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4-H Youth Leadership: Perceptions of Influence

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4-H Youth Leadership: Perceptions of Influence

Cathy Bartlett Gray, University of Southern Maine Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Goryunova, University of Southern Maine



Abstract

This study focuses on youth perceptions of leadership and leadership skills they may seek to acquire, particularly within the Maine 4-H program. Understanding the relationship between the youth perception of leadership influence and the skills they seek to acquire will enable 4-H club leaders and adult mentors to better facilitate acquisition of leadership skills. This study gains understanding from the perspective of current teen leaders in the Maine 4-H program through the use of personal interviews with active teen leaders. Findings indicate that Maine 4-H Teen Leaders do not necessarily recognize the influence they have with their peers and therefore, do not tend to seek out new leadership skills based on how that perceived influence. Though some youths are interested in developing their leadership skills, being able to recognize their positive influence on others appears to be gap in overall leadership understanding.

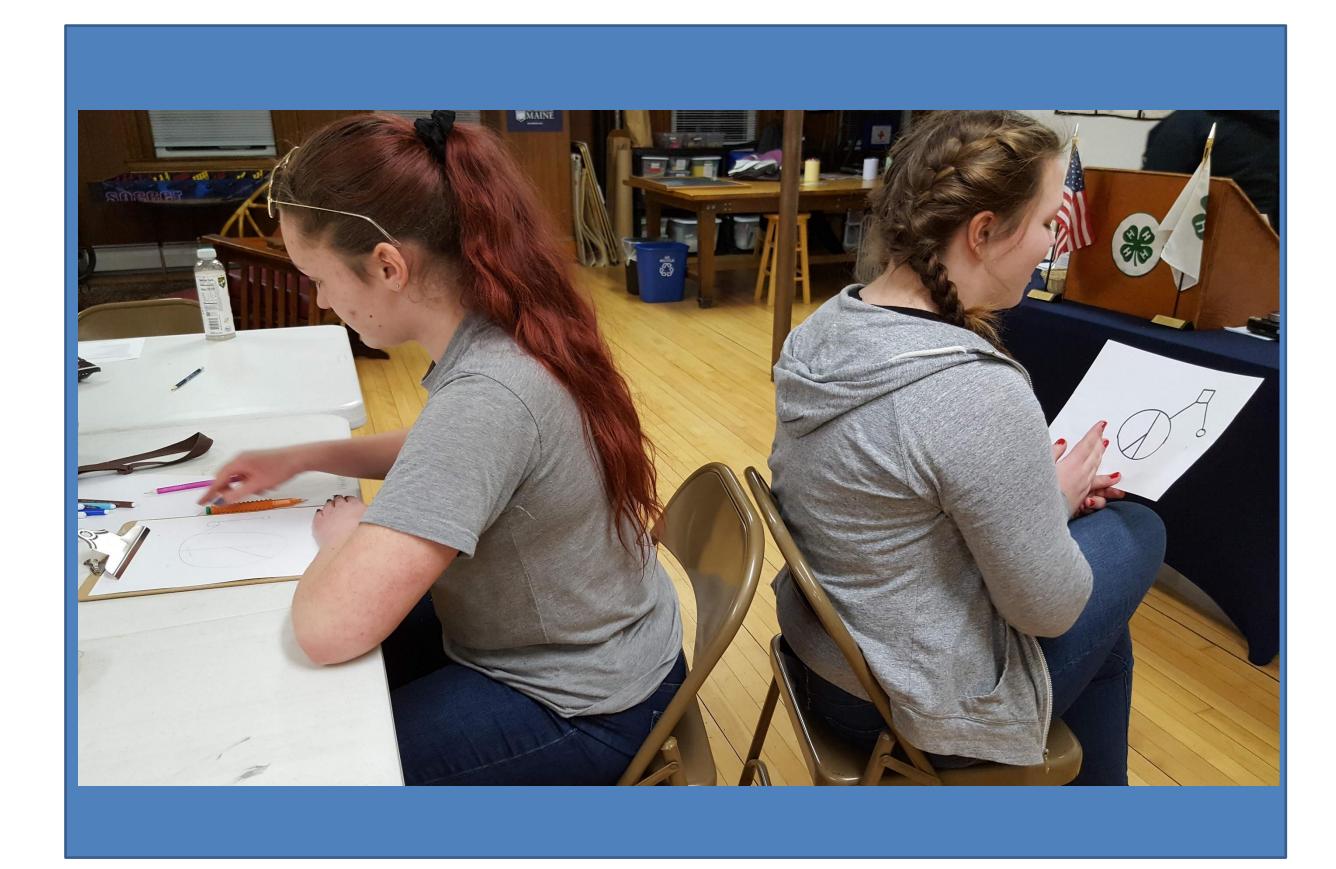
What is 4-H and its purpose?

4-H is the nation's largest youth development organization and serves approximately six million youth across the U.S. (National 4-H Council, 2019). With programming being delivered by Cooperative Extension, its focus is to empower young people with life skills such as leadership, confidence, goal setting, and mastery of learned skills.

Encouraging a strong sense of belonging is among the top priorities of the staff, volunteers, and mentors connected with the program. As helping youth develop into well-rounded adults is a mission of the 4-H program, it is important to understand how teens view themselves during the development process.

The Big Question in this study...

Is there a relationship between the influence that 4-H teen leaders perceive they have on their peers and the level of emphasis they put into their leadership skills acquisition through participation in various 4-H activities?



Two teen leaders in a communication learning activity

"I know that I influenced her to become a leader."

~ Mandy, 4-H Teen Leader

Quote from a Maine 4-H Teen Leader



Research-inspired word cloud

Methods

- •Phenomenological study of youth ages 13-19 who are enrolled in the 4-H program in the state of Maine
- •Study includes youth who are part of the study are defined as leaders either by self-identification or by adult mentors
- •The sample size is 5 participants
- •The interview questions are designed to gain understanding about a youth's perception of their leadership skills and influence among their peers.

Results

Three understandings have emerged from this study:

- 1. Teen Leaders tend to equate teaching with leadership
- 2. Youth often do not see the influence they have among their peers at the moment but will recognize it in retrospect.
- 3. Youth look for opportunities to engage with others or to have fun rather than for the significance of the training they will receive.

Conclusions and Next Steps

- •This research did reveal a few of the motives teen leaders have in learning new leadership skills, but did not necessarily indicate why some teen leaders are lackadaisical in their efforts to advance these skills.
- •Guiding youth to new leadership opportunities by offering attractive workshops that appear to be based in fun will have an impact on how youth do acquire needed leadership skills.
- •With training, 4-H staff and volunteers can learn to help youth identify when the youth have been influential, thereby empowering them to successfully mentor others.