

BUILDING LEADERSHIP IN FREMONT COUNTY 4-H

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EXTENSION AGENT CAREER SKILLS

- Assisted with 2023 summer camp management for 3 different camps impacting 64 kids
- Facilitated lesson plans for summer camps in topic areas ranging from Agriculture, Parliamentary Procedure, Cooking, Leadership
- Administration work: Provided customer service, kept paperwork organized, and processed payments
- Assisting 4-H families with questions
- Fielded calls and for Master Gardeners and assign tasks for volunteers
- Managed and organized entries for 2023 County Fair and processed over 190 4-H and FFA member entries
- Scored County .22 Shooting Sports in Orion data base.
- Assisted with county livestock shows with placings and ribbons



AGENT INTERVIEWS

As an intern, I was curious to see what other extension agents have done throughout their career and the advice they would give a new extension agent starting their career, what they like most about their job, and challenges they have faced during their career.

The advice given was:

- Be open minded
- Willing to ask for help when you don't know something
- Take a wide range of classes so that you are well versed and have knowledge on a little bit of everything.
- Wait 4-5 years before going to work in my home county as an agent so that people still look at me as an authority rather than a 4-Her still.

What they enjoyed most about their career:

- Being able to help people with questions
- Being able to learn more concepts when helping the community

Challenges that extension agents face:

- Gaining trust in their community,
- Setting up networks so people have the resources they need
- Balancing personal life verse work life
- Being able to say no when you are overwhelmed and stressed

SUMMARY OF ENTIRE INTERNSHIP

During my summer internship at the Colorado State University Fremont County Extension office, I was able to get a behind the scenes look of what it is like to be a part of the extension career. Though out the summer, I was able to interact with parents, youth in and out of 4-H as well as volunteers. Working with those individuals, I was able to learn how to solve problems as well as be able to answer their questions regarding certain topics. I enjoyed learning how to be able to interact with individuals on a more professional level rather than a personal level. I was also able to be able to experience the behind the scenes look of how county fair came together.

FIRST YEAR 4-H FAMILY RETENTION STUDY

BACKGROUND

For many years, 4-H has seen a decrease in the number of members retained. Research shows the primary reason for 4-H drop out is more an internal issue than external (Richie and Resler 1993). Many families drop out due to the lack of program understanding, goals, activities, events, and time commitment (Astroth, 1985). Also, youth had a feeling of not being welcomed or part of the group. Youth who enroll by the age of 7 are more likely to stay in 4-H throughout their teenage years (Iowa State University Extension, 2006). High School students feel frustrated because they believe that 4-H is focused more on younger youth than them (Homan et al, 2007).

Some reasons members drop out of 4-H are:

- Being busy with sports or other organizations,
- Youth feel unhappy with their projects or the different clubs they join
- Parents not being engaged (Lewis et al., 2022).
- Not understanding the 4-H program,
- Not having a welcoming environment,
- Having time conflicts,
- The program seeming boring to younger youth,
- Not being able to pay the program dues,
- An inability for clubs not meeting enough or having the appropriate activities (Astroth, 1985; Borden, Perkins, Villarruel, & Stone, 2005; Digby & Ferrari, 2005a; Ritchie & Resler, 1993; Weiss, Little, & Bouffard, 2005).

In Fremont County over the last ten years, there has been a decrease in total membership from 340 to 179. The average program age is 11.5 years old, which shows that older members are not staying in the program. Retainment from year to year has ranged from 70% to 86%, but first-year member retainment statistics are much lower. From 2022, only 19% of first year members re-enrolled for 2023. There is also a trend of not retaining members from enrollment through the end of the year. In 2022, 18% of first year members dropped 4-H before completing 1 year.

METHODS

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We completed IRB approval for research and conducted 2 different phone interviews with first year families in our 4-H program to see why they did or did not stay in the program, and conducted phone interviews with club and project leaders to get their input on why youth may not reenroll. We used reports from 4HOnline and called families and leaders in alphabetical order. Interview recordings were transcribed using otter ai. We used deductive coding methods and began coding using a code book created prior to interviews and will add codes as needed throughout the process. We also adapted a survey from previous retention research and sent it out using qualtrics to all first years on their 4-H experience.

Survey Reference:

Lewis, K. M., Hensley, S., Bird, M., Rea-Keywood, J., Miller, J., Kok, C., & Shelstad, N. (2022). Why Youth Leave 4-H After the First Year: A Multistate Study. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, 10(3), 5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55533/2325-5226.1429>

RESULTS

While conducting leader interviews, we received feedback from 16 club and project leaders. The reasons why youth might stay in 4-H consist of:

- Having fun
- Finding something they are interested in
- Making friends
- Found a sense of community
- Having a drive to compete
- Enjoy their project
- Parents supporting them

The reasons why youth might not reenroll consist of:

- Prices of everything are high
- Time Commitment
- Lack of Parent Support
- Lack of Understanding
- Youth and Parents get bored or frustrated

With both sets of interviews, I began the coding process with a code book that was created before beginning the interviews. Although the coding is not complete, it will be an ongoing process for the county to keep making improvements for the program.

While conducting parent phone interviews, we received feedback from 7 parents. The reasons why their child did not come back to 4-H the next year:

- Overwhelming
- Traveling
- Cost
- Other activities
- Timing was not right

We also sent out a survey and had 11 responses. The reasons of why their child did not come back to 4-H the next year:

- Did not have time because of other activities
- Did not feel connected in the club
- 4-H was not for their child
- Time Commitment
- Did not meet deadlines

qualtrics

CONCLUSIONS

Although the study is not complete, it has given the Fremont County 4-H program a foundation of where to start improving and making changes. The information that has been gathered so far consists of why youth aren't rejoining after their first year from a parent's perspective along with leaders.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations that we faced were:

- Having a small number of survey responses on the survey
- During the phone interview, I feel as if people held back their answers or may not have been completely honest even though it was anonymous

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations that has been suggested to the office consist of:

- Giving the expectations and rundown on what all 4-H entails from the beginning
- Recommend club leaders do a "Adopt a New Family" for their older families to help the first years
- Mid-year check-ins to see how those new families are doing and if they need anything
- Making sure they have contact info for everyone they need
- Giving them deadline dates and keep reminding them of those
- Find ways to support the Western Part of the county as well as the most southern part on keeping them involved and getting project meetings out to them

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