

Adventure Central: Applying the “Demonstration Plot” Concept to Youth Development

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Abstract

Historically, land-grant university research stations focused on demonstrating successful farming methods. The land-grant mission and the principles at its foundation have broad applicability, and we believe the land-grant principles can be successfully applied in urban settings to a university’s work with youth and families. In this article we describe our work at Adventure Central, which has become a demonstration plot to learn about and share what works for youth and family programming. We describe the program components and lessons learned from being engaged with youth on a daily basis for the past six years. We argue that Adventure Central is an example of how extension remains relevant to the needs of today’s society and serves as a model of outreach and engagement by extending the lessons learned to benefit other youth development efforts.

*“The place of the academy is in the world not beyond it. . .”
(Taylor 1981, 37)*

The Demonstration Plot Concept

The land-grant university model—including the agricultural experiment station and the Cooperative Extension System—has been considered one of the unique achievements in the American education system (*Rasmussen 1989*). Land-grant universities were established as “people’s universities,” and extension’s mission was to reach beyond the university campus to all the people in the state. Spanier (*1999, 199*) noted that the “fundamental and founding purpose [of the land-grant institution] is to use our educational resources to inform and improve the quality of life.” Demonstrations were considered an appropriate means of disseminating the useful and practical information generated by the university.

Historically, land-grant university research stations focused on demonstrating successful farming methods. Seaman Knapp, who is considered the father of extension, pioneered early demonstration work (*Bailey 1945; Seevers et al. 1997*). By establishing demonstrations in collaboration with local farmers in Texas, Knapp

convinced them to use research-based methods of farming, thereby increasing their annual yields compared to those who did not use his methods. A similar movement was under way under the leadership of Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama (Seevers et al. 1997). The success of this work set the stage for what became the Cooperative Extension System (Graham 1994). As a result, local field agents who held joint appointments with a land-grant college were hired in other parts of the country to build on this successful model.

In addition to agriculture, extension's work in the early years also focused on reaching youth and families. Around the turn of the twentieth century, educators organized youth into clubs that would become the present-day 4-H program (Wessel and Wessel 1982). Through these corn and canning clubs 4-H agents promoted learning by doing, and at fairs and contests, youth demonstrated what they had learned. Home demonstration agents worked with women to teach topics important to the well-being of the

“While many people still associate extension with agriculture and rural America, others note that the land-grant mission and the principles at its foundation have broader applicability.”

family—food preparation, sanitation, and home management—and worked to improve communities by starting school lunch programs and community betterment efforts (Christian 1959; Rasmussen 1989). When the agents could not meet the demand for instruction, they trained local leaders to give demonstrations (Christian 1959).

Now almost 100 years old, extension is seeing its relevance in today's society questioned. Spurred by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-

Grant Universities, there is discussion regarding whether extension work should be concentrated in agricultural departments or engage departments across the entire university to address other issues of concern. While many people still associate extension with agriculture and rural America, others note that the land-grant mission and the principles at its foundation have broader applicability (Bull et al. 2004; McDowell 2001; Reilly 2006). Although some have questioned whether expanding programs to urban areas violates the original intent of the Smith-Lever legislation that created the extension system in 1914 (Terry 1995), others have encouraged this expansion (Extension Committee on Organization

Table 1. Land-Grant Mission and Principles

Mission	
A three-part mission of research, teaching, and service	
Principles	
•	Providing access to higher education for all, not just the upper class
•	Education that extends beyond the campus to the community
•	Promoting scientific investigation
•	Conducting research that has value for the problems and issues of society
•	Developing new and practical knowledge to improve the quality of life
•	Practical application of knowledge generated at the university to problems and issues
•	Putting knowledge to work for the benefit of society
•	Reciprocally engaging with communities to solve problems
•	Teaching, research, and service missions inform one another

Sources: Aronson and Webster 2007; McGrath 2006; Seevers et al. 1997.

and Policy 1995). Today, in varying degrees, extension faculty and staff of land-grant universities are engaged with citizens across their states who live in urban, suburban, and rural areas. We believe the land-grant principles (summarized in table 1) can be applied successfully in an urban setting, as well as to extension's work with youth and families. As noted by Westwood (1973) over thirty years ago, "the laboratories to work in for the solution to the problems of inner-city youth are not on the university campus. . . . [We must] deliver the university resources 'where the need is.'"

One such location where extension is addressing needs of urban youth and families is Adventure Central at Wesleyan MetroPark, an education center that targets urban youth in Dayton, Ohio. Opening its doors in October 2000, Adventure Central is made possible through a partnership between Ohio State University (OSU) Extension's 4-H Youth Development program and Five Rivers MetroParks. In this article we describe our work at Adventure Central, which has become a demonstration plot to learn what works for youth programming. We trace the development of the program and describe its components and the lessons learned from being engaged with youth on a daily basis for the past six years. We argue that Adventure Central is an example of how extension remains relevant to the needs of today's society and serves as a model of outreach and engagement by extending the lessons learned to benefit other youth development efforts.

Origins of Adventure Central

In 1995 Five Rivers MetroParks took over ownership of a park in west Dayton. Through an organized neighborhood association, the local community expressed a desire to attract and serve children in their area. At that time the CEO of Five Rivers MetroParks also served on the Ohio 4-H Foundation Board of Directors and felt that 4-H could have a big effect on inner-city youth. With the vision of incorporating the 4-H experience into an urban park environment, a team of staff from both agencies was formed. In an effort to create a facility and a program reflecting the unique needs of the community, the team undertook a process of brainstorming, idea generating, and data gathering to bring the vision to reality. The process used fits the description of what Peters (2002) refers to as *educational organizing*, which has roots in the early years of extension and remains relevant today.

The needs assessment process included gathering national program examples; talking with staff in the two agencies; collecting local demographics, existing data, and reports; and conducting focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders in the community (e.g., residents, community leaders, and local government officials). The population of the target area is primarily African American, with a median annual income of approximately \$18,000. Nearly all youth (85%) qualify for the free and reduced-price meal program. Data collected locally in 1998 indicated that there were not sufficient positive opportunities for youth during out-of-school hours (Modic and McNeely 1998). Over forty representatives from the local community, social service agencies, and youth-serving agencies were interviewed. When asked what children in their neighborhood needed most, these representatives consistently indicated that there were not sufficient positive after-school and summer opportunities for youth, that youth in the target neighborhoods were underserved, and that youth development needs were not being met (e.g., for developing self-esteem and having positive role models).

The team concluded that a place and a program providing hands-on environmental education experiences and sustained contact with nature, other children, and positive adult role models would capitalize on the strengths of both organizations and fill an unmet need in the community. The resulting products from the community needs assessment and data collection process included a mission statement, goals, and a program plan. The mission of Adventure Central is to promote positive youth development education

Table 2. Adventure Central's Goals

Provide Youth Development with an emphasis on environmental education, life skills, job readiness skills, character education, leadership skills, decision making, and discipline.

Provide Positive, Sustained Adult and Youth Interaction on an ongoing basis through adult volunteers and others in the community.

Offer a Variety of Structured Events and Programs that are fun and utilize the environment, science, out-of-doors, and hands-on activities in a safe, caring setting.

Assume Young People Have a Say in Their Future and the program direction at Adventure Central.

Encourage Opportunities to Give Back to the community through service.

and leadership skills using an environmental foundation in a welcoming, safe, fun, active setting that utilizes volunteers and community resources with adult and youth interaction. Table 2 summarizes key goals.

Among the most exciting aspects of this program are the resources that both partners brought together to create and maintain a strong urban youth development program. Both partner organizations share a similar vision focused around environmental education and long-term contact with youth as well as a commitment to engage the urban audience of west Dayton. This collaboration between the two organizations was more than the sum of its parts, as it expanded programmatic efforts that neither entity could have accomplished alone. Five Rivers MetroParks brought an outstanding local public image, physical access at a community park, and a strong funding base. Ohio State University Extension's contributions included success with bringing together stakeholders to deliver community-based educational programs; capacity for program management; youth development philosophy; and experiential, research-based curriculum. An annual budget of \$350,000 includes financial support from both partner organizations as well as grants and contracts. Five Rivers MetroParks provides the facility, adjacent park, and associated support, resources typically provided by county commissioners when funding a local county extension office. (Adventure Central exists in addition to a county extension office in Montgomery County where Dayton is located.) Table 3 summarizes the lessons learned from the early phase of development of the Adventure Central partnership.

Table 3. Lessons Learned from the Early Phase of Development

1. **Setting the Stage.** Conducting a community needs assessment, securing a long-term (ten-year) formal agreement, and collaborating to develop a mission and goals early in the process provided a strong foundation for the program.
2. **Being Flexible.** Those involved must demonstrate flexibility in how the organizations work together, in staffing, in developing programs, and in policies and procedures.
3. **Finding the Right People.** It takes the right kind of people to navigate an interagency effort successfully. Flexibility, communication and interpersonal skills, an open mind, patience, and a positive attitude are key traits.
4. **Using the Same Measurement of Success.** All partners need to be headed in the same direction and have the same vision for what success looks like.
5. **Becoming Part of the Community.** Urban communities see many programs come and go. Thus, it is important to take a long-term commitment and get engaged with the community. The level of success will be determined by the trust and relationships established with partners and the community.

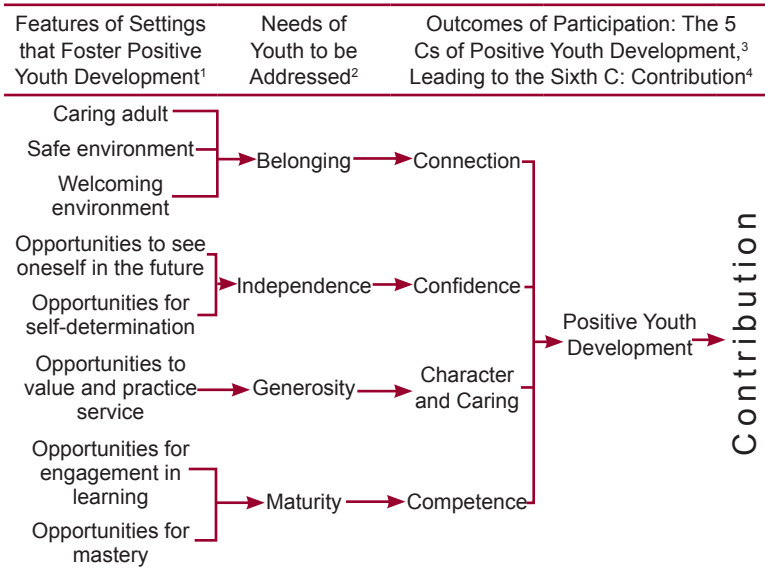
Source: Cochran and Arnett 2005.

The Place

Serving as a hub for out-of-school time programming, Adventure Central brings the 4-H experience into an urban environment for youth in kindergarten through age 18 during out-of-school hours. Beginning with just 25 youth when pilot programming started in October 2000, total enrollment for the 2005–2006 year has grown to 387 youth and their parents. There have been over 60,000 contact hours with youth in after-school, day camp, and residential camping programs, and 51 percent of the youth attended at least 100 days of programming (with some attending as many as 185 days). In addition, 115 volunteers have contributed over 18,000 hours working with youth.

The Adventure Central program is housed in a renovated one-floor building with an open central reception area with lockers for youth to store their belongings. The building contains a multipurpose room, kitchen, staff offices, five classrooms, and a mobile lab of fifteen laptop computers. Situated on fifty-plus acres, outdoor space includes raised-bed gardens, a fenced play yard, access to a creek, a paved recreation trail, and hiking trails, all providing opportunities for a variety of interactions with the natural environment. We believe this physical location is particularly relevant in an urban area, as it has allowed for a consistent, stable presence

Table 4. Key Components of Positive Youth Development



¹ Eccles and Gootman 2002; National 4-H Impact Assessment 2001

² Kress 2005

³ Eccles and Gootman 2002

⁴ Lerner 2006; Lerner et al. 2005

and identity in the neighborhood. However, there is more to understanding Adventure Central than describing its physical location. The environment created within this physical space is also important.

The Program

We have learned that the less structured and informal aspects are as significant as the organized activities, and striking a balance is an intentional programmatic effort. Even more important than the program components is the philosophy of positive youth development upon which they are based. These key elements of positive youth development were derived from the National 4-H Impact Assessment (2001) and represent features that programs need to provide in order to ensure quality and to ultimately achieve outcomes for youth. Programs that provide these elements address young people’s needs for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (Kress 2005) and in turn enable them to develop positively and contribute to society (Lerner 2006; Lerner et al. 2005; see table 4).

Table 5. Lessons Learned about Parent* Engagement

1. Dedicate staff resources to parent involvement. Adventure Central employs a full-time staff member to address family engagement and connections between home, after-school, and school settings. However, family engagement is also viewed as a role for *all* staff members.

2. Plan specific activities to engage parents and evaluate these efforts. Adventure Central staff developed and expanded activities to foster family involvement. These activities included Family Reading/Literacy Nights, Family Fun Nights, educational events, field trips, and camping trips with team-building activities.

3. Focus on communication to build relationships and trust. We have found that an equally important aspect of engaging families is the informal interactions and conversations that occur. While informal, these interactions are intentional, and much parent education is embedded in these contacts. Building a program staff that understands and strives to apply this philosophy to parents and youth is a reason the program has been successful.

Source: Ferrari et al. 2006.

**Parent is conceptualized broadly to mean the primary caretaker.*

Youth programming: Youth are engaged through programmatic models such as structured after-school activities, a youth leadership board, clubs, summer day camps, overnight camps, and work-force preparation and work-based learning experiences. The center is open for programming between 2:00 and 8:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday during the school year, and offers expanded hours in the summer. Youth spend time getting help with homework, reading with volunteers, learning through hands-on activities, and forming positive relationships with caring adults. During this time, youth are provided with a meal, and they engage in activities focused on such topics as technology, gardening, science and nature, or health and nutrition. An emphasis is placed on hands-on, experiential activities utilizing research-based curriculum. These activities enhance engagement in the learning process. In addition, there is an embedded curriculum that addresses developing personal qualities, such as respect and responsibility, and life skills, such as leadership, teamwork, and communication, as well as an emphasis on building relationships with peers and adult role models, features that characterize high-quality youth development programs (*Eccles and Gootman 2002; Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pittman 2004; Russell and Reisner 2006*).

Parent engagement: In 2003, Adventure Central was selected as one of two sites for Ohio's New Communities Project, part of the

Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program administered through the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, OSU Extension’s federal partner. The emphasis was on enhancing parent involvement in order to promote the holistic development of youth participants and to close the circle of support between school, home, and after-school environments. This focus is in alignment with an ecological approach and current models of family engagement (e.g., *Kakli et al. 2006*) and research evidence suggesting that parents’ involvement in their children’s lives is key to their academic achievement and overall healthy development (*Fan and Chen 2001; Jeynes 2005*). We conceptualize parent involvement to include the many ways that parents can be involved beyond being physically present at programs. Based on our experience, our research, and the application of these and other research findings, we summarize the lessons learned regarding enhancement of parent engagement within a youth development program in table 5.

The People

In addition to place and program, having the right people involved can help the program reach its full potential. Extension educators play a variety of roles in relation to the development and implementation of community programs (*Peters and Hittleman 2003*). As a result, the two 4-H youth development educators from OSU Extension who lead the Adventure Central project spend much of their time on staff development and training. We use the term “people” or “staff” broadly at Adventure Central to include our entire team, including paid staff, AmeriCorps members, college student interns, teens (paid and unpaid), and many community volunteers.

This diverse staff mix—in terms of background, age, gender, race, level of education, and other characteristics—is an important part of our success. We recruit, select, and train staff and volunteers from the local community, and have been successful in engaging this group, most of whom are from an urban, low-income community traditionally underserved by extension. In addition, last year partnerships with the University of Dayton’s Semester of Service Program, University of Dayton Fitz Center for Leadership and Community, Ohio Community Computing Network, and Sisters of Notre Dame Mission Volunteer Program provided the service of six full-time AmeriCorps members. The word “staff” embraces everyone who participates in that capacity, regardless of the source of funding.

The Adventure Central team emphasizes having professional role models and caring adults engaged with youth in experiential learning. Research supports that caring youth-staff relationships may be the most critical element to program success (*Rhodes 2004; Shortt 2002*). Engaging with caring adults creates the opportunity for youth to create valuable relationships, and we have found that these relationships contribute to improved youth attendance and engagement (*Ferrari and Turner 2006; Paisley and Ferrari 2005*).

A comprehensive orientation and training program for staff (including teen and adult volunteers) who work with youth at Adventure Central is focused on developing leadership skills and abilities as a foundation for positive youth development and includes an initial individual orientation/training and group training sessions held throughout the year. This is accomplished through intentional development and training activities for the entire team that include a combination of one-on-one teaching, group teaching, and external training opportunities.

1. Orientation for staff includes 4-H philosophy, behavior management, youth protection, and volunteer responsibilities.
2. Training sessions focus on skills and abilities to support the key features of positive youth development programs (see table 2).
3. Skills addressed in training opportunities have included teamwork, communication, problem solving, strategic planning, program planning, time management, grant management, nutrition, and specific curricula to be used with youth.

Our goal in staff development is to help each individual learn, grow, and make positive contributions. An atmosphere that values learning is fostered, making the work experience a learning experience for both teens and adult staff. Table 6 summarizes lessons learned about place, program, and people.

A Demonstration Plot for Urban Youth Development—What Does It Mean?

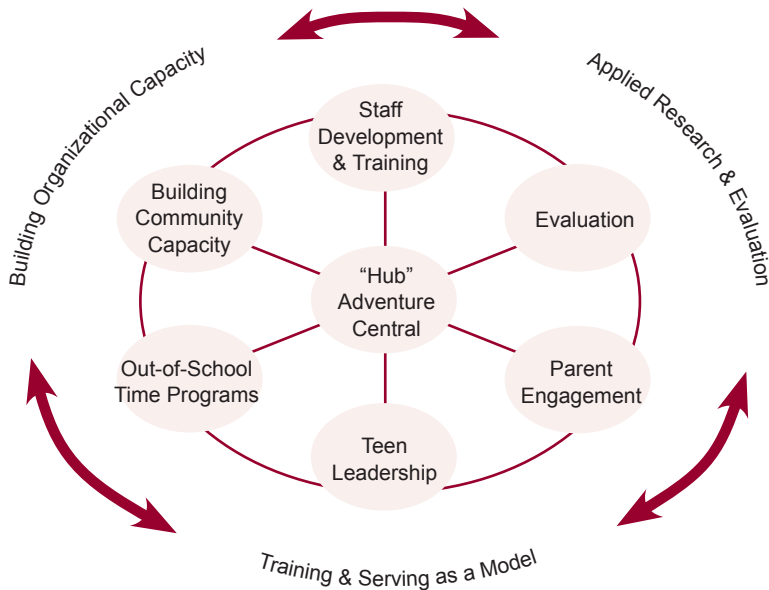
We believe Adventure Central represents a model for outreach for the twenty-first-century land-grant institution. In the words of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (*2000, 10*), it is a “conscious effort to bring the resources and expertise at our institutions to bear on the commu-

Table 6. Summary of Lessons Learned about Place, Program, and People at Adventure Central

Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that relationships are at the heart of the program: staff ↔ staff, staff ↔ parent, staff ↔ youth, organization ↔ community, and organization ↔ organization. • Work consciously to connect home, school, and after-school environments. • Undertake continuous monitoring and evaluation to maintain a program that meets needs and upholds high standards. • Reflect on what you're learning. • Focus on the big picture without losing sight of the day-to-day aspects.
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a stable physical location in the community. • Create a physically safe and welcoming environment within that space.
Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground the program in a philosophy of positive youth development. • Develop intentional program plans, even for embedded aspects of the curriculum. • Strike a balance between structured and less structured aspects of the program. • Ground all aspects of the program in best practices.
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be creative in developing a staffing plan—a mix of full- and part-time, paid and volunteer staff can work. • Develop the capacity of staff through orientation and ongoing training and professional development opportunities. • Ensure opportunities to make the work experience a learning experience. • Communicate underlying philosophy and expectations to staff.

nity.” However, the learning that occurs at Adventure Central is reciprocal in nature, which is particularly important with the complex situations encountered in communities (*Aronson and Webster 2007*). Part of the process is learning about the needs of youth and families and then empowering them to make a difference in their lives and in the local community. In addition, the partnership we have created between field staff and a campus-based extension specialist has allowed us to be grounded in the community through the day-to-day conduct of educational programming, while also approaching this work in a scholarly manner. Both aspects of our work are better because of it.

In the early years energy was devoted to establishing the program on a firm footing, and after more than six full years of operation, we are now successfully reaching urban youth and their families to provide positive youth development and environmental education through ongoing after-school and summer programs (*Cochran and Arnett 2005*). Now, in the words of our OSU Extension

Figure 1. Adventure Central Demonstration Model

director, it is time to “shout about it” (*Smith 2004*). The practical needs of the program have driven an applied research agenda in which scholarship leads to use of best practices and contributions to the knowledge base. While individual elements contribute to its success, Adventure Central derives its strength from the comprehensive nature of the program. Furthermore, this model of engagement can be replicated. We describe this model in more detail in a subsequent section.

The model depicted in figure 1 contains a central “hub” and spokes that represent the high-quality, relevant program developed to meet local needs. In our example, the hub is physically situated in an urban community. The first circle around the hub represents the activities that constitute the day-to-day work at Adventure Central. McGrath (*2006*) has argued that high-quality extension work is scholarly, and we agree. Because we are part of a land-grant university, whose mission is to develop and disseminate new and practical knowledge to improve the quality of life, we conceive of our role as including both outreach to meet local needs and using the experience within the local community to inform our scholarly work. The outer circle illustrates our scholarly work in terms of discovery, integration, application, and teaching, the four aspects of an expanded definition of scholarship promoted by Boyer (*1990*). In addition, it builds on a definition of scholarship as

Table 7. Examples of Scholarship at Adventure Central

Type of Scholarship ¹	Description ¹	Example ²
Discovery	Investigating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research to contribute to the body of new knowledge • Answers questions of "What is to be known?" and "What is yet to be found?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting needs assessment • Conducting focus groups and surveys of parents, staff, and program participants • Conducting evaluation of program components and program models • Studying long-term participation of youth
Integration	Synthesizing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making connections across the disciplines; placing knowledge in a larger context; illuminating data in a revealing way; critical analysis; interpreting research • Answers questions of "What do the findings mean?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommending program practices based on a combination of reviews of literature and program evaluation findings • Incorporating parent engagement within a youth development program • Developing program models that draw on literature in a variety of disciplines that will apply to other program settings • Reflecting on and synthesizing lessons learned
Application	Applying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of knowledge to solve problems; application of knowledge for the public good • Answers questions of "How can knowledge be applied to consequential problems? How can it be helpful to individuals as well as the institution?" and "Can social problems themselves define the agenda?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making changes to programs based on research findings (e.g., expanded offerings in parent engagement) • Writing program reports and journal articles to share findings of program evaluations • Expanding the Adventure Central program model to other locations (e.g., Dayton Public Schools) • Using practical problems experienced by after-school and youth development programs to drive a research agenda
Teaching	Understanding and Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmitting, transforming, and extending knowledge; ensures the continuity of knowledge • Teaching includes non-formals and not-for-credit offerings (Adams et al. 2005) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting training for after-school program staff • Hosting field trips for faculty, staff, and students studying youth organizations • Developing and teaching sessions for students on campus prior to service-learning assignments • Supervising students in service-learning placements at Adventure Central

¹ Based on Boyer 1990, 17–25.

² Examples based on a definition of scholarship as original intellectual work that is communicated to and validated by peers (Adams et al. 2005; McGrath 2006; Schaubert et al. 1998; Smith 2004).

original intellectual work that is communicated and validated by peers (Adams et al. 2005; McGrath 2006; Smith 2004; Schauber et al. 1998). Table 7 summarizes examples of scholarship at Adventure Central. The arrows indicate that each part of the model is connected, each informed by the other, resulting in a program that is more than the sum of its parts. As McGrath (2006) noted, this is a dynamic process; “when we try to apply new ideas, we discover new knowledge” (par. 14).

Evaluation and Applied Research

Evaluation is used to improve the program at Adventure Central on an ongoing basis. Evaluation methods include interviews, observation, focus groups, youth surveys and self-assessment, adult mentor assessments, end-of-program surveys, review of participation measures, and an annual parent survey. Using multiple evaluation methods, several studies indicate that Adventure Central is meeting the developmental needs of its participants (Ferrari, Arnett, and Cochran 2007; Ferrari et al. 2002; Ferrari et al. 2006; Ferrari and Turner 2006; Paisley and Ferrari 2005). In addition, focus groups and surveys indicate that parents believe their children are experiencing a variety of educational and social benefits due to their participation (Ferrari et al. 2006). Results of these evaluation efforts have led to program changes, such as expanded offerings of family learning experiences. We continue to plan additional studies, such as an exploration of the impacts of youths’ long-term program participation.

“[P]arents believe their children are experiencing a variety of educational and social benefits . . .”

Continuous monitoring and evaluation ensures that the programs at Adventure Central are aligned with best practices in youth development. Programs include essential elements such as opportunities to develop mastery, practice community service, set goals, and make decisions. These key elements, from the National 4-H Impact Assessment (2001; Kress 2005), represent features of youth development programs that have been strongly supported in the literature (Eccles and Gootman 2002). However, the results of evaluation not only affect what we do at Adventure Central, but are beginning to be applied more broadly to the practice of conducting youth development programs as we communicate those results through a variety of forms, including teaching, presentations, and publications.

Training and Serving as a Model

Adventure Central has evolved to serve as a model program. Because Adventure Central is an extension-managed facility with programs conducted on site, a unique opportunity exists to act as a learning laboratory within a community-based setting. Adventure Central has hosted visitors from across Ohio, as well as other states, and from other countries, including Armenia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan. Others seek advice via phone and e-mail. In addition, Adventure Central hosted a two-day training session for extension professionals and their partners from after-school programs in sixteen counties around the state. Participants engaged in hands-on learning sessions during the day, then interacted with youth program participants and saw after-school programming in action. They used this knowledge when they returned to their local communities to implement healthy lifestyles and science programming in after-school settings.

Application and teaching beyond Adventure Central are accomplished through presentations and publications that share the results of our work. Just as academic departments measure their productivity in terms of scholarly output, so can Adventure Central. From 2001 to 2006, research related to Adventure Central resulted in three peer-reviewed journal articles, nineteen peer-reviewed presentations, and six peer-reviewed presentations to OSU Extension professionals. Adventure Central has also been recognized in organizational reports (e.g., Ohio 4-H Foundation, annual reports), newspaper articles, and parks and recreation publications, as these formats are relevant to the audiences we strive to reach. Another example of validation by peers is the addition of Adventure Central to the Harvard Family Research Project's Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database in 2006. In addition, Adventure Central was selected by peer review as one of twenty-three programs in the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents' *Directory of Successful Urban Programs* to be published online in 2007 (<http://www.nae4ha.org>). Inclusion in these databases is an indicator of program quality, and it means that the outcomes of Adventure Central's program are available to a wider audience.

Building Individual, Community, and Organizational Capacity

Other aspects of Adventure Central's productivity are harder to measure. By expanding and enhancing the local skill base and the role that staff, volunteers, and teens play in out-of-school time programming, program impact is enhanced. Significant capacity

has been built during Adventure Central's six years of operation. The extension educators providing leadership have been able to build a team of local staff who are providing most of the daily leadership for ongoing programming. Through our approach to building a program model that is based on current best practices and focused on creating a learning environment, we are building community capacity at Adventure Central and beyond.

Building capacity of University of Dayton students is another example. Adventure Central staff members have developed and taught sessions on building relationships with youth to over 1,800 University of Dayton student volunteers. These students have an impact through their volunteer work in Dayton during the school year and in their home communities. Students also provide service at Adventure Central and consistently report having a positive experience. To date, two courses have integrated service-learning into their curriculum. When students are prepared in such a way, it enables them

“Adventure Central represents a collaborative effort to bring the resources of multiple organizations and institutions to bear on a community need.”

to respond to the complex problems of society once they leave the confines of the university (Aronson and Webster 2007). Individuals trained through Adventure Central are moving into other work settings in the community where they are applying their skills in schools and other nonprofit organizations. They carry with them the philosophy of positive youth development that is the foundation of Adventure Central's program.

Community capacity is also being built beyond the Adventure Central hub. One example is a pilot after-school program implemented at a Dayton public school facility. Through a partnership with Dayton Public Schools and the University of Dayton, Adventure Central placed a former college intern into a leadership role for this new after-school program. The lessons learned from this effort, similar to those from the early phase of Adventure Central's development (see table 2), have been used by other Neighborhood School Centers in the Dayton public school system to improve practices and programs. In terms of organizational capacity, the University of Dayton has also looked to Adventure Central for assistance with volunteer management and screening issues, issues that have campuswide implications. Adventure Central has also

hosted biannual tours for University of Dayton faculty to increase awareness of programming and partnering opportunities.

Finally, building capacity extends beyond the Dayton community. Connections have been made at the university level to the Ohio State University (OSU). Even though Adventure Central is located outside Columbus and the main OSU campus, it has been a frequent destination for class trips (e.g., youth organizations class, teaching methods course) as well as faculty tours (e.g., OSU Roads Scholar Tour, College of Education faculty). Visitors see how an extension program can effectively engage an urban audience, and on-site presentations include lessons learned in partnerships, programming, and best practices. On the macro level, we are engaged in scholarly work in areas such as leadership, partnerships, evaluation, and funding. Through presentations and publications, this work is communicated and disseminated to a wider audience, thereby helping others to build individual and organizational capacity. Our challenge will be continuing to identify the public benefits of our programs (*McGrath 2006*), when many of the impacts of such programs take years to be realized.

Conclusions

This article has described a land-grant university's work to develop an urban youth education center in Dayton, Ohio. We propose that Adventure Central is a model of outreach and engagement in an urban community. The partnership that created Adventure Central and its continuing work in the community embodies the Kellogg Commission's (2000) definition of engagement. We believe the work we are doing at Adventure Central is in keeping with this tradition of early extension work (*Peters 2002*), as well as being on target with the present needs and future issues of our target audience. Although we are growing people, not corn, in our modern-day demonstration plot, the same land-grant principles of engagement apply.

Adventure Central represents a collaborative effort to bring the resources of multiple organizations and institutions to bear on a community need. A certain synergy is created by the setting, the activities that take place in the setting, and the people involved in leading the activities. An additional synergy is created by the meaningful engagement of the university with the community. Adventure Central's role as a demonstration plot for positive youth development programming continues to evolve. We believe the success of Adventure Central can be judged not only by its effect

in the local community, but by its influence on the practice of youth development programs on a larger scale. Through developing a program model, applying lessons learned, disseminating scholarly work, and educating current and future youth development professionals, we are also building capacity in Ohio and nationally. Our model is one example of how other institutions can be engaged in outreach scholarship and continue the land-grant spirit of public service into the twenty-first century by addressing the most difficult and pressing problems of our urban communities and playing a part in the future of our society (Reilly 2006; Severino 1996).

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