

Adventure Central: A Research Station for Urban Youth Development

**Program Showcase
Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Conference
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The Demonstration Plot Concept

Historically, land-grant research stations and the demonstration work pioneered by Seaman Knapp focused on demonstrating successful farming. Knapp described the importance of demonstration work best when he said:

“What a man hears he may doubt, what he sees he may possibly doubt, but what he does himself he cannot doubt...school teaching merely instructs; it rarely reforms.”

We believe the same argument can be made in the 21st century for Extension’s work with youth and families. Following Knapp’s example, Adventure Central in Dayton, Ohio, provides a “demonstration plot” to learn about what works for youth programming, particularly in urban areas.



A Research Station for Urban Youth Development –What Does It Mean?

Adventure Central at Wesleyan MetroPark is a youth education center that targets urban youth in Dayton, Ohio. Adventure Central brings the 4-H experience into an urban environment for youth in kindergarten through age 18 during out-of- school hours. Adventure Central is made possible through a partnership between The Ohio State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development and Five Rivers MetroParks.

Adventure Central is a learning laboratory in many ways. Through applied research projects, evaluation efforts, pilot programming, and on-going opportunities for teens, volunteers, college students, and staff members to learn through direct experience, Adventure Central is building capacity to deliver high quality educational programming and illustrate to others how it’s done.

Key features include:

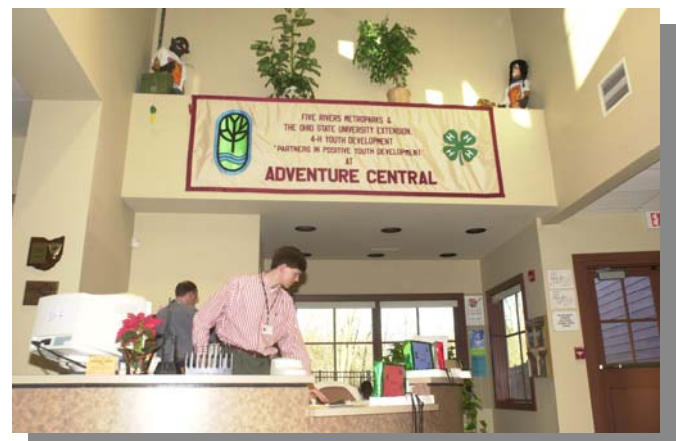
- Developed based on identified community need
- Programming aligned with best practices
- Continuous evaluation
- Application of evaluation findings to improve practice
- Sharing information and serving as a model

From the start, Adventure Central was a model for outreach and engagement. Learning through experience with pilot programming, evaluation, and applied research projects has ensured that programming is aligned with current research on best practices. Now we have begun to explore Adventure Central’s role in transferring that knowledge and building capacity for OSU Extension’s work with youth programs.

Adventure Central – The Place

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 multi-purpose room, kitchen, staff offices, five classrooms, and a mobile lab of fifteen laptop computers.

Situated on 60 acres, outdoor space includes raised bed gardens and an open field. A short walk leads to the river, where a bridge connects to the bulk of the park area. A trail leads to a building that houses the aquaculture project – 200 bluegills in two large tanks.



Based on Community Needs

Programming was developed based on a clearly identified community needs. Data were collected from over 40 representatives from the local community. They consistently indicated a lack of sufficient positive after-school and summer opportunities for youth, youth in the target neighborhoods were underserved, and youth development needs were not being met. The resulting effort at Adventure Central draws from the combined resources of Five Rivers MetroParks and OSU Extension.

ADVENTURE CENTRAL'S MISSION

To promote positive youth development education 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.

Adventure Central – The Program

Adventure Central serves as a hub for out-of-school time programming such as after-school activities, a youth leadership board, workforce development training and work experiences, open computer labs, clubs, overnight camps, and summer day camps for school-age youth. The center is open between 2:30 and 8:00 p.m. from Monday through Thursday, 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 snack (the equivalent of a healthy dinner), and a program or activity that focuses on such topics as technology, gardening, or health and nutrition



For each session, youth participants are divided into five groups based on age, grade level, and maturity level. A group leader, an assistant group leader, and other staff or volunteers supervise each group. The center also offers six-week, topic-specific clubs that meet one day a week for one hour following the after-school program.



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 on-going 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.

Adventure Central – The People

Two 4-H Youth Development Educators from OSU Extension provide leadership for programming at Adventure Central. A diverse mix of staff includes paid staff, AmeriCorps members, college student interns, and many community volunteers,.

2005 Program Highlights

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|------------------|--------------------------|
| Total Enrollment | 260 Youth 100 Parents |
|------------------|--------------------------|

43, 000 Contact Hours

117 Volunteers contributing over 9,400 hours

Continuous Evaluation

Evaluation is used to improve the program at Adventure Central on an on-going basis. Evaluation methods used include:

- Interviews
- Observation
- Focus groups
- Youth surveys and self-assessment
- Adult mentor assessments
- End-of-program surveys
- Review of participation measures
- Annual parent survey

Programming Aligned with Best Practices

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.



Focus on Parent

Involvement. 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) grant. The emphasis was to enhance parent involvement in order to promote the holistic development of youth participants and to close the circle of support between home, school, and after school. This focus is in alignment with research that parents' involvement in their children's lives is key to their academic achievement and overall healthy development. Focus groups and surveys indicated that parents believe their child is experiencing a variety of educational and social benefits due to their participation. Social skills and school performance were mentioned most often. Results of this evaluation led to expanded offerings of family learning experiences.



Serving as a Model

Because Adventure Central is an Extension-managed facility where programs occur 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 countries, including Armenia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan.

In 2005, Adventure Central hosted a two-day training session for 62 staff from 15 4-H Afterschool demonstration sites from around the state. Participants engaged in hands-on learning sessions during the day, and then were able to interact with program participants and see after-school programming in action. The potential to continue hosting similar trainings is being explored by the Ohio 4-H Youth Development Afterschool Priority Team.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
&
FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS



"PARTNERS IN POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT"

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