Evaluative Paper

SENIOR CITIZEN VOLUNTEERS TO YOUTH PROGRAM

By

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I. SITUATION

The "traditional" 4-H program is dependent upon a large corps of volunteers in various roles. One role, that of project leader, involves teaching a specific skill to the 4-H member. Four-H clubs are constantly seeking volunteers to assume this responsibility for the projects youth in the club desire.

The Waukesha County Department on Aging offered the Waukesha County 4-H Youth Program a grant in 1985 to explore and initiate an effort to utilize senior citizens as volunteers for youth programs. These volunteers would teach skills that could enhance 4-H or other youth organizations.

This short term project focused on locating senior citizens with skills of value to younger generations. Skills sought were comparable to those taught by 4-H project leaders.

II. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

1) To identify senior citizens in Waukesha County who practice skills that might be used by 4-H or other youth programs.

2) To organize a "skill bank" for use by educationally oriented youth programs, particularly 4-H.

3) To coordinate the senior citizens' skills with those projects or activities presently carried out with youth groups such as 4-H.

4) To develop a pilot "video window" project that would videotape a select number of seniors engaged in using their particular skill. This would be a prototype for a permanent skill lending library that would be funded by other sources.

III. METHODS

This project required the cooperation of several disciplines within and outside of the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Office of Waukesha County. Marcia Salisbury, Extension Home Economist, facilitated access to senior citizen clubs and organizations through the Waukesha County Council on Aging. This agent provided the youth organization linkage through the 4-H Leaders Association. Additional support was available through the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, Area Communications Agent, Walt Ulbricht.

Two part-time project workers were utilized to carry out this program. Due to the short time frame for program implementation, these workers were sought from people already familiar with the 4-H program and youth volunteer efforts. A 4-H volunteer serving as an organizer of a local club and a 4-H teen volunteer, recently graduated from the 4-H program, were selected.
These two individuals were counseled and supervised by Tom Riese, 4-H Youth Agent. Other professionals involved in their orientation were Rosalie Powell and Marcia Salisbury, Extension Home Economists, and Tamie Koop, 4-H and Youth Agent.

Specific methods utilized to attain the program objectives were:

Objective #1

A) In consultation with Marcia Salisbury, advisor for the Waukesha County Council on Aging, four primary locations were identified for reaching senior citizens. These locations were prioritized as follows:
   1. Waukesha County Council on Aging Clubs
   2. Nursing Home activity departments
   3. Nutrition Sites
   4. Residential living centers

B) The locations were reviewed. The project workers agreed to focus primary efforts on the Waukesha County Council on Aging Clubs. These clubs were then assigned to the project workers for presentations and surveys.

C) A question card was developed and utilized to identify senior citizens and skills that may be applicable. Availability and willingness to work with youth were also surveyed.

Objective #2

A) Results were tabulated for an index card listing of volunteers, skills and other information.

Objective #3

A) The card index previously mentioned also contained the appropriate 4-H project or activity to involve the volunteer.

Objective #4

A) After the survey was conducted two individuals were identified for videotaping. The videotape presentations were 10-20 minutes in length. These presentations focused on specific skills and general background on a craft.

B) The videos were created with the involvement of the Southeast Area Communications Agent, Walt Ulbricht.
Timetable

September, 1985  Acquire funding, assistants hired.
October 1, 1985  Project begins, survey to identify senior resources developed. Dates set to meet with senior groups.
December, 1985  Do informal taping sessions with senior citizens.
January-April, 1986  Survey existing 4-H programs to develop a linkage with project leaders.
                     Finish project efforts and final report.

IV. EVALUATION

Relative to Objective #1

Contacts made by project workers met with numerous conflicts. Senior citizen clubs were heavily committed to Thanksgiving and Christmas activities. Groups with conflicts were rescheduled after the December 31 deadline. A commitment to reach as many senior citizen clubs as possible was made by the project workers. Forty-one senior citizen clubs were to be surveyed by the end of the project. Twenty-nine were reached (70% of those available). Those twenty-nine clubs included 1689 members (38% of all the members in the Senior Citizen Clubs identified).

Project workers observed that the reaction by most senior citizens was highly favorable. There were positive remarks on the project idea and value of the effort. Positive reactions to the 4-H program were shared. Most club members, however, were unwilling to put their name onto a list of potential volunteers.

As the survey results were evaluated, it was clear that an alternate method for reaching senior volunteers was needed. Senior citizens that exhibited in the Waukesha County Fair were noted as an additional source. Fair entry forms were requested and individuals were contacted via a telephone survey. Through this method fifty-three senior citizens were identified. Forty-two were reached through a telephone survey.
This survey met with much better results than the club presentations. The willingness of these people to make a commitment may be due to the development of their specific skill. They had already shared this skill through exhibition at the fair. In addition they may have been more familiar with 4-H. Another factor which influenced this group is that they were individually asked to volunteer their skills.

Relative to Objective #2 and #3

The interest cards distributed by project workers encountered a major barrier when working with the Senior Citizens Clubs. Although the groups welcomed the presentation, few cards were taken and fewer yet returned. One hundred and five cards were distributed, but only two cards were returned. This low positive response caused many concerns for the project staff. Methods were reviewed and goals re-evaluated. After some cautious deliberation, the decision was made to continue with the program.

The alternate method noted in evaluation of objective #1 reached 42 potential volunteers and generated five positive response cards. A total of seven positive responses were received from 1731 senior citizens. These responses were routed to local 4-H club volunteers. The seven volunteer senior citizens were welcomed as project leaders. The long range success of their involvement is unknown at this time.

Relative to Objective #4

Extremely low return of the survey cards limited the number of potential subjects for videotaping. Alternative methods of identifying subjects for taping were reviewed. Videotaping efforts focused on senior citizens familiar with the 4-H youth program. This allowed for receptiveness on the part of the subjects and allowed the process to be carried out. Two senior citizen volunteers were identified from the listing of 4-H project leaders. These 4-H volunteers were asked to share their respective craft area by videotaping done at their home.

Videotaping efforts were not as easily conducted as had been hoped. Limited time available from the staff and limited time of the subjects delayed the efforts. The subjects' familiarity with the 4-H program was the most positive influence in their agreement. The fact that a copy of these videotapes would be given to their family was also an influencing factor.

To identify and videotape someone not familiar with the program would greatly add to the preliminary trust building time. It would also make the taping efforts themselves more awkward.

The videotapes; "True Treasures," "Ceramic Treasures," and "Woodworking Treasures" are available from this author and the UW-Extension Library.
V. IMPLICATIONS

In conducting this project, this author tested two assumptions. The first assumption was that senior citizens have time and talents. The second was that given the opportunity, senior citizens would willingly share these with others (youth). These assumptions were not supported by the program results.

The following reasons were identified by project workers as possible causes for the negative response given to the program. Further research is needed to confirm these ideas and to study senior citizens as youth program volunteers.

(1) Senior citizens involved in senior citizen organizations are limited in their expendable free time. They may be too committed in their present organization to be involved in other volunteer efforts.

(2) Senior citizens involved in senior citizen clubs enjoy the sociability and peer relationship of their club. This feeling of comfort, hinders commitment to "outside" or "non-group" activity.

(3) If a senior citizen has time and talent to share they will do so, if there is group or peer support, if they are approached individually, and if there is a very limited possibility of failure.