

# **The Impact of the Indiana 4-H Junior Leader Project on the Development of Leadership Skills in Teens**

## **Abstract**

Interest in leadership development is at an all time high. More attention and resources are being given to leadership development. Businesses today view leadership as a competitive advantage and are investing resources in its development. Youth organizations today also see the need to invest in leadership development. Youth organizations are striving to provide a structure that is developmentally appropriate, with clear expectations to increase the opportunities for youth to learn to make decisions, to participate in governance and rule-making, and to take on leadership roles as they mature.

## **Introduction**

The study was conducted to investigate a County 4-H Junior Leader Project. The study focused on the County 4-H Junior Leader Project by utilizing a control group of 600 4-H members and a treatment group of 50 County 4-H Junior Leaders. The study utilized a control group pretest/posttest quasi-experiment design which also examined the education intervention of the County 4-H Junior Leader Project. The study was conducted in this manner to allow the researcher to examine multiple variables. The study follows a year long County 4-H Junior Leader Project. Specifically, the study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- Do activities in the County 4-H Junior Leader Project target the development of leadership skill set items?
- Is there a significant improvement in leadership skills, in the 4-H Junior Leader members after participating in the County 4-H Junior Leader Project?
- Is there a significant difference between the control group versus the treatment group?

The leadership skill set items for this study were development from a comprehensive review of empirical research. The six skill set items consisted of: 1) character and integrity, 2) working with others, 3) solving problems, 4) communicating, 5) making decisions, and 6) overall leadership.

## **Background**

The County 4-H Junior Leader Project started in the 1930's and is offered in every county. The project is for youth thirteen through nineteen years olds. The project provides educational activities for youth. The project has no set curriculum and varies from county to county. The 4-H Junior Leader Project membership size varies by county.

The County 4-H Junior Project selected for this study came from input from the State 4-H Program Leader. The 4-H Youth Educator in charge of the County 4-H program and the County 4-H Junior Leader Project has over twenty years of experience in this county.

#### How It Works

The study started in September 2003 and will conclude in August 2004. County 4-H Junior Leader Project conducts one regular meeting and a number of special meetings each month. The regular meeting consists of a business section and a section where a leadership activity is conducted. Special meetings include field trips, community service projects, and 4-H mini camps. At the end of the month the 4-H Youth Educator sends three reports for each meeting held to the researcher of this study. The reports include activity report forms (leadership skill set items), the minutes, and the attendance. The researcher will visit one monthly County 4-H Junior Leader Project to make an observation of how the meeting is conducted. At the end of the study the researcher will visit with the 4-H Youth Educator for the purpose of reviewing all the monthly reports.

Data is presently being analyzed to answer each of the research questions listed above. Results of the study will be utilized to assist the State 4-H Office to evaluate the impact of the 4-H Junior Leader Project.

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Kevin Harris grew up on a small farm in South Georgia. Growing up on a farm taught him to have many values. In high school he was active in FFA. In FFA he had the opportunity to serve as an officer, committee member, and compete in a number of events. After high school he attended Fort Valley State University (Fort Valley, Georgia) where he completed his B.S. degree in Agricultural Education in 1992. He served as president of the collegiate FFA chapter at Fort Valley State University. In addition he participated in a number of other collegiate professional organizations. He gained valuable working experience at Fort Valley State University through a number of

agricultural summer internships. He worked for about ten years before deciding to return to graduate school. In that ten year period he gained valuable experience working as a school teacher, agricultural chemical sales representative, and with the Cooperative Extension Service. Working in the Cooperative Extension Service led Mr. Harris to become interested in leadership skills as it relates to youth development.

Currently as a full-time graduate student at Purdue University, Mr. Harris is pursuing his masters' degree in agricultural and extension education. His research interest is in leadership as it relates to youth development. He is involved in a number of professional organizations. He works as a graduate research assistant in the Youth Development and Agricultural Education Department. He expects to complete his degree in December 2004.