



Contribution of 4-H Participation to the Development of Social Capital within Communities: Multi-state project NCERA215

2015 Research Project Overview

Social Capital Defined:

Social Capital is the connection among individuals and their social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust that develop from that connection (Putnam 2000). The presence of social capital is a predictor of community action and engagement, which facilitates and enhances productive community development (Agnitsch, Flora & Ryan, 2006). Through ties and connections formed in the development of social capital at the family, neighborhood, school and community level, young people gain access to a multitude of opportunities, experiences and forms of support in the areas of education, jobs and careers, emotional growth and life skills development. These connections and opportunities create successful transition to adulthood and a productive engaged citizenry (Benson, 1997; National Research Council Ad Institute of Medicine, 2002; Scales et al2000).

The Need and Issues

Youth-at-Risk Large numbers of youth and young adults, particularly in urban areas, are disconnected from school, the workforce, and community institutions due to community and neighborhood factors such as social isolation, lack of economic opportunities, and school failure. Youth workers attempting to benefit individual youth may not intentionally provide opportunities to engage in their communities and develop strong, positive and productive relationships. *There are missed opportunities to include community connections in youth activities.*

Community Vitality When young people do not feel attached to their communities of place, do not understand

the assets available to them, and feel that they have to leave the community to get ahead, communities suffer. We posit that a lack of social capital among young people in communities makes community action and engagement more difficult and results in fewer cooperative endeavors and less long term positive community development.



Our Solution



We bring together youth and community development researchers from 17 land grant universities

Accomplishments: We have powerful preliminary indicators that 4-H builds social capital but need to build bigger data set to move from anecdotal to definitively quantifiable outcomes that will demonstrate the importance of this construct to different stakeholders and allow for the development and implementation of promising practices across the youth and community development fields.

We plan a multi-phased study using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to build on a preliminary study indicating that social capital development occurs in 4-H.

Accomplishments: Social capital survey and interview protocol piloted in California and Maryland demonstrated robust reliability. A participatory ripple mapping process is integrated into a toolkit to measure community change in the USDA-funded Engaging Youth Serving Communities project.



The results of this research will improve the quality of community youth development practice.

Accomplishments: Research findings have been disseminated through the Extension system via CYFAR, NAE4-HA and Galaxy Conference presentations, *Journal of Extension* articles, and national and state webinars and training sessions. Findings have been shared more broadly with the field, notably through a 2013 special issue of *New Directions for Youth Development*. Findings from current research are building content for a toolkit focused on producing and documenting public value.

Project Participants

Kirk Astroth (Arizona), Keith Nathaniel (California), James Lindstrom (Idaho), Jodi Sterle & Keli Tallman (Iowa), Elaine Johannes (Kansas), Barbara Baker (Maine), Nia Fields (Maryland), Brian Wibby (Michigan), Steve Hennes (Missouri), Mary Emery (South Dakota), Pat Boyes & Janet Edwards (Washington), Matt Calvert (Wisconsin) and others...

Upcoming Opportunities

Your state or county programs can participate in the next phase of our research.

Website launch and webinar in early 2016 – give a business card or your email to a team member to be invited. Or you can email matthew.calvert@uwex.edu.