

**“I felt really respected and I know she felt respected too”:  
Using Youth-Adult Partnerships to Promote  
Positive Youth Development in 4-H Youth**

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*Youth-adult relationships exist on a continuum from adult-led to youth-led collaborations. However, research suggests that quality youth-adult partnerships, which fall in the middle of this continuum, directly contribute to positive youth development. Given this, the current study evaluated the impact of a 4-H Youth Development program, using youth-adult partnerships and a teens as teachers program model, on positive youth development outcomes of participating youth. Qualitative data were collected from 29 youth to evaluate the 4-H Food Smart Families program presented by Washington State University Youth Advocates for Health (YA4-H!). Data analysis identified themes related to the benefits and challenges of the youth-adult partnership and skills gained from being a teen teacher. When looking at results from a positive youth development perspective, it is evident the youth who participated in youth-adult partnerships and as teen teachers experienced beneficial outcomes. Qualitative codes clearly aligned with 4-H Essential Elements of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity, indicating positive youth development had occurred despite real-world implementation challenges. Based on our experience and lessons learned, we conclude with suggestions for successful implementation of a youth-adult partnership.*

**Key Words:** positive youth development, youth-adult partnerships, teens as teachers

### **Introduction**

It is well established that youth engagement in structured, supervised, out-of-school activities is associated with both short- and long-term positive outcomes, such as greater psychological health and academic achievement (e.g., Bartko & Eccles, 2003). One important aspect

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enhancing healthy development is the presence of supportive, caring adults within out-of-school activities (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). Although youth engage with adult leaders in a variety of contexts (e.g., teachers, coaches, 4-H club leaders), not all youth-adult relationships are true partnerships. In many instances, adults retain much of the control and power in the relationship. While this power imbalance may be appropriate for some types of activities such as sports, greater developmental outcomes may be reached when youth and adults are equals in the relationship. Research suggests youth-adult partnerships, characterized by shared power, directly contribute to positive youth development (Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010; Zeldin, Krauss, Collura, Lucchesi, & Sulaiman, 2014). Given this, the current study evaluated the impact of a 4-H Youth Development program, where youth and adults work in partnership to implement a teens as teachers program model, on positive youth development.

### **Positive Youth Development and the Essential Elements**

Positive youth development (PYD) is a strategic approach to youth development focused on empowering youth to actively promote their own positive growth by building external (e.g., relationships, opportunities) and internal (e.g., personal qualities) assets (Scales & Leffert, 2004; Surko, Pasti, Whitlock, & Benson, 2006). As an applied developmental science, PYD is grounded in developmental psychology and driven by an emphasis on youth as agents of change, especially in community contexts (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2007). The concept of PYD emerged in the early 1990s in contrast to the more common deficit-based approach that “underestimated the true capacities of young people by focusing on their deficits rather than their developmental potentials” (Damon, 2004, p. 13). As the theory and practice of PYD rapidly developed so did language by which to measure it. The Six C’s (i.e., connection, competence, confidence, character, compassion, and contribution), proposed in a synergistic progression by Little (1993), Eccles and Gootman (2002), Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003a, 2003b), and Lerner and colleagues (2005; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003), are widely recognized as the developmental foci and indicators of PYD programming.

As PYD and the six C’s became more widespread, 4-H was beginning to acknowledge the importance of PYD within its programming. In 1999, eight Critical Elements (listed in Table 1) were identified as crucial components of PYD experiences by evaluators from the National 4-H Impact Design Implementation Team (Martz, Mincemoyer, & McNeely, 2009). These eight Critical Elements were later simplified by Cathann Kress, former Director of Youth Development at National 4-H Headquarters, into the four Essential Elements of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. These four Essential Elements were modeled after the Circle of Courage, a PYD model developed in 1990 by Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2005) who consider the Essential Elements vital and universal needs of all children. The Essential Elements are designed to work in concert with one another to empower youth while building positive assets and to best promote healthy development when program facilitators

emphasize them in the appropriate hierarchy: establishing belonging before mastery, followed by opportunities for independence then generosity (Martz et al., 2009).

The four Essential Elements are a holistic assembly of the eight Critical Elements and the Six C's. Table 1 demonstrates these relationships and related vocabulary. In addition, this table clarifies how the key features of developmental relationships (i.e., attachment, progressive complexity, balance of power, and reciprocity) align neatly within the Essential Elements framework. These features are thought to be a foundational component of youth-adult partnerships and subsequent PYD outcomes (Bowers, Johnson, Warren, Tirrell, & Lerner, 2015; Li & Julian, 2012) and will be reviewed in detail later in this article.

**Table 1. Synthesis of Positive Youth Development Indicators**

Four Essential Elements	Essential Element Definitions <sup>1,2</sup>	Eight Critical Elements <sup>3</sup>	Features of Developmental Relationships <sup>4</sup>	Six C's <sup>5</sup>
BELONGING	Opportunity to establish trusting connections. <sup>1</sup> Youth need to know they are cared about and feel a sense of connection to others. <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive relationship with caring adult</li> <li>• Safe environment</li> <li>• Inclusive environment</li> </ul>	Attachment	Connection
MASTERY	Opportunity to solve problems and meet goals. <sup>1</sup> Youth need to feel they are capable and experience success at meeting challenges aligned with their own interests. <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement in learning</li> <li>• Opportunity for mastery</li> </ul>	Progressive Complexity	Competence
				Confidence
INDEPENDENCE	Opportunity to build self-control and responsibility. <sup>1</sup> Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future</li> <li>• Opportunity for self-determination</li> </ul>	Balance of Power	Character Contribution
				Compassion
GENEROSITY	Opportunity to show respect and concern. <sup>1</sup> Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to value and practice service for others</li> </ul>	Reciprocity	

<sup>1</sup>Brendtro et al., 2005, p.132; <sup>2</sup>Kress, 2004, p.1; <sup>3</sup>Martz et al., 2009; <sup>4</sup>Li & Julian, 2012; <sup>5</sup>Lerner et al., 2005

## Youth-Adult Partnerships

Since its inception in the early 1900s, the 4-H Youth Development program has fostered positive relationships between youth and adults. Initially, these relationships were adult-driven – not allowing for equal youth voice. However, in the 1970s, policy changes initiated by the National Commission on Resources for Youth and the National Task Force on Citizen Education highlighted the importance of youth and adults working together. These youth-adult partnerships were identified as a “strategy for increasing civic and political knowledge, promoting personal efficacy, and encouraging later democratic action” (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013, p. 386). Recently, the model of a reciprocal, evolving relationship through youth-adult partnerships has become more prevalent. In the 2000s, empirical data began to support youth-adult partnerships as a strategy to promote positive youth development (Camino, 2000; Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2006). Zeldin and colleagues took this one step further, stating “From the perspective of accomplished practitioners, the *most effective* [emphasis added] type of youth participation is typically labeled as youth-adult partnership” (2014, p. 338).

A youth-adult partnership is characterized by a supportive relationship of mutuality and respect between youth and adults with a focus on shared learning and decision-making while working together for a common purpose over a sustained period of time (Camino, 2000; Zeldin et al., 2013; Zeldin, Krauss, Kim, Collura, & Abdullah, 2016; Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2006). Li and Julian (2012) proposed the underlying foundation of the youth-adult partnership is developmental relationships, which are necessary to reach sustained and effective positive youth outcomes. As depicted in Table 1, developmental relationships are comprised of four interwoven features of attachment (e.g., positive emotional connection), progressive complexity (e.g., scaffolding), balance of power, and reciprocity, and tie into the Essential Elements framework as PYD indicators. These relationships are key to “produc[ing] meaningful developmental change” (2012, p. 164), such as early development of cognitive and social skills for children, and later outcomes of greater social skills, emotion regulation, and general psychological well-being.

### Components of Youth-Adult Partnerships

Youth-adult partnerships based on the Essential Elements (and developmental relationships) support positive developmental outcomes for youth. Zeldin and colleagues (2016) proposed the two main components of youth-adult partnerships, youth voice in decision-making and supportive adult relationships, lead to the developmental outcomes of youth empowerment and community connectedness when encompassed by program safety and engagement.

Youth voice, the opportunity to speak on behalf of one’s self and others, is an important ingredient to identity formation and gaining competence and social trust by providing youth

opportunities to explore their identity, practice and sharpen critical thinking, and develop teamwork and communication skills (i.e., mastery, independence; Zeldin et al., 2016). The second main component, supportive adult relationships, is key to the developmental relationship that enables the youth to increasingly gain skills and power (i.e., mastery, independence; Camino, 2005; Zeldin et al., 2016). A developmental relationship with a caring adult provides a sense of belonging and increased commitment to community and social networks, as well as personal and social well-being and empowerment (i.e., belonging, generosity; Christens, 2012; Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2006).

Youth participation in youth-adult partnerships is associated with youth empowerment, self-determined behaviors, and the ability to see one's self as having influence (i.e., independence; Zeldin et al., 2014). Anderson and Sandmann (2009) depicted this in their model for youth empowerment, identifying five key practices for a successful youth-adult partnership including fostering self-efficacy, setting a context for action, structuring the task, creating a sense of ownership, and coaching for performance. Empirical research has supported this association between participation and empowerment. For example, Cowan and Smith (2010) found that youth participating in a youth-adult partnership while planning a leadership event for their peers reported positive outcomes, such as greater sense of empowerment and independence (e.g., greater self-confidence and autonomy).

In addition to youth empowerment, research has suggested a link between youth-adult partnerships and greater community connectedness (i.e., belonging, generosity; Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2016). The connections formed with adults and peers can provide networks of opportunities for youth, including access to scholarships, awards, and employment (Zeldin et al., 2013). In addition, such community interactions provide opportunity for generosity to be “engaged with and act to enhance their world” (Lerner, Lerner, von Eye, Bowers, & Lewin-Bizan, 2011, p. 1109). Greater connectedness within their community, in turn, enhances the youth-adult partnership by enabling adults to observe youth competence and motivation (Zeldin, 2004).

### **Teens as Teachers**

Youth-adult partnerships can be utilized in multiple settings and are a natural fit within teens as teachers (TAT) program models, which are often employed by Extension youth development programs such as 4-H (Lee & Murdock, 2001). TAT program models utilize cross-age teaching in which teens (i.e., youth) become lead teachers providing academic lessons to younger youth. Through the Essential Elements framework, youth-adult partnerships, using intentionally designed TAT program models, are primed to provide high quality PYD for both the youth and those they teach. Cross-age teaching programs are “believed by many to be among the most effective at providing youth with opportunities that will lead to healthy development and

avoidance of delinquent behaviors” and therefore nicely complement a youth-adult partnership (Lee & Murdock, 2001, p. 1).

Lee and Murdock (2001) outlined critical components for TAT success, all of which align within one or more of the four Essential Elements. A successful TAT program model promotes belonging through active teen recruitment, team building, recognition, and the support of dedicated adults. Mastery and independence are promoted by strong, detailed curricula, initial and ongoing trainings, communication and support plans, and appropriate evaluation. Generosity is promoted through the service teen teachers provide to their community. Of all the components, Lee and Murdock (2001) found the passion and commitment of adults working in partnership with teen teachers as the key factor for success and long-term sustainability.

### **Current Study**

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to evaluate the impact on youth participating in youth-adult partnerships to implement the 4-H Food Smart Families (4-H FSF) program presented by Washington State University (WSU) Youth Advocates for Health (YA4-H!). YA4-H!, originally developed by Dr. Mary Arnold at Oregon State University, is an umbrella program that engages youth and adults in partnership to address critical community health issues. WSU adopted this program and under it, the 4-H FSF project was implemented using youth-adult partnerships to support 4-H teens as teachers and advocates for health teaching younger youth nutrition, cooking, and food-related budgeting lessons using the Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness curriculum (CHFFF; Cornell University, 2014). Within the current study, we focused on the experience and positive youth development outcomes related to being a youth partner in the 4-H FSF program.

### **Methods**

The study employed a qualitative approach of using focus groups and interviews to capture rich detail on the experience of being in a youth-adult partnership. A focus group is a “group interview – centered on a specific topic (‘focus’) and facilitated and coordinated by a moderator or facilitator – which seeks to generate primarily qualitative data, by capitalising [sic] on the interaction that occurs within the group setting” (Sim & Snell, 1996, p. 189). Focus groups are a cost-effective and efficient approach to understanding phenomena and provide for a less formal and structured environment that “facilitates self-disclosure of teens and permits researchers to capture experiences and perspectives that may be less readily available via one-on-one situations” (Jones & Broome, 2001, p. 90). When focus groups are not feasible (e.g., due to small sample size, geographical distance), interviews are a viable alternative as long as the same protocol is used for both methods of data collection to facilitate continuity.

## **Participants**

The sample was taken from a roster of all teens (age 14 to 18 years) who participated as teen teachers in the 2013-2014 implementation of 4-H FSF presented by YA4-H! Out of 61 teens who participated as teen teachers, 29 (48%) participated in the follow-up qualitative evaluation. Twenty-four participated in one of four focus groups, and five participated in a one-on-one interview between October 2014 and January 2015. These 29 teens (59% female) represented eight different counties throughout Washington State. Teen participants were recruited via phone call, email, and word of mouth. The university-affiliated research office found the project was exempt from the need for IRB review; however, parental and youth consent were obtained for all study participants.

## **Program**

YA4-H! employed a three-step implementation model: 1) a 12-hour train-the-trainer event for youth and adult partners statewide, 2) recruitment and training of additional youth and adults at the community level, and 3) implementation of the selected curriculum or process. In the current project, YA4-H! youth-adult partners were engaged in the 4-H FSF program which utilized teen teachers with adult partners to teach CHFFF to younger youth, 8 to 12 years old, in their communities.

Critical to the success of the program is the initial 12-hour train-the-trainer event. The Essential Elements (Kress, 2004), best practices for teens as teachers (Lee & Murdock, 2001), and best practices for enhancing youth-adult partnerships (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005) were considered when designing the structure of the training. The training was held over a weekend in a central location within the state where youth-adult partners, comprised of one adult and two teens, participated from eight communities. The training was facilitated by an experienced YA4-H! youth-adult team consisting of the research staff (two of whom were curriculum authors), a nutrition specialist, and an experienced teen teacher. The 12 hours were divided into 3 sections: 4 hours on working as youth-adult partners (Arnold & Gifford, 2014), 4 hours on teens as teachers (Arnold, Gifford, Deen, & Edwards, 2015), and 4 hours on subject matter content (i.e., CHFFF). Upon returning to their communities, youth-adult partners recruited additional youth and adults, conducted training for the new members, and implemented the 4-H FSF model of teaching the CHFFF curriculum at a variety of community settings.

## **Procedures**

Prior conceptual work on positive youth development and manualized curriculums on youth-adult partnerships and teens as teachers by Arnold and colleagues (Arnold et al., 2015; Arnold & Gifford, 2014) were used as sensitizing information to develop the focus group and interview

protocol and inform the coding process. The research team and curriculum experts reviewed the protocol questions to ensure they represented main concepts of interest. Interviews and focus group sessions were conducted using a semi-structured protocol to achieve consistency across data collection methods. Probing or follow-up questions were left to the discretion of the facilitator. The project evaluator led two focus groups and five interviews, while two county Extension faculty who were directly involved with the project each conducted one focus group. Focus group questions covered the topics of nutrition (e.g., “How do you think participating in the program has impacted your nutrition or healthy eating?”), the youth-adult partnership (e.g., “What was your experience like in the youth-adult partnership?”), the translation of teen teacher skills to job skills (e.g., “Thinking back on your experience, not only working with adults but in being a teen teacher, are there any skills you learned that could be used in future or current work setting?”), the translation of teen teacher skills to other life areas (e.g., “How do you think the skills you learned could translate into other areas of your life?”), and physical activity (i.e., “How do you think participation in the program has impacted your level of physical activity?”). The current study focused on responses related to the youth-adult partnership and the translation of TAT skills gained to employment and other life areas.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews and focus groups were conducted until data saturation had been achieved or the point where additional data provided no new information and no new themes were observed (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Sessions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by a project staff member. Data analysis followed the four steps to generate best qualitative evidence from Green and colleagues (2007), including data immersion, coding, creating categories, and identifying themes. Three members of the research team read through all transcripts (i.e., data immersion), independently coded (i.e., coding), and collectively discussed and developed an emergent coding scheme based on theory, curriculums used, and prior empirical work (i.e., creating categories). To achieve reliability, six additional research team members independently coded each transcript with the previously developed coding scheme. All authors of the current study then convened to identify themes present (i.e., identification of themes). Intercoder agreement was calculated by percent of agreement divided by the percent agreement plus percent disagreement for coding pairs. Due to the large number of coded transcripts, 33% of transcripts were randomly selected for reliability calculations. Discrepancies within codes were discussed among coders until an acceptable level of agreement was reached (Creswell, 2013).

## Results

### Benefits and Challenges of the Youth-Adult Partnership

Youth were asked about their experience in the youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) and specifically, what worked well and challenges faced. Seven subcodes were identified under the broader category of benefits of Y-APs. Subcodes included mutual respect, the opportunity to lead/teach, having an adult as a supportive mentor/coach, friendship with adults and peers, shared responsibilities/partnerships with adults and peers, independence/autonomy in teaching, and having fun.

Youth reported they felt as equals in the relationship with a supportive adult. One youth reported, "... she [the adult partner] didn't try to control anything, and we worked together, and it wasn't as if she was a superior – it was like we were equal." A second youth noted the mutual respect and the availability of the adult as a mentor when needed, "I felt really respected, and I know she felt respected too. She let me lead but was really helpful when I needed help." This support was noticed as youth had the opportunity to teach lessons independently, "...when it came to the actual teaching, we were pretty independent and were able to do things with our other teen teachers." Finally, youth appreciated the opportunity to work collaboratively not only with adults but also to develop relationships with peers as illustrated by this female, "We [youth] were all very close, and like kind of became friends, and it was a lot of fun."

Youth were also asked about the challenges of Y-APs. Although few challenges were identified, two common challenges included communication within the partnership and logistics such as organizing schedules and transportation. One female youth reported a challenge was "the time before the lessons and communication about when we needed to be places and where we needed to be." Method of communication was a challenge with youth and adults tending to use different forms. For example, many youth preferred to text versus read and answer emails. Other youth acknowledged transportation as a challenge since some youth were not able to drive on their own yet.

### Skills Gained from Participating as Teen Teachers

In the process of participating as a teen teacher, youth reported gaining skills related to the four themes of teaching, communication, leadership, and emotional intelligence. Teaching skills encompassed aspects of preparation, engaging with youth, managing the classroom, and adapting curriculum. One youth who discussed the importance of planning stated, "I learned how to plan ahead of time and make sure I schedule my time well..." while another teen reported gaining flexibility as teens "learn[ed] how to make last minute adjustments...and last minute improvising" while teaching.

Communication skills included those related to public speaking (e.g., greater skill and confidence), being assertive, listening, tailoring a message to a specific audience, and nonverbal skills. Youth reported greater confidence in their own speaking skills, such as, “I was really shy to talk in front of a whole bunch of people but... I could do it now without being shy.” Youth also noted how important it was to change their communication approach depending on to whom they were speaking. One youth stated:

For example, if one of your friends said something wrong you’d want to be like “oh no, you’re so wrong.” Like if a kid says it wrong, you’d be like “nice try but it’s actually this,” so learning to change from talking to friends to kids.

Leadership skills gained spanned dealing with stressful situations, responsibility, organization, working in groups or teams, and professionalism. Many youth noted the importance of working as a group, with one stating, “...pretty much we had to work as a team ‘cause some people are better at doing something than others. Like one person’s probably better at cutting stuff or one person’s better at talking to others, you know.” Another youth noted how their own style may conflict with others:

I’m kind of a controlling person, and I’m like, okay, I know this is going to work, so we should do this. But then I’m like wait, there’s other ways we can do it. I think it (being a teen teacher) taught me a lot because I know not everywhere I work there’s going to be people that work with me – sometimes I’m going to clash with people.

Finally, the subcode of emotional intelligence represented respecting others, relationships with other people, and personal characteristics or traits. Multiple youth reported developing skills related to patience throughout their experience. For example, one youth stated:

Because we’re teaching little kids and that requires a lot of patience, but towards the end, I would sort of get frustrated, and I couldn’t, of course, be like, rude to any of the kids, so I would have to, like, take a deep breath and say, ok, this is what we’re going to do.

## **Discussion**

When looking at the results from a PYD perspective, it is evident the youth who participated in youth-adult partnerships as teen teachers experienced beneficial outcomes. Specifically, emergent qualitative codes clearly aligned with the 4-H Essential Elements of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity, indicating PYD had occurred even when the overall program did not explicitly target such outcomes.

## **Evidence of Positive Youth Development**

By developing a training and program in line with Zeldin et al.'s (2016) conceptualization of youth-adult partnerships, the critical components of a teens as teachers program model (Lee & Murdock, 2001), and characteristics of developmental relationships (Li & Julian, 2012), we anticipated positive youth development outcomes would emerge from the experiences of youth partners.

The two key components of a youth-adult partnership, youth voice in decision making and supportive adult relationships, were illustrated in emergent codes related to mutual respect, shared responsibilities with adults, and adults acting as a supportive coach or mentor. These codes also reflect the characteristics of developmental relationships between the youth and adult. Critical components of a TAT program model were intentionally built in through aspects such as the curriculum (i.e., Arnold et al., 2015) and structured training and were also evident through youth responses. Within qualitative codes, youth reported shared responsibilities, partnerships, and friendships with adults as well as other teens and reported greater confidence and comfort with a number of teaching-related skills (e.g., classroom management, preparation).

Given this foundation, finding evidence of the Essential Elements within the data was not surprising. Participating youth developed a sense of belonging through intentional engagement with adults and other youth in a positive environment where they were treated as equals. They developed mastery as they increased their knowledge, confidence, and skills related to being a teen teacher. Independence was evidenced through the opportunity for autonomy within the teaching environment with a supportive adult present. Finally, generosity was observed through the development of emotional intelligence where youth developed greater respect and appreciation for those around them.

Overall, this suggests that youth participants achieved short-term gains indicative of positive youth development. Continuing along this line, we would expect these youth to maintain a thriving trajectory toward adulthood, continue to engage and contribute positively within their world (e.g., social, community), and be less likely to engage in risk or problem behaviors (Lerner et al., 2011).

## **PYD as a Secondary Outcome**

One notable feature of the current program was the positive impact made on youth when the intended focus of the program was the younger youth that were receiving the lessons. Broadly, the 4-H FSF program was designed with the aim of supporting healthy food choices for youth and families from point of purchase to preparation and enjoyment at the family table. This healthy living and nutrition education program primarily targeted younger youth aged 8 to 12

years. The role of older youth was limited to the delivery methods of the youth-adult partnership and teen as teacher program model. Therefore, the intended outcome for the program was primarily to promote nutrition in younger youth and their families. However, what the program neglected to fully appreciate was the potential for a PYD opportunity for the teens involved as partners and teachers. Results from the current study demonstrate how effective a purposeful youth-adult partnership can be in increasing PYD outcomes.

### **Moving Beyond Engagement**

Youth today have ample opportunities for engagement with youth programs, illustrated by the fact that 83% of 12 to 17 year olds participate in at least one organized activity outside of school (Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, 2012). However, simply attending and participating does not achieve the same developmental benefits as purposefully engaging youth. In addition, the balance of power between youth and adults varies drastically depending upon the structure of the activity. In the current study, youth may have initially participated for external reasons (e.g., my parents signed me up); however, research suggests that when youth develop a personal meaning and connection to the activity through internal motivation, psychological engagement is facilitated, which promotes greater developmental benefits (Dawes & Larson, 2011). Results from the current study suggest the shared power present in youth-adult partnerships and the opportunity to be a teen teacher were associated with such psychological engagement as evidenced by the development of competence (e.g., communication skills gained), the understanding of how skills gained in the youth-adult partnership could be used for future goals (e.g., how to communicate with others in the future), and the ability to connect the activity outside of themselves (e.g., greater respect for others). By engaging youth as an equal partner, rather than in an adult-led partnership, we maximized the potential for PYD outcomes.

### **Implementation Challenges**

Results from the current study demonstrate the value of intentional opportunities for teens to experience PYD. The 4-H FSF program was implemented by 4-H Youth Development professionals who understand the evidence behind youth-adult partnerships and have seen firsthand the impact quality partnerships have in the lives of young people. However, as with any curriculum, real-world factors highly influence implementation. In the current study, issues arose when implementing 4-H FSF at different county sites resulting in varying levels of youth participation.

One challenge Extension educators face is the reality of reaching participation numbers expected by funders and stakeholders at the expense of spending the time necessary for the type of PYD outcomes desired. The 4-H FSF program was intended to reach 2,500 younger youth 8 to 12 years old using youth-adult partnerships and a teens as teachers program model. In order to

reach that number of consistently attending younger youth, some counties partnered with their local school districts to offer the curriculum during educational class time. Unfortunately, this meant youth (i.e., teens) were in school when the curriculum was delivered and therefore were not able to participate as teachers. Second, many county coordinators for the 4-H FSF program partnered with other youth serving organizations within their communities. For example, Boys and Girls Clubs and local Parks and Recreation held after school and summer programs for youth in low-income neighborhoods at nearby community facilities. In these collaborations, 4-H FSF operated within the framework of existing programs. Third, while many counties were successful at engaging youth in partnership with adults, other counties involved youth as ‘helpers’ (i.e., adult-led collaborations) to the process instead of being truly engaged in a quality youth-adult partnership. Finally, youth lead busy lives, and one challenge was keeping the same youth engaged for the duration of the program. While there were examples of youth who continued to be involved after the 4-H FSF program ended, there were other youth who dropped out due to conflicts or competing interests.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

Despite these challenges, positive outcomes were identified in participating youth. Based on our experience and lessons learned, we have identified three suggestions for successful implementation of a youth-adult partnership including basing programming on theory and evidence, proactively anticipating potential challenges of youth and adults working together, and considering funding deliverables.

In addition to the Essential Elements, it is important to build programs on a solid foundation of theory and evidence such as the components of youth-adult partnerships (Zeldin et al., 2016), elements essential to the success of teens as teachers (if using this program model; Lee & Murdock, 2001), and peer-reviewed curricula (Arnold et al., 2015; Arnold & Gifford, 2014). As described earlier, our initial train-the-trainer weekend event was critical to not only disseminating information about curriculums used but also to fostering positive relationships between youth, their adult partners, and peers.

Sustained youth engagement is key to the youth-adult partnership, and some challenges can be anticipated prior to program implementation. In the current study, the train-the-trainer event included a discussion on the benefits and challenges of working in a youth-adult partnership where youth and adults were in separate groups and had the opportunity to share their challenges with one another. Challenges identified in this training activity and in the qualitative evaluation focused on transportation (e.g., coordinating transportation, working around busy schedules) and communication issues (e.g., method and timeliness of communication). By identifying these issues prior to program implementation, youth-adult partners can jointly strategize ways to mitigate these challenges.

The program described here had funding to cover the costs of additional staff wages, training costs, curriculum, travel, and supplies. In planning any program involving youth-adult partnerships, how the program will be implemented and sustained must be considered carefully. At a minimum, the costs of initial and ongoing training and support must be determined, as training is key to the success of the partnership.

From an evaluation perspective, additional information on the youth-adult partnership would be beneficial. In the current study, qualitative data were collected from participating youth only. In the future, collecting data from both youth and their adult partners would provide a more holistic representation regarding the quality of the youth-adult experience. One potential tool for this is the Involvement and Interaction Rating scale (Jones & Perkins, 2005) which quantitatively assesses constructs of youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction. This could then supplement qualitative data collection approaches such as those used in the current study.

### Conclusion

4-H remains one of the largest youth development programs in the United States. As such, it is important that 4-H Youth Development not only continue to use the 4-H Essential Elements to drive programming but also incorporate theoretically- and empirically-based approaches to maximize positive youth development outcomes. Supportive, caring adults are considered one of the most important strengths in an adolescent's life promoting youth development. Results from the current study add to the growing body of literature finding quality youth-adult partnerships serve to promote youth development outcomes in the short-term and place youth on a thriving trajectory toward adulthood in the long-term.

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