3,243 youth participating in 131 home school clubs across North Carolina. A recent report released from the N.C. Division of Non-Public Education reveals that more North Carolina parents are choosing to home school than ever before. The report found that during the 2005-06 school year 3,690 home schools were operating in the state, a 6.9 percent increase from the 2004-05 school year. The total estimated number of home schools students increased by 9.5 percent since the 2004-05 school year with 64,387 enrolled students for the 2005-06 year.

In addition to the growth in home school 4-H clubs; all of our 4-H club models grew: 4-H community clubs saw an increase of over 18% (22,301 participants); after-school 4-H clubs increased by over 7% (14,852 participants); and military 4-H clubs experienced a 15% (434 participants) increase in youth participation. Perhaps this state-wide increase was due in part to parents, schools and communities recognizing the importance of such programs and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (P.L. 107-110) which poses the following challenge for all school: To give families – children and their parents – more out-of-school learning opportunities so they are better prepared for academic success.⁶

NC 4-H Club Participation



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“This Summer at 4-H Camp . . .”

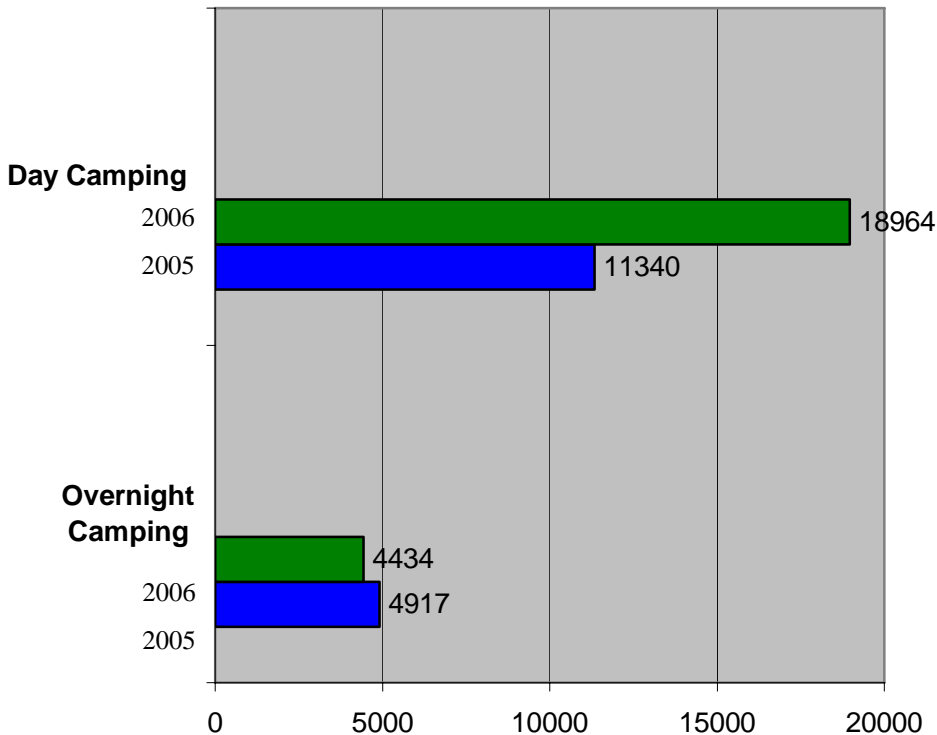
Day camps and residential camps are powerful, positive experiences for young people. Community living, away from home, in an outdoor recreational environment provides a dynamic setting for personal growth. Best of all, 4-H camp is fun. Developing life-long friends, exciting activities, and an environment that lets youth be themselves are just a few reasons why the 4-H Camping Program in North Carolina grew by over 44% (23,400 participants) during 2006.

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4-H camps have never stood still. Since their inception they have been alive with laughter and wisdom. Laughter from the thousands of campers that enter their doors yearly and staff whose joy and learning are immeasurable; and wisdom from the camp directors who embrace the belief that camp could be better next season. Today, 4-H camps are moving faster than ever, using innovative and practical research that enhances the camp experience. More than ever, the North Carolina 4-H Camping Program understands how to meet campers' needs.



NC 4-H Camp Participation



Numbers include traditional and county-based camping programs.

The “Abercrombie & Fitch” Generation

A recent USA WEEKEND's Teens & Parents survey reveal a generation of young people who get along well with their parents and approve of the way they're being raised. They think of their parents with affection and respect. They speak with Mom or Dad when they have a problem. Most feel that their parents understand them, and they believe their family is the No. 1 priority in their parents' lives. Many even think their parents are cool! Such results may seem surprising against the backdrop of horrific incidents, such as Columbine and Santee, that color the way the mass media portray the young. Yet, their positive outlook on life comes as no surprise to the 4-H professionals that worked with over 20,860 high school age youth in 2006, an increase of over 15% from 2005.

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The North Carolina 4-H Teen Program experience tremendous growth in 2006. Over 20,860 high school age youth participated in 4-H programs statewide - a ten year high for NC 4-H! Which leads us to the question. “What’s bringing all those high school youth into our program?”

North Carolina teens have found that in 4-H “they have a voice”. Their thoughts, opinions, ideas, and artistic innovation are valued. 4-H is locally lead thus, program are relevant to the teens. As teen leaders, 4-H ambassadors and TRY team members, 4-H youth become mentors to younger youth, teach workshops, and give presentations to their local government officials and community civic organizations. 4-H gives teens “hands-on” leadership opportunities that are often missing during the school day. In addition, 4-H provides youth a means to travel outside their community to learn about our 21st century global economy.



Rural Youth – Harvesting What We Sow

For America and the world, rapid change is the defining variable of the last half of the 20th century. Scholars agree that this change has been brought on by the movement from industrial jobs to service jobs, globalization of economy and the infiltration of technology into the fabric of society. As our nation changes, so too does the face of rural North Carolina. These economic and technological changes transform the contexts of people who live in rural areas.



Industries that have traditionally sustained rural people and places – farming, timber, mining, fishing and manufacturing – are employing fewer workers than they have in the past. Many rural North Carolina communities, especially those distant from urban areas and with few scenic amenities, are struggling with low incomes, a low skill labor force, limited access to services, and weak infrastructure. Other communities are finding new development opportunities in their rural quality of life, natural resources and landscape. Regardless of whether they are declining or growing, our rural communities must cope with the impact of globalization, new land use patterns, changing demographics – including new immigrants – and challenging issues such as longstanding poverty, drug abuse, engaging young people, and limited access to good

housing, health care, and other basic infrastructure.

In 2006, North Carolina 4-H experienced a significant influx of youth participants (approximately 16,543) from farming and rural (towns under 10,000) communities. This represents a 35.5% increase in rural youth in the North Carolina 4-H program during 2006 year. 4-H provides rural youth a unique venue for having their voice heard and a platform that can propel them into leadership opportunities at both the local and state level. The North Carolina 4-H program also offers these youth high-level, in-depth workshops and resources to build strategic collaborations for better programs and policies for vulnerable families and communities. North Carolina 4-H is engaging our future rural community leaders in positive ways that will be seen for generations to come.

Endnotes

¹ 21st Century Workforce Commission: *Building America's 21st Century Workforce*. (2000). <http://www.workforce21.org>

² Scarf, A. & Woodlief, L. (2000). *Moving toward equity and access in afterschool programs: a review of the literature*. California Tomorrow Working Paper #2. www.afterschool.org/sga/pubs/whatweknow.pdf

³ McLaughlin, M. (2000). *Community counts: How youth organizations matter for youth development*. Washington, D.C.: Public Education Network.

⁴ Mahoney, J.L., & Cairns, R.B. (1997). Do extracurricular activities protect against early school dropout? *Developmental Psychology*, 33(2), 241-253.