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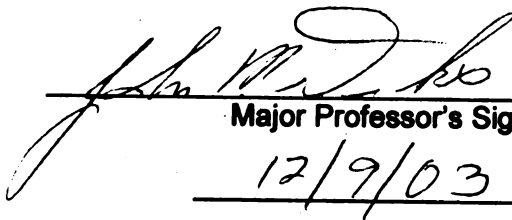
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**UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTION CHANGE IN
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEERS**

By

Julie A. Chapin

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTION CHANGE IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEERS

By

Julie A. Chapin

Helping educators improve their teaching practice is a challenge facing many researchers in the field of education. In the nonformal education arena, volunteer-driven organizations – like the Cooperative Extension System and more specifically it's 4-H Youth Development program – comprise one of the fields of practice struggling to address this issue.

The 4-H program is committed to promoting positive youth development in communities. Since the early 1990s, the Michigan 4-H organization has focused more on life skills and asset development as a way to achieve its goal of positive youth development. This shift presents the organization with some particular challenges. Volunteers are initially recruited in the 4-H program to provide leadership for a specific project or activity. Increasingly, they are being encouraged to focus more on the developmental needs of their 4-H members. This shift in focus requires the volunteer to change his or her basic perception of the volunteer role. How this change occurs is not well understood.

The purpose of this research study was to explore how volunteers' perception of their practice, within a club or group, changes from a "subject matter" focus to a "youth development" focus and the context within which this change occurs. This question was explored through a qualitative-research

design, using a narrative-inquiry approach and in-depth interviews with participants. This approach allowed the participants to share their perceptions of their experiences as Michigan 4-H volunteers.

Data analysis demonstrates Michigan 4-H volunteers come to the organization with a subject-matter focus to their work and, over time, change their focus to achieving the organization's youth-development mission. Their behaviors within the 4-H club or group change to reflect this shift in focus.

The findings of this study are consistent with literature related to the emergence of expertise within communities of practice. There is also strong evidence to support arguments for the concept of the development of wisdom by individuals, as influenced by life stage development. This research provides strong evidence volunteers define their roles through experiences with others involved in similar work. The development of expertise results from learning due to a variety of experiences, and the opportunity and support for the "deliberate practice" of that learning within groups of individuals with similar interests.

This work makes a strong case for committing organizational resources and time to the intentional formation of communities of practice related to positive youth development as a way of supporting and enhancing the work of volunteers in this field. Individuals responsible for the professional development of volunteers in the nonformal-education field need to broaden their approach to include acknowledgment of learning that occurs from interactions with others and through general life experiences.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Helping educators improve their teaching practice is a challenge facing many researchers in the field of education. Understanding the nature of behavior change and how it occurs involves understanding the context in which the behavior occurs as well as the knowledge, skills and beliefs of the individuals being studied. Researchers in the field of teacher education continue to look for ways to change classroom behaviors to improve the practice of teaching and learning in K-16 education (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Clark & Yinger, 1979; Cranton, 1996; Fang, 1996; Mezirow, 2000). Changing teacher behavior in the classroom is a process that is mediated, in part, by understanding and influencing how the educators think about their work.

Health education, adult basic education (ABE), adult literacy programs and developmental education programs are just a few examples of other learning communities that are working to address this issue. Increasingly, these fields provide educational support to individuals through the efforts of volunteers who serve as “teachers” for the program participants.

One field of practice that is struggling to address this issue in the nonformal educational arena is volunteer-driven organizations like the Cooperative Extension System and more specifically its 4-H Youth Development program. The purpose of this research study is to explore how volunteers’ perceptions of their practice, within a club or group, change from a “subject-matter” focus to a “youth-development” focus and the context within which this change occurs.

Historically, volunteers have played a significant role in education for hundreds of years. In the late 1700s, volunteers were found helping with churches and school systems. Many schoolhouses coexisted with the church and, quite often, the teacher “was paid by the parents who could afford it, while less fortunate children were allowed to attend for free” (Ellis & Noyes, 1990, p.26). Seibold (1997) noted that by the late 1800s there was an infinite number of such groups across the country. This included the National Congress for Mothers that later developed into the National PTA. Volunteers have always been an integral part of Extension programming. Even in the early 1900s, “the volunteer . . . emerged as a central figure in Extension’s educational delivery system” (Vines & Anderson, 1976, p. 97).

The 4-H program is a volunteer-driven organization. A strong corps of volunteers, working with paid Extension staff, is responsible for organizing and conducting educational experiences in community and family settings, utilizing curriculum provided by the Cooperative Extension System. In Michigan alone, approximately 25,000 volunteers work with over 281,000 youth annually (Michigan State University Extension, 2002). They typically work within clubs or groups, the most common educational delivery vehicle of the 4-H Youth Development program.

The 4-H program is committed to promoting positive youth development in communities. Pittman (1991) defines positive youth development as a maturation process and the positive development of one’s capacities. Roth, et al. (1998, p. 272) defined youth-development programs as “age-appropriate programs designed to prepare adolescents for productive adulthood by providing

opportunities and supports to help them gain the competencies and knowledge needed to meet the challenges they will face as they mature.” The mission of 4-H Youth Development is to assist youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills and forming attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

The mission of 4-H is primarily accomplished through project area programming and activities designed to help young people build life skills and developmental assets through involvement with adults and other youth. Within 4-H, projects and activities are seen as vehicles for positive youth development. These projects and activities provide the educational base of the 4-H experience. In Michigan, volunteers have traditionally been recruited to provide expertise and support for subject-related projects and activities, and they come to 4-H with a subject-matter focus.

As society has changed, the skills children need to cope successfully with the demands of life have also changed. Since the early 1990s, the Michigan 4-H organization has been focusing more on life skills and asset development as a way to achieve its goal of positive youth development. It is reducing the emphasis on the development of subject-matter skills that have long been the central focus of the projects and the work of the volunteers.

The shift in organizational emphasis from subject-matter skills to life skills and asset development requires more intentional integration of subject-matter skills and youth-development experiences within the 4-H curriculum. More emphasis is being placed on making life skill and asset development an intentional part of the 4-H curriculum, rather than an unintentional outcome of the

4-H experience. The shifting emphasis in the curriculum brings with it a corresponding need for a paradigm shift in the volunteer's behavior from a focus on subject-matter skills to a more developmental approach which focuses on positive youth development.

This shift presents the Michigan 4-H organization with some particular challenges. Volunteers are initially recruited into the 4-H program to provide leadership for a specific project or activity. Increasingly, volunteers are being encouraged to focus more on the developmental needs of their 4-H members rather than on the project or activity they were originally recruited to teach. This shift in focus requires volunteers to (a) change how they understand their responsibilities, (b) change their behaviors within the 4-H club and (c) define the success of their efforts in new and different ways. How this change occurs is not well understood.

Background and Rationale

The organization we know as 4-H began in the early 1900s in response to a "national focus on the needs of farm boys and girls" (Reck, 1951, p. vii). Some of the issues that drove this effort included:

- A feeling on the part of educators that rural schools were inadequate;
- A growing sentiment for practical education in agriculture, manual arts and homemaking;
- The urge of colleges of agriculture to pass on new techniques to farm communities;
- A growing desire on the part of farm families for the better things of life;

- A drive to lift rural cultural standards; and
- A concern for the needs of adolescents.

The mission of the 4-H program has always been positive youth development. From its earliest history, programs and activities have been intent upon providing youth with skills and knowledge to be successful in society. According to Reck (1951), the heart of 4-H work is the club and the soul of the club is the local volunteer leader. Early in the evolution of 4-H, county Extension workers discovered that programs would develop faster and reach more young people if they spent their time training local volunteers and less time attending club meetings themselves. The Smith-Lever Act, passed in 1914, provided financial support for the Cooperative Extension System and 4-H. America's entry into World War I in 1917 provided additional support to the concept of youth learning useful skills to better themselves, their communities and their countries. These efforts were originally supported by the work of part-time, paid club leaders but the support quickly evolved to include the use of unpaid volunteers.

Throughout its history, the Cooperative Extension System has utilized many volunteers to assist in the development and delivery of educational programs. Vines and Anderson (1976) stated, "Without the cooperation and energy of tens of thousands of volunteers, it's inconceivable that Extension could succeed in rallying the resources it has to help solve individual and community problems" (p. 92).

Volunteers have been a critical component in the facilitation of Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) programs and have aided in delivering a multitude of resources to the community. In 1990, Michigan 4-H Youth

Development recommitted itself to a strong emphasis on volunteer development and positive youth development in all sectors of our communities (Michigan State University Extension, 1990).

Need assessments conducted with Michigan 4-H staff in the mid-1990s supported the need for emphasis on volunteer development related to positive youth development (Michigan State University Extension, 1993). Staff indicated that many volunteers still focused primarily on the young person's project (clothing, foods and nutrition, animals, etc.) and not on the young person and his or her personal development within the 4-H club and group activities. As a result of these need assessments, more attention has been directed to providing volunteers with the broader knowledge and skills of positive youth development. More emphasis is being placed on integrating this knowledge into the club's subject-matter activities and group meetings, and making them an intentional part of teaching and learning, rather than an incidental outcome of the 4-H experience.

The assumption behind this approach to volunteer development is the belief that providing volunteers with knowledge and skills related to positive youth development equips them with the tools they need to become effective youth developers. Similar to many approaches in staff and professional development (Cervero, 1988), Michigan 4-H volunteer development efforts have largely focused on building volunteer knowledge and skills. However, these approaches do not adequately represent the nature of change required of volunteers in making a behavioral shift from a subject-matter emphasis to a more developmental focus. In reality, the shift from "subject-matter expert" to "youth

developer” is a much more complex process. Changing an individual’s behavior requires an examination of the basic belief structure, values and assumptions related to the individual’s role and responsibilities (Mezirow, 2000).

Traditionally, developmental strategies for educators have focused on the improvement of skills, and the acquisition of knowledge and techniques related to their subject-matter area. Michigan 4-H invests over \$100,000 each year in training volunteers who work with young people in clubs and groups. Research on adult learners has shown that acquisition of new knowledge or skills does not always result in behavior change (Daloz, 1986). The researcher’s observations of volunteers within Michigan 4-H Youth Development have also shown this to be true. Tenured volunteers who have received training in positive youth development do not always change their behaviors within the club or group. A significant number of these volunteers continue to focus their efforts on skill development. In reality, change in practice is influenced by multiple factors: knowledge and skill development, beliefs, values, and contextual variables such as the environment within which the volunteer works.

The typical orientation process for Michigan 4-H volunteers consists of a one- to two-hour meeting conducted by paid Extension staff and/or one or more experienced 4-H volunteers. During this orientation, Michigan 4-H volunteers receive information about the overall mission of 4-H, and the resources and training opportunities available to them at the local, regional and state level. It is also during this initial orientation meeting that volunteers are usually introduced to the goal of positive youth development as the ultimate purpose of the 4-H experience. Volunteers may or may not understand the principles of positive

youth development or know how to structure environments for their work that will foster the development of youth assets and life skills. As a result, most new volunteers focus their educational efforts primarily on teaching the subject-matter skills of the particular project for which they provide leadership.

One- to three-day educational workshops are the primary vehicle Michigan 4-H uses to provide volunteers with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in their volunteer role. Traditionally these workshops have focused on the development of subject-matter skills related to the projects or activities the volunteers provide to their youth members. Projects in 4-H are self-directed learning activities a 4-H member undertakes in a content-based area. Through projects and activities, a young people learn specific skills, unique to the project area, as well as the broader life skills of effective communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, time management, organization and teamwork.

With the renewed emphasis on positive youth development, volunteers now receive information and training in project-skill development and broader youth-development areas such as the stages of child development, interpersonal communication skills, conflict resolution, working with children who have special needs, and coping with peer pressure. Michigan 4-H Youth Development provides project resource materials, to participants and volunteers, that contain subject-matter information as well as information on the development of life skills such as decision-making, problem solving and communication. However, this information is not always concretely connected to 4-H's positive youth-development mission.

As the tenure of Michigan 4-H volunteers continues, they receive more information and training about positive youth-development concepts at the local, regional and state levels. When volunteers become comfortable with and accustomed to their role of volunteer leader, they are expected to focus more of their efforts on the positive youth-development aspect of their responsibilities and less on subject matter.

The organizational shift in training emphasis from subject skills to developmental needs and assets does not always result in volunteer behavior change. In recent years, a great deal of research in teacher education has looked at the relationship between behavior and an individual's belief or value system. Within education, Fang (1996) showed a significant relationship between teacher beliefs and classroom behavior. Clark and Peterson (1986) contend that an individual's behavior is guided by an implicit belief system made up of personal values and assumptions. In order to change behavior, the individual must ultimately reconstruct the basic belief structure used to direct his or her behavior. This change in values and belief structure requires more than the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. It requires a fundamental change in the individual's frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000). To become meaningful, learning requires that new information become incorporated into an already well-developed, symbolic frame of reference. This is an active process involving thought, feelings and disposition.

The way we see the world is a product of our knowledge about the world, our cultural background and language, and our human nature. Mezirow (1991) refers to this as a meaning perspective. Each meaning perspective is made up of

a set of meaning schemes: specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, feelings and assumptions. As individuals continue to learn new knowledge and skills, they must integrate these new experiences with prior learning. When this integration does not occur easily -- and contradictions or dilemmas occur -- the prior learning and new experiences must be examined and adjustments made. Individuals can reject the new information that does not fit with their current understanding or revise their views to include it (Cranton, 1994).

A 4-H volunteer, who is initially recruited and trained by the organization to be a subject-matter specialist, must integrate new knowledge and skills with experiences the or she has to make the successful transition to focusing on positive youth development. In formal education arenas, one of the most useful approaches to understanding classroom life has been in understanding the thought processes of teachers (Clark & Peterson, 1986). The cognitive-information processing approach to the study of teaching looks at issues of teacher judgment, decision-making and planning (Clark & Yinger, 1979). The study of these processes has led to a better understanding of teacher behavior. "The purpose of research on teachers' implicit theories is to make explicit and visible the frames of reference through which individual teachers perceive and process information" (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p.287). The judgment and decision-making of teachers comes from interpretations of experiences. Because of this, it is important to understand how teachers make sense of their world. The early studies of teacher thinking looked at personal perspective (Janesick, 1977), an implicit theory (Snow, 1975), conceptual system (Duffy, 1977) or belief system (Brophy & Good, 1974) when studying teaching and learning. More recent

research about adult basic education teachers (Dirkx & Spurgin, 1992) supports these works.

Adult literacy programs are the closest link between the formal classroom environment of K-16 education and the nonformal learning environments of 4-H. Literacy programs are generally delivered by trained volunteers working under the supervision of paid staff. The behavior of literacy teachers is guided largely by implicit sets of beliefs and preconceptions about their students, and by values and norms about what one should do in classroom settings and how these activities are to be accomplished (Dirkx & Spurgin, 1992). This researcher believes the behaviors of 4-H volunteers are guided in similar ways.

Problem Statement

Research on teacher thinking and classroom behavior offers an effective conceptual approach for the study of adult literacy programs, the teaching-learning activities that occur within these settings and how these activities influence what it is that adult learners derive from participating in literacy programs. In a similar way, research on the perception change volunteers undergo as they change their practice to reflect positive youth development may help us better understand the process volunteers use to shift from a “subject-matter expert” role to the broader “youth developer” role. Understanding how volunteers come to perceive their roles differently and the context in which change occurs can also contribute to the development of more effective volunteer-development programs for organizations like the Cooperative Extension System. For the most part, volunteer training has focused on knowledge transfer and skill development. A better understanding of how

volunteers build understanding of their role and the experiences that contribute to the development of this understanding may help us plan more effective volunteer development programs, especially as they relate to integrating life skills and youth-development concepts into the 4-H curriculum.

Because of the scope and potential impact of the 4-H volunteer on children, a solid grasp of how 4-H volunteers come to understand their role from a youth-development perspective – and the experiences which influence changes in their behaviors within a 4-H club or group – is important for the Cooperative Extension System. Given the impact 4-H volunteers have on the lives and future success of the youth they work with, more work must be done to understand:

- The volunteer's experiences within the club or group in which he or she works;
- How individuals change over time within the volunteer experience;
- Significant components of the volunteer experience that contribute to the change.

Limitations of the Study

The narrative inquiry approach to data collection in this study brings with it several limitations (Daloiz, 1996; Phillips, 1994). First, because narrative inquiry deals with perceptions and interpretations of life events, the information is subject to distortion and inaccuracy. Retrospective work or drawing conclusions from stories that people have recomposed over time is risky. Phillips argues that credible stories are not necessarily true and therefore may not truly reflect the individual's actual experiences. He goes on to say, however, "If we want to know what about a person's beliefs makes him or her behave in a certain way, it might be of little consequence to us that his or her key beliefs are unfounded" (p.19).

For the purpose of this study, it is the subject's beliefs about their volunteer experiences and their response to those experiences that are of the greatest interest. Having multiple study participants and looking for patterns and themes helps increase the likelihood that the findings will suggest something important about the nature of the change process.

Second, an individual's interpretation of the significance of an event may be inaccurate from a theoretical standpoint. The researcher is challenged to choose between using the participant's own intuitive sense of importance and the need to apply a meaningful or more useful framework from the outside to understand the significance of life events. Due to the subjective nature of perception and interpretation, narratives have also been described as justifications or rationalizations of behavior that contradicts the image the participant prefers to project of himself or herself.

According to Phillips (1994), when evaluating the value of narrative inquiry, two final questions arise: a) What is the role of scientific inquiry in narrative? and b) What follows from a good narrative? The value of the narratives in this study will be found in their capacity to stand alone as individual stories and their ability, when combined into a single set of data, to broaden our understanding of the phenomena around which they are organized.

An additional limitation of this study is that the results of this study can only be generalized to tenured 4-H volunteers within Michigan 4-H Youth Development.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

An Overview of Volunteers as Educators

Organizations and businesses have utilized volunteers in their efforts to extend outreach and impact for centuries. Ellis (1986), Finley (1987) and McCurley (1994) identified several reasons why organizations have tried to attract volunteers. Volunteers provide extended community contact, more creditability, additional skills and abilities and help to extend information and programs to a larger audience. Darling and Stavole (1992) stated, "Volunteers fulfill a variety of functions ranging from organizing mass mailings to providing professional services" (p. 27).

An historical look at volunteerism in the United States shows that as early as the late 1700s volunteer educators were found helping with churches and school systems. Colonists volunteered through charitable contributions of resources and other educational materials. Volunteer involvement continued to grow through the 17th and 18th centuries and concerned citizens were found in various areas of America. In the mid-1800s, the spirit of volunteerism was on the rise in the United States as population growth created greater opportunities for volunteer service (American Red Cross, 1988). Volunteers were forcing reforms as their attention focused on inadequacies in the nation's social system. Volunteerism was one of the oldest traditions by then.

The pioneers who settled America in the westward push found themselves in a wilderness where they could only rely upon each other. The beginning of the

19th century found volunteer postal carriers, newspaper writers, travel aids, firemen, humane societies and more. Volunteers also advocated for youth. Seibold (1997) noted that by the late 1800s there were countless volunteer across the country, including the National Congress for Mothers that later developed into the National PTA. Throughout history, volunteers have played a large role in the operation and maintenance of society and they continue to perform a vital function in our current society.

Volunteers have always been an integral part of Extension programming. Vines and Anderson (1976) stated, "Ever since the first Extension demonstration farm in Terrell, Texas in 1903, the progress of Extension programs has been closely tied to the efforts of unpaid local leaders. Far-sighted men and women helped develop the program and brought it forward in pace with changing times" (p. 92). Since the early 1900s volunteers have been central figures in Extension's educational delivery system (Vines & Anderson, 1976). Finley (1987, p. 1) noted that "4-H and extension homemakers were the first programs to develop a continuing responsibility to volunteers who teach a specific subject matter to a group." The 4-H program quickly began to utilize volunteers to assist the county Extension agent in delivering educational programs to youth. In the early 1900s, clubs began under the direction of paid club leaders. However, hundreds of club leaders were lost after World War I, creating a need for volunteer leadership. Wessel and Wessel (1982) said, "To state and federal officials it seemed obvious that a greater reliance on volunteer leadership could be made an integral part of the club movement" (p. 41).

History of 4-H

Four-H is the youth-development program of the United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension System. Positive youth development is the ultimate purpose of the 4-H Youth Development program. Michigan State University, Michigan's land-grant university, is the home of Michigan State University Extension and its 4-H Youth Development program. This nonformal, educational program is funded by federal, state and county governments. It combines the work of federal, state, and local Extension staff and volunteers. Nationally, 4-H's mission is to assist youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills and forming attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society (Rasmussen, 1989; Vines & Anderson, 1976; Wessel & Wessel, 1982). Michigan 4-H Youth Development's mission is to work together with communities to create environments that build strong, healthy young people who are proactive in a complex and changing world (Michigan State University Extension, 1999, p.1).

The threefold purpose of educational youth-development programs like 4-H is to: (a) afford youth interactions with positive adult role models, (b) provide youth with opportunities to build the skills and competencies necessary for them to be productive, contributing members of society and (c) prevent youth from engaging in problem behaviors (Perkins & Butterfield, 1999, p. 7). Historically, 4-H volunteers have provided an economically feasible way to reach youth in every local community (Reck, 1951, p.285). They also offer insight into community issues and opportunities, and greater access to the community's resources. In 2001 to 2002, more than 25,000 volunteers devoted their time and

expertise to help over 281,000 Michigan youth develop into healthy, productive citizens.

As 4-H programs expanded, volunteers became involved in broader roles. Wessel and Wessel (1982) stated, "The vast array of projects and activities available to young people in 4-H would have been an empty promise without the help and guidance of an army of professional Extension agents and volunteer leaders" (p. 107). In addition, Wessel and Wessel found that "volunteer leaders have been central to the success of 4-H club work since its inception. Without the enthusiastic involvement of thousands of adults willing to donate their time and energy to 4-H, little could have been accomplished" (p. 126). Volunteers not only assisted in club work, but they also helped the Extension agent teach basic courses and aided in the recruitment of other volunteers. (Feather, 1990; Navaratum, 1986).

MSUE 4-H Youth Development has traditionally utilized volunteers to help meet its goal of positive youth development to help young people gain the skills and knowledge they need to be successful. Utilizing volunteers as educators within MSUE programs has helped expand the time and resources of Extension staff. "Michigan 4-H is committed to recruiting and continuously training community volunteers to deliver fun, practical and proven youth development activities and programs" (Michigan State University Extension, 1999, p.1).

Positive Youth Development

In the late 1980s, Pittman and others began to shape a perspective of youth development that focused on needs and competencies of youth rather than a deficit model, that had a programmatic focus on youth problems. This asset-

based approach to program development is grounded in “risk and resiliency” literature (Bernard, 1991; Blyth, 1993; Keith & Perkins, 1995; Lerner, 1995; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992). Assets are factors that appear to protect young people from experiencing severe, long-term damage resulting from adverse conditions while growing. Assets are both external and internal (Blyth, 1993). External factors include things such as positive relationships in families, friendship groups, schools and the community. Internal factors reflect the young person's convictions, values and attitudes (Benson, 1990).

While a single, commonly used definition of youth development does not exist (Pittman, 1991), the term “youth development” is generally used to describe “a focus on supporting or promoting, during the second decade of life, the positive developmental processes that are known or assumed to advance health and well-being” (Benson & Saito, 2001, p. 135). According to Pittman (1991), positive youth development is a maturation process and the positive development of one's capacities. This typically takes place in the context of the family, peer groups, the school and the neighborhood or community. Benson and Saito (2001) believe that youth development occurs in the following four primary settings:

1. **Programs.** These are semi-structured processes, often led by adults and designed to address specific goals and youth outcomes.
2. **Organizations.** These include “place-based” youth-development opportunities, that is settings in which a wide variety of activities and relationships occur that are designed to improve the well-being of children and youth.

3. **Socializing systems.** Youth are embedded in an array of complex and constant systems intended to enhance processes and outcomes which are in line with youth-development principles.
4. **Community.** This is the most general of the four categories, the most difficult to define and probably the most potentially powerful source of youth development. Benson and Saito define community not only as the geographic place within which programs, organizations and systems connect, but also the social norms, resources, relationships and informal settings that inform human development, directly and indirectly.

Baines and Selta (1999) define youth development as an “on-going process in which young people are engaged in building skills, attitudes, knowledge and experiences they feel prepare them for the present and future. The youth-development process is smoother and youth-development concepts enhanced when adults (as individuals and professionals) work with young people to help them set and monitor their course and work with youth and each other to ensure that the course options are plentiful, positive and varied.” This position is supported by the work of Pittman and Irby (1998).

Konopka (1973) and Pittman (1991) have identified eight critical elements as essential for the development of healthy young people. They are: (a) feeling physically and emotionally safe; (b) experiencing belonging and ownership; (c) development of self-worth through meaningful contributions; (d) discovery of self; (e) development of quality relationships with peers and adults; (f) discussion of conflicting values and forming personal values; (g) feeling pride and accountability that comes from mastery of skills; and (h) expanding the capacity

to enjoy life and knowing success is possible. These eight elements, along with the five basic competency areas identified by Pittman (1991) as essential for success in adulthood, serve as legitimate criteria for assessing the impact of teaching life skills in positive youth-development programs like 4-H.

Pittman (1991) defines the five basic competency areas that define the youth development perspective as:

1. **Health and physical competence.** This is good current health status plus evidence of knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that will ensure future health.
2. **Personal and social competence.** These are comprised of the skills for understanding self and having self-discipline; working with others; communicating; cooperating; negotiating and building relationships; coping, adapting and being responsible; making good judgments, evaluating, making decisions and problem-solving.
3. **Cognitive and creative competence.** These are useful knowledge and abilities to appreciate and participate in areas of creative expression for thinking, seeing, feeling, tasting and hearing.
4. **Vocational competence.** This is the understanding and awareness of life planning and career choices, leisure and work options, and steps to act on these choices.
5. **Citizenship competence.** This is understanding of personal values, moral and ethical decision-making, and participation in public efforts of citizenship that contribute to the community and the nation.

The goal of positive youth development is to help young people gain the skills, assets and knowledge they need to be successful now and in adulthood.

Youth development is a holistic process. It takes into account all aspects – physical, social, emotional and cognitive – of a child's growth and development. All of these parts make up the whole child. An organizational commitment to positive youth development requires programs to build and develop young people's assets.

Positive youth development is most likely to happen in programs where there is an extraordinary commitment to children and youth (Perkins & Butterfield, 1999, p. 8). Programs that focus attention on increasing assets in youth are more likely to be successful in building strong and resilient young people.

Training as a Vehicle for Behavior Change

Many professionals who provide training programs to educators and others assume education will have a positive effect on the behavior of the individual (Ryan, 1999). Results of research on the effect of education on behavioral change in nursing practice and teacher education have not been consistent (Cervero, 1988; Tatto, 1998). The research literature suggests that some professional education programs are effective. Other reports assert that professional education is not implemented in practice (Cervero, 1985). Cervero suggests a complex situation may exist when evaluating professional education for behavior change and that multiple variables should be considered to determine why behavior change does or does not occur. Abrussese (1987) also discusses the complexity of determining the impact of education on behavior change in the nursing field. Both models attempt to identify the variables that are involved in behavior change. They include personal characteristics of the

participants, the work environment, expected outcomes of behavioral change in practice, the nature of the change required of the participant, the quality of the educational experiences the individual participates in and the level of satisfaction with the learning experiences (Ryan, 1999).

The fields of nursing, business and education have developed extensive bodies of research about professional development and training as ways to bring about behavior change within the profession. Researchers in these fields have sought to understand expertise by carefully examining professional practice (Cervero, 1988). Benner (1984) developed a model about clinical nursing practice based on an intensive study of nurses in actual patient care situations. The central premise of Benner's theory is that "expertise develops when the clinician tests and refines propositions, hypotheses, and principle-based expectations in actual practice situations" (p.3). The most important implication of this model is that training programs need to promote the development of clinical knowledge so that nurses learn from clinical experience and that different instructional strategies are necessary for each level of proficiency because knowledge is acquired differently at each level (novice to expert).

Isenberg (1984), Klemp and McClelland (1986), Quinn (1988), Wagner and Sternberg (1985), and Weick (1983) have all researched the processes underlying expert performance and learning among business managers and senior executives. While their individual work uses differing language, all their efforts focused on understanding an executive's knowledge and how that knowledge was utilized in real-life situations. These researchers did not focus on how executives acquire knowledge and therefore they do not address issues of

how knowledge and skills can be fostered through education. However, their research does provide a strong basis for the need to support the experiential approach to learning.

Current approaches to professional development in education are informed by research about how teachers think about their work (Clark & Peterson, 1986). The emphasis of research in teacher education has shifted from what teachers do, to what they know, what their sources of knowledge are and how those sources influence their work in classrooms. Elbaz (1983) referred to this as “practical knowledge.” This knowledge includes first-hand experiences of student learning styles and needs, a repertoire of instructional techniques and classroom management skills as well as the teacher’s theoretical knowledge base of subject matter (p. 5). Cervero (1988) contends that the most effective way to improve practice for educators is to understand the assumptions and principles that guide their work, examine whether they are the most useful ones and change them if necessary (p. 4).

Research by Greeno (1997) looks at the nature of knowledge, thinking and learning from a “situative perspective.” This work identifies three conceptual themes central to the situative perspective: Cognition is (a) situated in particular physical and social contexts; (b) social in nature; and (c) distributed across the individual, other persons and tools. As well as providing new perspectives on teaching and learning in K-12 classrooms, the situative approach has provided important implications for research about teacher education (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

These approaches to education are more constructivist in nature, rather than oriented toward information transmission. They give recognition to the fact that all teachers (prospective and experienced) bring prior knowledge and experience to all new learning situations just as all learners do. Constructivism is a learning or meaning-making theory in education. The premise of this approach is that individuals create their own understanding based upon the interaction of what they already know and believe, and the ideas they come in contact with through training and other professional-development experiences. Constructivism is a descriptive theory of learning that attempts to define the way people learn and develop. It is not a prescriptive theory of learning that defines the way people *should* learn (Richardson, 1997).

In a report from the National Institute of Education, panelists agreed that teachers' actions are directed by what they think and, therefore, innovations in content, practice and teaching technology would have to be directed by teachers' minds and motives (Snow, 1975). Panelists further argued that, in order to understand, predict and influence what teachers do, researchers must study the psychological processes or beliefs by which teachers perceive and define their professional responsibilities and situation.

Belief Systems and Impact on Behavior

A belief is a conceptual representation that signifies to its holder a reality or given affair of sufficient validity, truth, and/or trustworthiness to warrant reliance upon it as a guide to personal thought and action. The behavior of a person is the result of (a) what he or she believes about himself or herself, (b) what he or she believes about the situation in which he or she is involved and (c) the interaction

between these two things (Brown, 1969). Changing belief structures and, ultimately, behavior is a complex process (Fang, 1996).

In formal education, one of the most promising approaches to understanding teacher classroom behavior has been understanding the thought processes and belief systems of teachers (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Because the context in which teachers work is often ill defined and multifaceted, beliefs allow teachers to make sense of ambiguity and role diffuseness. Teachers beliefs may have the greatest impact on what they do in the classroom, the way they conceptualize their instruction and learn from experience (Brody, 1998).

The study of issues of teacher judgment, decision-making and planning has led to a better understanding of teacher behavior (Clark & Yinger, 1979). The judgment and decision-making of teachers comes from interpretations of experiences. Because of this, it is important to understand how teachers make sense of their world. The early studies of teacher thinking were based, in part, on the assumption that in creating a classroom space, the teacher refers to a personal perspective (Janesick, 1977), an implicit theory (Snow, 1975), conceptual system (Duffy, 1977) or belief system (Brophy & Good, 1974) about teaching and learning. More recent research about adult basic education teachers (Dirkx & Spurgin, 1992) supports this assumption.

Brody's research shows that the values and premises teachers hold toward their work (including their own stance toward knowledge, both within a discipline and toward the student as knower) are important and potentially significant knowledge for staff developers and teacher educators (Brody, 1998). The same information can help the facilitators of volunteer development programs be more

effective in their efforts. Just as teachers need support to continue evolving their conception of new teaching strategies (Brody), volunteers need support to continue evolving their conception of their role in positive youth development. Some teachers are more cognizant of developing their practices to become more congruent with their ideal vision, while others need a safe environment in which to explore what an ideal vision would be for themselves.

Cranton (1996) looked at professional development as transformative learning. In this work, she discussed an educator's growth and development as a process of becoming more autonomous and independent, of engaging in critical reflection and of revising personal perspectives on practice. Educators learn about teaching through their experiences. The learning may focus on developing skills and techniques. It also involves understanding other people and questioning and thinking critically about one's own practice. Brody (1998) contended professional-development programs should encourage educators to critically examine any innovation in light of their existing beliefs, assumptions and "dilemmas of knowing" that the innovation poses for them. They need support in undergoing shifts in beliefs about teaching and learning that run counter to the existing status quo. Research about transformative learning, meaning perspectives and their influence on adult learning, can be useful as we attempt to understand how volunteers successfully make the shift from "subject-matter expert" to a positive youth-development focus.

Volunteer Training in 4-H

Over the years, the utilization of volunteers in 4-H Extension programming has been vital to its success, as has the training of volunteers. As the needs of

children and communities changed over time, 4-H volunteers needed to develop new skills and expertise that benefitted young people and their community. In the mid-1950s Extension looked at training as it related to volunteer satisfaction and retention. A study conducted by Laurel Sabrosky, in the western region of the United States, indicated that Extension would have to expend significant effort to upgrade volunteer training if it wanted to meet the expressed needs of volunteers. Many of the existing training sessions focused on increasing the volunteers' knowledge level in subject-matter areas such as agriculture and home economics, instead of teaching the volunteers how to solve problems, educate others or address the broader needs of young people. Sabrosky judged these training sessions as inadequate for preparing volunteers for the challenges that they would encounter in 4-H in the future (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

In 1959, Kelly and Sabrosky proposed a training model to guide 4-H agents in providing more effective leadership training for volunteers (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). They believed that training conducted over a period of years would eventually provide communities with a large group of well-prepared volunteers who were capable of and committed to carrying out the mission of 4-H. Experienced volunteers and other resource persons in the community could be called upon to conduct training sessions and provide programs that would be developed for volunteers by volunteers.

Kelly and Sabrosky's study (as cited by Wessel & Wessel, 1982) also recommended that staff should be consistent with the 4-H motto "learn by doing" and make active learning the basis for volunteer leadership training programs. McKeachie (1994) supported the suggestion to train 4-H volunteers with

techniques that encouraged active learning. His research indicated that active learning tends to be better than lectures in producing retention, comprehension, application, synthesis, and participant enthusiasm and satisfaction.

In 1960, the first national volunteer training was offered as a weeklong forum, hosted at the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland. While 4-H structures and programs had changed dramatically in the past century, volunteers remained the one constant element. Just as Extension organizers had seen in the early 1900s, the success of 4-H programs “rested squarely on the shoulders of well-trained volunteers” (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). In 1971, Dr. Milton Boyce presented a leadership development model entitled ISOTURE. This model, when applied to volunteer development programs, consists of the following steps (Safrit, Smith & Cutler, 1993):

- Identifying volunteer opportunities within the organization and developing appropriate written job descriptions for them.
- **Selecting** (recruiting) volunteers best qualified for the volunteer opportunity.
- **Orienting** volunteers to both the total organization and the specific volunteer responsibility.
- **Training** volunteers in developing additional knowledge, attitudes and skills that will help them be successful in fulfilling their volunteer responsibility.
- **Utilizing** the volunteers’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills in contributing to the success and growth of the organization.
- **Recognizing** volunteers for the positive contributions they make to the organization.

- Evaluating the individual's performance as a volunteer, professional support of volunteers and the total volunteer development program.

In the early 1990s, two volunteer-development curricula were published. *BLAST (Building Leadership And Skills Together)* and *TAXI (Taking Anybody into Expanded Involvement)* are two curriculums that use the principles presented in ISOTURE. The Ohio 4-H *BLAST* program is a research-based, pragmatic curriculum designed to support professionals and middle managers in developing, supporting and maintaining volunteer development programs (Safrit, Smith & Cutler, 1993). *TAXI* is a curriculum that offers compatible tools for specific stages of volunteer program development. It is a step-by-step guide to creating a middle-management system for local volunteer programs (Adkins, 1994). These curricula are widely used across the Extension system as tools for volunteer training.

At this time, Michigan 4-H Youth Development does not have a uniform 4-H volunteer training program (Wagester, 1999). Michigan 4-H volunteers have traditionally been recruited to provide expertise and support for subject-related projects and activities, and they come to 4-H with a subject-matter focus. Through projects and activities, youth learn specific skills, unique to the project area, as well as the broader life skills of effective communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, time management, organization and teamwork. Michigan 4-H Youth Development provides project-resource materials, to participants and volunteers, that contain subject-matter information as well as information on the development of life skills such as decision-making, problem

solving and communication. However, this information is not always concretely connected to 4-H's positive youth-development mission.

In 1990, Michigan 4-H Youth Development recommitted to a strong emphasis on volunteer development and positive youth development in all sectors of our communities. Need assessments conducted with Michigan 4-H staff in the mid-1990s supported the need for emphasis on volunteer development related to positive youth development. Staff indicated that many volunteers still focused primarily on the youth's project (for example, clothing, foods and nutrition, animals, etc.) and not on the young person and his or her personal development within the 4-H club and group activities.

As a result of these need assessments, more attention was directed to providing volunteers with the broader skills of positive youth development. More emphasis was also placed on integrating these skills into the subject-matter activities of the club and group meetings and making them an "intentional" part of teaching and learning, rather than an incidental outcome of the 4-H experience. Adult ambivalence about youth status has undermined the youth-development efforts of many organizations. Following the model of success in the public health field in changing public awareness of preventable health problems, an effort has been made to incorporate youth-development education into ongoing volunteer training (Costello, Toles, Spielberger & Wynn, 2001, p.225).

With its shift toward a stronger emphasis on positive youth development, Michigan 4-H must also intentionally incorporate training related to human development and youth development into its volunteer training efforts. Knowledge of human development and the practice of skills that promote youth

development are important skills in youth-development organizations. The absence of these skills, among volunteers, can weaken the potential impact of programs. (Brown, Ogletree, Garg & Robb, 1995; Costello, Barden & Howard, 1995; Costello & Ogletree, 1993).

In 1997 and 1998, Michigan 4-H conducted 11 focus group meetings with Michigan 4-H volunteers and paid staff to evaluate the need for expanded and/or improved volunteer training support (Wagester, 1999). Each group represented a different region of Michigan and consisted of people who had different lengths of service to 4-H, roles in 4-H, gender, age and race. These groups responded that Michigan 4-H volunteers desired information that would be useful and applicable to their roles as 4-H volunteers, support of their volunteer activities, and opportunities to interact with other 4-H volunteers. They also thought that current resources were not able to provide adequate training needed by new 4-H volunteers.

As society has changed, the skills have changed that children need to cope successfully with the demands of life. The Michigan 4-H organization has shifted its focus to a greater emphasis on life skills and asset development as a way to achieve its goal of positive youth development. It is reducing the emphasis on the development of subject-matter skills that have long been the central focus of volunteers' projects and work. This shift in organizational emphasis from subject-matter skills to life skills and asset development requires more intentional integration of subject-matter skills and youth-development experiences within the 4-H curriculum. More emphasis is being placed on making life skill and asset

development an intentional part of the 4-H curriculum, rather than an unintentional outcome of the 4-H experience.

This change in emphasis presents the 4-H organization with some particular challenges. Michigan 4-H invests over \$100,000 annually to train volunteers at the local, regional and state levels. These trainings consist of orientation for new volunteers (typically conducted locally) and 20 to 30 regional or statewide training opportunities that are offered annually.

The typical orientation process for Michigan 4-H volunteers consists of a one- to two-hour meeting conducted by paid Extension staff and/or one or more experienced 4-H volunteers. During this orientation, Michigan 4-H volunteers receive information on the overall mission of 4-H, and the resources and training opportunities available to them at the local, regional and state level. Usually during this initial orientation meeting, volunteers are also introduced to the goal of positive youth development as the ultimate purpose of the 4-H experience. Volunteers may or may not understand the principles of positive youth development or know how to structure environments for their work that will foster the development of youth assets and life skills. As a result, most new volunteers will focus their educational efforts primarily on teaching the subject-matter skills of the particular project for which they provide leadership.

Regional and statewide educational workshops of one to three days in length are the primary vehicle Michigan 4-H uses to provide volunteers with the tools and knowledge they need to be successful in their volunteer role. Traditionally these workshops have focused on the teaching of subject-matter skills related to the projects or activities the volunteers provide to their youth

members. With the renewed emphasis on positive youth development, broader youth-development areas – such as the stages of child development, interpersonal communication skills, conflict resolution, working with children who have special needs and coping with peer pressure – are included as regular parts of regional and statewide workshops.

As their tenure with Michigan 4-H continues, volunteers receive more information and training about positive youth-development concepts through the training and information they receive at the local, regional and state levels. As volunteers become comfortable with and accustomed to the role of volunteer leader, they are expected to focus more of their efforts on the positive youth-development aspect of their responsibilities and less on subject matter.

The assumption behind the current approach to volunteer development is the belief that providing volunteers with knowledge and skills related to positive youth development equips them with the tools they need to become effective youth developers. Observation and experience has shown that the organizational shift in training emphasis from subject-skills to developmental needs and assets does not always result in volunteer behavior change. Therefore, more effort must be given to exploring and understanding the nature of the change that occurs in 4-H volunteer behavior as they move from a “subject-matter focus” to a “youth-development focus” in their work. Specifically, the following questions need to be addressed:

1. What are the volunteer’s experiences within the 4-H club or groups in which he or she works?
2. How has the individual changed over time, within the volunteer role?

3. What significant events in the volunteer experience contributed to the change?
4. What impact have training (local, regional, state and/or national) opportunities had on the changes that have occurred?

CHAPTER 3

Methods and Materials

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of perception change that occurs as volunteers involved in youth-development programs move from a “subject-matter” focus to a “youth-development” focus in their work, as reflected by their behaviors when working with youth. The specific research questions addressed were:

1. How has the individual's perception about their role changed over time, within the volunteer experience?
2. Is there a common set of experiences among the volunteers studied that characterize these changes?

Research Design

These questions were explored through a qualitative research design, using a narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach allowed the participants to share their perceptions of their experiences as a Michigan 4-H volunteer. Narrative research refers to studies utilizing or analyzing narrative materials such as interviews, field notes, journals, diaries or meetings.

The concept of narrative and life stories has become increasingly prevalent in the social sciences. It can now be found in the theory, research and application of a wide variety of disciplines including education, psychology, psychotherapy, sociology and history (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). Narrative inquiry is an effective way to begin to understand real-life problems by involving

individuals whose life experiences are directly relevant to the issue being studied. For this study, the narrative inquiry approach was especially appropriate as it helped provide insight into how a youth-development volunteer develops an understanding of his or her role, and if or how that perception changes over time. Narrative inquiry is a good tool for providing a perspective on development that can enhance an understanding of learning and change throughout the life course (Rossiter, 1999). By using this methodological approach, it was possible to study how experience was organized, interpreted and reshaped through the work and life experiences of being a volunteer in a youth- development organization.

Selection of Participants

The target population for this study was tenured Michigan 4-H volunteers (that is, those with 10 or more years of service) who work, in an ongoing basis, with youth in 4-H clubs or groups. The average length of service of current Michigan 4-H volunteers is 6 years. Tenured volunteers were chosen because researcher observation has shown that it is more commonly volunteers who have been with the organization for longer periods of time who exhibit behaviors related to positive youth development rather than simply skill development. A survey instrument was developed to do the initial screening of a random sample of the target population (Appendix C). The target population consisted of 1121 Michigan 4-H volunteers. A random sample of 200 was selected from this population using a random number generator. Surveys were sent to the selected individuals. In the surveys, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements on the survey. One follow-up mailing was needed to achieve a survey return rate of 54 percent.

Returned survey responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 4 to determine the individual's focus in his or her work with youth in a 4-H club or group. A score of 1 indicated a strong subject-matter approach and a score of 4 indicated a strong youth development approach. The highest possible score an individual could receive was 72. High scores on this survey reflect a focus on youth development in the volunteer's work with his or her 4-H club or group. From the initial sample, 29 individuals were selected for possible inclusion in the study. These individuals achieved a score of 54 or more on the screening survey. A score of 54 was used as the lower limit because there was a natural break of 3 points between this group and the next cluster of scores.

MSU Extension 4-H Youth Development staff, who work with the selected volunteers, were asked to rate the individual's observed behaviors within their 4-H club or group (Appendix F). During the past five years, MSUE 4-H Youth Development staff received intensive training in positive youth development concepts and practices. Through this training, staff developed a solid understanding of positive youth development and the observable outcomes that are indicative of this focus in 4-H club and group programming. MSU Extension staff work closely with 4-H volunteers in their local communities and are in the best position to verify individuals who emphasize positive youth development in their work. In counties with more than one staff person, the lead agent was asked to rate individuals, with input from other 4-H staff in the county.

The staff feedback form used the "Michigan 4-H Youth Development Guiding Principles" (Michigan State University Extension, 2002) as the basis for determining if youth development practices were observable in the volunteer's

work with young people. These 7 principles are grounded in the literature of positive youth development and describe the observable outcomes for youth that are the goals of an effective Michigan 4-H experience. A similar rating scale of 1 to 4 was used to rate the observed behaviors of the 29 volunteers. From this group, 9 individuals, who achieved a score of 27 or more out of 28, were asked to participate in in-depth interviews. A score of 27 was used as the low score because there was a break of at least 2 points between this group of volunteers and the rest of the scores.

Invitations were sent to the nine individuals selected to participate in the interview portion of the study (Appendix G). Three volunteers declined for personal reasons. Six individuals agreed to participate and completed the Consent Authorization form (Appendix G). These individuals were contacted by telephone to schedule the initial interview.

Profile of the Interview Subjects

Demographic data collected during the initial screening surveys provided information for creating a profile of each volunteer in this study. Information on age, educational background, years of service as a 4-H volunteer, size of club or group worked with, ages of youth worked with, and family situation are provided here to help create a picture of each individual. More in-depth descriptions of each individual are provided in Chapter 4. For the purpose of confidentiality and to provide order for presenting findings throughout the text, each volunteer was given an alphabetical code name (Alice, Barbara, Carol, Debbie, Ellen, Frank).

1. Alice has been a 4-H volunteer for more than 40 years. She is between 60 and 70 years of age. Alice was a 4-H member as a youth and this was a

significant factor in her decision to become a 4-H volunteer. She has an associate's degree from a community college and has participated in numerous nonformal educational opportunities through MSU Extension and other community-based organizations. Alice is married and the mother of four children. Her children are no longer involved in 4-H. Alice currently works with a large 4-H club (that is, more than 31 members) whose members range in age from 5 to 19.

2. Barbara has been a 4-H volunteer for 10 to 15 years. She is between 40 and 50 years of age, married and the mother of two children. Barbara was not a
3. 4-H member as a youth, but became involved when her children decided to join 4-H. Her children are still involved in the 4-H program. She has a graduate degree from a university. Barbara currently works with a club of 11 to 20 members, between the ages of 9 and 19. She has participated in numerous educational programs offered by MSU Extension.
4. Carol has been a 4-H volunteer for more than 20 years. She currently works with a club of 11 to 20 members, between the ages of 5 and 19. Carol attended college for several years, but did not receive a degree. She has participated in many educational programs offered by MSU Extension and serves as an instructor for other volunteers and youth, at statewide workshops, on a regular basis. She is between 50 and 60 years of age. Carol is married and has four children. All of her children have graduated out of the 4-H program.
5. Debbie has been a 4-H volunteer for more than 10 years. She is between 60 and 70 years of age and was a 4-H member as a youth. Debbie is a college

graduate with a bachelor's degree from a four-year university. She currently works with a small club of 10 members, ranging in age from 5 to 15. Debbie has not attended many educational programs offered by MSU Extension. Much of the information she draws upon for her work with the 4-H club comes from training she receives through her employment.

6. Ellen has been a 4-H volunteer for more than 25 years. She is between 50 and 60 years of age and works with a large club of over 30 members. Members of her club range in age from 5 to 19. Ellen is married with two children. She has a bachelor's degree from a four-year university. Ellen has participated in many educational programs offered by MSU Extension and regularly serves as an instructor at state-level programs.
7. Frank has been a 4-H volunteer for more than 25 years. He is between the ages of 50 and 60, has bachelor's degree from a four-year university, is the father of four children and was a 4-H member as a young person. Frank works with a club made up of 20 to 30 members between the ages of 5 and 19. Over the years, Frank has participated in many educational programs offered by MSU Extension, both 4-H and those offered by other parts of the organization. Frank's children are no longer actively involved in 4-H as members, but two of his children have become 4-H volunteers, working in the same club with him.

Data Collection

In this section, the specific instruments used to collect the data and the data collection procedures are described.

Data Collection Instruments

A multistep process for data collection and analysis was used. An 18-statement survey was developed to assist in the selection of research subjects for this study (Appendix C). Respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements using a Likert-type scale of Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Agree – Strongly Agree. The survey statements reflect either a subject-matter or youth-development focus. Survey statements were reviewed by a nationally recognized panel of youth-development specialists for validity (Appendix D). The survey was used to identify and narrow the potential population of volunteers being considered to participate in interviews.

A seven-item questionnaire was developed for use by county MSUE 4-H staff to rate the observable behavior of the volunteers being considered for inclusion in the interview portion of the study (Appendix F). This questionnaire was based upon the Michigan 4-H Guiding Principles.

A semi-structured protocol was the primary instrument used to collect data for the interview portion of the study. Prior to the actual interviews, the researcher conducted 2 practice interviews. The practice interviews were used to help clarify the wording and relevance of different questions in the protocol and improve the researcher's interview technique. Interviews were audiotape recorded and kept confidential. Two interviews of 60 to 90 minutes were conducted with each subject. Depending on volunteer availability, a follow-up interview was conducted 4 to 6 weeks after the initial interview.

Through the interview, the participants were asked to share experiences as a volunteer, in a manner similar to telling their life story. The purpose of "life

stories” is to provide interpretations of significant incidents and their meaning from the participant’s point of view (Kotre & Coles, 1996). The “life story” focused on the dimensions of the overall research questions. The questions in Appendix I served as the starting point of each interview.

Data Collection Procedures

Research participants were identified through the process described above. Those who achieved a score of 54 or higher out of 72 on the volunteer screening survey and a score of 27 or more out of 28 on the staff feedback instrument were included in the study. The final group of 9 individuals, selected for participation in this study, were contacted by letter to determine their willingness to be interviewed. Of the 9 individuals in the final group, 6 agreed to participate in interviews. Those who were selected and agreed to participate were sent a follow-up letter confirming their participation in the study. The second phase of the study was initiated with a one-on-one interview. As a component of the interview, participants were asked to complete a “River of Life” activity (Dirkx, & Prenger, 1997) through which the subject identified significant incidents, experiences or “trigger events” in his or her volunteer experience (Appendix H). The information gathered through this activity was used to guide the interviews and assist in identifying important factors that had an impact on the perception-change process.

Prior to the second interview, a summary vignette was shared with interview participants to check the accuracy of interpretation of the initial interview data. Follow-up interviews were held with research subjects four to six weeks after the

first interview to clarify responses to questions from the first interview and to test conclusions formed during the transcription of the initial interviews.

Analysis of Data

Data were analyzed throughout the study. Summary vignettes of each interview were written up and shared with the participant for his or her review. Participants were asked to make corrections or add any information they felt was important that had been omitted (Seidman, 1991). A preliminary analysis was conducted after each interview. This analysis consisted of a full transcription of the recorded interview. The transcripts were reviewed to identify recurring themes and concepts within the conversations. This information was used to help formulate follow-up questions for the second interviews.

Data from all interviews were coded and recoded according to the constant comparative method of pulling preliminary patterns together until themes began to emerge (Reissman, 1993). Attention was paid to content analysis as themes and patterns emerged from the narratives.

Pratt's (1998) General Model of Teaching was used as an organizing framework for the analysis. This framework provides a structure for understanding the perspectives on teaching adults that recognizes diversity within teachers, learners, content, context, ideal and purposes. Pratt's model contains five elements and three relationships. The five elements relate to the interviewee's perspectives on his or her work. The relationships between the elements provide another avenue for understanding the interviewee's perception of his or her volunteer role.

Pratt's model was adapted to better reflect the work of a youth-development volunteer. It provides a framework for understanding the youth-development perspective of the volunteers, the nature of the change that has occurred over time and factors that have contributed to the changes in perception. The model was used to provide a common frame of reference for understanding the subjects' responses. This common frame of reference allowed the researcher to accommodate the diversity that exists between the research subjects when describing their volunteer roles and experiences and assisted in organizing the data for analysis. The adapted model can be found in Appendix A.

Limitations of the Study

The narrative inquiry approach to data collection in this study brings with it several limitations (Daloiz, 1996; Phillips, 1994). First, because narrative inquiry deals with perceptions and interpretations of life events, the information provided is subject to distortion and inaccuracy. Retrospective work or drawing conclusions from stories that people have recomposed over time is risky. Phillips argues that credible stories are not necessarily true and therefore may not truly reflect the actual experiences of the individual. However, he goes on to say, "If we want to know what about a person's beliefs makes him or her behave in a certain way, it might be of little consequence to us that his or her key beliefs are unfounded" (p.19). For the purpose of this study, it is the subjects' perceptions of their volunteer experiences and their response to those experiences that are of the greatest interest. Having multiple people in the study and looking for patterns and themes helps increase the likelihood that the findings will suggest something important about the nature of the change process.

Second, an individual's interpretation of an event's significance may be inaccurate from a theoretical standpoint. The researcher is challenged to choose between using the participant's own intuitive sense of importance and the need to apply a meaningful or more useful framework from the outside to understand the significance of life events. Due to the subjective nature of perception and interpretation, narratives have also been described as justifications or rationalizations of behavior that contradicts the image the participant prefers to project of himself or herself.

Two final questions arise when evaluating the value of narrative inquiry: a) What is the role of scientific inquiry in narrative? and b) What follows from a good narrative (Phillips, 1994)? The value of the narratives in this study will be found in their capacity to stand alone as individual stories and their ability, when combined into a single set of data, to broaden our understanding of the phenomena around which they are organized.

An additional limitation of this study is that the results of this study can only be generalized to tenured 4-H volunteers within Michigan 4-H Youth Development.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of perception change that occurs as volunteers involved in youth-development programs move from a “subject-matter” focus to a “youth-development” focus in their work, as reflected by their behaviors when working with youth.

Michigan 4-H volunteers have traditionally been recruited to provide expertise and support for subject-related projects. Since the early 1990s, the Michigan 4-H organization has been focusing more on life skills and asset development as a way to achieve its goal of positive youth development. This shift in focus requires the volunteers to (a) change their understanding of their responsibilities; (b) change their behaviors within the 4-H club and (c) define the success of their efforts in new and different ways. How volunteers make these changes is not well understood.

From an initial sample of 200 volunteers, 6 individuals were selected for participation in this study, 5 females and 1 male. Each of these individuals had identified themselves, through responses to a survey, as having a strong youth-development focus to their work. The 4-H staff in the county where they volunteer supported these perceptions, which indicated that a youth-development emphasis was visible in the work these volunteers did with their 4-H club or group. To be considered for this study, volunteers needed to:

- Have been a Michigan 4-H volunteer for 10 or more years.
- Be actively working with youth in a 4-H club or group.

As a group, the participants' years of service ranged from 12 to 43, with the average being 23.5 years. The age of the group ranged from 44 to 68 years, with an average age of 55.8. Educationally, the group ranged from "Some College" to "Graduate Degree," with the most common being a Bachelor of Science degree. All of the participants were Caucasian, which is representative of the lack of diversity in the Michigan 4-H volunteer community. In the following discussions, the names of all participants have been changed. Their age, educational background and residence have not been identified to protect their privacy.

The goal of this chapter is to begin to identify common connections within the study participants in order to understand the experiences and insights that contributed to their involvement and success as youth developers in the Michigan 4-H Youth Development program.

The Study Participants

When beginning to analyze the data from the 6 interviews, a composite sketch was developed to describe the volunteers' early career (1 to 2 years) and later career (10 or more years), and to assist in building understanding of the perception change which occurred over time. This portrait can be found in Appendix J.

In order to better understand the individuals who participated in this study, an in-depth descriptive profile of each interviewee was compiled. These profiles are intended to provide an overview of each individual and how their understanding of the volunteer role has changed over time.

1. Alice has been a 4-H volunteer for more than 40 years. She is between 60 and 70 years of age. Alice was a 4-H member as a young person and this was a significant factor in her decision to become a 4-H volunteer. She has an associate's degree from a community college and has participated in numerous nonformal-educational opportunities through MSU Extension and other community-based organizations. Alice is married and the mother of four children. Her children are now grown and no longer involved in 4-H. Alice currently serves as one of the leaders of a large 4-H club (31 or more members) whose members range in age from 5 to 19.

Early in her volunteer career, Alice described her role as a teacher. Her goal was to teach [project] to the children who made up her club. The focus of her efforts was teaching the members the skills needed to complete their projects. She knew she was successful as a 4-H volunteer "when the members of her club enjoyed what they were doing and completed their projects." While it was nice to see her members receive blue ribbons, this was not Alice's primary motivation. She wanted her members to learn the project skills and be proud of what they had learned.

When describing her role in the 4-H club now, Alice says she is a "facilitator, counselor, comforter and educator." Her job is to help youngsters "learn about something they are interested in and learn responsibility." She sees herself as providing resources and encouragement to the members so that they will grow to be successful adults. When describing success now, Alice talks about

the skills young people learn that will help them be successful later in life. These are skills like decision-making, communications and teamwork. Her goal now is to have members build confidence in their abilities. "Being the best" is not as important as "doing your best." It is most rewarding to her to see her members "develop, go out in life and do well."

For Alice, an important part of her development as a 4-H volunteer has been the professional development opportunities provided by MSU Extension. Workshops, conferences, trips, tours and hosting opportunities were activities she identified as having helped "broaden my perspective." Other leaders and Extension staff that she has worked with were also perceived as important influences on her development. Alice sees the opportunities to get together with other volunteers and talk about common issues and concerns as a key way she has learned to be a 4-H volunteer.

Being a 4-H volunteer is a way for Alice to help improve her community. "What better way to make your world or your community better than to work with the young people?" As a volunteer, she feels she gets more from the children she works with than she gives. As Alice declared:

You actually get back more than you give and you get it back in the way of feeling good as you watch them [grow up]. [It] keeps you young because it keeps you involved with the world. [Being a 4-H volunteer] has broadened my perspectives as a person. It has probably made me a better person [because] I keep learning. When you stop learning, you quit living so it is important to have your eyes open and your ears open and see what you can find out about this world that you did not realize before. There is a lot out there!

2. Barbara has been a 4-H volunteer for 10 to 15 years. She is between 40 and 50 years of age, married and the mother of two children. Barbara was not a 4-H member as a young person, but she became involved when her children decided to join 4-H. Her children are still involved in the 4-H program. She has a graduate degree from a four-year university. Barbara currently works with a club of 11 to 20 members, between the ages of 9 and 19. She has participated in numerous educational programs offered by MSU Extension.

Barbara started as a volunteer when her oldest son wanted to join 4-H. The existing club leader needed someone to teach [project] to some of the other club members. This was a skill Barbara had, so she volunteered. Since that time, she has taught a variety of projects to the youth who are part of the club and she has served on several county-level committees. When asked what motivated her to get involved, Barbara said "I saw a need. There were so many kids and they wanted to learn so many different things. I happened to enjoy [project] so it was natural for me to help with that."

Early on, Barbara's goals were to help her members complete a project for the fair. Much of the early work she did focused on helping young people be prepared for the competitive events of the local county fair. "In our club, a lot of it did revolve around the fair and projects that were geared toward achievement at the fair."

Currently, Barbara's goals are to expose the youth she works with to as many different life experiences as she can. She feels this is the best way to help children grow. The experiences of 4-H help children "learn responsibility. They learn respect. They learn to respect each others talents and weaknesses [and] appreciate the differences in people." As a volunteer, Barbara believes it is her job to encourage kids to go a little bit farther than they think they ever thought they could. One of her other jobs is to let them fail. "That is a very hard thing for me. You have to let them struggle. That is how they learn. Learning by doing."

For Barbara, important influences on her personal development as a volunteer have been the 4-H families that have become a very important part of her family's social life and the other volunteers she has met through the professional-development experiences she has participated in.

In general, I have met more people than I ever would have if I had not been in 4-H. It just opened me up to meeting so many different people, doing so many different things I could never picture myself doing. [All] of the people that I met have helped me learn and grow, and learn how the kids learn and grow.

The people who are part of Barbara's 4-H club have become a very important part of her social life. Many of the people she has met and works with through 4-H are now close personal friends and provide a great deal of emotional support for Barbara and her family. She frequently refers to these people as part of her "family" and feels closer to many of them than to her own siblings. These people provide a great deal of personal support to Barbara and her children.

3. Carol has been a 4-H volunteer for more 20 years. She currently works with a club of 11 to 20 members, between the ages of 5 and 19. Carol attended college for several years, but did not receive a degree. She has participated in many educational programs offered by MSU Extension. Carol regularly serves as an instructor for other volunteers and youth at statewide workshops. She is between 50 and 60 years of age. Carol is married and has four children. All of her children have graduated out of the 4-H program. She continues as a volunteer because she enjoys the opportunity to spend time with young people and has found that 4-H provides her with the flexibility to do this without some of the restrictions of other volunteer experiences in which she has participated.

Carol was not involved in 4-H as a young person, but she became involved when she heard about a local group that needed help with [project]. She had a personal interest in this subject and agreed to help. When she first started, Carol's goal was to teach the children in the club the proper way to [project]. As she reflected on how she defined success when she first started, Carol stated, "Just like the kids, in the beginning, the ribbons were important. Then I could say I had taught them something and they did well."

As Carol has continued to work with young people in her 4-H club, her goals and definition of success have changed. Her goals now are to have the members of her group have fun while they are learning and to learn skills that

will prepare them for adulthood. She now sees “being a role model” as part of her volunteer responsibilities. From Carol's viewpoint:

It's not just about doing things right. I need to show them that I am human and I make mistakes. It's okay to make mistakes. Hopefully though, we do more things right than wrong. It's not just how I [project]. It's how I talk to my husband, how I talk to [other people] and how I follow through [on my responsibilities].

Carol now says she knows she is successful when: “[I] see a child or member feeling good about themselves, making good decisions and living with those decisions. These are skills they need to learn: to live with life and deal with people. There will be disappointments in life and they need to learn how to deal with them.” An important part of 4-H, from Carol's perspective, is the new experiences young people have that help them grow up to be successful.

As Carol reflected on her growth and development as a 4-H volunteer, important influences she identified include MSU Extension staff and other 4-H volunteers she has interacted with as a part of Extension-sponsored, professional-development experiences. She sees these individuals as having helped her broaden her perspective on the role of a volunteer and having increased her understanding of the 4-H organization. As she has learned more about the opportunities 4-H offers for volunteers and members, she has begun to see more opportunities for herself and the youth with whom she works. “I found out there was more than [my] county in 4-H. Even though I had been up to Kett Center, it didn't really sink in what other things statewide were offered until I got [more involved]. These things have really helped me grow as well as the kids.”

4. Debbie has been a 4-H volunteer for over 10 years. She is between 60 and 70 years of age and was a 4-H member as a young person. Debbie is a college graduate, with a bachelor's degree from a four-year university. She currently works with a small club of 10 members, ranging in age from 5 to 15. Debbie has not attended many educational programs offered by MSU Extension. Much of the information she draws upon for her work with the 4-H club comes from training she receives through her employment.

Debbie is married and the mother of three children. Her children are all grown and out of 4-H now, but her grandchildren are currently part of her club. She originally became a volunteer because she wanted her children to be part of 4-H. Her experiences as a 4-H member were an important part of her childhood and she wanted her children to benefit from similar experiences. Debbie's mother had been a 4-H volunteer, so she felt it was natural for her to become one as well. She continues to volunteer because she likes being around young people and feels she gets more from the youth she works with than she gives to them.

Early in her volunteer career, Debbie talked about her volunteer role as that of a teacher. She feels she was responsible for working with the club members to teach them how to do things, what to do and when to do it. She described her goals as "hoping to help and [keep] the kids active." She knew she was successful when her club members completed their projects at the end of the year and participated in the county fair.

As Debbie talked about her role and goals as a volunteer today, she shared:

I just want to help keep kids off the street, keep them active, keep them involved in something that will keep them out of trouble. [When] the kids turn out to be pretty good kids, you know that you did something to help them. [When] they are responsible, they are not getting into trouble, they stay out of drugs, that kind of stuff. They are good kids. I get a lot of satisfaction from that. It makes me feel good.

Significant influences on Debbie's development as a volunteer include the opportunities she has had to serve on state-level committees and the other leaders she had met from across the state, through these committees. Debbie described her committee work as a wonderful professional development opportunity. "I learned patience from working with so many different people. I learned how to convince them to do things and I learned how to listen better, because sometimes their way was better than mine!" She also feels that she learns a great deal from her club members.

I think the kids have had a very positive influence on me. [Just] by knowing you helped them, maybe you taught them a few things or you have helped them develop skills that will help them in their adult life. That all has a positive influence. [It] keeps me young. I don't feel (age) all the time! Kids have such an interesting outlook on life. They are experiencing life and looking forward to it and they can't wait. [They] pick you up out of the dust and make you feel better just by being around them and listening to them. They keep you young.

5. Ellen has been a 4-H volunteer for over 25 years. She is between 50 and 60 years of age and works with a large club of more than 30 members. Members of her club range in age from 5 to 19. Ellen is married with two children. She has a bachelor's degree from a four-year university. Ellen has participated in many educational programs offered by MSU Extension and regularly serves as an instructor at state-level programs.

Ellen originally became a volunteer because she was looking for a way to teach her children (project) and thought it would be easier to teach more than just her children. As a former 4-H member, Ellen knew 4-H had curricula available to help teach (project) to her kids, so she advertised the club to other families in her neighborhood and started a club. Initially, her goals were to teach [project] and make sure the children in her club learned to do [project] correctly. She also saw 4-H as a way to connect with her community in a positive way. Ellen was raised in a family with a strong volunteer ethic. Becoming a volunteer was something she always expected to do. Four-H is one of several places Ellen volunteers. Her involvement with 4-H has continued longer than her involvement with other community-based organizations because she enjoys the activities and people she has met through her participation.

Ellen's volunteer responsibilities with her 4-H club have changed over time. As the club has grown, more leaders have been recruited to help provide leadership for the learning activities of the group. Ellen now describes her role as a facilitator. She sees her job as guiding the members in their learning and planning, and encouraging them to try new things and take risks. Ellen knows she is successful:

If a child gets one tiny new skill a year. It doesn't have to be a huge thing. [Just] seeing a little more confidence or being able to talk to [people] they were afraid to talk to before. Seeing them beginning to help other people and understand why it is important. That is what is really important about what I do.

Ellen feels other leaders she has met and worked with through 4-H deserve a lot of credit for her growth and development over the years. When talking about the people she has met and come to know, she describes them as a “family” and considers her 4-H friends to be a major part of her own and her family’s support system and social network. This perspective is one of the reasons she stays involved as a volunteer. This network of friends provides Ellen with role models and a source of knowledge that support her own development as an individual and a volunteer.

Throughout the interview, Ellen talked about her interest in people as a significant factor in her development as a 4-H volunteer. “I think I am fascinated by people and the way they develop and mature. [Kids] are my passion so helping shape lives and helping kids see opportunities is a big thing [for me].” Involvement with young people helps her to keep focused on the positive parts of life. She best described this when she said, “They have helped me keep a perspective that the world is not all going down hill and that there are lots of good things going on with kids. That there are things to invest in.”

6. Frank has been a 4-H volunteer for over 25 years. He is between the ages of 50 and 60 and has bachelor’s degree from a four-year university. Frank is the father of four children and was a 4-H member as a young person. He works with a club of 20 to 30 members between the ages of 5 and 19.

Frank's children are no longer actively involved in 4-H as members, but two of his children have become 4-H volunteers, working in the same club with him.

He continues to volunteer with 4-H because, as he states:

Kids are our future. They will be taking care of this world when we are gone. I get more out of it than the kids do. I think kids are the sunshine in your life. They make you feel young. You learn things from them. [It's] an opportunity for me to grow. [One] of the ways to keep up to date is by being involved with them. They just give you a reason for living, I think.

When reflecting on his early career as a 4-H volunteer, Frank shared that his goal was for his children and others in the club to "be number one or be at the top of the class. It reflects back on you. Because your kids were successful, then you were successful." Over the years, this has become less important and he now focuses on the learning that the members do and the self-confidence that is developed through participation in 4-H and experiencing success in personal goals. When asked about the reason for this change, Frank said, "I think [over time] you have a better understanding of what the program is about and what success really is."

Frank now describes his responsibilities as a 4-H volunteer as "advisor," "role model," "parent," "father figure" and "teacher." He feels every volunteer must be a role model for children. "You have to be a role model for kids. I think you have to model character. It's just like being a parent. You always have to model [the behaviors] you want kids to have, not just sometimes. You can't just say it. You have to do it too." Frank feels his job now is to prepare his members for the future. Frank explains:

If they come away [from 4-H] feeling good, they are going to try something new again. Whether it is 10 years down the road, they know if they try something new, something good [can] happen. [Through 4-H] we are giving them opportunities they might not have had. You give them the opportunity to either succeed or fail, an opportunity to learn, an opportunity to interact with other youth, an opportunity to interact with other adults. You open up doors or windows from within and I think that is how they learn about themselves.

Important influences on his own development as a volunteer are the professional-development opportunities offered by 4-H, the people he has had the opportunity to work with through 4-H, the young people who make up his club and his own personal maturing. Over the years, Frank has participated in many educational programs offered by MSU Extension, both 4-H and those offered by other parts of the organization. Having the opportunity to work with a variety of people from across the county and the state was an important part of Frank's volunteer experience. Franks sums it up this way:

I think the things that mean the most to me are the opportunities to share with other people, both adults and kids, that [I] wouldn't normally have. I think any time you are doing something that you normally wouldn't do and you have opportunities for success or for people to reinforce that you have done a good job, you learn. [As] I have gotten older, I have found that I am good at working with a variety of people. I have learned that I can be patient when I want to be. Four-H continues to change as our world changes, so I am always learning something new. That keeps it exciting for me too.

Understanding Change in the Volunteer Perception

Analysis of the interview data indicates that Michigan 4-H volunteers undergo a perception change regarding their role when working with young people in a 4-H club or group. Changes in perception appear to be influenced by three key factors. They are:

1. Over time, the volunteers developed a clearer understanding of the mission of 4-H and began to view their role as a volunteer differently, as a result of that understanding.
2. Individuals in this study developed a strong connection to the 4-H community as a whole. It has become an important part of their personal and family social life and support systems.
3. The concept of “maturity” and growing up surfaced in the interviews of all the volunteers. From their perspective, this had significant influence on how they now approach the job of a 4-H volunteer.

Each of these factors will be examined in more detail in the following section.

Understanding the 4-H Organization and the Role of Volunteers

When looking at the change in the study participants' understanding of 4-H and their role in the organization, three key areas emerged that can help explain this change. They are: (a) the perspective of youth development as manifested in the work of the volunteer; (b) changes in the perception of the volunteer's role as reflected in their understanding of 4-H, their sense of self as a volunteer, the activities they organize and participate in as volunteers; and (c) how they determine success within the volunteer role.

Volunteer Perspective of Youth Development

A solid understanding of youth development is critical to an individual's ability to work effectively in a youth-development organization. Costello, Toles, Spielberger & Wynn (2001) demonstrate that the public health field's success (in changing public awareness of preventable health problems through public-education initiatives) provides strong support for intentionally incorporating youth-

development education into volunteer training. Since the early 1990s, Michigan 4-H has attempted to do this. Responses from the interview group indicate that this has had some positive effects. As a result of their volunteer experiences, volunteers build a strong foundation in youth-development concepts and objectives. Carol's comments are reflective of a shift in priorities for the respondents:

I think when you first start, you want your kids to be number one or be at the top of the class. How many of your club members were first in the class or best in class? You look at it that way and put it in the paper. It reflects back on you. Because your kids were successful, you were successful. That was the way I was looking at it at first. Now, I always want to kids to enjoy the project. I want them to improve their skills. But it isn't really about winning a trophy or winning Grand or Reserve. It's about them becoming better at something they were interested in. Basically, learning but enjoying it at the same time.

Throughout the interviews, volunteers talked about the benefits of the professional-development opportunities provided by the 4-H organization. These experiences are perceived as helping to increase understanding of the purpose of the organization as well as the needs of children, and increasing the volunteers' confidence in their ability to help their members, by improving their skills. During the conversation with Frank, he shared the following thoughts about training he received as a 4-H volunteer. "I really think that the statewide things like Kettunen Center and things at MSU are great. They help you think about things that you can do with your club, things that you can do to improve, get more kids involved." Later in the interview, he spoke in more detail about specific learning that had taken place.

Taking classes helped me [understand] some of 4-H's goals. I questioned things at the time when we started having 5- to 8-year-olds in 4-H. I was thinking it's too long and kids are going to burn out.

Looking at things developmentally, where kids are, its really important because of the way kids learn and where they are developmentally at 7 to 8 is wanting to get involved in things. That is the perfect opportunity to get them involved in 4-H. So that really changed my idea about Cloverbuds.

Barbara comment about her experiences, and how they helped her to grow, reinforce this perspective. She said:

I am not exactly sure what the name of the workshop was, but we learned how to work with kids, how to help them when they were feeling emotionally upset or having a hard time coping with some things in their families. So it kind of broadened my perspectives that way. It was a real growing experience for me.

In the interviews, volunteers also talked about the changing needs of the children and teens that make up their groups and how this had an impact on the work they do. Their comments reflect an understanding of the changing needs of children who are part of 4-H and their role in addressing those needs. Carol discussed the kinds of children who join 4-H and how that has changed over time:

Yeah, as you know, our society has changed. The [kids] that were coming [to 4-H] in the late 70s and 80s were coming from strong family backgrounds. Their parents were together and they were doing things together. A lot of our kids today are not coming from that background anymore. They are coming with a different level of knowledge. A different level of parental involvement, I think. You have to do a better job of getting to know the youth you are working with now. What is their level of knowledge and what do they want to get out of the program?

The needs of children who make the 4-H clubs and groups influence the activities volunteers plan for their members. This is reflected in Ellen's comments when she said:

I think a lot of the kids that are in our club now are two different kinds of kids. There are probably more than that, but I see kids who are involved in lots of things. They are just naturally leaders and they are involved in a lot of things. They want to be competitive. Then we have

a group of kids who don't have lots of outside experiences. They want to be, to use the catch phrase, connected to something. So there are different reasons for being in 4-H, to belong to a group. Some people just want to belong to something, to know that they are wanted and part of a group. I think that going to 4-H meetings starts out as something meaningful that a child can be involved with. You might go to fair or whatever. As they get older [for those kids who are not involved in lots of things], because they are already involved in 4-H, it's safe activity for them. It gets them exposed to more.

Barbara shared further insights that show an understanding of the value of the 4-H experience to youth because it allows all youth to participate and it provides developmentally appropriate activities that address the individual's needs:

The kids are pretty sheltered and [4-H] gives them an opportunity to experience things they would not otherwise do. I like to say that 4-H is an activity where everyone participates as much or as little as they want to. A lot of kids are involved in sports in school and they tend to get weeded out at a young age. I think that is unfortunate. A lot of kids are weeded out before they have developed their ability. They are weeded out when they could have developed their ability. So we turn them off to something that they could have been successful at. In 4-H, you don't get cut from a 4-H club or anything like that. You can participate in as much as you want to, so I think they learn more. There are things that they learn from sports activities, but there are things that 4-H allows them to do where it's okay to not be the best. In sports, it's more like 'Okay, if I am not good at this, it will bog down the team.' In 4-H, we just let things evolve. Kids can find the things they are good at or build skills at.

Initially, all of the volunteers agreed to become a volunteer because a child wanted to learn a specific skill and they felt comfortable teaching that skill. Alice described this: "My girls wanted to learn to cook. They were 10 and 11 and I thought 4-H was a good way to get them started. So, anyways, I started a group and initially, I had my girls and some of their friends from school. I think that first year, we had 7 or 8 girls and we learned to cook."

Over time, the reason for being a 4-H volunteer changed for the interviewees. Their reasons for volunteering now reflect a stronger understanding of positive youth development and how, as a 4-H volunteer, they can help achieve this goal. Debbie spoke about this eloquently:

When I first started leading, I was more project oriented and more tunnel vision. Then as I matured, I became more aware of the world around me and more aware of the changes that had come with many of the activities that children are drawn to. It's not so important that we get the blue ribbon, because we are not going to get that throughout life. In so many things now days, the kids are forced to be on a team and win all the time. The pressures that are placed on kids today are much greater than we had when we were growing up. I feel like we had lots of leisure time to explore and to kind of figure out who we were as kids. Now days, children have so much organized time. Granted 4-H is organized time also, but to be able to get together, have fun and enjoy learning, there are so many places today where they can't do that. 'You're not good unless you are the best!' That's not right because all kids aren't going to be the best.

When they spoke about their role as a 4-H volunteer, the interviewees clearly saw their role as being a youth developer. Alice articulated this when she said:

I guess that is the challenge. Making sure that a 4-H leader remembers why we are here. We are here for the kids and not for ourselves. Sometimes we forget that. It's all about the kids. If we remember that it's all about the kids, their growth, their success. I guess growth is the big thing because everything else comes with growth; what they are going to get out of it, where they are going to be 5 to 10 years from now. If we do our jobs good now, we aren't going to have to worry about where they are going to be 5, 10, or 20 years from now.

For many, the satisfaction they derive from this role is evident in their comments. Frank expressed that when he said, "The satisfaction that I get out of it; that's all I need. The satisfaction that maybe I did something good for somebody else, that I made something better for them." Barbara also described the satisfaction she receives from her volunteer role.

First of all their enthusiasm, I think. Their smiles. I think when they are successful or you see their growth, then that gives you a feeling of satisfaction. I guess I am maybe like a carpenter. When you do a fine finished piece of furniture and you know someone is enjoying that piece of furniture, you can see the pride they take in it, and it gives you pride. So, I think we help shape lives and any time you do that, kids are our most important resource. I have always felt that. If your communities are going to grow, you have to have a good base. So by working in 4-H, I can give our community a good base of young adults who can come back into the community and become productive.

Perception of the Volunteer Role

An individual's perception of their volunteer role is influenced by a number of factors. Each of these factors contributes to the shift in focus from subject matter to youth development. An examination of the respondents' understanding of 4-H, their motivation for becoming and staying involved, the way they describe their roles and the activities they are involved in, helps build comprehension of how the respondents perceive the role of volunteer and how that perspective has changed.

Over time, volunteers in this study changed their understanding of 4-H, its mission and goals. This change had an impact on the work they did with the youth in their clubs and groups, and how they knew when they were successful.

Frank expressed this well when he said:

I think over time you have a better understanding of what the program is about and what success is. You know many kids you find out over the years become very successful and they were never the blue ribbon kids. They didn't need to be blue ribbon kids to be successful. Sometimes it takes a while to learn that. I don't know if it's a maturity thing or what it is. I know it's just an observation. I think over time you realize that it's the ones that were having the most fun or feeling the best about themselves who were the ones that were the most successful. They came away feeling good about themselves. They had found something that they would define as success. It might not have been considered by the whole group or another group of people, but for them it was success. They went from step one to step two.

Carol expanded upon this same thought when she said:

[4-H] has changed over the past 25 years. If we always stick to the old ways of doing things or old ways we used to approach youth, it won't always work. We have to look at new ways of working with kids. [Overall] it's a good organization and that's what it is all about. It's all about youth and their growth and development. It's like raising a family, time after time again. I guess that's what 4-H is about when you stay in it over the long run. You know, you raise your own family, but you are also seeing lots of other kids grow and develop and you take pride in your own kids and you take pride in the successes that each and every one of those kids obtains. So that's one of the great things about being a 4-H leader. You get to do that over and over again, year after year after year.

Motivation is defined as the combination of forces that lead people to behave as they do (Wright & Noe, 1996). Comprehending an individual's initial motivation to volunteer and continue volunteering over time can also help build understanding of his or her perspective about the role he or she plays within the organization. It can also help us to understand how individuals build a comprehension of themselves within the context of their volunteer role. All of these factors contribute to their behaviors as a volunteer and as a youth developer.

As we examine the responses of the volunteers in this study, several key insights into their motivation are reflected in the comments about their reasons for becoming and remaining a 4-H volunteer. The needs of children (their own or others) was a significant factor in why many interviewees became involved. For early career volunteers, motivation was expressed as a desire to help or teach specific skills he or she had to share. As Frank reflected on his initial reasons for involvement, he said:

I wasn't a 4-H kid. When my son . . . was 10, he wanted to learn about [project] and I didn't know a whole lot about [project] other than what I

had taught myself. We had a neighbor, who was involved in the same thing in 4-H, so we asked . . . about it. They told us when and where the next meeting was and we went. So the first year, I worked with another 4-H leader. I took some classes any place I could find them and I have been working with [project] ever since.

For others, an enjoyment of working with young people was an important part of their decision-making process. Debbie spoke about this when she said, “. . . being able to help the kids, being able to do things for them. Being able to be part of planning activities that help people. They make me feel good, like I have done something important.” She continued, “I have always tried to be a giving person. I think the reason I went into [employment] was the fact that I wanted to do for other people. So this was another way that I could do for other people, especially when I was home and not working outside the home.” Alice discussed a similar motivation in her interview:

I think it is that sense of helping someone else, helping shape the life of children. I know that, through my church, I took a class. One of my gifts is helping. . . . it really hit home with me last year. I had taken that class several years ago, then it was given as a weekend workshop. It talked about your passion. Kids are my passion. So that helping shape lives and helping kids see opportunities is a big thing.

Past 4-H involvement was another motivating factor for those who had been 4-H members as young people. Ellen’s comments reflect this, “I think probably my 4-H background had more influence. I wanted to give back. I had enjoyed it and I felt that it had really benefitted me in my growing up. I really felt like I wanted to return, back to 4-H and the community, the enjoyment I had gotten and I wanted to pass it on.” Alice also spoke about this part of becoming a 4-H volunteer when she said:

I was a 4-H member from the time I was 9 years old. That probably had a big impact on my decision to become a 4-H leader. My mother

was always a 4-H leader, so that probably had an impact also. I just love working with kids, that is probably why I stay with 4-H even though my kids are no longer in it. I think I wanted to give back because I was raised to feel, as a responsible adult, we are responsible to not take from the world, but to give back some of what we have learned or at least to try and make the world better. I felt like, as a responsible adult, I should return to my community and try and make the community better. What better way to make your world and your community better than to work with the young people and return some of your knowledge to them, to pass it on. I guess that was a strong feeling.

When asked to reflect on why they continue to volunteer, respondents also talk about helping and filling a need. However, the focus of their answers shift from helping in a specific project area to a greater emphasis on a responsibility for helping to support and develop the next generations of our society, a greater awareness of the needs of young people and how they can help address these needs. Frank reflected this when he stated:

I stayed with it because I had worked with [child] since grade school. His father has cancer. [Child] needs other adults. He needs somebody who can take him places. His dad can't do that right now. There will be another [child]; there will be another Jaimie, another Pat who comes along that is going to need help for some reason.

He continued:

The best part is seeing the smile on kids faces. Knowing that when they come back, you know in your heart that they know they have accomplished something. That's one of the things that make you keep coming back. You are going to see kids grow and any time you see kids grow, that's a good feeling.

The activities a volunteer organizes and conducts are another reflection of how he or she perceives his or her role within the organization. People spend time on those things they consider important and that will most contribute to achieving success in their role. Early in their volunteer careers, respondents focused their efforts on teach the skills needed to successfully complete the

project. Over time, the emphasis shifted to less tangible skills that would have an impact on the child's future success in life. Barbara expressed this when she said:

They are learning stuff that they can carry with them for a lifetime. So that should be my goal as a leader. That they grow, that they are going to have something that they can take with them for a lifetime, down the road. I know I am successful when they come away feeling good about themselves. We want them to learn something yes, but if they come away feeling self-confidence or they come away feeling that they have accomplished something, that is good.

Alice continued this train of thought when she said:

Well, I guess you can use the 4-H pledge, but I think [my job] basically is to build youth and prepare them for the challenges they are going to face as young adults and adults. So if we give them the foundation, a lot of the trials and tribulations they are going to face in life and a lot of the decisions that they will make will be easier. Maybe it's mostly a decision-making tool. We are going to give them a good foundation for making good decisions in the future. Do we have bad 4-H members? Yeah. Do we have good 4-H members? We have great 4-H members. The opportunities we give them are what we are about. We are about giving the [member] the opportunity to grow and we can open the doors for them or we can make stumbling blocks for them. I think we are there to open doors for kids. I think that we need decent people in this world and I hope that what we are doing is helping to develop those people. People that don't mind helping other people, don't mind giving of their time, I think that is an important character trait. To work for the good of someone else and not get paid for it. That is good for our world.

Respondents also described their role within activities differently. As the goal of the activity shifted from project completion to youth development, volunteers no longer described themselves only as a "teacher." Debbie's comments reflect how she interacts with her members now:

I think when I first started working with the teens, I was much more directive and I would spell out exactly what needed to be done. Now I tend to more ask them [what they think we need to do]. Then we walk through the steps together. [They] are thinking more about what they are doing rather than [just doing what they are told].

Frank shared the following thoughts on the role of a volunteer.

The 4-H volunteer's job is to be a facilitator to help youngsters learn something, be it how to do something or just to learn about something or to learn responsibility. You provide resources for them to use. You encourage them. You help them with their needs and you try to be a counselor and comforter if they are having a bad day. Because all kids, and we do, too, have bad days. Sometimes things are not going as well as they think they should be going. As a leader sometimes you can see that it's coming. It just takes a little more time and children tend to be impatient and expect things a little faster than they sometimes come. So I think our job is facilitator, comforter, educator and you try to make things fun. Make it a fun learning experience. If they are having a bad day you try to encourage them to hang in there because it will get better. Once in a while you need to correct, but not too often. [The best part is] seeing kids develop and seeing them go out in life and do well. That is really rewarding. That's the part I like. Just watching them grow up.

Ellen described the skills she wants her members to develop:

. . . following through with what you started, being able to express yourself in front of people, having fun while you are learning and being able to do paperwork. All of life seems to be paperwork and in 4-H you learn to fill out records, you learn to keep records. When you get done, you evaluate whether you came out on top or whether you lost money, or whether when you finished what you made, you are satisfied with it. It gives you a really good feeling if you have made something and you enjoy it. These are all things that I want to pass on to the children. Not so much to be a winner, but to have self-satisfaction in what you do. To be happy with yourself, to be happy with what you can accomplish and what you do and to have some knowledge to be able to do something.

As Alice reflected on the way she works with her members in her club as a "facilitator" instead of a "teacher" she stated:

We talk. I talk to the kids a lot. Everyday, when we are doing things, I talk to the kids. You hear them talking and you can hear the growth. 'Yeah, that could have been better. I could have made a better decision there'. So just listening to what they have to say tells me if they are growing or not and they always are. Watching them when they interact with each other. It's really interesting to watch them interact with each other and how they have to learn to get along even when they are not always that similar in personality or talents or abilities. They learn to get along. They learn to help each other. They get knowledge from the club, from the leaders and the other kids. They get

to interact with adults. Sometimes with these kids, their interactions with adults in the home are not always good. They get to see interactions with adults in another light in a 4-H club. We are not yelling at them. We are not hollering at them to get their room cleaned or something like that. There is a whole different level, with a whole different idea. There is another side to us that they might not always see at home. They need to see there is more to life. If they have a bad situation at home, they need to see that there is more to life than that.

Ellen's comments expanded on this idea and reinforced the understanding that positive youth development is the ultimate goal of a 4-H experience:

When we first started, I wanted to make sure they all got their projects done. I wanted them all to complete their [project] in time for the fair. Now, that is still a goal, but I am not so worried about it. If we get done, we get done. Sometimes there are more important things going on in their lives than [project] and I find I just have to listen to them. Some meetings we make a lot of progress. Others we never really work on our project, they just seem to want to talk about what is going on at school or with friends or wherever. If they have a problem, they know I am there. If they have a question, they can come and ask. There is not a stupid question. I am there to help them. I think it is just what I call common sense. You talk to them, you address them by their name, you let them know you are happy that they are there. Sometimes it's a touch on the shoulder or you stand close to them. [You] let them know by your body language that they are part of the group. Sometimes, that's the best thing. Even though you are not thinking they are more special than anyone else, just by talking to them, you make them feel special.

Defining Success

How we define success in our work is greatly influenced by what we understand the goal of our efforts to be. A significant change occurred in the way respondents defined success as a volunteer. This change supports the idea that volunteers shift their focus from the subject matter they teach to youth development, in the work that they do. Early in their volunteer career, interviewees defined success in terms of awards won and being "correct" in the performance of a task. As Debbie said, "I think when you first start, you want

your kids to be number one or be at the top of the class. How many of your club members were first in the class or best in class? You look at it that way and put it in the paper. It reflects back on you, because if your kids were successful, you were successful. That was the way I was looking at it at first.” As Frank explained it, “I think there was more emphasis on producing a product. In getting ready for fair, you produced a product. You still wanted the kids to learn and grow, but the emphasis was on producing a product for the fair.” Carol also expressed this perspective when she said, “Just like the kids, in the beginning, the ribbons were important. I liked to see them get them. Then I could say, ‘I’ve taught them something. They did well.’”

All of the study participants changed the way they defined success. When discussing success as a volunteer now, Carol goes on to say:

[The importance of winning blue ribbons] didn’t last long. Having fun with the kids and seeing their accomplishments soon became more important than the kids getting a blue ribbon. Probably within the first two years, the first fair, I was really anxious, they had to get a blue ribbon. After that, just watching them struggle. The second year there was a little more struggle because we added some difficult things [to the project]. It was really a struggle for some of those 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds. I thought, ‘If we can get this and you feel good about yourself, that’s more important than a blue ribbon. You did your best.’

Alice’s comments expanded on this idea and reflect an awareness of the importance of involvement and connection in a child’s development:

I think as I look back at some of the early days and you always, after the fair, looked at how many first place in this area or that many in that area. This child won this. That’s become less important to me over the years, how many first places we have gotten. Now I think I am looking at how many kids were actually involved. If you have the kids actively involved the whole time. Not necessarily how many areas, but if they are involved and they learn something along the way and they grew a little bit of character. Made some new friends, experienced something

new that they had not experienced before. That's when you know it was a good year.

Connections to the 4-H Community

The second factor that appears to significantly influence perception change is an individual's connection to 4-H and the people who make up the organization and its programs. For all of the respondents, this was identified as an important factor influencing their development. It provided insight into what a volunteer is and should be, support for their efforts in the club or group and encouragement for their ongoing involvement.

Early in their volunteer career, respondents identified relationships as an important reason for becoming a 4-H volunteer. Familiarity with the organization or individuals within the organizations helped them make the decision to become involved. Debbie spoke about the importance of this sense of community and her decision to become a volunteer:

I think 4-H was an outlet for me that I felt comfortable with because it was something I knew. I am not a very outgoing person so it is difficult for me. It is difficult for me to go out and establish friendships or seek groups out. This was a way for me to do that. It probably wasn't even a conscious way for me to get involved in the community. When I was growing up, I think in my teen years, I started feeling that 4-H was a kind of family. I felt a part of a group and I think in teen years I think that is important to feel like you are part of a group. The feeling of family is the feeling of acceptance, of friendship with other people who have a like interest. With 4-H there is involvement with other leaders and then involvement with the young people so you have the feeling of being included in the group, whether is a project group, or a group going to camp or a group meeting for something else. So the feeling of family is feeling part of a group. So when you meet, everybody knows everybody and it is like old home week.

The influence of the 4-H community also impacted how respondents viewed their volunteer role. Within this concept of community and family, volunteers

began to describe themselves as role models. The idea of being a “role model” for young people occurred frequently in conversations, with respondents seeing the need to be a role model for children as an important part of their volunteer role. As Ellen reflected, “Giving kids whatever they need to be successful in their life and to be satisfied in their life. Being satisfied with where they are at and knowing that they always have the ability to take one step beyond where they are now. If we are good role models, the kids will have a positive experience.” Setting positive examples for others is seen as an effective way of helping young people develop into healthy and productive adults. Debbie sums this up well when she stated:

You are at the forefront and they are looking up to you so you have to be a model to them all the time. It truly affects your behavior and the way you perceive things. If you are really there for the youth and want them to grow and experience growth, you have to make sure you always set yourself in a position that the kids are going to benefit and that they are going to have an opportunity to grow. I think you have to model good character. It's just like being a parent. If you tell your kids that it's not good to smoke and you are smoking you really are not modeling the behaviors you really want them to use. So if you model that – if something doesn't go your way and you get angry and you stomp your feet – then you are telling them that it's okay for our youth, if they don't win first place or a committee rules against them on a certain thing, if they stomp their feet, maybe they will get their way. It's not a good thing. You have to show them good character and you also have to show them that they are working with a wide range of exhibitors and they are not all the same and they don't all come from the same background, but that doesn't necessarily make them bad people or that they are lesser people than they are. So you open up and accept all of the kids in the group or all of the kids in the county. That is what we are there for, all of them. They need to be involved just as much as we are.

Respondents talked at great length about the sense of family and community that develops over time as a result of their volunteer experiences. The sense of family and community has an impact on the volunteer's work with

youth and the volunteer as an individual. It has a strong impact on the choices volunteers make regarding their volunteer role. This concept of family can be seen when a volunteer describes his or her responsibilities when working with young people and it reflects an awareness of the volunteer's youth development role. Barbara stated:

It will be just like being a parent. There will be some good things and there will be some things that you hate to do, but in the end you know that everything that you do, the youth are going to benefit from As anything you can do to help our youth grow makes us feel good about yourself and good about your community and your county and your state and your country. Because when you know you are doing good things for youth, that's the bottom line.

Frank expanded upon this idea when he said:

In your club, you tend to be kind of a leader or father figure, so to speak. You're the disciplinarian. You are pushing the kids to do well or do things the right way. I think a father is a teacher, someone that builds the kids up, teaches them to be independent, teaches them to be lifelong learners. As volunteers, we should be like a father, somewhat of a disciplinarian at times if it's necessary, more of a guide so to speak. Someone, who is going to lead, like a parent. I guess the other thing is for when they need a hug or a pat on the back, you are there when they are down.

For the research participants, the 4-H community (members, other leaders and families) has become a major part of their personal life also. This social connection provides support for their actions and influences the decisions they make about current and future involvement in the program. Alice spoke about the importance of the friends she has made through 4-H and how they have had an impact on her life:

We have so many friends through 4-H. That is probably the biggest social part of our life. If somebody needs help, we are all there to help out. If somebody is sick or hurt, everybody does what they can to help, as a family would. You know, we are that close. I honestly think that we are closer than a lot of families are. People call each other and say 'I

need help with this' and everybody is there to help. I think some families are just off doing their own thing and not really connecting. The group really does connect. We have a lot in common. We appreciate each other. Sometimes we don't agree on things and that's okay. We can disagree and still be friends. I think sometimes in our real families that is not always true. I think I have almost more in common with my 4-H family than my real family.

Carol spoke about the impact her own leader had on her life:

He was like a friend of the family so that you felt comfortable being at his house. I did [project] and [project] with this leader. So I was at his house doing whatever. It was like going to visit an uncle. They knew you and there was a certain amount of respect because you were learning from them. You sat down around the kitchen table and discuss things. They were like a mentor so to speak. [That's] what my leader did for me and so I think that is part of my job.

She continued discussing the impact others have had on her development as a volunteer by describing another leader with whom she works:

I have a lot of respect for George. He can really pull off a lot with just a few resources. He takes chances on young [people]. I can't tell you how he does it, to cultivate the strengths in people and make them work for him and the program. He sees something in people and is able to pull out their best. George is good at appreciating his [people]. He doesn't have to say a whole lot to me but I know I am appreciated.

In the same vein, Barbara discussed what she learned from another leader and how this influenced the way she viewed her responsibilities as a 4-H volunteer in this way:

I think the thing that had the [biggest impact on who I am as a 4-H volunteer] is the opportunity to work with another leader, Bob. That has had a huge influence. Bob and his wife Kathy. I worked with Kathy so that is how we got involved in their [4-H] club. Then they just have been such an inspiration, especially Bob. He enjoys kids so much. That's been very important. I learned that not everything has to be perfect. You don't have to shoot to score. I think many people come to 4-H and think, 'We are going to get this big prize or we are going to have success every year,' whatever it is. Kids are the most important part. That's what I learned from him. Kids are the most important part.

Concept of Maturity

The final factor that appears to have strongly influenced the changes that occurred in the study participants is the concept of maturity. The maturity process involves both chronological aging and life experiences that occur over time, and that influence what the volunteers now see as important in their lives and in their work.

For the purpose of discussion within this study, I will refer to this as the “Grandparent Factor.” The Grandparent Factor occurs over time. It is made up of components of personal growth and maturity – a distancing from parenting by the individual that allows for a compassionate detachment when working with young people and their parents – and the development of “wisdom” regarding their role. The respondents described each of these components as affecting their perception of the volunteer role they play in Michigan 4-H and as helping provide them with a more developmental approach to their work.

The concept of maturity surfaced in the interviews with all study participants. In discussing factors that influenced changes in the way they approach their work with the children and teens who make up their clubs and groups, the idea of “growing up” and “maturing” was frequently mentioned. Maturity is not necessarily an age-related issue. As Ellen pointed out, “I think [maturity] is a viewpoint on your surroundings, an understanding of what’s going on, that makes maturity rather than an age.” Alice expanded on this thought, “It’s an evolving process. You never reach mature, I don’t think. You evolve and become more confident in what you are doing. You begin to see a perspective, a little more

removed perspective. You begin to see a wider view. You accept people for who they are and then work with them at that point.”

For the study participants, maturity was closely linked to their ability to view their role from a broader perspective. The following excerpt from the interview with Debbie illustrate this idea:

Winning is not everything you need to be satisfied. I think maturity helps you be satisfied with where you are and with yourself. You recognize that you are doing a good job even if your kids aren't all getting blue ribbons. You know, I look back at the people who mentored me and I have had some pretty good people here in the county to help me know what is important.

The ability to distance themselves from the actual raising of children, while still being involved with, and committed to, their growth and development was seen by many of the respondents as a significant factor in helping them be effective volunteers. This “compassionate detachment” provided the participants with the ability to focus on the big picture of youth development and not to get caught up in the day-to-day processes of raising children. Barbara shared her perspective on this:

I think it is easier for me doing it for other kids than it was as a parent, because you are not so close to the situation. You're are not so worried about are they going to make the right choice? I do think about the kids, but I am not so caught up in the everyday kinds of things. I think it is easier to overlook now. I have a lot of parents coming to me, sounding just like what I sounded like with my kids, especially teenagers. I can very calmly talk to them and I know I was a basket case back then. I think just living through that experience helps. You have that perspective that you have been through this before and its not uncharted territory any more.

Frank also reflected on this aspect of his work. “Probably it is a grandfather's viewpoint. You get a little more removed from the actual activities of your own

kids and you begin to see that, well, learning is important, but it's important for them to enjoy it while they are going through it."

Debbie expanded on the idea of "compassionate detachment" and linked her approach to an increased focus on learning in a broader context and not just within the project activities.

I probably relax and enjoy the children more now than when my own kids were in it, because you've got a little more tunnel vision then. But then, as I matured and became more aware of the world around me and became aware of the changes that had come with many of the activities that children are drawn to, I think I have matured and see that it's important that we complete what we start. I think as I went out in the working field and saw that you are not always going to be on top, I have changed from being so project oriented to [wanting] them to learn something and enjoy learning while they do it.

Learning from life experiences is another aspect of maturity that most respondents discussed. This learning did not have any direct connection to the individuals' volunteer experiences, but was seen as having significant impact on how they have come to view their volunteer role. Some learning was directly linked to life experiences of the individuals while other learning occurred through the process of growing up and growing older. Frank described his thoughts on this:

It was more of a personal crisis [for me] than a 4-H thing that changed my perspective on things. In a 12-month period, my mother died, my wife had surgery and I went through a personal health crisis. The [projects] and the ribbons were no longer important. As long as they were doing something, as long as they were participating.

Alice considered the change in her perspective to be a result of growing older as well as having a more realistic view of what is important in her life. She expressed these thoughts in the following way:

I don't think my expectations are as high any more. I think they are more realistic now. I don't think that I had very realistic expectations of a lot of things when I was younger. I let them make mistakes if they think that is the way to do something. It doesn't all have to be done my way. Over the years, I have found that there are several ways to get to the end. So, I think that is part of it. Also, coming to the realization that if I am telling them everything, then they are not growing.

Role of Professional Development on Perception Change

Understanding what factors may have contributed to the changing perception of the study participants is an important part of understanding the change process. This information is especially important as organizations make decisions about future professional-development efforts for volunteers. Analysis of the interview data provides strong clues to the role professional-development opportunities played in supporting the changes that seem to have occurred over time.

The participants in this study clearly changed their perception of the volunteer role in several significant ways over the course of their volunteer career. All came to the role with a strong focus on teaching a specific subject matter to the young people who made up their 4-H club or group. Over time, the focus of their efforts shifted to address the broader developmental needs of children as they grow to adulthood. The club or group's planned activities are now intended to support individual growth, success and a sense of belonging. The study participants' behavior changes can be attributed to a change in perception about the role of a Michigan 4-H volunteer.

Over time, respondents developed a clearer understanding of youth development and the needs of children. Their understanding of the importance of their role in the lives of their members changed. While all respondents came to

the program with a desire to work with young people, the focus of their work shifted from teaching a specific project skill to teaching the broader life skills children need to grow to be successful adults. With this understanding, volunteers also dramatically changed their definition of “success.” It is no longer the tangible awards received from competitive activities but rather the individual growth they see in the children and teens with whom they work. Success is more personally defined for each individual.

Study participants also developed a strong connection to the 4-H community as a result of their volunteer experiences. This connection resulted in a clearer understanding of the 4-H mission and a commitment to ongoing involvement because of the relationships that developed between the volunteer and his or her members and the evolving social connections. For all of the respondents, the 4-H community has become an integral part of their family life, their personal friendships and their community life.

A major influence on all of the respondents can be found in discussions related to the professional-development opportunities the 4-H program provides to volunteers and youth. These opportunities include the learning that occurs in clubs and groups, and through participation in more formal educational programs and workshops offered locally or statewide. Respondents spoke at great length about the learning that occurred for them personally as well as for members through involvement in 4-H clubs, workshop and educational events.

While the initial focus of the professional-development experience may have a subject-matter emphasis, some of the significant learning that occurred does

not seem to be linked to a project area or specific subject. In discussing the important things members get out of a 4-H experience, Debbie explained:

In a 4-H club, over the years, people change but the group remains. People are brought in and there's a lot of learning about group dynamics as people change. The kids have to learn how to relate to each other, how to help each other. You hear it in the kids building each other up. You hear them giving each other advice. I think the biggest thing [4-H] helps with is the self-confidence. It allows kids to meet people from outside their comfort zone and they can communicate at all levels of people: young adults, adults or professionals. It helps them feel comfortable and it gives them a self-confidence that they don't get in other opportunities in the school or in the community. When they have that self-confidence and that comfort level working with people or talking with people, it increases their chance for success in the world one hundredfold. There are not a lot of other youth organizations that can say that. When they get out of their comfort level and meet people who are different, they feel a little bit more comfortable about themselves and they have a better understanding of who they are. It helps them develop and go on to college and go into the workforce. They can communicate with all kinds of individuals that they might not have encountered before. [They] can step into those situations a lot more comfortably than some other youth who are graduating high school.

Interaction with other leaders is another component of professional development that seems to contribute to the study participants' changing perceptions and behaviors. The respondents identified these individuals as significant sources of knowledge, support and learning. Participants frequently spoke about how the opportunity to interact with other volunteers played a key role in building understanding of their role as a volunteer. In the following excerpt from Frank's interview, he reflected on the importance of other leaders in his evolution as a youth-development volunteer:

I think the sharing you do with other leaders is always most useful. The problems are the same here as they are in [other] counties. Sometimes when you sit down and start bemoaning your particular situation, they have already gone through it or their situation is worse than yours. So then, you know, you realize that your situation is not as bad as you

thought. I think any time you get to work with other leaders is probably one of the most important things. Just having the opportunity to interact.

Carol supported this idea:

In my professional life, in my work life, I have worked with people who, for one reason or another, don't have a lot of conscience in their life and are not making good choices. So, I think that 4-H leaders being so positive and 4-H being about choices and improving and expanding life is good. You can get bogged down in all this negative that you are working in all the time. They have helped me to keep perspective that the world is not all going downhill, and that there are lots of good things going on with kids, that there are good things to invest in.

Alice viewed her interactions with other volunteers and staff as personal-growth experiences:

It's all the adults. It's the volunteer leaders and the staff. They really helped expand my horizons. They help me see what the possibilities are. I like the workshops. I learn something every time I attend workshop and everything like that. Usually from the resource people and just talking with people. I like just having general conversations with people who have the same interests as I do. Everyone has ways of doing things and things that have happened to them that did not happen to you. You learn from general conversations. It's just fun.

The simple process of bringing people together for common learning experiences is seen by many as an important part of 4-H and a contributing factor to volunteer growth and development. Barbara expressed the value of these experiences when she said:

By being involved in 4-H I have worked with all sorts of individuals that I wouldn't have been involved with if I hadn't been involved in this group. You work with the hotheads and you work with the people that are calm and anything is fine, so you learn how to work with all sorts of different people. I think that's one of the great things about 4-H. It brings all sorts of people together and something successful is coming out of it.

Debbie's comments support this idea.

In general, I think I have met more people than I ever would have if I had not been in 4-H. It just opened me up to meeting so many different people, doing so many different things I could never picture myself doing. All of the people that I have met over the years have helped me to learn and grow and learn how kids learn and grow. I think just meeting the number of people that I have met through 4-H has been probably the number one thing, including all of the friends I have made now through [project]. I have lots of friends [all over the state] who are 4-H leaders. Every time I get together with these people, they inspire me and they help me learn and grow more as a person.

Involvement as a volunteer is viewed by the respondents as a personal-growth opportunity and a learning opportunity. Barbara's comments that follow demonstrate that individuals recognize the value of their volunteer experience for their personal growth.

You know, I have done a lot of things that I never would have thought about if 4-H were not part of my life. My family has done a lot of things that they would not have done. There is even more to 4-H than we have experienced. I read about stuff that other clubs are doing that we have never gotten around to doing. I think there is something for everyone in 4-H. All these experiences I have been a part of have helped make me who I am. I think that my experiences as a 4-H leader have helped me become a more confident person, become a more well-rounded person. It's broadened my experiences. I think it has benefitted myself and my family.

From a personal perspective, respondents viewed the opportunities to work with a wide variety of people as having significant impact on how they have grown as a youth-development volunteer. The opportunity to work with volunteers and youth who have different backgrounds than their own is seen as an important learning opportunity and one that has had tremendous impact on how they have come to understand and view their roles. Ellen shared her insight into this process when she stated:

I think one of the nice things that 4-H does is that it puts people together that would not normally be together, whether it is from the local town to the county level. It gives them the opportunity to work . . . and be with people that they normally wouldn't be with. I think of adults or youth that I work with, that if I was only working with the local club I wouldn't have the opportunity to experience those people if I wouldn't have been involved at the county or state level. And so I think that is one of the great things about 4-H. It puts not only youth together, but it puts adults together that would not normally be together. Any time you work with people or associate with them – I won't use the word work – but associate with people, you learn from them and you share their joys and you share their discouragements, so there is always an opportunity to learn from other people. So if you broaden the base of people you come in contact with, you broaden the opportunities to learn, both for the student, the 4-H member and the leader.

Frank, too, saw an opportunity to work with young people from a different background than his own as a growth experience:

It was the first time I took on a situation where I didn't have control of who I was teaching. It really stretched me in that I had to learn really quickly how to deal with different races. They were using a lot of slang and I had no clue what they were talking about. I was supposed to be in a leadership position and I couldn't understand what they were saying. I survived it. When I couldn't understand I would say 'Okay, slow down a minute. You are talking your local slang and I don't understand your local slang. Let's see if we can figure out between the two of us, what you are asking me and I will give you an answer, hopefully, that you can understand.' By the end of the day, we were able to work well together. We all live in a box that someone has created for us. If we can get out of the box and try something new, meet someone new, we can grow. We can go back to the box when we get back home and get comfort if we need to, but we will never know what is outside of the box unless we get experiences with others.

It appears from these discussions that an important part of professional-development opportunities is simply the ability to gather together with others who were also involved in 4-H. The opportunity to gather with others with similar interests was mentioned by the study participants as important to gaining new knowledge and skills. Other volunteers were often mentioned as an important source of knowledge and support for study participants. Professional-

development opportunities sponsored by 4-H were seen as valuable ways to meet others and to learn from them. This unintentional benefit of professional-development opportunities appears to be an important influence on perception change.

Summary

The volunteers in this study underwent a significant change in perception about their roles within the Michigan 4-H Youth Development program. All came to the organization with a strong emphasis on teaching a specific subject matter or project skill to the children who make up their 4-H club or group. Over time, the focus of their work shifted from project knowledge or skill development to an intentional focus on the developmental needs of young people.

All respondents came to the role with an interest and passion for being around young people. Initially, their involvement was motivated because of a desire to support their own children. However, their involvement has continued because of a strong interest in helping all children grow into healthy and productive citizens. Through experience and their involvement with young people, they have come to understand more about themselves and they now see their work as a way of ensuring a strong future for their communities and society in general.

The perception change can be documented in the ways the volunteers have come to describe the work they do with youth, the kinds of activities they help coordinate with and for members, the way they interact with their members during these activities and in the way they understand and define success (their own and that of the young people). These changes reflect a stronger

understanding of positive youth development, and the mission and goals of the 4-H organization. The changes also reflect a growth and maturity on the part of the individual that cannot be fully attributed to the training and development opportunities offered by the organization. Personal life experiences and the aging process itself also contribute to the changing perceptions of the study participants.

On the day of her last interview, Alice was preparing to go to a funeral for a man who had been important in her life. In summarizing the work she does as a youth-development volunteer, Alice stated:

Tomorrow, I'm going to Bill's funeral. He was [a good family friend]. Even though I didn't have a lot of regular contact with Bill lately, he took an interest in my life and what I did. He always cared about me and asked about me. He always asked about my children. He cared about what I was doing. If I can do that for other kids, someday they will be there for future kids, to pass it on.

Helping today's children grow up to be successful and giving individuals are two overarching reasons the volunteers in this study continue their work. They view the work they do as an important contribution to the lives of the children with whom they interact. It provides these young people with opportunities to explore options, develop self-confidence and build skills that will carry them forward into their future. They also see themselves as modeling the behaviors and attitudes that society needs to thrive. For all of these people, the young people of today are our future. The work that they do is definitely the work of a youth developer.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of perception change that occurs as volunteers involved in youth-development programs move from a “subject-matter” focus to a “youth-development” focus in their work, as it is reflected by their behaviors when working with young people. The participants in this study were volunteers with Michigan 4-H Youth Development programs. These volunteers were identified as having come to the organization with a subject-matter focus in their work. Over time, they were observed to have developed a youth-development focus to their work.

Each of the study participants has a self-expressed passion for young people. They experience a feeling of enjoyment and receive personal benefit from their ongoing interactions with youth. Respondents share the perspective that their work with youth provides them with the opportunity to learn more about themselves and their personal values.

Analysis of the data demonstrates that Michigan 4-H volunteers do, in fact, come to the organization with a subject-matter focus toward their work and, over time, change their focus to achieving the youth-development mission of the organization. Their behaviors within the 4-H club or group changed to reflect this shift in focus and they define success in new and different ways as a result of these changes. Study participants perceive these changes to be a result of a clearer understanding of the purpose of 4-H and their role in it; an immersion in

the 4-H community which results in strong connections with other volunteers, 4-H members and their families, and staff; and a process of maturation on the part of the individual volunteer.

Study participants appear to be guided by a belief that their work as 4-H volunteers contributes to the development of current and future generations of young people. They also feel the work they do helps ensure the well-being of their communities and society in general. An increased understanding of the mission of 4-H, the needs of children and their own life experiences support these beliefs. Personal life experiences have helped them clarify what is important in their lives and how they want to spend their time.

Through their involvement as 4-H volunteers, these individuals feel they are working to create a better future for the youth with whom they work. The respondents view young people as facing many challenges that were not part of their own childhood. These challenges are perceived as making it much more difficult for today's children to grow up successfully. Their actions are guided by a strong commitment to the philosophy that the involvement of caring adults in the life of a child can make life better for this generation's children as well as the children of future generations.

Over time, the behaviors of the study group have changed to reflect their expressed beliefs about the youth-development role they play in Michigan 4-H. These beliefs are visible in the activities they organize and implement with and for the children who are part of their group. The ways they choose to interact with these young people also reflect the volunteers' underlying beliefs. Throughout the interviews, respondents identified a number of things that support them in

their efforts to provide developmental opportunities for the children with whom they work. These supports include training and educational opportunities through 4-H and from other community-based sources, and their connection to – and intense involvement with – others involved in 4-H programs (children and adults).

The volunteers interviewed in this study represent individuals, working in local communities, who are committed to working with and for young people through the Michigan 4-H Youth Development program. They demonstrate a deep commitment to supporting the current and future generations of children as they grow to adulthood. From this commitment has come an ethic of service to positive youth development. This is demonstrated by their expressed interest in helping young people develop self-confidence, strong communication skills, a sense of themselves as successful individuals who are not afraid to take risks and the ability to make informed decisions about their life choices. They have developed this commitment as a result of their ongoing interaction with the young people in their clubs and with others who are committed to the same ideals. The primary conclusions that can be drawn from this study are:

1. Individuals who come to Michigan 4-H with a subject-matter focus to their work do change their role perception to one that is more focused on youth development;
2. This change results in a visible behavior change on the part of the volunteers; and

3. The change process is impacted by professional development opportunities provided by Michigan 4-H Youth Development and the volunteers' interactions with others involved in 4-H programs.

Theoretical Implications of This Study

Several theories from the field of education can assist in understanding the emergence of a youth-development perspective in study participants. The process of perception change that results in behavior change among individuals can be examined through the lens provided by literature on (a) the development of expertise, (b) communities of practice, (c) Erikson's psychosocial theory of life-stage development and (d) the development of wisdom. Each of these lens gives us a slightly different way of looking at the change that has occurred in the study participants' perceptions as we try to understand the overall change process related to beliefs about role and the visible behaviors that result from these beliefs.

Development of Expertise

Many researchers have studied the development of expertise among individuals in business, nursing and education over the years (Benner, 1984; Cervero, 1988; Ericsson, 2000; Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Gosper, 2003; Isenberg, 1984; Klemp & McClelland, 1986; Quinn, 1988; Wagner & Sternberg, 1985; Weick, 1983). Researchers have sought to understand the development of expertise by carefully examining the professional development experiences and professional practice of individuals identified as "experts" in their fields. According to Ericsson (2000, p. 1), "the term expert is used to describe highly experienced individuals such as medical doctors, accountants, teachers and scientist, but has

been expanded to include any individual who attained their superior performance by instruction and extended practice.” Attaining a level of expert performance requires at least 10 years time, but it is not simply a consequence of more experience (Ericcson, Kamper & Tesch-Romer, 1993). Individuals who truly become experts seek out learning experiences that increase their knowledge and skills. Such individuals also commit themselves to the “deliberate practice” of the learning that has occurred. The accumulated amount of deliberate practice is closely related to the attained level of performance for many types of experts (Charness, Krampe & Mayr, 1996; Ericsson, et al.; Sloboda, Davidson, Howe & Moore, 1996; Starks, Deakins, Allard, Hodges & Hayes, 1996).

I believe the term expert can be applied to the individuals in this study. They have become “expert” youth-development volunteers as a result of their continued learning about the needs of children, the deliberate practice of this learning in their work, their longevity within the organization and their own personal development. Their ongoing involvement with 4-H, after their own children have left the program, demonstrates their commitment to positive youth development. They are committed to investing time and effort to this work. By doing so, they have made a conscious commitment to this and future generations of children.

Evidence gathered through the interviews with these individuals suggests that there is an intentional effort on the part of the study participants to continually learn from young people, other volunteers and resource people through formal and informal professional-development opportunities, and to apply this learning to their work as 4-H volunteers. Many of the interviewees had not

consciously thought about their work from a youth-development perspective prior to discussions with the researcher. However, when questioned, they all attributed the shift in how they view their roles and interact with children, to a better understanding of the mission of 4-H and their personal observations of the needs of young people. This perception is still evolving and new knowledge is continually incorporated into the ways these volunteers work.

This new knowledge includes what Elbaz (1983) refers to as “practical knowledge.” Practical knowledge includes first-hand experience of youth needs, a repertoire of teaching techniques and group management skills, as well as a theoretical knowledge base of subject matter. Greeno’s (1997) work related to the nature of knowledge and learning from a “situative perspective” adds to our understanding of the development of expertise. According to Greeno, cognition is (a) situated in particular physical and social contexts; (b) social in nature; and (c) distributed across the individual, other persons and tools.

All of these approaches to understanding the learning processes of the study participants and the development of expertise are constructivist in nature. They give recognition to the fact that the volunteers bring prior knowledge to the experience and continue to learn along with the members of their clubs and groups. Volunteers create understanding of their role within the organization based upon the interaction of what they already know and believe about 4-H and the children they work with, the ideas they come in contact with through formal professional-development opportunities and their ongoing interaction with children and other volunteers. As Resnick (1989) notes, adult learning is a process of knowledge construction, as opposed to knowledge absorption, and is

knowledge dependent because learners use existing knowledge to build new knowledge.

The development of “expertise” by 4-H volunteers is closely linked to the literature on how adults learn. It reflects a process of knowledge construction based upon deliberate practice and the incorporation of existing knowledge with new experiences and observations. Just as educators learn about teaching through experience (Cranton, 1996), this research supports the assumption that volunteers learn about their work in youth development through experience. As with teachers in formal education situations, their learning focuses on developing skills and techniques, building understanding of others and critically examining new ideas and information in relationship to current practice (Brody, 1998; Cranton, 1996).

Providing continuous opportunities for current and new volunteers to learn and practice the principles of positive youth development is critical to the organization’s future success. Learning must occur in ways that are accessible, relevant to the individuals and provide support for the application of new information into the volunteer’s day-to-day activities.

Communities of Practice

The importance of environment is well documented as helping to create understanding and ongoing commitment for adult learners. Volunteers in this study frequently mentioned the people they interact with as important to their learning and work. The literature related to “communities of practice” – as a way of enhancing learning among individuals with common interests – is another area with clear ties to the findings of this research.

A community of practice is defined as “a group whose members regularly engage in sharing and learning around their common interests” (Lesser & Storck, 2000, p. 1). Lesser and Storck further describe a community of practice as a group of people “playing in a field defined by the domain of skills and techniques over which the group interact. Being on the field provides the members with a sense of identity – both in an individual sense and in how the individual relates to the group as a whole” (p. 1).

Throughout the interview process, respondents talked about the importance of their interactions with, and connections to, other 4-H volunteers and staff. They view these individuals as a source of knowledge and support for the work they are doing. Additionally, they develop a sense of identity within the group based on the social interactions that result from their involvement with these individuals.

The concept of “communities of practice” is based upon the following assumptions: (a) learning is fundamentally a social phenomenon; (b) knowledge is integrated in the life of the communities that share values, beliefs, languages and ways of doing things; (c) the process of learning and membership in the community is inseparable; (d) knowledge is inseparable from practice; and (e) empowerment – or the ability to contribute to a community – creates the potential for learning (On Purpose Associates, 2001). The Institute for Research on Learning, a spin-off group of the Xerox Corporation of Palo Alto, CA, supports these assumptions. They refer to this as learning that is fundamentally social and motivated by engagement and participation in practice.

The assumptions outlined above clearly reflect the beliefs and behaviors of the respondents as members of a “community of practice” in Michigan 4-H Youth

Development. The social nature of their involvement as a 4-H volunteer was a significant motivating factor when they first joined. It is also a major factor in why they continued to volunteer. Respondents saw themselves as sharing a common set of values, beliefs and ways of doing things with other volunteers, and they talked frequently about the personal growth and learning that takes place as a result of their interactions. They viewed the 4-H community as inclusive, welcoming and supportive of them as individuals, as well as a source of knowledge and inspiration for their work. Respondents saw their involvement with others in the 4-H community as a critical component of their ability to continue to be successful as a volunteer.

The concept of creating and supporting organizationally sponsored “communities of practice” can provide important insight into future volunteer development efforts for Michigan 4-H Youth Development. This is especially important at the present time. Currently, Michigan 4-H Youth Development annually offers 20 to 25 statewide professional development opportunities for volunteers. Even more are offered on a county or multicounty level. The statewide workshops typically bring together large groups of volunteers (50 or more) for two to three days of skill development and subject-matter education. County and multicounty workshops are usually one day in length. Budget challenges, staff reductions and increased demands on the time of paid staff and volunteers have led the organization to consider reductions in the frequency and duration of professional development offerings.

Exploration of new and innovative ways to develop and support communities of practice for 4-H volunteers within local communities could

provide the Extension organization with more effective ways of supporting the professional development of these individuals. Just as communities of practice in the business world have proven to be an effective way for employees to share technical and practical knowledge, we can improve the knowledge and skills of volunteers by helping to create environments that view learning as a lifelong process. These “communities of practice” in positive youth development must include children and young people as a source of knowledge for professional development.

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Life Stage Development

Erik Erikson is best known for his work in refining and expanding Freud's theory of stages of human development. Erikson's (1963) work is based on the assumptions that:

Human personality, in principle, develops according to steps predetermined in the growing person's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with a widening social radius; and that society, in principle, tends to be so constituted as to meet and invite this succession of potentialities for interaction and attempts to safeguard and to encourage the proper rate and the proper sequence of their unfolding (p.270).

Erikson's work is also closely allied with the work of human motivation as described by Maslow (1968). This work is useful as we strive to understand the commitment of the study participants to helping create a more positive future for the current generation and future generations of young people.

Erikson's (1963) model of psychosocial development identifies eight stages in human development. The three adult stages of his model provide insight into some of the factors that may have influenced the change in perception for the study participants. All of the respondents started volunteering when they were in

their early to middle 20s. In Erikson's model, this is the stage of "Intimacy versus Isolation." Characteristics of this stage of human development include the desire to lose oneself in another (helping) and the desire to become involved as an active participant in society.

These characteristics are exhibited by young adults as they begin to enter the world of work. When the participants in this study first began volunteering, they were of an age consistent with Erikson's stage of Intimacy versus Isolation. Comments in interviews indicated a desire to get involved with others and commit to concrete affiliations and partnerships. These individuals found a way to act on this need by volunteering to teach a skill they had to others, through a community-based organization like 4-H.

The seventh and eighth stages of Erikson's model, "Generativity versus Stagnation" (late 20s to 50s) and "Ego Integrity versus Despair" (50s and beyond) may be most useful in beginning to understand the perception change of the group. Characteristics of these stages of human development include concern for the next generation and all future generations, a commitment to raising children (our own and others), a desire to see ourselves as having made a difference in the world and contentment with the choices we have made in our lives. Currently, all of the volunteers in this study are approximately of an age consistent with the last two stages of Erikson's model.

In the stories of the volunteers, the changes in perspective are reflected in their role descriptions, goals for members, how they define success and the satisfaction they derive from seeing former members become contributing members of the community. As they describe their current roles within 4-H and

their goals for the children they work with, the concepts of parenting and concern for the future are clearly evident. Their sense of self is clearly linked to a desire to see themselves as having made a difference in the world and a desire to make the world a better place for this generation and future generations. They see evidence of their success in the young people who have taken on adult roles in their community and are now carrying on a tradition of giving and caring for others.

This ethic of helping developed over time for most of the respondents. Early career volunteers talked about wanting to help teach specific skills to children. In discussions about their reasons for continuing as a volunteer, the concept of “helping” took on a much broader significance. Frank’s comments express this change effectively

Kids are our future, the world’s and mine. Somebody’s got to come up and teach the next generation’s kids. If I can have a hand in helping, then there is hope for future generations. You can’t change the world, but you can make a difference one person at a time. I don’t mean change them to your viewpoint, but help them see that they can change the world they live in. It’s just rewarding to pass things on.

This aspect of perception change cannot be attributed to experiences within the 4-H program. We can, however, use the insight gained from viewing change through this lens to think more critically about how we plan, conduct and evaluate the effectiveness of our volunteer-development efforts. Awareness and consideration of the developmental stages of our volunteer community is an important part of planned, effective, educational opportunities with this group.

Development of Wisdom

In education, a great deal of attention has been directed toward the quality of student learning. Brown (2002, p. 29) asserts:

What has been missing is an understanding of how students integrate the lessons they have learned in and out of class, on and off campus, and how they apply what they have learned from those experiences to their lives. The result of this integration process is something many refer to as *wisdom*.

This type of integration process can also be useful in understanding how perception change occurs in youth-development volunteers. For this reason, I believe an examination of the literature on the development of wisdom is also relevant to this discussion.

Literature on the development of wisdom is closely linked to research on the development of expertise and theories of life stage development. Within the psychology community, wisdom is seen as an emerging characteristic of the mature adult that is built upon intelligence, experience and a reflective nature (Sternberg, 1998). In her work on the constructs of wisdom in human development and consciousness, Prewitt (2000) explores the development of wisdom through the foundational research and theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, Maslow and Erikson. Within her work, "wisdom is generally characterized by goodness, often related to judgment, using acquired knowledge" (p. 3). She contends that there are certain preconditions to achieving wisdom and these preconditions can be viewed as developmental stages to the goal of becoming a wise person. This corresponds closely to the work related to lifespan development and provides a model for her work. Erikson's work on how adults develop socially also addressed issues related to the development of wisdom. He

defines wisdom as “detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself” (Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick, 1986, p. 37).

Maslow’s definition of self-actualization describes a mature individual who listens to his or her inner voice and is conscious of words and actions before executing them. This view is consistent with modern definitions of wisdom (Prewitt, 2000). Maslow also said the self-actualized person is mature, has moved beyond deficiency needs and is in a metamotivated state of being, rather than striving to be. Another way of describing this is to say the self-actualized person is one who is at peace with himself or herself and his or her existence. The self-actualized person is has come to terms with who, what and where he or she is in life.

Respondents in this study shared this perspective about their own lives when they talked about being more relaxed about their work now than when they first started as a 4-H volunteer. Study participants commented on their ability to focus on the “big picture” and not being caught up in worrying about the day-to-day challenges of raising children. They viewed this as a strong point in their work as a volunteer and an ability that developed over time, as a result of both age and experience.

In the construct proposed by Brown (2002), wisdom is comprised of six interrelated dimensions: self-knowledge, understanding of others, judgment, life knowledge, life skills and willingness to learn. “Self-knowledge” is defined as confidence in one’s own knowledge, skills and beliefs. “Understanding of others” is a genuine interest in learning about others, empathy, effectively engaging others and a willingness to use one’s sphere of influence for the common good.

“Judgment” is the ability to effectively obtain, process and utilize information. It includes the capacity to learn from experience. “Life knowledge” is seen as a combination of “book smarts,” “street smarts” and common sense. “Life skill” is a practical competence that gives a person the ability to balance multiple roles and tasks while handling their daily affairs. A “willingness to learn” is characterized by a general curiosity about life that is supported by confidence in the knowledge one has already gathered and the humility to recognize that one simply cannot know everything.

This construct for understanding the development of wisdom is useful as we examine perception change in youth-development volunteers. It pulls together the insights we have gained from the interviews and provides us with a way of understanding the change process in a comprehensive and logical. In addition, it describes a process of “learning from life” that is comprised of reflection, integration and application. Together, these steps can help build understanding of the process the study volunteers underwent in transforming their life experiences into one or more of the six dimensions of wisdom.

The development of wisdom, as it relates to youth-development work, may be a useful way to begin to understand the perception change of 4-H volunteers. The data provide strong evidence that these individuals have confidence in their own knowledge, skills and beliefs and are willing to use these things in an effort to influence the common good. They have demonstrated a capacity to learn from experience and combine formal and informal learning opportunities with their own common sense when addressing challenges. All of these individuals continue to display a general curiosity about life and a continuing commitment to finding

balance in their lives. In fact, many see their volunteer role as a key component to creating balance. It provides them with an outlet for interests and energies that are greater than themselves yet still focused on creating a better world for their families and society in general.

Contributions to the Literature

The contribution of this work to the literature on adult education is primarily in the area of understanding the nature of behavior change in nonformal education environments. Brown (1969) has shown that an individual's behavior is grounded in the interaction between what he or she believes about himself or herself and his or her beliefs about the situation in which they are involved. Much of the work related to belief systems and behavior change has been in the field of formal education. This work provides evidence that similar factors are at work in nonformal education environments.

Just as teacher beliefs about the needs of their students impacts their behaviors in the classroom, volunteer beliefs about the needs of young people involved in community-based youth development organizations impact their behaviors within that organization. In Cranton's (1995) work on professional development as transformative learning, she found that educators learn about teaching through their experiences. This research provides strong evidence that volunteers also learn about, and define their roles through, experience. Such knowledge supports the position that research about transformative learning (meaning perspectives and their influence on adult learning) is a useful tool for improving the volunteer-development efforts of community-based youth development programs.

This research also provides strong evidence for thinking about effective professional development in nonformal education through the lens of communities of practice. The concept of “family” is strongly portrayed in all of this study’s interviews. Being part of a community that is committed to a common goal is an important part of an effective learning environment for these individuals.

The concept of “communities of practice” originally developed in the business community (Lesser & Storck, 2000). The formal education community has begun to adopt this approach to teacher education also. Learning communities have become important aspect of the school reform effort (Hord, 1997). However, little is known about the development of communities of practice among groups of unpaid individuals who volunteer time to educational efforts and positive youth development.

While informal communities of practice have existed for many years in the nonprofit community, nonformal education organizations, such as 4-H, have not yet attempted to formalize the process. This work makes a strong case for committing organizational resources and time to the intentional formation of communities of practice related to positive youth development as a way of supporting and enhancing the work of volunteers in this field.

Implications for Professional Development

A number of implications for the field of professional development can be found in the results of this study. In the process of identifying the sample for this study, the researcher’s observation that not all volunteers develop a youth-development focus in their work with young people in 4-H clubs and groups was

validated. The self-described activities of individuals who completed the initial screen survey and the observed behaviors of volunteers by staff confirmed this observation. It can be concluded, then, that an organizational commitment to, and investment in, the professional development of its staff (in this case volunteers) is not enough to bring about changes in perception and ultimately changes in behaviors.

It can be argued from the data that one of the critical factors affecting an individual's willingness to change his or her role perception is the development of "expertise" as a youth developer. Expertise results from learning through a variety of experiences and the opportunity and support for the "deliberate practice" of that learning. Professional development in the nonformal education field does not have the same system of accountability that exists in business and formal education. Mandatory training and updates are not always possible or appropriate. Individuals responsible for the professional development of volunteers in the nonformal education field need to broaden their approach to include acknowledgment of learning that occurs from interactions with others and through general life experiences.

Through the interview process, it became clear that training designed to teach specific subject skills was not viewed as highly significant in a volunteer's growth as a youth developer. While training was seen as important, many times respondents could not remember the name of the workshop they attended or the primary skills they went there to learn. For many, the most learning that had the most impact came from the opportunities they had to talk with and learn from other participants through general conversations and the sharing of stories. From

a professional-development perspective, it is important to remember to allow time for informal learning as well as formal learning when planning development opportunities.

Implications for Volunteers

It is clear from this research that the challenge of maintaining connection with other volunteers is critical to the ongoing satisfaction and success of youth development volunteers. A constant theme which emerged as a result of this work is the idea that volunteers continue to volunteer because they feel they get as much from the experience as they give. Finding ways to connect to, and interact with, others in the organization was important to the long-term involvement of these individuals.

Respondents in this study continued to volunteer because of the friendships they had made across the organization. The social opportunities provided by their volunteer role are seen as an important part of their life. Study respondents also felt that involvement with young people helped them keep things in perspective and stay more connected to the world. Data from this study suggest that an important part of helping individuals develop a youth-development focus to their work is creating opportunities for them to have significant and ongoing interaction with a variety of young people. Organizationally, it is important that youth-development organizations put a high priority on creating opportunities for youth and adults to come together regularly to share and to learn with, and from, each other.

Implications for Future Research

This research project focused exclusively on tenured volunteers working with youth in 4-H clubs and groups in Michigan. Important information was gathered that provides insight into how these individuals changed their perspective and the understanding of their volunteer role to encompass a strong commitment to the principles and practices of positive youth development. Through the process of analyzing and making sense of this data, I reached the following recommendations for future research.

I recommend that this study be expanded to include individuals who have not developed a youth-development perspective to their work, either as self-identified or as observed by others. It will be valuable to understand how their experiences differed from those with a strong youth-development perspective and how they have been the same. This will help provide clarity to the kinds of planned experiences that may contribute to changing perceptions.

I would also recommend that this study be replicated with 4-H volunteers outside of the Michigan 4-H Youth Development Program. Four-H is a national youth-development organization with programs in all 50 states and U.S. territories. Not all of the programs use the same approach to volunteer recruitment as Michigan (teaching of a specific subject matter). It would be interesting and important to explore the impact recruitment strategies have on the perception volunteers have of their roles and the behaviors of volunteers working with young people in ongoing clubs and groups.

Another approach to expanding the learning of this initial study would be to interview volunteers who work with youth in short-term programs such as camps,

afterschool programs and childcare situations. These delivery vehicles are an significant part of 4-H programming. In these environments, volunteers do not necessarily have ongoing contact with the same groups of children that a 4-H club environment provides. Parental involvement is also typically less. It will be useful to know if volunteers working with children in these environments develop similar perceptions of their role as a youth developer.

Finally, I would recommend that this study be conducted with volunteers involved with community-based, youth-serving organizations other than 4-H. Many organizations existing in communities have positive youth development as a mission. It would be important to know if volunteers working in these programs do, in fact, have this perspective of their role and to understand how they develop this perspective, if it exists.

This information can greatly strengthen the efforts of all individuals and organizations committed to the concept of positive youth development and it can move our communities forward in significant ways as we strive to create “safety nets” for today’s youth and future generations.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Conceptual Model of Volunteer Work in Youth Development

Conceptual Model of Volunteer Work in Youth Development
(Based on D. Pratt's General Model of Teaching)

Elements:

Volunteer:

How do you define your role and responsibilities as a volunteer?
What do you do as a volunteer?

Learners:

How do you describe your learners?
Who are your learners?
What are some factors, histories or problems they bring that might affect their learning?

Content:

What do you teach?
What do you want your learners to learn?
How do you know when this learning has occurred?

Context:

Where does your work happen?
How does the environment impact your work?

Ideals:

Can you name any ideals, beliefs or values that influence your volunteer work?
Why did you start as a volunteer?
Why do you continue as a volunteer?

Relationships:

Learner X Content:

How do you engage learners in learning content?
How do you assess their learning?

Volunteer X Learner:

What is the nature of social interaction between you and your learners?
How do you provide feedback to your learners?

Volunteer X Content:

How did you learn the content you teach?
How do you deal with questions?
How do you deal with challenges to your "expertise"?

APPENDIX B

Letter to Initial Survey Sample

“UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTION CHANGE IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEERS”

INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT AUTHORIZATION

July 22, 2002

Dear Michigan 4-H Volunteer:

Volunteers are the cornerstone of MSU Extension 4-H Youth Development programs. During the past ten years, Michigan 4-H has placed significant effort on strengthening the youth development focus of our effort. Thousands of dollars are invested each year in providing support to the volunteers who work with young people in 4-H clubs and groups, assisting them in building their knowledge and skills in this area.

In order to better understand how volunteers have incorporated this training into the work they do with their 4-H clubs and groups, we are studying a select group of volunteers who are currently involved in Michigan 4-H Youth Development. You were selected to receive the enclosed survey because you are a volunteer with ten or more years of service in Michigan 4-H, who is actively working with a 4-H club or group. I hope that you will take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope. By completing and returning this questionnaire, you are indicating your voluntary agreement to participate in this study and you are agreeing to be contacted for possible interview in the future.

A small group of respondents to the initial questionnaire, will be invited to participate in follow-up interviews to gather more in-depth information about their 4-H involvement. These individuals will be contacted later. For this reason, we are asking for your name and address on the questionnaire. All information from the questionnaires and the follow-up interviews will be confidential. Your privacy will be protected to the full extent permitted by law. Responses to the questionnaire will be compiled and reported without any identifying information.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact me at 517-432-7608 or via email at <chapin@msue.msu.edu> or Dr. John Dirkx, the researcher working on this project with me, at <dirkx@msu.edu> . If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of the study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, Ashir Kumar, M.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) at Michigan State University. Dr. Kumar can be reached by telephone at 517-355-2180; by FAX at 517-432-4503; email at <ucrihs@msu.edu> or by regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

The results of this study will be made available to MSU Extension staff, others involved in the field of volunteer development and all interested citizens. You can receive a printed summary by marking the appropriate box at the end of the enclosed questionnaire.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project. I hope that you will take time to complete the questionnaire and return it before August 21, 2002.

Sincerely,

Julie Chapin
Program Leader
Michigan 4-H Youth Development

APPENDIX C

Screening Survey

Michigan 4-H Youth Development Volunteer Survey

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. For the items below, please put a check (✓) under the number on the attached scale that indicates the level of agreement you have with each statement.

Thank you!

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
1. Children come to my 4-H club to learn from me.				
2. I learn as much from the children in my 4-H club as they learn from me.				
3. I know I am successful as a 4-H volunteer leader when my members all receive blue ribbons at the fair.				
4. I know I am successful as a 4-H volunteer leader when my members talk to me about their goals and dreams.				
5. I plan the meetings for my 4-H club.				
6. The members in our club have primary responsibility for planning the meetings.				
7. The focus of my work as a 4-H volunteer is the youth who make up my club.				
8. The focus of my work as a 4-H volunteer is the project I lead.				
9. It is important that my members know how to conduct effective meetings.				
10. It is important that my members know they are welcome and wanted at meetings.				
11. As the leader, I should know the answers to the questions my members ask.				
12. As the leader, I should help my members find the answers to the questions they have.				
13. When I plan activities, my primary concerns are that my members both learn something new and have fun.				
14. When I plan activities, my primary concern is that the children complete the project correctly.				
15. The most important thing children learn in 4-H is how to get along with others.				
16. The most important thing children learn in 4-H is the project skill I teach.				
17. The purpose of 4-H is to prepare young people for the future.				
18. The purpose of 4-H is to teach young people the skills they need to complete their projects.				

-over-

Demographic Information

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone (____) _____ Email _____

Gender Male ____ Female ____ Age ____ Years As a 4-H Volunteer ____

Level of Education ____ High School Graduate ____ Some College ____ Associates Degree
____ Bachelor's Degree ____ Graduate Degree

Size of Your 4-H Club

____ 1 to 10 members ____ 11 to 20 members ____ 21 to 30 members ____ Over 31 members

Ages of Members in Your Club

(Please indicate how many members in each age category are in your 4-H club.)

____ 5 to 8 years old ____ 9 to 13 years old ____ 14 to 19 years old

I would like a copy of the printed summary of this survey. ____ Yes

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

APPENDIX D

Survey Instrument Reviewers

Survey Instrument Reviewers

Dr. Lynne M. Borden
University of Arizona
1110 East South Campus
Tucson, AZ 85721

Dr. Joanne G. Keith
Michigan State University
203 C Human Ecology
E. Lansing, MI 48824-1030

Dr. Daniel F. Perkins
Pennsylvania State University
341 Agriculture Administration Building
University Park, PA 16802

APPENDIX E

First Follow-Up Letter

“UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTION CHANGE IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEERS”

INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT AUTHORIZATION

August 22, 2002

Dear Michigan 4-H Volunteer:

Approximately 3 weeks ago, you received a mailing from me that contained a survey related to how volunteers work with 4-H members in clubs and groups. This survey is being conducted in order to better understand how volunteers have incorporated youth development training into the work they do with their 4-H clubs and groups. You were selected to receive the enclosed survey because you are a volunteer with ten or more years of service in Michigan 4-H, who is actively working with a 4-H club or group. If you have already completed and returned your survey, THANK YOU! If not, I hope that you will take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope. By completing and returning this questionnaire, you are indicating your voluntary agreement to participate in this study and you are agreeing to be contacted for possible interview in the future.

A small group of respondents to the initial questionnaire, will be invited to participate in follow-up interviews to gather more in-depth information about their 4-H involvement. These individuals will be contacted later. For this reason, we are asking for your name and address on the questionnaire. All information from the questionnaires and the follow-up interviews will be confidential. Your privacy will be protected to the full extent permitted by law. Responses to the questionnaire will be compiled and reported without any identifying information.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact me at 517-432-7608 or via email at chapin@msue.msu.edu or Dr. John Dirkx, the researcher working on this project with me, at dirkx@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of the study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, Ashir Kumar, M.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) at Michigan State University. Dr. Kumar can be reached by telephone at 517-355-2180; by FAX at 517-432-4503; email at ucrihs@msu.edu or by regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

The results of this study will be made available to MSU Extension staff, others involved in the field of volunteer development and all interested citizens. You can receive a printed summary by marking the appropriate box at the end of the enclosed questionnaire.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project. I hope that you will take time to complete the questionnaire and return it before September 1, 2002.

Sincerely,

Julie Chapin
Program Leader
Michigan 4-H Youth Development

APPENDIX F

Staff Screening Letter

October 3, 2002

STAFF NAME
ADDRESS
CITY STATE
ZIPCODE

Dear STAFF NAME:

(Insert Volunteer Name), who is a volunteer with your county program has been identified as a potential participant in an in-depth interview about (his/her) work with (his/her) 4-H club or group. I am looking for volunteer with 10 or more years of experience with Michigan 4-H Youth Development who show as strong focus on positive youth development in their work with 4-H members. Early this summer, I sent a survey to a sample of Michigan volunteers. Your volunteer(s) responded and has been selected for possible inclusion in the next part of the process.

In order to finalize the list of volunteers who will be invited to participate in interviews, I need your help. As the staff person who works most closely with 4-H volunteers in your county, I am asking you to take a few minutes to complete the enclosed feedback form about (insert volunteer name). The feedback form asks you to evaluate (his/her) behavior, relative to the seven Guiding Principles of Michigan 4-H Youth Development. Please rank the individual on observable behaviors within (his/her) 4-H club or group as it relates to each of the seven Guiding Principles.

Thank you in advance for taking time to complete this evaluation. Please return the form(s) in the enclosed envelope by October 18, 2002. If you have any questions, please call me at (517) 432-7608 or email me at <chapin@msue.msu.edu>.

Sincerely,

Julie Chapin
Program Leader
Michigan 4-H Youth Development

Enclosures

APPENDIX G

Volunteer Feedback Form

Volunteer Feedback Form

Please take a few minutes to complete this feedback form for _____.

You are asked to rate the observed behaviors of this individual relative to the seven Guiding Principles of Michigan 4-H Youth Development. Your feedback will be used to assist in the selection of individuals to participate in a series of interviews related to volunteer development. Below are listed each of the seven Guiding Principles for Michigan 4-H Youth Development, along with the clarifying statement which was developed for each one. Please rank the volunteer identified above on a scale of 1- 4 for each of the principles.

Ranking Scale:

1= Behaviors Do Not Support This Principle, 2= Behaviors Occasionally Support This Principle, 3= Behaviors Usually Support This Principle, 4= Behaviors Always Support This Principle, DK= Don't Know.

Statement	Ranking
1. Youth develop positive relationships with adults and peers. Youth develop sustained relationships with peers and adults that nurture their positive development.	1 2 3 4 5 DK
2. Youth are physically and emotionally safe. Youth will learn more and participate more fully when they feel physically and emotionally safe, a structured, yet flexible environment encourages honesty, trust and respect among all youth and adults.	1 2 3 4 5 DK
3. Youth are actively engaged in their own development. Through a process of identify awareness and discovery, youth increase their personal competence and sense of well-being.	1 2 3 4 5 DK
4. Youth are considered participants rather than recipients in the learning process. Youth are encouraged to actively participate in their own learning. Opportunities for youth to learn and develop take place in many different contexts and take into account a variety of learning styles.	1 2 3 4 5 DK
5. Youth develop skills that help them succeed. Youth experience and learn from hands-on educational opportunities that help them develop the skills they need to be successful adults.	1 2 3 4 5 DK
6. Youth recognize, understand and appreciate diversity and multiculturalism. Youth will respect differences among groups and individuals of diverse backgrounds. Youth will develop skills and competencies that help them foster social justice in their communities and their world.	1 2 3 4 5 DK
7. Youth grow and contribute as active citizens through service and leadership. Youth feel included and involved in their community. They have significant roles to play and important contributions to make as stewards of the future. Youth develop personal competencies which foster leadership, caring and citizenship.	1 2 3 4 5 DK

Please return to
Julie Chapin
Michigan State University
160 Agriculture Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824-1039
by October 18, 2002

APPENDIX H

Invitation to Participate in Interviews

**"UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTION CHANGE
IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEERS"**

INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT AUTHORIZATION

DATE

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE

DEAR NAME:

Thank you for completing the questionnaire you received in July. You are being invited, from our responding group, to participate in an in-depth interview. If you are willing to participate, please sign the bottom of this letter and return it in the enclosed envelope. You will be contacted to schedule a time for the interviews.

I would like to schedule two times to talk with you. Each interview will take approximately one hour. I would like to schedule the first interview during the month of December. The second interview will be held approximately 3 weeks after the first. During the interviews, I would like to learn more about your volunteer experiences and how you work with your 4-H club or group. These interviews will be audiotaped for accuracy. Following completion of this project, the audiotapes and accompanying notes will be destroyed. Your signature on the attached consent forms implies permission to audiotape the interviews.

All information from the questionnaires and the follow-up interviews will be confidential. Information will be kept in locked cabinets and destroyed after all data is compiled and analyzed. Only the researchers will have access to these files. Your privacy will be protected to the full extent permitted by law. Responses to the questionnaire will be compiled and reported without any identifying information. Names will be changed when reporting of interview findings.

If you have questions about the study and interviews, please contact me at 517-432-7608 or via email at chapin@msue.msu.edu or Dr. John Dirkx, the researcher working on this project with me, at dirkx@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of the study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, Ashir Kumar, M.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) at Michigan State University. Dr. Kumar can be reached by telephone at 517-355-2180; by FAX at 517-432-4503; email at ucrihs@msu.edu or by regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you for considering this request. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Julie Chapin
Program Leader
Michigan 4-H Youth Development

CONSENT AUTHORIZATION
"UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTION CHANGE IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEERS"

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

You are being asked to participate in a series of two in-depth interviews about your work with your 4-H club or group. The first interview will be held in December. The second interview will be held approximately three weeks later.

As the Program Leader within Michigan 4-H Youth Development responsible for Volunteer Development, I am very interested in better understanding the work of volunteers. It is my hope that the information you provided on the original questionnaire and the information gathered through these interviews will assist Michigan 4-H in designing more effective training and support for our volunteers.

Each in-depth interview will be audiotaped to help insure accuracy of information. The audiotapes will be kept in locked file cabinets and destroyed after the data is collected and coded. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and the information gathered will be kept confidential. Your privacy will be protected to the full extent permitted by law. Your name will not be used in any final reports or articles that result from this work.

Only the researchers will have access to any identifying information that you provide as a result of the interviews.

Thank you.

Julie Chapin
Program Leader
Michigan 4-H Youth Development

Please sign below if you agree to participate in the interview process. You will be contacted to schedule a time for the first interview.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please Print Name Here: _____

APPENDIX I

River of Life Activity

River of Life

On the time line below, please take a few minutes to identify significant incidents, experiences or “trigger” events in your volunteer experience that have helped you develop as a Michigan 4-H volunteer.

_____ / Today

APPENDIX J

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself. (education, experiences with 4-H as a youth, family situation, etc....)
2. How did you get started as a volunteer?
3. Describe your experiences/activities as a volunteer.
4. What stands out for you as significant in these experiences/activities?
5. How have your experiences/activities changed since you first became a volunteer?
6. What events in your volunteer career were significant in bringing about these changes?
7. What are your goals for working with your 4-h club/group?
8. How have your goals changed over time?
9. What has caused you to change your goals for working with your club/group?
10. What have been some of the positive influences in your volunteer development?
11. What have been some of the “not so positive” influences in your volunteer development?

APPENDIX K

Composite Portrait

Composite Portrait

The composite volunteer in this study is a 55-year-old female with a Bachelor of Science degree who has been a 4-H volunteer for 23.5 years. She was involved in 4-H as a young person and she feels that 4-H had a positive influence on her personal growth and development. This volunteer has a history of volunteering for other organizations within her community such as school, church or other groups in which she or her children participate.

Early Career Description

When asked to explain her role as a 4-H volunteer, the volunteer described her “job” as teaching children. This teaching was specifically related to the projects the children in the club were involved in such as knitting, photography, animal care or gardening. She started volunteering with 4-H because of a desire to help. As Alice explains, “I was hoping to help them. They needed people. I like [project] and so I just showed up at the next meeting.” There was a need for someone to provide leadership for a specific project within her child's club and she thought she could help. Her child(ren) joined 4-H to learn a project skill and be with friends. The volunteer's past involvement as a 4-H member made this a comfortable organization to work with and she felt it was an easy way to get involved in the community.

Initially, the volunteer's 4-H involvement focused on the teaching of a specific subject or skill. This skill was related to the volunteer's specific interest. Barbara explained her reason for starting to volunteer as “I knitted all of the time. There were some kids who wanted to learn to knit, so I started with them,

knitting.” When the volunteer first started working with the 4-H club, she primarily worked with her own child(ren) and some neighborhood children. These youth were interested in learning the skill the volunteer had to share and most teaching occurred in a club or group setting. As Carol describes, “Well, I had good sewing knowledge and I wanted my children to learn sewing, so I decided to lead some kids in sewing. My sewing kids did well and I continued to lead that.”

Teaching activities were designed to transfer knowledge and skills to the children who made up the group. Most meetings were held in the volunteer’s home on weekends or on week nights. Many times these meetings involved the entire family and adults were encouraged to stay and observe and assist with teaching activities. Alice states, “[The] parents brought them to my house. They were happy to do this and I thought it was kind of nice. I enjoyed the companionship and the ability to talk to someone on an adult level when my children were babies.” Many of the children in the club came from similar backgrounds as the volunteer and shared common life experiences. The activities of the club meetings focused on completion of specific projects or learning opportunities related to the skill or project being taught.

Early in her career it was important to the volunteer that the children learned to do the project correctly. Alice shared, “In the first two years, the girls said the name of our club should be the Stitch Rippers because that was all they ever did!” Success was often defined by achievement in competitive situations. Debbie states, “[Most] of our 4-H experience was geared around fair and fair activities. In our club, a lot of it did revolve around fair and projects that were geared toward achievement at the fair.” She knew she was a “good” volunteer

when there was public recognition for the efforts of her members. The volunteer knew she was successful and that the children had learned the material by the number of blue ribbons, Best of Show or Grand Champion awards received at the county fair or Spring Achievement. These two events are often described as the focus of efforts to complete projects and the goal the children worked toward.

As Ellen described it:

I think when you first start, you want your kids to be number one or being at the top of the class. How many of your club members were first in the class or best in class? You look at it that way and put it in the paper. It reflects back on you. Because your kids were successful then you were successful. That was the way I was looking at it.

Another common reason for volunteering was the desire to give kids the same opportunities to be in 4-H that the volunteer had. Alice explained, "I wanted to return to 4-H some of my knowledge. The enjoyment I had found when I was a 4-H'er myself, the fellowship with others kids, the fun of achievement and showing off what you had done and competing with other kids was important, too." The volunteer saw her own 4-H experience as something positive. She talked about how it had helped her to become a successful adult and wanted to make sure that other children had the same opportunity.

She sees the commitment of her 4-H leader and staff as providing a valuable opportunity in her life and wants to make sure other children have the same opportunity. Carol commented, "I think partly why I am here now as a 4-H leader is because of the experiences I had and the good experiences I had with my 4-H leader at the local level as a youth." She described her involvement, as carrying on a tradition of volunteering that was part of the way she was raised. Formal volunteering was not a part of the volunteer's childhood memories, but

the ethic of helping others was a lesson she had learned in her own childhood that she wanted to pass on to others. For the volunteer, a recognition that children are the future and supporting them in their growth was another clear motivating factor in her decision to become and remain a 4-H volunteer.

The volunteer was also motivated by a need to “fill a gap” in what the schools were providing and important life skills she thought all children needed to have. Barbara said:

In my job as a (employment), one of the things that I see is this whole generation of kids coming up who don't have a foundation in what I call general daily living skills: sewing, cooking, that kind of thing. Those things are no longer offered in school. Parents are working; they don't have time to do those things. [It] was a way to reach out a little bit and make sure some of those skills were passed on. I think some of those skills are really important basic skills for living.

The early career volunteer focuses much of her energy on engaging the club members in learning the specific subject-matter information or skills for which she is providing leadership. Success is defined as accomplishment of the skill, as demonstrated by achievement in competitive events. The volunteer is also interested in helping children grow to be successful adults and views the skills she is teaching as important skills for daily living. The volunteer is committed to working with young people through the 4-H program because she sees this as a way of helping support the future generation and ultimately society in general. She is focused on the helping roles that fill a need within the group.

Current Description

After working with children in her club for an average of 23.5 years, the volunteer now describes her role as facilitator, helper, counselor and educator.

Alice best summed this up by saying:

Basically, with the local youth I am there as an advisor. If they have questions, I will help them get their projects finished and completed any way that I can. I think it is important that they have positive experiences. I said this already once today, but when you hear them come home from fair or from a trip with a group or Exploration Days . . . and say things about what they got out of it and whenever somebody was nice to them or encouraging to them . . . When you see the growth in kids is when you give them positive experiences, you make them feel good about themselves. Whether they win or lose, doesn't really matter.

The focus of her work has shifted from specific skill building to the more abstract concepts of building self-confidence, self-esteem and responsibility. She increasingly talks about the critical part of her job as a 4-H volunteer as building communication skills and those abilities that will help young people be successful adults. Debbie describes her role as, "My goal for them is to have them look at what they are doing today as a foundation for life. To see that what they are doing now is going to help them with organizational skills, possibly their career paths."

The volunteer continues to volunteer with Michigan 4-H because she enjoys working with, and being around, young people. When questioned, she talked about how working with youth and teens helps to "keeps me young" and in touch with what is going on in her community. The volunteer's own children are no longer involved in the program, but she stays because "there will always be another Joe, Sally or David who comes along that is going to need help for some reason."

When describing the young people, who make up her 4-H group now, the volunteer frequently talks about the issues facing children today that 4-H can, and does, address. She talks about the time challenges young people today face

with increased school activities, employment at an earlier age and a greater number of out-of-school opportunities than were available even 10 years ago. The changing structure of families (single parent, divorced parents with joint custody, dual- employed parents, etc.) is also seen as a challenge for kids today. Carol describes this in the following way, "Sometimes trying to get all of our kids together in one place is extremely frustrating. These kids are so into stuff and they are doing everything. Their activities make it hard to get them all together at the same time. Some of them come from split homes. They have to go with Dad this weekend or Mom, I don't know."

The volunteer sees her role as being a stable adult force in young people's lives and providing an opportunity for children to interact with adults in different ways than their family situations may allow. As Ellen states, "Susie is one of my older members. She can do most of this stuff by herself. But you know she still comes to meetings and she still calls to see if I will help her with something. Sometimes it's as much the social aspects as the learning that is important to the kid."

The volunteer no longer teaches specific projects to children. The variety of projects the members are involved in has increased. She now focuses her efforts on leadership and life-skill development in a broad sense. As Barbara reflects,

I think building character is one of those things I am trying to do, to educate them about trying to make them a better person so that when they graduate high school or college and they go out in life, the skills that they learn at this level, they can take with them. Whether they be project skills or better character or how to work with other people or in groups.

The actual project has become a secondary concern. Alice shared “I just want to help kids, keep them off the street, keep them active, keep them involved in something that will keep them out of trouble.”

Participation is more important than completion and the importance of completion is now viewed from the aspect of building an ethic of follow-through for tasks undertaken as an important life skill for young people to develop.

Debbie talks about teaching “the discipline of finishing something” when she talks about her goals for the young people she works with:

I don't care if they never knit again. You need the satisfaction of overcoming an obstacle. You need the accomplishment. When you complete something, you complete it. If you don't complete it, it always stays in the back of your mind as something you didn't finish. You have to put forth effort in life. You are not going to get anywhere without effort. God didn't put you here to be a sponge. He put you here to be a person. He gave you self-will. He gave you choices. You have to make those choices.

Meetings with members tend to be more one on one or in small groups rather than bringing the entire club together on a regular basis. This change has come about in response to increased time commitments on the part of both youth and the volunteer. The volunteer's commitment to helping young people and spending time with them has not changed over time. “I like the one-on-one contact. I think probably the most fun about 4-H is the fact that you are working with them one on one.”

Older members helping younger members is a more common approach to helping members learn than in the volunteer's early career. This role is seen as an important learning opportunity for all of the members. As Alice stated:

I have challenged them a little more. ‘You have to do more this year. You are older. The kids are looking up to you.’ We do talk about that. That they

are role models for the other kids. They just cannot imagine that they are looked up to. So we talk about that. I just say 'What about when you were 9 years old? Who did you think were just the most cool people in the group?' So that makes them feel kind of good and challenges them.

The volunteer now talks about the importance of young people feeling good about what they have accomplished as an important indicator of success, rather than the more tangible blue ribbons or competitive awards that were important early in her career. Frank summarizes this in the following way, "Sometimes I can see the self-confidence. I can see them getting more confidence. [They] are more sure of themselves when they do something and they are not so afraid to try something. [Then] I know I have accomplished something." Competitive accomplishments are no longer indicators that the youth have learned the important lessons of 4-H. The volunteer defines success as "children who grow up to be confident and responsible, able to communicate ideas, make decisions and explain their decisions." For the experienced volunteer, making mistakes is an important part of the learning process. Carol says, "You have to let them struggle a little bit and make mistakes. That was probably the hardest thing for me as a 4-H leader, watching them struggle a little bit. But it is important for them to struggle and make mistakes. Not life-threatening mistakes, but little ones. That is how they learn. Learn by doing. That is the 4-H motto."

She feels that the children who were most successful in 4-H competitive activities are not necessarily the most successful adults. She has observed, over time, that those who get involved in their community as adults, who give back (either as a 4-H volunteer or in some other volunteer capacity) and who help to make the community better for the next generation, are the happiest and most

successful individuals. They are not necessarily the ones who had received the awards during their 4-H career. Frank reflected on this in the following way:

I look at some to the kids that were the blue ribbon winners and whether they went on to college or not and come back, they are not the ones now that are involved in building the community. They might be there doing their job, but they have not come back and given back. That might be a cliché but they are not the ones that are the 4-H leaders now or whatever. They are just there. The ones that have been successful have come back and said 'What can I do to help? What can I do to help someone else?'

This viewpoint has had significant impact on the decisions the volunteer makes regarding important learning activities for the children in her 4-H club or group. "I think [over time] you have a better understanding of what the program is about and what success is. You know many kids you find out over the years become very successful and they were never the blue ribbon kids. They didn't need to be blue ribbon kids to be successful. Sometimes it takes a while to learn that."

The experienced volunteer focuses on relationships, one-on-one interactions and providing these young people with an opportunity to build competencies such as self-confidence, self-esteem, responsibility, communications skills, leadership skills and an ethic of completion. Feedback to her members focuses on a discussion of the learning that has taken place for the individual, rather than how well he or she placed in competitive situations. The experienced volunteer also expresses concern about the learning of the youth. The focus of that learning, however, has shifted from a specific project skill to skills that will prepare and support a young person in adulthood. Alice expressed it best when she said, ". . . it is not about producing a product. It's

about developing kids, developing character and developing, hopefully, really good people.”

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