

**Positive youth development programs build civically engaged leaders**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Youth participation in meaningful and purposive civic organizations and activities not only impacts the participants' development, but also influences their involvement in their communities both today and in the future. The combination of the two studies included in this dissertation examine just that. Both studies were conducted utilizing original research by the author utilizing the frameworks of Positive Youth Development (PYD) and experiential learning. The first study is a program evaluation of the Iowa State 4-H Council, assessing the participants' outcomes in the common measure Life Skill constructs critical to the development of civically engaged individuals, including: citizenship, communication, leadership, and learning skills. These outcomes were identified through responses by the youth on a set of common Life Skill measures, as well as selected open-ended questions.

Study two examines the development of civic engagement or citizenship skills and contribution among youth or adolescents as part of PYD and explores the long-term civic engagement impact of those experiences for participating individuals. The members of the study are now young adults reflecting on and connecting their youth experiences to their involvement today. This was conducted through a phenomenological approach utilizing interviews of fourteen former State 4-H Council members now 25-35 years-old.

One can observe themes between the two studies in regard to the development of civic engagement and leadership within youth and the identified best practices to foster that development. The State 4-H Council is one unique experience, but can play a significant role in crystallizing and increasing the depth of skill and learning from the opportunities youth have had at a local level by expanding the scope of responsibility for participants. Empowering youth to have a voice and share in decision-making builds confidence in the youth themselves and their

ability to make decisions, regardless of the PYD organization or group the youth belonged. Additionally, it gives them real and meaningful practice in doing so in ways that are significant and long-lasting. It also develops a life-long commitment and belief that not only can make a difference in their communities and beyond, but in fact, they should.

## CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW

### Introduction

There is, of course, no one model for the perfect citizen. For some, a good citizen is someone who votes, obeys laws, and contributes to others' welfare. Others prioritize active engagement in democracy—knowing how to join others to influence policy and better the community. For still others, good citizenship is guided by a quest for justice (Youniss, 2011). Researchers identify three factors that are necessary to spur individuals to become civically engaged: the desire or motivation to get involved; the ability to contribute, based on skill, time, or finances; and a connection to or invitation from an active member (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002). An active and engaged citizen, as defined by Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, and Lerner (2010), is someone who has a sense of civic duty, feeling of social connection to their community, confidence in their abilities to effect change, as well as someone who engages in civic behaviors.

Similarly, Positive Youth Development (PYD) scholars have defined civic engagement as “individuals’ commitments and contributions to community and society, which are multifaceted and include a wide range of actions such as political participation and volunteering” (Wray-Lake & Soper, 2016, p. 250; Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009). Civic engagement is associated with such positive outcomes as individual development, educational achievement and social competencies, while its societal benefits include having an active citizenry that participates in democracy and contributes to the greater good (Bobek et al., 2009). When young people are actively engaged in improving the well-being of their communities and their country, their own development is enhanced and it improves their family, community and society (Zaff et al., 2010; Lerner, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001; Bobek et al.,

2009; Sherrod, 2007). Civic outcomes constitute a range of phenomena including students' knowledge of democratic processes and issues, organizing skills, commitments, and identities (Barnhardt, Sheets, & Pasquesi, 2015). Further, youth participation in extracurricular organizations as adolescents influences adult civic participation (Verba et al., 1995; Kirlin, 2002).

This chapter provides an overview of the background that frames two studies, both addressing the development of civically engaged youth through PYD programs, particularly 4-H. The first study is a quantitative program evaluation that assesses the effectiveness of the Iowa State 4-H Council experience in developing the Life Skill outcomes of citizenship, communication, leadership, and learning. The second is a qualitative research study that includes interviews of young adults who are currently involved in their communities and were participants in various PYD programs as youth, including 4-H. The development of their civic engagement understanding and practice with special emphasis on understanding what and how experiences throughout their participation in PYD programs contributed to that aptitude are explored.

### **Background and Context**

Civic education can be more than acquiring a set of facts, learning about rights and obligations, and becoming an informed voter. It is, at its psychological base, coming to know how to function in a democratic system and working to sustain it for oneself and for others (Youniss, 2011). Active and engaged citizens, those who contribute to their communities, have a sense of civic self-efficacy, responsibility and social connection to community, possess appropriate skills, and engage in civic behaviors (Zaff et al., 2010). Participation in high school government like student council and other clubs, such as yearbook, 4-H, and debate team, have

been found to be strongly associated with later civic engagement (Verba et al., 1995; Kirlin, 2002). Kirlin (2002) hypothesized that such membership teaches skills that are necessary for later involvement including real-world training in communication and organizational skill development.

Community-based learning also has the potential to give students experiences that will challenge their ability to simultaneously consider the influence of social systems, local history, and cross-cultural dynamics. At the same time, it can challenge them to address their own assumptions about working with others, where knowledge lies, and how to engage in a leadership process (Wagner & Mathison, 2015). Community-based learning happens in many ways. The two studies included in this effort particularly focus on the PYD program of 4-H Youth Development. The mission of 4-H is to empower youth to meet their full potential through research-based experiences (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, 2013). The 4-H program utilizes various delivery modes, including school enrichment opportunities, after school programming, camping experiences, and club membership. The emphasis of the 4-H program includes long-term group experiences that meet the needs and strengths of youth, their families, and their communities and the development of Life Skills.

Civic engagement and leadership development are concepts that intertwine in ways that enhance both. Civic engagement practices such as service-learning and community-based research give youth a context or framework through which to learn leadership in more transformational ways. Likewise, learning collaborative leadership values and skills prepares students to engage in the community more sensitively and effectively (Wagner & Mathison, 2015; Astin & Astin, 2000). The research is clear—community engagement educational experiences can foster transformative learning for many learning objectives related to leadership

and civic engagement (Wagner & Mathison, 2015; Astin & Astin, 2000). However, the research is also clear that civic engagement and leadership development programs must be designed and implemented well in order to achieve those outcomes (Wagner & Mathison, 2015).

Demonstration of contribution, which can be equated to civic engagement, has become a measure to determine effectiveness of PYD programs because it illustrates the presence and effective development of the Five C's, priorities in PYD programming. Additionally, citizenship and leadership are key elements of contribution (Davis, 2014). Contribution, as defined by Lerner (2004; Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013) is evident when a young person enacts one of the Five C's of PYD (competence, confidence, connection, character, or caring) by contributing positively to self, family, community, and ultimately society. These contributions can include physical actions or demonstrations of ideological shifts that show an understanding and compassion for their own development and the health of their social world.

### **Theoretical Framework**

PYD theory is based on the idea that youth have strengths and can be guided to become positive contributors to society. The PYD framework is informed by developmental theories of resilience, plasticity, and competency building; this framework replaces a deficit view previously held by many who studied adolescent development (Arnold & Silliman, 2017; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016; Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013; Lerner, 2004). Youth require opportunities and supports for positive growth, including positive relationships with caring adults, challenging experiences, and skill-building experiences (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016).

Experiential learning theory is built on the idea that knowledge, skill and understanding are gained through experiences (Nistler, 2014; Kolb, 2015; Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning is learner-centered (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Nistler, 2014), meaning strategies and learning

opportunities and experiences are based on the participants' needs; the participant is actively engaged in the learning process. Providing an experience alone does not create "experiential learning" (4-H National Headquarters, 2011). Critical to the Experiential Learning Model is not just the action, but subsequent participant reflection and application of the experience to the future. See the Experiential Learning Model in Appendix A for reference.

Encompassing the priorities of PYD and Experiential Learning theories, the 4-H program has utilized the framework of Eight Essential Elements to be present in a group experience for PYD. Those elements include: caring adult, safe environment, inclusive setting, and opportunities for mastery, service, self-determination, planning for the future, and engaged learning (Gleason, 2012; Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, 2013). These elements are foundational for a PYD experience to develop the desired Life Skill outcomes within the 4-H program of citizenship, communication, leadership, and learning. In addition, they influence the lens through which the data was collected for the two studies presented in this dissertation.

Relatedly, Balsano (2005) suggested that civic engagement represents an important vehicle to promote PYD. The Youth Engagement Continuum (Pittman, Martin, & Williams, 2007; LISTEN, Inc., 2003) provides a lens for which to understand the value of youth leadership development and civic engagement within PYD work (see Appendix B). Pittman et al. (2007) explain that organizations who work with youth range in approach from youth services to youth organizing. At the stages of youth leadership and civic engagement within the Youth Engagement Continuum, youth organizations include opportunities within programming for authentic youth leadership and build skills and capacity for youth to take action around issues young people identify as priorities. The Youth Engagement Continuum model (Pittman et al., 2007; LISTEN, Inc., 2003) also influences the research for these two studies.

### **Problem Statement**

Youniss (2009) identifies the following factors in creating civically-minded adults: reaching youth at a developmentally appropriate time in the life cycle; structure provided through organized action; material, social, and cognitive resources for support; and participation toward a meaningful and just cause. The strongest predictor of adult membership in voluntary groups, according to Youniss (2011), was participation in high school extracurricular activities, which included participation in school government. His research also led him to identify a link between adult civic participation and high school involvement in other clubs and activities. Kirlin (2002) also found consistently strong evidence that participation in clubs and organizations during adolescence leads to higher levels of civic engagement in adulthood. Additionally, previous studies suggest that youth enrolled in 4-H programs do better in school, develop leadership skills, and help others in communities more than those enrolled in other youth organizations (Lamm & Harder, 2009; Astroth, & Haynes, 2002; Goodwin et al., 2005; Canadian 4-H Council, 2003; Maass, Wilken, Jorden, Culen & Place, 2006; and Radhakrishna & Doamekpor, 2009).

As important as this information is to help us make the connection between youth involvement in extracurricular activities and civic or community involvement, it is important to note the vast array of types of activities in which youth can be involved. These experiences vary in their opportunities for leadership, engagement, and community relevance. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2016) note that while there is a wealth of research on extracurricular activities, those opportunities vary with regard to the developmental experiences provided and the outcomes associated with participation. Despite ample research demonstrating these variations in both experiences and outcomes for youth participating in different types of organized activities, too

often conclusions from one category of activities are assumed to apply to all types of programs or activities. Some may try to generalize their study to all other PYD programs, but it is important to note the great diversity in programming in this field (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016) and thus, the need to add to the body of knowledge to help further define what good PYD programming includes and means.

Likewise, while some research has investigated the impact of 4-H into adulthood, 4-H programs vary from state to state and experiences and relevance can vary from youth to youth. Participant costs or fees and selection processes can also vary for different experiences and across states. Therefore, periodic evaluation of 4-H programming is a healthy and useful tool which allows organizations to ascertain whether they are achieving their goals and if changes need to be made to improve the program (Davis, 2014).

### **Purpose of the Current Studies**

With a framework based on PYD and the experiential learning model, it is believed by the author that youth learn by doing. Thus, their participation in meaningful and purposive civic organizations and activities as youth not only impacts their development, but also influences their involvement in their communities both today and in the future. The combination of the two studies included in this dissertation examine just that. The researcher is most interested in better defining which experiences impact the development of civic engagement and how youth and young adults explain that impact. Both studies were conducted utilizing original research by the author.

The first study is a program evaluation of the Iowa State 4-H Council, assessing the participants' outcomes in the following common measure Life Skill constructs, all critical to the development of civically engaged individuals: citizenship, communication, leadership, and

learning skills. For the context of this study, citizenship is defined as “the opportunity, right, and responsibility to contribute to shaping the world around you and provide service to others” (Allen et al., 2005, p.5). “Communication is the exchange of thoughts, information, or messages between individuals, as well as the sending and receiving of information using speech, writing, and gestures,” (Allen et al., 2005, p.7). The leadership outcome is defined as “influencing and supporting others in a positive manner toward a common goal” (Allen et al., 2005, p.3). Finally, learning skills include developing youth’s understanding and ability to master new skills and information related to self-selected areas of interest (Allen et al., 2005, p.14).

The Iowa State 4-H Council experience offers its members the opportunity to build Life Skills in many meaningful areas to prepare youth to be civically engaged citizens and productive leaders in their communities. It does so through a year-long experience offering such hands-on opportunities as committee leadership, project and program implementation, public speaking engagements, volunteer experiences, and conference coordination. The purpose of this program evaluation is to analyze the outcomes of youth participants on the State 4-H Council in the areas of citizenship understanding, confidence in communication, leadership development, and the ability to use effective learning strategies. These outcomes were identified through responses by the youth on a set of common Life Skill measures, as well as selected open-ended questions.

Participating in State 4-H Council provides youth with an opportunity to gain Life Skills in a multitude of ways (Boleman, Merten, & Hall, 2008). With that understanding, it is also important to note that each state selects and conducts its state councils differently. Sizes of councils vary, as well as structure; some states have a differentiation between officers and members while others do not. In addition, meeting frequency and structure are different, and responsibilities vary from state to state as well. There is therefore a need for more in-depth

evaluation of specific programs in 4-H, including the various state 4-H council groups across the country to examine which practices seem to be having the most positive impacts.

Study two examines the development of civic engagement or citizenship skills and contribution among youth or adolescents as part of PYD and explores the long-term impact of those experiences for participating individuals. The members of the study are now young adults reflecting on and connecting their youth experiences to their involvement today. The Tuft's longitudinal 4-H Study identified factors that lead to contribution, the 6<sup>th</sup> C in PYD (Lerner & Lerner et al., 2012; Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013; Lerner, 2004). Additional studies have focused on civic engagement by youth. Lerner and Lerner et al. (2013) begin to touch on the impact youth organizations, and specifically 4-H, have on developing civic engagement in youth, but their results do not stretch to those who have moved out of their home of origin and are making decisions on their own. In fact, there has been very little research done exploring young adults, beyond high school or college age, who make their own decisions regarding civic engagement or asking them to reflect on what parts of their experiences as youth influenced their desire or practice of contribution or civic engagement and in what ways (Fox, Schroeder, & Lodl, 2003). We do not know what youth experiences lead to sustained involvement in communities by individuals or how participating in PYD experiences can impact continued civic engagement beyond a youth's experience within that particular organization or beyond.

Davis (2014) stated, "Many studies have been done on the perceptions of Life Skill development and usefulness for 4-H youth, but not many have been done with 4-H alumni or specifically focused on citizenship, civic engagement, and leadership" (p. 11). Yet, the development of civic engagement is a critical component of PYD. Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan (2010) remind us that functioning as a citizen is as important as working or being a part

of a family. Additionally, there is a perceived shortage of involvement by young adults as volunteers and active community members in our towns and cities today, making this an important issue (Sherrod et al., 2010; Bessant, Farthing, & Watts, 2015). Study two was conducted from a phenomenological approach utilizing interviews of fourteen former State 4-H Council members, which provided a retrospective look at how their involvement in PYD programming at multiple levels contributed to their development, understanding, value, and practice of civic engagement both as youth and today.

Through the following studies, young adults' development of civic engagement practices is examined. This included their understanding of and priority or value development for being an engaged citizen. Each individual had different definitions or degrees of involvement that they classified as being civically engaged. In addition, each person's path toward his or her level of civic engagement looks slightly different.

### **Significance of the Current Studies**

Much of our knowledge about the positive effects of participation in youth development programs relies heavily on research demonstrating favorable influence of participation in organized activities in general, rather than specifically in youth development programs. Researchers using data from the *4-H Study of Positive Youth Development* (Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013) to investigate the outcomes associated with participation in national youth serving organizations with a positive developmental mission did not find a direct association between PYD program participation and their combined measure of PYD. However, they found that participation in the youth development programs examined did predict current reports of civic engagement and youth contribution (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016).

Continuing integration of the interests of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers around the measurement and meaning of youth civic engagement is a valuable means to enhance both PYD theory and its use as a force for enhancing civil society (Zaff et al., 2010). It can logically be explained that youth develop and practice civic skills through their participation in organizations (Kirlin, 2002), but there has been very little exploration of the “how.” Through these two studies, greater insight can be gained regarding the most influential experiences within PYD programs for individuals’ development of an understanding of citizenship and the importance of being civically engaged leaders.

The study of youth civic engagement has important theoretical relevance and applied significance (Zaff et al., 2010). It has implications for program design and for research (Kirlin, 2002). Civic engagement is a core outcome of current theories of PYD (Zaff et al., 2010; Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2004). In addition, understanding and enhancing youth engagement in civil societies is a critical facet in programs and policies aimed at maintaining and enhancing democracy (Zaff et al., 2010; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009).

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## CHAPTER 2. STATE 4-H COUNCIL EXPERIENCES DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS FOR YOUTH

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### **Abstract**

To become productive, contributing individuals who are civically engaged and can be proactive in determining the course of tomorrow's world, today's adolescents must develop positive leadership knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations (Kleon & Rinehart, 1998). As one considers best practices to help adolescents develop understanding of, capacity for, and efficacy around civic engagement and the role that leadership plays, it requires intentional, developmentally appropriate curriculum design and implementation, both in the classroom and outside of it. This paper discusses a program evaluation articulating the Life Skill development of participants in a year-long state 4-H council leadership experience in the Midwest. The Life Skills assessed were in the areas of citizenship, communication, leadership, and learning as part of overall Life Skill development. Participants were youth ages 17-20 years. A retrospective pretest-posttest was used to evaluate skill development and understanding. Analysis, including paired sample t-tests, indicated growth in each of the 16 common outcome measures evaluated. In addition, covariates, including gender, years of 4-H and council experience were regressed to assess for their relationships and possible influences on the potential for Life Skill development. Finally, open-ended questions were utilized to further explain the authentic and meaningful leadership experiences youth identified as contributing to their development, including hands-on experiences in decision-making, planning the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference, and leading peers.

## **Introduction**

Employers today are looking for bright, able individuals who are passionate about what they do and can work in a team, find creative solutions to problems and will treat others with respect. These are skills that will put youth in a position to not only begin a successful career, but also to be a responsible citizen and to have successful personal relationships (Gagen, 2015). To become productive and contributing individuals who are civically engaged and can be effective and proactive in determining the course of tomorrow's world, today's youth must develop positive leadership knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations (Kleon & Rinehart, 1998).

Academic learning alone does not produce happy, healthy, well-rounded individuals or fully prepare young people who want to start a career. Participation in high quality, structured activities outside of school can situate youth in safe environments; prevent youth from participating in delinquent activities; teach youth general and specific skills, beliefs, and behaviors; and provide youth opportunities to develop relationships with peers and mentors, all significant in the process of Positive Youth Development (PYD) (Simpkins, 2003). Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, and Lerner (2005) define PYD as "a strength-based conception of adolescence" (p.10). The PYD model emphasizes that when the strengths of young people are aligned with resources and mutually beneficial relationships are developed with the people and institutions of their social world, youth will be headed toward a hopeful future that includes positive contributions of self, family, community, and civil society; in short, they will thrive (Bowers et al., 2015; Lerner et al., 2005). Becoming contributors to one's family and community involves the development and understanding of such Life Skills as leadership, citizenship or civic engagement, communication, and learning.

Best practices to help youth develop an understanding of, capacity for, and efficacy around civic engagement and the role that leadership plays, include intentional, developmentally appropriate curriculum design and implementation, whether it is in the classroom or outside of it. It is essential that knowledge of cognitive development and experiential learning are used to inform the practice of creating leadership development programs and teaching youth Life Skills (Torrez & Rocco, 2015). Research indicates that precollege exposures to leadership opportunities are one of the most significant factors in college student leadership trajectories (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Torrez & Rocco, 2015). It is critical that those opportunities are experiential in nature for the greatest impact.

The 4-H youth development program is a community-based PYD organization with the aim to increase youths' Life Skills through youth-adult partnerships and research-based group experiences. Many studies have been done with 4-H youth on the perceptions of Life Skill development and usefulness of program experiences, but few have specifically focused on civic engagement and leadership development (Davis, 2014). Lerner (2004) argues that when youth are able to experience living definitions of good citizenship and leadership through the youth development programs in which they are involved and can identify themselves as individuals who are committed to making valuable contributions to self, family, community, and society, they continue to make similar contributions as adults (Lerner, 2004; Davis, 2014). This emphasizes the idea that we need to train good citizens and leaders as youth (Davis, 2014).

The present study involves a program evaluation of the Iowa State 4-H Council, a group of approximately 40 junior and senior level high school students selected from across the state annually to serve as ambassadors for the Iowa 4-H program. Their responsibilities also include providing leadership for planning and implementation of the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference, the

Iowa 4-H'ers for 4-H fundraising campaign, and creating marketing plans and suggestions that connect with their peers across the state. The program takes an experiential learning philosophy to teaching Life Skills to the youth participants, providing hands-on skill development for participants through their leadership roles and responsibilities throughout the year. This study hopes to add to the current literature and further identify both experiences that lead to PYD Life Skills development, as well as a better understanding of which outcomes are most likely to result from the particular experiences of serving on the State 4-H Council. This program evaluation measured the Life Skill outcomes for participants in the areas of citizenship, leadership, communication, and learning, all skills that prepare youth to be civically engaged.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

#### **Leadership as Civic Engagement**

For years, strategies to transfer knowledge and prepare young people for future roles as citizens and leaders have been practiced and valued in families, places of worship, clubs, and organizations such as Girl Scouts, 4-H, or Boy Scouts. Leadership development and civic engagement are concepts that intertwine in ways which enhance both. Civic engagement practices such as service-learning and community-based research give students a context and pedagogy through which to learn leadership in transformational ways. Likewise, learning collaborative leadership values and skills prepares students to engage in the community more sensitively and effectively. Civic learning objectives typically include a leadership aspect (Wagner & Mathison, 2015). Likewise, civic engagement is an important feature of many leadership development programs as well, in part because it helps address why leadership development is relevant, but also because it can address how people do leadership. However, the study of youth leadership development and civic engagement preparation still has many gaps and

limited research regarding best practices that will lead to youths' long-term community engagement and leadership (Libby, Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006; Easterling, 2013; Checkoway & Aldana, 2013; Zaff et al., 2011; Hastings et al., 2011).

Leadership in today's rapidly changing world demands the ability to work collaboratively with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, address change in interconnected systems and make decisions amid ambiguity (Heifetz, 1994; Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2013; Komives & Wagner, 2012; Wagner & Mathison, 2015). Leadership is not a practice that can be learned in the abstract, but instead through concrete experiences connected to meaningful decisions and consequences (Wagner & Mathison, 2015). The study and practice of leadership has its roots in numerous disciplines, such as communication, psychology, organizational management, and even social movements in history; thus, leadership development requires learning via multiple methods (Owen, 2015).

Leadership is interpersonal and social in nature, requiring engagement with others in the process of leadership through initiating, building, and maintaining relationships with a variety of people who might differ from oneself in age, gender, ethnicity, social class, religion, or even political agenda. (Hogan & Warrenfletz, 2003; Haber-Curran, Allen, & Shankman, 2015). Thus, it is imperative that leadership educators devote considerable attention to helping youth learn about themselves and others. Leadership development involves growth in one's knowledge, beliefs, skills, and ultimately behaviors, requiring leadership development programs to provide opportunities for youth to engage in personal exploration of their own values, strengths, emotions, perspectives, privileges, and identities (Haber-Curran et al., 2015). A full definition of youth leadership must encompass values, power, and action; without power sharing, a theory of change, and action, youth are not exercising leadership, but merely taking steps to plan and

implement activities prescribed by adults (Libby, Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006). Leadership goes beyond an appointed position or elected office. It includes both formal and informal roles and responsibilities that influence and move others to action. For this study, leadership is defined as “the ability to influence and support others in a positive manner for a common goal” (Allen et al., 2005, p. 2).

## **Theory**

It is often said that experience is the best teacher. Experiential and active learning have long been the hallmarks of leadership education and development. Student development literature also documents the high value of educationally purposeful activities to student learning and development (Priest & Clegorne, 2015). Experiential learning theory, therefore, is a critical philosophy by which this program is based and provides a guiding principle for this study.

Kirlin (2002) reports the valuable role both experiential and participatory education can play in preparing students to be civic-minded citizens. School-based experiential learning has a positive impact when, among other things, student decision-making is encouraged and supported by teachers. Kirlin (2002) further found that involving students in many levels of the learning process can facilitate the development of civic skills important for later civic engagement. These concepts can easily be applied beyond the classroom to non-formal education and PYD opportunities. In fact, adolescent participation in organizations provides opportunities for hands-on development of foundational civic skills such as working in groups, organizing others to accomplish tasks, communicating, and working out differences on the way to accomplishing a goal (Kirlin, 2002; Patrick, 2000).

Experiential learning includes the process by which learners shift from the acquisition of knowledge to developing skills and capacities to do something useful with that new knowledge.

This type of learning can be intellectual (implementation of new ideas), physical (embodiment of practices), or social (development of group skills) (Pigza, 2015). Experiential learning identifies a cyclical pattern of knowledge cultivation, encountering a concrete experience and engaging in reflection and meaning making, and then integrating knowledge gained as insight for future experiences (Torrez & Rocco, 2015; Kolb, 1984).

A PYD framework, which lies in developmental systems theory and promotes experiential learning opportunities as its foundation, guides this work as well. This model emphasizes that the positive, healthy trajectories of life are the result of mutually beneficial relations between the developing person and his or her environment or experience that support and promote healthy growth (Arnold & Silliman, 2017; Benson et al., 2006). Key to a PYD perspective is the idea that mutually beneficial relations will lead the young person to make contributions to themselves and their family, community, and the larger society (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007; Zimmerman, Phelps & Lerner, 2007; Phelps et al., 2009; Lerner, 2004). Youth require opportunities and supports for positive growth, including positive relationships with caring adults, challenging experiences, and skill-building opportunities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016).

From a PYD perspective, leadership and citizenship development experiences are good for all youth, providing them with supportive relationships and opportunities to see themselves, and be seen by others, as having valuable contributions to make to the world. Further, their active engagement can help them develop self-esteem, confidence, and essential social and intellectual competencies that provide an important foundation for future civic involvement (MacNeil, 2006). When youth are engaged in authentic opportunities for leadership (where they not only develop their leadership abilities but also exercise leadership authority), their leadership

has a real impact, either on their organization or on a specific project, as well as for them (MacNeil, 2006). In one of the earliest studies on 4-H youth outcomes, Seevers and Dormody (1995) found that participation in many different leadership activities at a variety of levels promoted personal development as well as the opportunity to work with other youth and adults, set goals and priorities, accept responsibility, and have a greater role in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership development activities. That work has continued across the states, including research done regarding youth experiences at the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference and its successful impact on developing the outcomes of leadership, citizenship, communication and learning (Allen & Lohman, 2016).

As youth programs seek to support youth in developing leadership, the leadership literature, according to MacNeil (2006), suggests that we must frame our programs so that youth have opportunities not only to develop skills and knowledge but also to apply them in meaningful and authentic ways. Meaningful experiences include responsibilities and decisions that have true impact and consequences and authentic means real decisions that need to be made for the organization or community, rather than simulations or mock situations - decisions that adult leaders must make every day. For youth to develop and practice leadership, adults have to share power (MacNeil, 2006).

### **Relevance of Youth Civic Engagement Development**

Just as leadership development happens incrementally over time, so does the development of youths' abilities to consider social issues and engage with others in addressing them, the development of civic engagement skills and understanding (Wagner & Mathison, 2015). Organized groups can provide youth with experience in service to the community, connect them to the broader society and also help youth develop a better understanding of

themselves (Youniss et al., 1997), all components of an understanding and aptitude for civic engagement. As youth are brought into community organizations and civic roles, this leads to skill enhancement, confidence building, and ownership that prepare them as they navigate toward adulthood (Brennan, Barnett, & Baugh, 2007). According to Zaff et al. (2008), age-appropriate civic opportunities will aid in the development of civic knowledge, skills, engagement, and eventual identity. Adolescents have the capacity to affect their communities, schools, and society positively, while also promoting their own psychological, social, and intellectual growth as young citizens (Zaff et al., 2008). Civic engagement is essential for a healthy democracy (Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016). It is therefore critical that we provide age-appropriate, meaningful and authentic opportunities for youth to be involved in clubs, organizations and their communities.

According to Zaff et al. (2010), initiative is a form of deeper community participation that is considered engagement because it includes intrinsic motivation partnered with a drive to reach a challenging goal. Through their work on committees, roles as 4-H ambassadors, and facilitators and leaders at the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference, the State 4-H Council members are being asked to act independently, initiate contact with 4-H staff and other adults across the state, and exhibit other skills and traits that demonstrate initiative.

The study of youth civic engagement has important theoretical relevance and applied significance to the field of PYD (Zaff et al., 2010; Lerner et al., 2009; Lerner, 2004). Civic engagement is a core outcome of current theories of PYD. In addition, understanding can assist in enhancing youth engagement in civil societies and identifying critical facets in programs and policies to be aimed at maintaining and enhancing democracy (Zaff et al., 2010; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009). In fact, in his study in 2008, Zaff et al. recommended that researchers should

continue to consider more nuanced ways to measure and enhance understanding of youth civic engagement because of the likely applied importance of this research, and thus its potentially substantive impact on youth and civil society.

There is general agreement that programs are most effective when they create positive relationships for youth and engage them in challenging, authentic activities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). When young people are actively engaged in improving the well-being of their communities and their country, their own development is enhanced, while the larger community benefits as well (Zaff et al., 2010). Kirlin (2002) reported that participation in organizations and clubs during adolescence can teach skills necessary for adult civic participation as it promotes and creates youth's capacity. In fact, participation in high school student government and other clubs has been strongly associated with later civic engagement (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Kirlin, 2002). One can assume that similar experiences in non-formal education or PYD groups would have a similar or even enhanced effect, but there is less documented research.

### **Previous 4-H Research**

Some research on leadership development and civic engagement has been done in 4-H programs across the nation. For example, Boleman, Merten and Hall (2008) found that members of the State 4-H Council in Texas reported growth in oral communication, an ability to relate to others, and leadership skills including networking, management skills, and confidence. Bruce, Boyd, and Dooley (2004) found that leadership Life Skill development dramatically increased when 4-H members experienced leadership roles beyond the club level, positively affecting development in the areas of value development, interpersonal skills, citizenship development, communication skills, career development, agricultural skills, and home economics skills. Through their research on the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference, Allen and Lohman (2016) found

youth participants self-identified Life Skill growth in the areas of citizenship, leadership, communication and learning as a result of their experiences at that short-term statewide event. Further, through their qualitative work, Bruce et al. (2004) identified themes of growth in the development of relationships and the understanding of self, group processes, and management skills. Seevers and Dormody (1995) identified a significant relationship between leadership Life Skills development and involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities. Finally, Davis (2014) examined citizenship and leadership development in 4-H alumni, summing up her participants' perspective of citizenship and leadership as, "Good leaders were confident, caring, competent and team players. A good citizen is someone who is involved in their community and broader surroundings, has a positive attitude and is selfless," (p.59).

To add to the body of knowledge regarding best practices in PYD, we can compare results from this study with those of other state leadership experiences to identify consistencies regarding the development of Life Skills of 4-H council members. In addition, we look to expand the body of research to allow both the practitioner and researcher to identify themes in best practices and philosophies to aid in future work. For example, Boleman et al. (2008) identified growth in leadership, communication, management skills, networking and confidence as part of their study on Life Skill development through 4-H. Further, former Pennsylvania state 4-H council members reported gains in decision-making, communication, and getting along with others as a result of serving as a state 4-H council officer. Members also indicated the value of developing positive long-lasting relationships through their experience and the opportunity it provided for self-growth and self-discovery (Bruce et al., 2004). Each of these studies utilized slightly different methods and looked at different samples. In addition, none of the above studies assessed the methods that were used to achieve the particular outcomes identified. As the body of

research grows, it provides opportunities to create more significant connections and allows greater opportunity for generalization and effective application to enhance PYD work.

### **Program Evaluation Question**

The aim of the design of the State 4-H Council is to provide meaningful and authentic leadership opportunities for its members, recognizing them as leaders today while preparing them to be engaged in their communities in the future as well. Each year in the state of Iowa 40 youth are selected to participate in the State 4-H Council. The selection occurs through both a written and interview selection process with 40 representatives selected from a pool of approximately 60 applicants from across the state annually. Participation on the council is free for those selected to participate for the year with transportation reimbursements and all accommodations and meals provided for the participants. The group of 40 State 4-H Council youth are given real responsibilities, including planning a conference for approximately 850 youth across the state. Their roles range from committee chairs to members, decisions on keynote speakers, design and facilitation of break-out workshop sessions, determination of daily schedules and menus, and creation of dress codes and codes of conduct. These decisions are made in partnership with staff and volunteer adult advisors. Council members also have responsibilities to explain statewide opportunities to their peers and be a voice and representative of the Iowa 4-H program locally across the state. The group meets face-to-face for overnight retreats five times throughout the year for both training and action. In addition, much work must be accomplished between retreats through electronic means of communication.

Being a state 4-H council member is often seen as the pinnacle of a young person's 4-H career (Bruce et al., 2004). Participating in state 4-H council provides youth with opportunities to gain Life Skills in a multitude of ways through their various activities and responsibilities

(Boleman et al., 2008). With that understanding, it is also important to note that each state selects and conducts its state councils differently. Councils vary in size and structure; some states differentiate between officers and members while others do not. In addition, meeting frequency and structure are different, and responsibilities vary from state to state as well. There is therefore a need for additional in-depth evaluation of specific programs in 4-H, including the various state 4-H council groups across the country. While there are some studies on the impact of 4-H (Howard, 2001; Boyd, 1991; Ladwig & Thomas, 1987), there is still a vast shortage of 4-H youth development program evaluation and program impact data, especially in regard to its impact on civic engagement (Boleman et al., 2008; Davis, 2014; Nistler, 2014).

The Iowa State 4-H Council experience offers its members the opportunity to build Life Skills in many meaningful areas to prepare youth to be civically engaged citizens and productive leaders in their communities. It does so through a year-long experience offering such hands-on opportunities as committee leadership, project and program implementation, public speaking engagements, volunteer experiences, and conference coordination. The purpose of this program evaluation is to analyze the outcomes for youth participants on the Iowa State 4-H Council in the areas of citizenship understanding, leadership development, confidence in communication, and the ability to use effective learning skills and strategies. These are identified through responses by the youth on a set of common Life Skill measures, as well as selected open-ended questions.

### **The Current Program Evaluation**

This study focuses on the Life Skill development of youth as a result of their membership on the Iowa State 4-H Council. Life Skills are learned competencies known to assist individuals with leading constructive and rewarding lives. They include decision-making, accepting differences, teamwork, self-responsibility, cooperation, leadership, and

communication, among others (Hendricks, 1998; Maass, Wilken, Jordan, Culen, & Place, 2006; Allen & Lohman, 2016). These skills contribute to the broader PYD goals of equipping youth with knowledge and abilities to make good decisions, take ownership, be an active member of one's community, and positively influence and work with others through leadership roles and responsibilities (Tallman, 2009). The 4-H program has a set of common measures utilized throughout the program to assess the development of these prioritized Life Skills (Le Menestrel, 2014). The Life Skills to be examined in this study are part of a selection of Life Skill Outcomes the Iowa 4-H youth program evaluates throughout the program to measure citizenship, communication, leadership, and learning Life Skills in 4-H (National 4-H Council, 2016). For the context of this study, citizenship is defined as "the opportunity, right, and responsibility to contribute to shaping the world around you and provide service to others" (Allen et al., 2005, p.5). "Communication is the exchange of thoughts, information, or messages between individuals, as well as the sending and receiving of information using speech, writing, and gestures," (Allen et al., 2005, p.7). The leadership outcome is defined as "influencing and supporting others in a positive manner toward a common goal" (Allen et al., 2005, p.3). Finally, learning skills include developing youth's understanding and ability to master new skills and information related to self-selected areas of interest (Allen et al., 2005, p.14).

Previous research has examined the role service learning plays in developing civic engagement in college students. Barnhardt, Sheets, and Pasquesi (2015) found that college students' personal characteristics and beliefs shape their civic views and that the overall college experience contributes to civic knowledge, skills, and commitments while simultaneously serving as a venue for students to practice public problem solving. By providing these opportunities to develop civic engagement at the high school level, youth are even more prepared

and primed for seeking those opportunities and growing into life-long learners and difference-makers in their communities. This study measures youth's recognition of growth in the desired outcome areas. Not only does this study assist in program planning for the future, but it also increases the current body of knowledge regarding the impact of 4-H youth development experiences, and more specifically, statewide youth leadership opportunities. By providing citizenship and leadership opportunities, and training and valuing youth as resources, the 4-H program has the potential to increase external assets such as support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time that are essential to the development of youth into caring, responsible and successful adults (Davis, 2014).

Although Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2016) found there is very little evidence linking specific program features to youth outcomes, there is evidence that participation in youth development programs, such as 4-H, do predict concurrent reports of civic engagement and youth contribution. Because conclusions from one category of activities cannot be assumed to apply to all types of PYD activities, it is critical to continue conducting research and program evaluation to further define what effective PYD programs are and what best practices they include. By assessing the Life Skill outcomes for a cohort of State 4-H Council members over the last three years, this study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the impact of statewide leadership opportunities for 4-H youth on specific, identified Life Skill common measure outcomes and provides insight regarding the youth participants' application of those skills outside of their State 4-H Council experience.

## Methods

### Sample

Electronic surveys were sent to all youth who had served on the Iowa State 4-H Council in any of the last three council years: 2014-2015, 2015-2016, or 2016-2017. This included 103 youth; 57 youth completed the survey, a 55% response rate. Completing the survey were 47 females and 10 males. This gender ratio is reflective of participation on the state 4-H council in any given year. The survey respondents were distributed across ages: 9 seventeen-year-olds, 20 eighteen-year-olds, 13 nineteen-year-olds, 12 twenty-year-olds, and 3 twenty-one-year-olds. Youth can apply and serve on the state 4-H council during their junior and/or senior years in high school as well as be selected to serve as a Collegiate 4-H representative on the council for up to one year. Three participants had been on State 4-H Council for three years, 18 had been on council for two years, while 35 had been on council for one year. Participants had been in 4-H for a range of six years (1 participant) to ten or more years (9 participants) with 2 participants being seven-year members, 16 participants eight-year members, and 29 participants were nine-year members. Finally, participants were categorized by their place of residence including farm (56%), rural non-farm (32%), town (4%), suburb (2%), and city (5%).

Following IRB guidelines and recommendations, the potential survey participants received an e-mail that included a consent form prior to participation in the survey. For youth under 18, their parents received a letter in advance alerting them to the fact that their child would be receiving this request and provided them the opportunity to opt their child out of the invitation to participate. Participants who had not completed the evaluation survey received an auto-generated reminder e-mail every five days for approximately six weeks before the evaluation was closed. The participants did not receive any incentives to complete this program evaluation.

See Appendix C for the participant materials for this survey evaluation including a copy of the questionnaire, consent form, invitation letters, and IRB approval.

## **Procedure**

This study utilized a survey approach with prioritization on quantitative results, adding qualitative results to supplement and enhance data interpretation. Barnhardt et al. (2015) used a similar method, promoting the inclusion of qualitative data and analyses to amplify the interpretations derived from the quantitative findings. A retrospective pretest-posttest of participants was conducted via electronic Qualtrics survey sent to youth who had completed their State 4-H Council experience in any of the last three years. Nielsen (2011) explains that “post-then-pre” or retrospective pretest-posttest evaluations have been useful for documenting self-assessed changes that occur as a result of the particular intervention being assessed; in many settings this method has provided a more accurate assessment of program outcomes relative to the traditional pre-posttest format because the pre-test questions are answered with the same frame of reference as the posttest. In addition, open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey to provide opportunities for participants to further explain ideas and concepts referenced in the survey questions and to assess both what experiences impacted the participants’ acquisition of the skills measured and how they plan to utilize them in the future.

## **Measures**

**Life Skills Outcomes.** In an effort to improve consistency in program evaluation and reporting and to provide a more comprehensive evaluation plan in our state, Iowa 4-H has identified a set of common measures to assess Life Skill outcomes. Common measures create a standardization of assessment instruments and/or questions used across various programs to evaluate the overall impact and effectiveness of programs with similar topics or objectives

(Payne & McDonald, 2012; Allen & Lohman, 2016). Allen and Lohman (2016) conducted a similar study to assess the Life Skill outcomes of those participating in the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference in 2014. That study found significant positive changes for each of the Life Skills assessed and the overall constructs of citizenship, communication, leadership and learning (Allen & Lohman, 2016).

Participants were asked to consider both “*Now* and *Before*, participating in this 4-H program (Iowa State 4-H Council) how do your actions show you can...” Each Life Skill measure was evaluated on a five-point Likert-type scale: 1-Not at all; 2-Very little; 3-Some; 4-Quite a bit; or 5-A great deal (Jones, 2009). The same options were used for both the *Now* and *Before* components of the pretest-posttest.

First, the 16 items (see Table 1) were assessed independently and then as compiled composites in the areas of citizenship, leadership, communication, and learning. Items were grouped based on the outcome they address. For example, Items 1-5 from Table 1 were summed together to create a ***citizenship*** composite ( $\alpha = .76$ ). The same was done to address the ***leadership*** composite using items 6-8 ( $\alpha = .80$ ). A ***communication*** composite was created using items 9–11 ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Finally, items 12-16 were summed to address ***learning skills*** ( $\alpha = .75$ ). A pre- and post-composite was created for each of the four aforementioned Life Skill constructs. Reliabilities were also tested for each Life Skill subscale. Analysis found that the reliability for the 16 “Pre-Test” measures was at .88 and the “Post-Test” reliability was .91.

**Demographics.** In addition to the common measures listed above, demographic information served as covariates in this study; these included gender (Male=1, Female=0), grade in school, residence, years in 4-H, race/ethnicity, current age, and years of state 4-H council membership. These were selected as covariates to provide consistency in measurement across the

Iowa 4-H program evaluation system. Council Years refers to the number of years each participant served on state 4-H council (1-3 years). Years 4-H was a continuous variable indicating the number of years the individual was in 4-H. This ranged from six to ten years. Current age was the age of the participant at the time of survey completion. This variable was found to have collinearity with years in 4-H ( $r = .40$ ) and so was not utilized in the regression analysis. In addition, while both residence and race/ethnicity were surveyed, neither had enough variability in their responses to serve as meaningful covariates with the small sample size and thus were not utilized in further analysis.

**Youth Reflections.** Five open-ended questions were also included on the assessment to further explain youths' experience on the Iowa State 4-H Council, including: (1) What was the most important skill or knowledge you gained from participating on the State 4-H Council?; (2) What does leadership mean to you after participating on the State 4-H Council?; (3) What does being a responsible citizen or civic engagement mean to you after participating on the State 4-H Council?; (4) What specific experiences on the State 4-H Council would you identify as being the most influential in developing your leadership or citizenship skills and why?; and (5) How will you use the skills or knowledge you gained from your State 4-H Council experience in other parts of your life? These questions provided participants the opportunity to share impacts or outcomes that may not be addressed in the pretest-posttest evaluation. They help the researcher to better understand the participants' perceptions of the previously measured Life Skill outcomes, and they also enhance the assessment by providing further explanation regarding responses to the common items above. Finally, addressing the gaps in previous literature, the open-ended questions provide further understanding of the experiences on State 4-H Council that were most meaningful. Examining previous studies that focused on the state 4-H leadership

experiences across the country (Boleman et al., 2008; Bruce et al., 2004; Astroth, 1996; Maass et al., 2006; Garst et al., 2006; Kleon & Rinehart, 1998; Seevers & Dormody, 1995), none included a youth definition or explanation of either their interpretation of the outcomes' meanings or the specific experiences that led to those desired outcomes.

## **Analysis**

Using SPSS 24.0, descriptive analyses were conducted on the study variables. First, comparative analysis was done regarding the differences between the pre-test and post-test responses to identify growth. As suggested by Payne and McDonald (2012), responses to each question were examined individually using paired t-tests to analyze perceived changes in participants' knowledge or competence level. Second, to assess whether any of the four Life Skill composites varied based on the demographic data collected, a series of multilinear regressions were conducted with demographic data included as covariates, similar to those which were conducted for the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference program evaluation (Allen & Lohman, 2016). Finally, open-ended question responses were compiled and analyzed for themes and trends. To increase trustworthiness, a systematic approach to data analysis was followed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Responses were first coded based on key words and then grouped into categories as themes were identified (Saldana, 2013). Once categories and themes were identified, the responses were then tallied to determine a count of responses for each theme. These responses and themes were then cross-analyzed with the 16 common measure items to look for agreement or further expansion and explanation of any themes identified from the quantitative survey items. The open-ended questions were also studied for new themes that should be addressed further or explored in later evaluations.

## Results

### Descriptive and Bivariate Statistics

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and results of the paired t-tests for the 16 items and four Life Skill constructs. Growth in Life Skills occurred for youth in all 16 Life Skills and all four constructs—citizenship, leadership, communication and learning—when Pre-Test and Post-Test scores were compared. Mean Pre-Test scores ranged from 3.33 (out of 5) for “creating learning goals” to 4.05 for “working together in a team.” Post-Test scores ranged from 4.30 for “asking questions” to 4.74 as the highest Post-Test score for “feel confident when speaking in front of others.” The greatest growth was seen in the measure “listen to everyone’s views whether I agree or not” with a 1.00 change in score from Pre-Test to Post-Test. The least change in score was .58 for “work on service projects to meet a need in my community” with a Pre-Test mean rating of 3.82 and Post-Test mean of 4.47.

Table 2 shows the correlations for each of the Life Skills and covariates. Each of the four Post-Test constructs (citizenship, leadership, communication, and learning) and the mean total were correlated with the Pre-Test mean scores for those same constructs, as well as the covariates of Council Years, Years in 4-H, and Gender. In this correlation assessment, there was a statistically significant association between Pre-Test and Post-Test scores for citizenship ( $r=.30, p< .05$ ) and for communication ( $r=.33, p< .01$ ), but not for leadership ( $r=.11, p>.05$ ) or learning ( $r=.07, p>.05$ ) when looking at the Pre-Test and Post-Test scores for each of those respective constructs. There was also a negative correlation for gender and Post-Test communication ( $r= -.49, p<.001$ ), learning ( $r= -.32, p<.02$ ), and the total composite ( $r= -.34, p<.01$ ). Results did not demonstrate a significant correlation between the number of years on council or years in 4-H with any of the Post-Test scores.

## Multivariate Tests

To test if the mean differences were due to any selection effects or demographic characteristics of the youth, a series of multilinear regressions were conducted with demographic data included as covariates. Specifically, the Pre-Test score was regressed on the Post-Test score while controlling for a host of covariates. Tables 3 and 4 show the regression coefficients for the four Life Skills; Table 3 looks at the regressions with the entire sample while table 4 separates results by gender. When analyzing the regression results to look at the data further, it was found that only change in citizenship (e.g., Pre-test regressed on Post-test) was statistically significant ( $\beta=.29, p<.05$ ). In addition, when regressed, dosage or Years on Council was positively related to greater change in citizenship ( $\beta=.28, p<.05$ ). When running the models separately for males and females (Table 4) it appears that the change in citizenship was driven by females ( $\beta=.31, p<.05$ ), while the change in communication was driven by males ( $\beta=.80, p<.05$ ). However, only 10 males participated in the study and these results should be interpreted with caution.

The regression analysis found the changes in communication ( $\beta=.18, p=.14$ ), leadership ( $\beta=.08, p=.55$ ), and learning ( $\beta=.02, p=.86$ ) to no longer be statistically significant. This was likely due to the addition of the covariates in the models. Specifically, gender was positively related to greater change in communication ( $\beta=-.44, p<.01$ ) and learning ( $\beta=-.31, p<.05$ ) with male youth driving the change scores in communication and learning. Significant covariates were not found for leadership.

## Reflections

In addition to the growth measured through quantitative items, participants' responses to five open-ended questions further explain the impact of membership on the Iowa State 4-H Council regarding growth in the Life Skill outcomes measured. Table 5 shares a summary of

those findings. In the open-ended section of the survey, youth shared a variety of the skills they obtained related to communication, leadership and citizenship.

Gains in communication skills, whether they were categorized as public speaking skills, listening and learning from others, or being able to speak up, share ideas, or ask questions in a group were some of the most profound skills noted in this area. Comparing the open-ended responses, one can see consistencies between the most listed skills and those that received high Post-Test scores, such as “feel confident when speaking in front of others” (4.74), “work together in a team” (4.70), and “listen to everyone’s views whether I agree or not” (4.67). Likewise, through the open-ended questions, 23 youth identified “working together as a team” as the most important skill they gained, while 15 identified “respecting one another’s differences,” 14 said “listening and learning from others,” 11 identified “communication skills,” and 7 said “public speaking” was their most important skill gained from the State 4-H Council experience. To illustrate this more completely, one youth stated, “I realized while being on State 4-H Council that others have different opinions based on their past experiences. I need to listen and ask questions because I am not the most knowledgeable one in the discussion many times.” Another shared,

The most important skill I learned from being on the State 4-H Council was to speak in a variety of different group sizes and settings. I learned to speak in front of approximately 900 people at the conference banquet and communicate in small group settings at our meeting retreats.

In addition, leadership skills were more clearly defined through the comments shared by youth. There was a common theme regarding leadership understanding, which included empowering others and being able to organize a group toward a common goal. Youth also

acknowledged the importance of self-awareness as an integral part of being a good leader. One youth reflected,

Although I may be younger than some of the people I am leading, it is still leading...I learned there are many different types of leaders. Not everyone has to be the leader that leads the whole group, you can lead in a small group discussion or just with another peer. Another shared, "Leadership is the ability to effectively manage and work with other people. It involves a willingness to listen and compromise. Another big part of leadership is improving both yourself and others for the betterment of the entire group."

Gained civic engagement or citizenship understanding was also articulated by the participants through open-ended question responses. Youth identified meaningful civic engagement primarily as community involvement and being engaged in something larger than oneself with 33 youth sharing in open-ended responses that they interpreted civic engagement as some form of "community involvement" and 17 articulating the importance of "investing in something bigger than oneself." One youth shared, "Being a good citizen is supporting your community whether it is through volunteering, talking to my local representative on an issue or voting. 4-H has taught me that my voice can make a difference in legislation and that I can help others in my area through a gift of time or talents." Another explained,

I feel like after state council, the way I defined community changed a little bit to broaden up the people I could reach and help and the things I could be a part of. Not only is your community your town, but it's the people you interact with, it's the groups you're a part of, and it's even the country you live in...I know that I can make a difference by being engaged in what goes on, helping out, and connecting with others with things I do in my daily life.

This correlates with the high Post-Test score for “gain skills through serving my community that will help me in the future” (4.61).

Additionally, in order to better understand how skills were gained on the State 4-H Council, youth were asked to share what experiences were most meaningful in their skill development. While youth found a variety of experiences meaningful, planning and implementing the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference topped the list with 22 participants identifying “conference implementation,” 17 saying “conference planning” was their most meaningful experience, and 16 identifying “leadership of peers” as the most significant. These experiences provide council members an opportunity to learn through action, leadership, and self-responsibility. One youth commented,

Working with various committees to plan the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference (was most influential). We had to make important decisions in small time frames and then find ways to act out those decisions in the best way possible and most efficient way.

Another youth reflected,

Over the course of the year, sometimes I didn’t notice my own growth. The moment I realized I’d grown as a leader and as a communicator was when I had the confidence to stand on stage and speak in front of hundreds of people—something I’d never imagined I would do or be comfortable doing.

Finally, youth were also asked how they would apply their new knowledge and skills beyond the council experiences. Participants connected their experiences on State 4-H Council to future careers (24), current school experiences and student groups (23), and leadership roles (17), to name a few. What was most profound may have been their ability to make the connection of how they are already using the gained skills today. “I use these skills every day to communicate

with my peers and professors/supervisors,” shared one youth respondent. Another participant explained, “I have already used many skills like listening and participating in committee discussions when working on county council or school clubs.”

### **Discussion**

The initial results of this assessment paint a positive picture for the impact of participation on the Iowa State 4-H Council toward the desired outcomes of citizenship, communication, leadership, and learning growth. Through their open-ended responses, youth participants supported previous studies’ assertions that participating in experiences with real and meaningful responsibilities are necessary for true leadership development (MacNeil, 2006). “Leadership especially (was gained) because of the large responsibility we were trusted with as a council. It definitely taught me about working with large groups of people,” shared one youth. Meaningful experiences identified by the council members as contributing to their leadership or citizenship development included such authentic and meaningful roles as planning and implementing the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference, serving as an ambassador to other counties, working with different people and groups in committees and in large group discussions and decision-making. The youth were able to identify and articulate the meaningful roles and responsibilities they experienced as a part of the State 4-H Council.

In addition, when considering the role of the State 4-H Council experience in regard to preparation for future civic engagement or citizenship, Pre-Test and Post-Test scores demonstrate growth in citizenship related to their council experience. Recognizing this growth was driven by the female participants, this could be explained by research that has found women to have higher values than men in affiliation motivation and sociability (Lehman et al., 2013; Czeschlik & Nurk, 1995; Mazur, 1989; and Wong & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). This leads to an

opportunity for future study regarding males' and females' different perceptions of civic engagement and their confidence in the citizenship realm.

As PYD practitioners consider the responsibility to prepare youth for engagement in the larger community as responsible citizens, areas of acknowledged growth through the State 4-H Council experience provide key insight on the value of some scaffolded experiences that were unique to this statewide leadership opportunity. Highlighted areas of growth were the ability to “respect differences” as mentioned in the open-ended question responses or similarly addressed in the evaluation survey portion as the ability to “learn about people who are different from me,” which showed .74 growth between Pre-Test (3.70) and Post-Test (4.44) scores, and “listen to everyone’s views whether I agree or not,” which showed a 1.00 growth between Pre-Test (3.67) and Post-Test (4.67). Further explained by the youth, one shared, “Group discussions were the most important (learning experience) to me because they helped me realize the importance of other people’s opinions and how they can help create a better solution.” Another reflected, “Retreats where we would work with and meet kids that were different than me were influential in developing my leadership and citizenship skills.” Another said it this way,

I think throwing together a group of kids that have never met is huge in developing these (citizenship and leadership) skills. I learned a lot about how to read others, work with others, and come together for a common goal.

This is one of the unique opportunities that is provided at a regional or state level that may not be able to occur within a local group. These scaffolded experiences provide youth opportunities to engage with a broader diversity of youth, including individuals with different experiences, perspectives, and leadership styles in a safe environment to gain confidence in communicating and working with others. State level experiences like planning the state 4-H

conference or being responsible to speak at county events as a 4-H ambassador also provide greater depth and breadth of responsibility, reaching the levels of “leadership development” and “youth civic action” on The Youth Engagement Continuum (Pittman, Martin & Williams, 2007; LISTEN, Inc., 2003).

Communication similarly showed significant growth, but this time the males influenced this demonstration of growth. The average Pre-Test communication score for females was 3.89 as compared to a 3.37 for males. The female participants in the study came into the experience with greater confidence in their communication skills with less room for growth. When looking at the open-ended question results, communication topics that youth said they experienced growth in as a result of their council experience included general communication (11), public speaking (7), and listening and learning from others (14). In addition, when asked how they would use the skills they gained, high on the list was communicating with others (21). This supports the findings of Boleman et al. (2008) who identified both informal communication and public speaking as skills gained from the state council experience in Texas. Looking more deeply at communication when thinking about future program planning, participants explained that it was important to “find my own voice to speak up” in a large group or when making decisions within a committee. Others recognized the importance of learning to manage conflict with others and understand their point of view.

As we think of putting PYD principles into practice based on the insights of the youth in this sample, it is important to allow youth to struggle with one another as they work through group decision-making processes so they learn how to share their opinions and manage conflict respectfully in a safe environment. As one council member explained,

One of the most influential experiences was coming up with a theme for conference because I learned how to lead in conversation, but also listen to others. This is very important because in the future I need to know how to listen as well as lead.

As adults, instead of leading or facilitating, the more we can provide opportunities for youth to take direct leadership and instead be a guide on the side, we provide those authentic, meaningful opportunities that are needed for youth to grow while also being present to serve as a support through the process.

When examining the Life Skill of learning, it was identified that there was a stronger relationship between Pre-Test and Post-Test scores for males than for females. This coincides with recent research; in their examination of a campus-based 4-H summer conference program, Arnold, Davis, and Lundeberg (2017) found males to be more open to challenge and discovery. Additional research has also shown that boys may be more open to experience (Lehman, Denissen, Allemand, & Penke, 2013). Expanding on the quantitative results, through their open-ended responses, youth indicated their plans to apply their learning in future professional and school positions, leadership roles, communicating with others, and giving back to their communities and the 4-H program. One council member shared,

State council has made it significantly easier for me to make new friends in college, to facilitate workshops and other youth development activities. It's improved my confidence and helped me to become a leader. I wouldn't have been able to be working in higher level positions right out of high school if it hadn't been for the knowledge that 4-H and state council has given me.

It was a really good experience to lead youth my own age. Usually, when I was in a leadership role, I was helping younger 4-H members but as a State 4-H Council member at state 4-H conference I was leading my peers, said another council member.

Helping youth learn how to lead means empowering them to lead their peers. This requires trust by adult facilitators, but also plays great dividends.

For the State 4-H Council participants, these direct learning experiences started at the State 4-H Council retreats as council members facilitated discussions among their peers with advisors present to assist. They practiced break-out sessions and sought feedback from their peers before going out to lead at the Conference, fully responsible for groups of 15-20 high school participants without direct adult supervision or support. At the conference, time was set aside each night for the council members to discuss and evaluate their efforts and make adjustments to plans for the following day as needed. These findings support the suppositions by Seevers and Dormody (1995) who also identified a relationship between Life Skill development and youth's involvement in planning, implementing and evaluating activities. The current findings help to more concretely explain the pieces of that process that were important to the youth in this study; these included independent committee and group decision-making that led to plans for the conference as well as taking responsibility and leadership in facilitation of activities and discussions with groups of their peers.

### **Limitations and Future Recommendations**

There were many insights from this study that build on previous literature, especially when looking at the combination of quantitative results and open-ended responses that further explain the ideas. However, there are also limitations to the study and opportunities for further examination in future research. While the positive change from Pre-Test to Post-Test scores was

statistically significant for all of the Life Skills, further multi-variate analysis revealed that the relationship is potentially more complicated and also could be indicative of limitations within the study. First, the sample size was small with only 57 completed surveys. Second, the variance within the covariate groups of gender, years in 4-H, and years on State 4-H Council made even smaller samples to run comparative analyses across these demographic groups. This is particularly evident when assessing the possible effects of gender. While reflective of the current participation on the State 4-H Council, the small number of males within the study may have impacted the results and overall understanding of relationships regarding the additional covariates. Based on the current results, it appears males may have more opportunity for growth in the areas of communication and learning through the council experience. This leads to a larger question of the recruitment and application processes for the experience and whether those lower communication skills prior to council also impact selection for the council. An important future study should examine not only participation and selection for State 4-H Council by gender, but also an examination of reasons for a lack of participation with respect to racial and ethnic diversity or diversity of residence type.

In addition to the sample size, there are other acknowledged limitations to this study. The number of items for each Life Skill construct ranged from three items each for leadership and communication to five each for citizenship and learning. This limited number, while keeping the survey brief for participants to complete, could be expanded. The range of time from conclusion of one's experience on the State 4-H Council in relation to completing the evaluation ranged from those who concluded their term within the month of receiving the survey to those who had been away from the experience for up to three years. This could have impacted perception and

context for participants. Additionally, while many in Extension find benefits to a retrospective pre- and posttest, we know that some researchers also see this as a potential limitation.

Finally, when examining the mean Pre-Test scores, the 16 items ranged from 3.34 to 4.05. On a five-point scale, there was little room for growth. For each of the measures assessed to see statistically significant growth indicates change occurred. But, when analyzing the correlation and regression results, it is less conclusive what role the State 4-H Council experience played in that growth compared to time, gender, or overall years in 4-H. The open-ended responses help to fill in some of those gaps to explain where and how significant growth occurred.

## **Summary**

Looking at the messages the youth participants shared in their open-ended reflections, one can gain greater connection and understanding of the impact of the State 4-H Council experience for the youth respondents. “Over the course of the year, sometimes I didn’t notice my own growth,” shared one council member,

The moment I realized I’d grown as a leader and as a communicator was when I had the confidence to stand on stage and speak in front of hundreds of people—something I’d never imagined I would do or be comfortable doing.

Youth participant responses in this study suggest that to most effectively support the leadership development and civic engagement of youth, youth need authentic opportunities to practice leadership and citizenship. This includes providing legitimate opportunities for decision-making, creation of real life programs and learning experiences for peers or others, opportunities to carry-out programs and lead others in learning, and growth opportunities with support from adult partners. Adults must let go of the reins and show youth they are trusted in these

meaningful roles by allowing them to take leadership and responsibility, while partnering and supporting them through that process.

This also means addressing barriers that prevent youth from having authentic and meaningful roles in our programs, organizations, and communities (MacNeil & McClean, 2006). In this case, that may include examining selection practices to ensure opportunities are equitably available for all youth, particularly in relation to gender differences, an opportunity for future study, but also geographical and racial or ethnic representation. It also includes continuing efforts to define the best practices that are achieving desired results and meeting the needs of youth, particularly through engaging youth in that process.

Certainly, the potential benefits are great: for the youth, for the adults who work with them, and for the organizations and communities that benefit from the emerging leadership of young people (MacNeil & McClean, 2006). One youth reflected,

I will use these lessons and experiences the rest of my life and I have applied what I have learned in school, my hobbies, and my 4-H club. I will continue to use the leadership skills I further developed on state council for the remainder of high school, college, and in my career.

As PYD professionals and volunteers work to grow young adults' commitment and aptitude for civic engagement, the insights provided by the youth in this study support much of the literature that is available on civic engagement development (Zaff et al., 2010; Wagner & Mathison, 2015; Youniss et al., 1997). These are insights and lessons to consider when developing future PYD programs. "I didn't know what 'civic engagement' really meant until my time on the State 4-H Council," said one youth. Another shared, "I think that not just from State 4-H Council, but from 4-H I was able to become engaged in my community and aware of things

I could do to be a better citizen and community member.” As youth grow and gain skill, adult partners must also continue to challenge them through opportunities that increase in depth and scope and provide new levels of responsibility and leadership in order to create lifelong practice.

This PYD effort is possible with more information through intentional evaluation and purposeful research on what is working and why it is effective. Learning more about how programs in different states are structured and providing a greater body of evaluation evidence regarding the effectiveness of those programs assists future programmers to create more meaningful and purposeful experiences for youth. Sometimes growth is hard to quantify, but one former State 4-H Council member illustrates the impact of the program,

I learned a substantial amount about youth development and the HUGE role that 4-H plays within teamwork and collaboration through State 4-H Council. I have found myself constantly reflecting on the activities that I do with others because of the skills that 4-H and state council have instilled in me, and I have found that I am often using the activities and tools that I was given on state council within my other leadership roles, such as leading day camps and making class plans for a course I am teaching next semester.

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## Supplemental Tables

Table 1: Outcome Results for Pre-Test and Post-Test of Youths' Experience on State 4-H Council

<b>Common Measure: “How much do your actions show you”:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean “Pre-Test”</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean “Post-Test”</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Change Score</b>	<b>Significance</b>
1. Apply knowledge in ways that solve “real life” problems through service projects	57	3.55	.68	4.43	.60	.88	.000
2. Work on service projects to meet a need in my community	57	3.89	.80	4.47	.68	.58	.000
3. Gain skills through serving my community that will help me in the future	57	3.82	.78	4.61	.59	.79	.000
4. Listen to everyone’s views whether I agree or not	57	3.67	.83	4.67	.58	1.00	.000
5. Enjoy learning about people who are different from me	57	3.70	.87	4.44	.73	.74	.000
6. Work together in a team	57	4.05	.61	4.70	.53	.65	.000
7. Listen and talk to others before making decisions	57	3.88	.66	4.65	.64	.77	.000
8. Handle conflict respectfully	57	3.84	.75	4.63	.59	.79	.000
9. Feel confident when speaking in front of others	57	3.86	.95	4.74	.55	.88	.000
10. Use good listening skills when others are talking	57	3.88	.87	4.58	.65	.70	.000
11. Ask questions	57	3.65	.95	4.30	.80	.65	.000
12. Create learning goals	57	3.33	.99	4.28	.75	.95	.000
13. Review a variety of resources related to a topic	57	3.39	.92	4.11	.86	.72	.000
14. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of different ideas, solutions, or approaches	57	3.65	.77	4.52	.68	.87	.000
15. Identify what is going well and what needs to change to achieve goals	57	3.73	.75	4.59	.65	.86	.000
16. Apply what was learned to new or different experiences	57	3.74	.77	4.61	.59	.88	.000
Citizenship Composite (Items 1 – 5)	57	3.73	.53	4.53	.46	.80	.000
Leadership Composite (Items 6 – 8)	57	3.92	.48	4.66	.50	.74	.000
Communication Composite (Items 9 – 11)	57	3.80	.71	4.54	.57	.74	.000
Learning Composite (Items 12 – 16)	57	3.57	.57	4.42	.50	.86	.000
<b>Total Composite (Items 1 – 16)</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>3.73</b>	<b>.48</b>	<b>4.52</b>	<b>.44</b>	<b>.79</b>	<b>.000</b>

Table 2: Correlation Table for State 4-H Council Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Composite Scores and Covariates

	Citizen Post- Test	Citizen Pre- Test	Leader Post- Test	Leader Pre- Test	Communi cate Post- Test	Communi cate Pre-Test	Learn Post- Test	Learn Pre- Test	Total Post- Test	Total Pre- Test	Council Years	Years 4-H	Gender
Citizen Post-Test	1.00												
Citizen Pre-Test	.30*	1.00											
Leader Post-Test	.70**	-.07	1.00										
Leader Pre-Test	.07	.55**	.11	1.00									
Communicate Post-Test	.62**	.01	.63**	.12	1.00								
Communicate Pre-Test	.20	.70**	.02	.62**	.33*	1.00							
Learn Post-Test	.72**	-.06	.64**	-.05	.65**	-.01	1.00						
Learn Pre-Test	.07	.59**	-.12	.62**	.09	.66**	.07	1.00					
Total Post-Test	.89**	.07	.83**	.06	.82**	.15	.90**	.04	1.00				
Total Pre-Test	.20	.85**	-.04	.77**	.15	.88**	-.01	.87**	.09	1.00			
Council Years	.24	-.06	.26	.08	.17	.12	.07	-.09	.20	-.00	1.00		
Years 4-H	.08	.00	.07	.21	.16	.12	.03	.04	.09	.09	.35**	1.00	
Gender	-.23	-.15	-.15	-.22	-.49**	-.28*	-.32*	-.22	-.34**	-.25	.06	-.03	1.00

**Notes:** The sample (N) was 57 for each of the outcome constructs measured. (1) The correlation for each measure is listed. (2) \*\* indicates  $p < .001$ . \* indicates  $p < .05$

Table 3: Regression Coefficients for Mean Citizenship, Leadership, Communication, and Learning Composites

	<b>Post-Test Citizenship</b>	<b>Post-Test Leadership</b>	<b>Post-Test Communication</b>	<b>Post-Test Learning</b>
<b>Pre-Test:</b>				
Citizenship	.29* (.11)			
Leadership		.08 (.15)		
Communication			.18 (.10)	
Learning				.02 (.12)
<b>Covariates:</b>				
Years in 4-H	-.01 (.07)	-.04 (.09)	.08 (.09)	.00 (.09)
Years on Council	.28* (.10)	.27 (.12)	.15 (.12)	.09 (.12)
Gender	-.20 (.15)	-.14 (.17)	-.44** (.18)	-.31* (.18)
R <sup>2</sup>	.20	.10	.32	.11
F	3.27*	1.42	5.90*	1.50

**Notes:** (1) The scores above show the standardized coefficients for each composite when analyzed in a multilinear regression. Parentheses indicate the standard error of the coefficient. (2) \*\*p < .001. \*p < .05.

Table 4: Regression coefficients for Life Skills Composites, Compared by Gender

	Post-Test Citizenship Female	Post-Test Citizenship Male		Post-Test Leadership Female	Post-Test Leadership Male		Post-Test Communication Female	Post-Test Communication Male		Post-Test Learning Female	Post-Test Learning Male
<b>Pre-Test:</b>											
Citizenship	.31* (.12)	.35 (.33)									
Leadership				.08 (.16)	.13 (.44)						
Communication							-.02 (.09)	.80* (.29)			
Learning										.04 (.12)	.08 (.51)
<b>Covariates:</b>											
Years in 4-H	.06 (.08)	-.47 (.18)		-.01 (.10)	-.26 (.26)		.18 (.07)	-.44 (.34)		.06 (.09)	-.27 (.41)
Years on Council	.24 (.12)	.35 (.23)		.29 (.14)	.30 (.27)		.18 (.11)	.43 (.37)		.09 (.12)	.17 (.44)
R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.32		.09	.07		.09	.60		.02	.05
F	2.76*	.93		1.43	.16		1.30	2.87		.24	.10

**Notes:** (1) The scores above show the standardized coefficients for each composite mean when analyzed in a multilinear regression. Parentheses indicate the standard error of the coefficient. (2) \*\*p < .001. \*p < .05.

Table 5: Summarized Responses to Open-ended Questions for State 4-H Council Participants

<b>Skills/Knowledge Gained on Council</b>	<b>Citizenship Understanding</b>	<b>Leadership Understanding</b>	<b>Meaningful Council Experiences</b>	<b>Application of Skills/Knowledge</b>
Work with others: 23	Community involvement: 33	Take initiative or positive risk: 20	Conference implementation: 22	My profession or career: 24
Respect Differences: 15	Invest in something bigger than self: 17	Organize efforts toward common goal: 16	Conference planning: 17	School experiences and student groups: 23
Listen to & Learn from others: 14	Do what is right: 13	Empower others: 15	Leading peers: 16	Communicate with others: 21
Communication: 11	Help others: 12	Know when to lead or follow: 12	Working with different people & groups: 12	Work better with others: 20
Leadership: 10	Awareness of issues: 9	Listen to & work with others: 11	Group discussions & decisions: 9	Leadership roles: 17
Share ideas & ask questions: 8	Share your voice or vote: 6	Make a positive difference: 11	Committee work: 8	Give back to 4-H: 7
Plan events: 7	Respect others: 5	Set example: 8	Ambassador roles: 6	Interview skills: 5
Public Speaking: 7	Be role model: 4	Be active participant: 8	Teambuilding & teamwork: 6	Public speaking: 4
Building relationships: 4	Be a leader: 4	Taking responsibility: 7	Working with other goal-oriented people: 4	Involvement in the community: 4
4-H Youth Program Awareness: 4	Listen to & work with others: 4	Communicating effectively: 4	State Fair responsibilities: 2	
Personal growth and self-awareness: 4	Improve 4-H: 3	It's more than a position: 4	Educational workshops: 2	
Goal setting: 3		Teaching others: 4	Orientation: 2	

**Notes:** The sample (N) included 57 participants. The number after each response indicates the number of separate participants who identified the item as an outcome or impact from their experience. These categories were created and tallied by the evaluator through a qualitative coding process to identify themes.

### CHAPTER 3. THE ROLE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS PLAY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING

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#### **Abstract**

The development of civic engagement understanding and practice happens at various stages of one's life, but is often the focus of Positive Youth Development organizations and efforts. When young people are actively engaged in improving the well-being of their communities and country, their own development is enhanced, improving their family, community and society (Zaff et al., 2010; Lerner, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001; Bobek et al., 2009; Sherrod, 2007). This study examines the impact of Positive Youth Development experiences on the development of civic engagement through a series of fourteen interviews of young adults. This was a retrospective or reflective examination, interviewing young adults (25-35 years old) who were involved in PYD programming, specifically 4-H, among other youth activities, during adolescence. This allowed the young adults the opportunity to consider the impact of their PYD experiences on their current understanding and practice of civic engagement. All fourteen young adults are civically engaged today in efforts ranging from serving as a non-profit organization board president to creating a young mother's support group. Results concluded that for these participants, the practice of community involvement began early through direct experiences doing service in their 4-H programs, being empowered to make decisions in their clubs and communities, and learning from the examples and support given by their volunteer leaders, parents, and other caring adults.

## **Introduction**

A sense of belonging is one of the most basic needs for any young person, for any person, to thrive (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Brockern, 2002). Civic engagement, or being involved in one's community, both contributes to a sense of belonging and serves as outward evidence that one feels that he or she belongs. Civic engagement includes being a personally responsible citizen, a participatory citizen, and a justice-oriented citizen (Thomson et al., 2011). An active and engaged citizen, as defined by Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, and Lerner (2010), is someone who has a sense of civic duty, feeling of social connection to their community, confidence in their abilities to effect change, and who engages in civic behaviors. "Civic engagement is a critically important topic in that a democracy requires engaged citizens in order to survive," (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009, p. 372). Camino (2000) explains that a community with actively engaged and involved members creates civic stability, social justice, strong advocacy, and consensus.

The development of civic engagement understanding and values happens at various stages of one's life, but is often the focus of Positive Youth Development (PYD) organizations and efforts. Understanding youth civic engagement has never been more important; civic participation continues to be lowest among adolescents and young adults with only 41% of eligible young adults (ages 18-25 years) voting in the 2012 presidential election (CIRCLE, 2013; White & Mistry, 2016). Moreover, less than 30% of adolescents and adults currently volunteer in their communities (Kirby, Kawashima-Ginsberg, & Godsay, 2011; White & Mistry, 2016) and yet there are a myriad of social issues facing the United States today, including poverty and inequality. In their study in 2002, Kirlin and Kirlin found that increased civic engagement strengthened democracy and contributed to the development of public judgment. In addition, if youth are able to participate in civic and public affairs as participants, not solely beneficiaries,

they tend to experience optimal development (Camino, 2000). Finally, employers these days are looking for bright, able individuals who are passionate about what they do, can work in a team, can find creative solutions to problems and treat others with respect (Gagen, 2015; Brennan, 2007). These are life skills which can be gained through community engagement experiences.

Civic engagement of youth is important and supporting youth in that participation is key to a culture's success (Brandt & Klein, 2016; Bennet, 2000; Putnam, 1995). Thus, understanding and enhancing youth engagement in our society is a critical facet in programs and policies aimed at maintaining and enhancing democracy (Zaff et al., 2010; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009). Further, civic engagement is a core outcome of current theories of PYD (Zaff et al., 2010). Since the early 1990s, the field of PYD has encouraged the understanding and perception of young people as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be fixed (Dymnicki et al., 2016; Lerner, 2005; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). PYD approaches focus on and encourage the unique talents, strengths, resources, and future potential of young people, including the contributions youth can make to their local communities and the broader society (Dymnicki et al., 2016; Durlak et al., 2007; Lerner et al., 2012).

Studies thus far that explore the civic education and promotion of civic engagement in youth include examination of service learning (Kirlin, 2002; Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003; Yates & Youniss, 1998), 4-H and other PYD organizations' Life Skill outcomes and program evaluations (Nistler, 2014; Davis, 2014; Boleman, Merten, & Hall, 2008; Bruce, Boyd, & Dooley, 2004; Flynn, Frick, & Steele, 2010; Radhakrishna & Doamekpor, 2009), K-12 and post-secondary educational opportunities and emphases (Barnhardt, Sheets, & Pasquesi, 2015; Gagen, 2015; Youniss, 2011), community youth development and community engagement (Camino, 2000; Brennan, Barnett, & Baugh, 2007), parent influence and other socialization factors (White

& Mistry, 2016; Youniss, McLellan, & Mazer, 2001) and civic engagement or citizenship education for youth (Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the analysis of long-term effects of such efforts regarding service learning or civic education during adolescence that lead to sustained civic engagement into adulthood. This study explores the influence PYD programming has had on the development of the participants' civic engagement practices and understanding. It was conducted as a phenomenological study that utilized interviews of young adults who participated in the PYD program of 4-H as youth and who are now living and working in communities across the country.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Three overarching theoretical frameworks guide this effort; PYD, ecological systems, and experiential learning theories. Taken together, these corresponding frameworks inform the approach used to investigate the development of civic engagement.

Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, and Lerner (2005) define PYD as “a strength-based conception of adolescence,” (p.5). The Federal Government Interagency Working Group for Youth Programs explains PYD as

an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their families, peer groups, schools, organizations, and communities in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances youth's strengths and assets; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths. (Dymnicki et al., 2016, p. 8)

The PYD perspective has been integrated into contemporary developmental systems theories which seek to combine multiple levels of an organization, promote development through mutually beneficial individual-context relations and emphasize the potential for systemic change within these relationships (Brandt & Klein, 2016; Lerner et al., 2015; Lerner et al., 2002).

Lerner (2005) emphasizes the significance of community-based programs for the PYD process. When such programs focus on developmental systems ideas that stress the strengths of youth, positive development may be substantiated through the promotion of the five C's of PYD, which include caring, confidence, competence, character, and connection (Phelps et al., 2009). PYD researchers have then suggested that, when the five C's are present in a young person, there emerges a sixth C, contribution (Lerner, 2004; Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013). That is, a young person enacts behaviors indicative of the Five C's by contributing positively to self, family, community, and, ultimately, society (Lerner et al., 2005; Davis, 2014; Lerner & Lerner et al., 2011). Such contributions are envisioned to have both a behavioral and an ideological component. This concept of contribution could also be identified as civic engagement or citizenship. Merriam-Webster (2014) defines citizenship as “the fact or status of being a citizen of a particular place; the qualities a person is expected to have as a responsible member of a community.” In the Iowa 4-H Youth Development program, citizenship is defined as “the opportunity, right, and responsibility to contribute to shaping the world around you and provide service to others,” (Allen et al., 2005, p. 5).

This is most likely to happen when programs include positive and sustained youth-adult relationships, youth skill-building activities, opportunities for youth engagement and youth leadership of community-based activities. Zaff et al. (2010) found that when youth are actively engaged in their communities and beyond, not only is their own development enhanced, but civil

society benefits as well. The theory of PYD that has emerged in much of the adolescent development literature indicates that if youth have mutually beneficial relations with the people and institutions of their social world, they will be headed toward a future that includes positive contributions of self, family, community, and civil society. In short, young people will thrive.

A different perspective comes from Larson (2000), who focused on adolescents' development of initiative, which he saw as a core quality of PYD in Western culture. He described it as an ability to be motivated from within to direct attention and effort toward a challenging goal. In addition to being an important quality in its own right, it is a core requirement for other components of positive development, such as creativity, leadership, altruism, and civic engagement. Through Larson's research of youth in school and out of school activities, he noted that structured voluntary activities are a context that is particularly suited to the development of initiative. The presence of intrinsic motivation and concerted engagement suggests that participants in these activities are having experiences of directing and regulating their actions in pursuit of a goal.

According to Benson et al. (2006), central to PYD theory is a series of questions rooted squarely in the discipline of developmental psychology. The goals of this theory are to explain the capacity of youth to change and to do so in a direction that fosters both individual well-being and social good, how and under what conditions contextual factors contribute to this change, and the principles and mechanisms that are at play in maximizing the dynamic and developmentally appropriate relationship between the context and the individual.

Civic engagement typically develops through socialization (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). Through a person's interaction with societal institutions, including school activities, community organizations, youth programs, service-learning experiences, and families,

he or she develops an understanding of what it means to be civically engaged. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory explains that human behavior results from a process of mutual interactions between an individual and his or her immediate relationships and settings, in addition to larger social and cultural contexts (Olson & Goddard, 2010). For example, Mahoney et al., (2009) identified that out-of-school activities in which youth participate significantly affect their social, educational, civic, and physical development, but also acknowledged that not all out-of-school activities are equal in terms of their potential to facilitate PYD, based on their emphasis on the aforementioned priorities, in addition to their structure, duration, social or physical contexts. Additionally, the strength of ties between the youth and the social institutions they participate in affect their development; relationships with caring adults within the program serving as leaders or mentors are part of that ecological context (Mahoney et al., 2009).

Experiential and active learning have long been the hallmarks of leadership education and development (Priest & Clegorne, 2015). Kolb (1984, 2015) defined experiential learning as a specific type of learning that occurs from life experience rather than through traditional classroom lectures. This learning goes beyond just the experience, and in fact, includes critical reflection and consideration of the lessons from the action (Kolb, 2015). Through her research on civic engagement, Nistler (2014) recognized that the experiential learning theory has been widely tested through both qualitative and quantitative approaches and has been applied at many levels in the 4-H youth development program across the country. Brennan, Barnett, and Baugh (2007) found that if youth are included in programs to meet needs and empower communities, they become lifelong participants and take on a sense of ownership in developmental efforts. Their studies indicated youth and adults volunteer or become active in their communities for practical reasons, such as meeting requirements, getting good grades in a particular class, or as

an entry to a desired job. They also found motivations to be linked to efforts toward self-actualization, social responsibility, and the need to be taken seriously. Participation in service activities, including volunteer activities, has been linked to the development of altruism, social responsibility, and moral and political identity (Mahoney et al., 2009; Yates & Youniss, 1996). As a result of their work, Henness, Ball, and Moncheski (2013) recommend that we prepare youth and adults to work together in partnership through service-learning, engage students in identifying community issues to address and strategies to do so, and ensure that service learning projects involve ongoing contact and interaction among youth and adults while also considering public impact.

Pittman, Martin, and Williams (2007) explain that young people build skills, acquire understanding, develop passion, and take on responsibilities for changing their environment as they grow, learn, and develop. Young people are most likely to develop these strengths when they are connected to programs and organizations that have effective youth engagement strategies that are purposely designed to address those core needs. The Continuum of Youth Engagement (LISTEN, Inc., 2003) can serve as a guiding principle for the design of youth community engagement and PYD programming. Youth require opportunities and supports for positive growth, including positive relationships with caring adults, challenging experiences, and skill-building opportunities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Through its scaffolded approach to engagement from youth services to youth development, youth leadership to civic engagement, to finally youth organizing, the Youth Engagement Continuum (LISTEN, Inc., 2003) reminds PYD programmers there is a continuum of opportunities for young people to own their own learning and create opportunities to reflect on that learning. At the stages of youth leadership and civic engagement, youth organizations include opportunities within programming for authentic youth

leadership and build skills and capacity for youth to take action around issues young people identify as priorities, key ingredients for civic engagement.

### **Research Problem**

The development of civic engagement is a critical component of PYD. Sherrod et al. (2010) remind us in their *Handbook of Civic Engagement in Youth* that functioning as a citizen is as important as working or being a part of a family. Recent studies have begun to explore the role of youth programming on civic engagement development (Brandt & Klein, 2016; Barnhardt et al., 2015; Bobek et al., 2009), but they have just begun to scratch the surface. The Tuft's longitudinal 4-H Study identified factors that lead to contribution, the 6<sup>th</sup> C in PYD, which includes 4-H involvement (Lerner & Lerner et al., 2012; Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013). Additional studies have focused on civic engagement by youth (Bobek et al., 2009; Brennan et al., 2007; Seevers & Dormody, 1995; Gagen, 2015; Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003; White & Mistry, 2016; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016; Youniss et al., 2002; Zaff & Eccles, 2008).

Lerner and Lerner et al. (2013) begin to touch on the impact youth organizations, specifically 4-H, have on developing civic engagement in youth, but their results don't stretch to those who have moved out of their home of origin and are making decisions on their own. Similarly, Bobek et al. (2009) acknowledged the possible connections of 4-H involvement and greater civic engagement, but also noted that the research conducted assessed a young person's civic engagement and out-of-school time participation occurring at one point in time. Nistler (2014) examined youth who had participated in Florida's 4-H Legislature program and found youth to be higher than the control group in all of the social capital constructs measured. Likewise, Davis (2014) investigated the Idaho 4-H program's impact on citizenship, civic engagement and leadership Life Skills into adulthood, interviewing twelve 4-H alumni. It is

important to examine this phenomenon further to gain understanding of PYD's program influence of active and engaged citizenship beyond youth into adulthood.

Most research, however, has been done regarding the impact of higher education experiences on civic engagement. Barnhardt et al. (2015) explain that higher education institutions assume the responsibility of aiding students in their acquisition of a sense of duty to positively contribute to their communities. The development of civic engagement skills and aptitude can and likely does begin much earlier as a part of PYD programs and opportunities, but there is less research to explain this phenomenon. In addition, there has been very little research done exploring young adults, beyond high school or college age, who make decisions on their own regarding civic engagement or reflect back on what parts of those youth experiences impacted their desire or practice of contribution (Fox, Schroeder, & Lodl, 2003). There is a perceived shortage of involvement by young adults as volunteers and active community members in our towns and cities today (Sherrod et al., 2010; Bessant, Farthing, & Watts, 2015). To date, there has been little examination of what youth experiences lead to sustained involvement in communities by individuals, or how participating in PYD experiences can impact continued civic engagement beyond a youth's experience within that particular organization or beyond, making the study of the development of civic engagement an important effort. This leads to the **three research questions** examined in this study. **First**, how do young adults define civic engagement and what value do they place on being involved in the community? **Second**, how do the participants define leadership, what relationship do they see between leadership and civic engagement, and what influence did PYD experiences have on their definitions and connections between civic engagement and leadership? **Finally**, what are the long-term impacts

of PYD experiences, specifically 4-H, on the value development of civic engagement or contribution for participants?

### **Summary of Study: A Phenomenological Approach**

Creswell (2007) explains that a phenomenological study describes the meaning of a concept or phenomenon shared by several individuals, each with their own lived experiences. The researcher focuses on describing what all participants have in common related to a particular experience. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to investigate individual experiences, search for both commonalities and uniqueness's, and synthesize those perspectives to find a larger meaning or understanding of a particular phenomenon.

According to Creswell (2007), the type of problem best suited for a phenomenological approach includes understanding several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon. Understanding those experiences helps the researcher and others to develop best practices, policies, or deeper understanding of the features of the phenomenon. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) emphasize the importance of the individual lived experiences and the responsibility of the researcher to examine those experiences as they occur on the subject's own terms.

The phenomenon that I have examined is the development of youth civic engagement practice and understanding, including the participants' value development of being an engaged citizen into adulthood and how the participants' involvement in PYD experiences impacted that development. Each individual has different definitions or degrees of involvement that they classify as being civically engaged. In addition, each person's path toward his or her level of civic engagement may look different. This study was completed through a retrospective or reflective examination, interviewing young adults who were involved in PYD programming, specifically 4-H, among other youth activities during adolescence, but who are now young

adults. The reason for the retrospective approach is to allow these young adults the opportunity to practice the components of the experiential learning model of reflection and application (4-H National Headquarters, 2011) to consider the impact of their PYD experiences on their current understanding and practice of civic engagement.

The choice of a phenomenological approach comes from an understanding of the topic of civic engagement from a constructivist paradigm, with its aim to understand and become more aware of content and meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). In this case, the topic is the content and meaning of civic engagement by young adults. Additionally, young adults' development of civic engagement practices was explored, including both their understanding and priority or value development of being an engaged citizen and what level of importance or value civic engagement has had over time for them based on their experiences in youth. Participation in youth development programs has predicted concurrent reports of civic engagement and youth participation (Bobek et al., 2009; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016) but has not yet been able to substantiate longer term impacts of this civic engagement. White and Mistry (2016) note the need for additional research to better understand the processes leading to lasting civic engagement. In addition, Camino (2000) suggested the importance of broadening the range of methodologies researchers use to address and gain new insights regarding PYD program objectives. Kirlin (2002) attempted to focus on how adolescents learn how to be active participants in a democracy to gain insight on what activities during adolescence lead to long-term civic engagement. Through conversations and interviews with young adults who have participated in PYD programs, not only what activities led to their civic engagement were examined, but also how those connections were made and why they were meaningful for the

study participants in their development into engaged members of their families, communities, and beyond.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

As a former 4-Her and current state 4-H youth development program specialist, I bring an understanding of non-formal educational experiences and PYD programs and philosophy. In addition, I have heard many anecdotal stories of how 4-H has impacted the development of former participants' citizenship skills and understanding beyond their 4-H experiences into their engagement as young adults in college and professional roles in new communities. As a result, I came to this study with inclinations that 4-H can have a significant positive impact on young adults' likelihood to be civically engaged in their communities. In particular, I was interested in which parts of the 4-H experience were most impactful for developing civic engagement or contribution and in what ways those experiences and others have led to continued community involvement. In addition, I explored what youth experiences outside of 4-H were impactful for participants to establish best practices that might support active civic engagement through any organization. While I work with the 4-H program statewide, I have not been responsible for direct programming or experiences of the study participants beyond previous short-term opportunities; I learned about their 4-H experience directly from them through our interview conversations. In addition, as a person who champions systems theory, I explored what additional factors contributed to participants' civic participation, including families, school and community environments, and peer groups.

## **Methods**

### **Sample**

Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select information-rich cases, finding participants who have the greatest potential to yield insight and understanding of the particular

phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This sampling technique allows the researcher to gain in-depth understanding about an issue, often not available through random sampling. The process of purposive sampling can be rigorous as the researcher identifies the critical characteristics or experiences that would be most helpful in creating the needed sample.

A database of Iowa 4-H Alumni between the ages of 25 and 35 was utilized to identify 14 young adults who were former Iowa 4-Hers and involved in the program in a capacity beyond the local club and county, including the Iowa State 4-H Council, and who were currently involved in some organization or activity within their current community for this study. In addition to their 4-H involvement these individuals also participated in a variety of activities including band, scouts, FFA, sports, faith-based groups, National Honor Society, choir, student council, FCCLA, and tumbling. Participants included six males and eight females, for a total of 14 young adults living in Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, and California. Eight of the participants currently live in cities or urban areas, while six live in small towns, rural areas or on farms. Twelve out of the fourteen participants work full-time outside the home, while two identified themselves as stay-at-home moms currently. See Table 1 for detailed descriptions of the study participants and their current involvement.

Following is a snapshot of the 14 participants and their current civic engagement. Any names used for purposes of sharing the stories of the participants have been changed in order to protect participants' anonymity. Jason, 28, serves as president of a large youth-serving non-profit board, while also being involved as a United Way volunteer and participating in various church service activities. Louise, 25, is currently the marketing chair of her community's young professionals' group, while also participating in the Soroptimist Club and volunteering for United Way and 4-H. Amy, also 25, volunteers in her home county's 4-H program while serving

as a chamber of commerce ambassador in her work community and participating in the regional Land and Legacy Group. Mason is a 32-year old former Peace Corps Volunteer who now advocates for those in under-developed countries through a local chapter of the World Economic Forum and a U.S. global leadership group. Becky, 34, has become involved in activities in her local school district like the Parent Teacher Organization and community FFA advisory group, but she also serves on a broader scale through the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation and State Young Farmer's Advisory Group. Additionally, she volunteers with her county's 4-H program. Joy, 30, is a new mother, but has found a passion for revitalizing her community through her presidency of the local young professionals' organization; she also volunteers in her local church nursery. Thirty-year old Grace is involved in her community through her children, which includes volunteering at local youth activities, being her church's financial secretary; professionally, she works with many local service clubs providing leadership development, getting particularly involved with the local Jaycee's group.

As a teacher, Marci, 29, has found her passion in engaging with programming related to her students. She serves as the advisor to the local Key Club and has become engaged in her state professional organization, in addition to continuing to volunteer for the 4-H program. Adam, 32, also a teacher, serves on his school's leadership advisory team; beyond the school, he has become a youth sports team coach and participates on the planning team for an annual community festival. Twenty-six-year-old David has been especially involved with the 4-H program in his new state, serving both as a local club volunteer leader, but also as a county council advisor and president of the state 4-H advisory group. A gymnastics program director, Jay, 35, takes his work interest into his personal life, serving as a volunteer tumbling coach and tumbling association judge. Ella, 29, has recently started a young mother's group and is part of a

local bike trails foundation. Sally, 32, serves her church as the Education Director and high school youth group leader, engages in a social media in agriculture group, grants wishes for Make-a-Wish Foundation, volunteers with the county Clover Kids 4-H program, serves on the local school's FFA community advisory board, and participates in the Farm Bureau Federation at both local and state levels. Finally, George, 25, serves on the boards of both a state scholarship foundation and the American Royal, participates in the Eastern Star, and volunteers with the 4-H program at the state level.

These young adults were contacted through e-mail or Facebook message with an initial invitation to participate. Before participating, each individual was provided with information about the study and asked to provide informed consent per IRB guidelines. See Appendix D for documents related to invitation, participant information, and IRB approval. The participants were not paid for participation in this study. While these young adults have similarities as former Iowa 4-Hers that were involved in the program at the local level and beyond, additional influences such as home, community, K-12 and post-secondary school experiences and extra-curricular activities, and current residence varied, providing different perspectives and understanding of civic engagement and its value development; but there were easily identifiable common themes among the participants' stories.

## **Procedure**

The study was conducted through individual interviews using a general interview guide approach. This included a series of open-ended questions formed prior to the interviews being asked of each participant in order to encourage the participant's own narratives, while also allowing for the researcher to follow-up with questions to expand on initial responses (Grant, Bennett, & Crawford, 2016). According to Turner (2010), the general interview guide approach

is more structured than an informal conversational interview, but still allows for flexibility in its question composition and ensures more consistent information collection from each interviewee. The interview, through its intentional dialog, encourages individuals to think and to talk about their needs, wants, expectations, experiences, and understandings at both conscious and unconscious levels (Nunkoosing, 2005). Utilizing the general interview guide approach provided flexibility to probe further when needed and allowed the participants to clarify meaning.

### **Interview Protocol**

Key constructs investigated during the interviews included participants' understanding of community and civic engagement or citizenship, influences that impacted understanding and/or practice of civic engagement, leadership development and the role of leading as a function of civic engagement, and prioritization of civic engagement in one's life. Appendix D contains a schedule of questions for the interviews connected with each of the three major research questions. Basic demographic information and background regarding the participants' previous 4-H and additional PYD experiences were collected through a series of twelve questions. Twelve guiding questions addressed the construct of the young adults' definition of civic engagement and the value they place on being involved. To address the participants' perspective on the relationship between leadership and civic engagement and the role that PYD experiences play in that understanding and practice, there were eight general questions. The third research question addressed the long-term impact of PYD experiences, specifically 4-H, have on the value development of civic engagement. Sixteen questions were designed to address this construct.

### **Interview Summary**

Interviews were in-depth, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes to adequately capture the perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of the interview participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016;

Grant, Bennett, & Crawford, 2016). Thirteen out of the fourteen interviews were conducted via Zoom, an internet based video conferencing system; one interview was conducted in person at the participant's place of work. Using technology allowed for a face-to-face experience so the researcher could observe non-verbal communication for further meaning of the words spoken, but also created easier accessibility for the participants and researcher to connect with some participants living in different states and provided the ability to record the interviews. Nonverbal communication can be extremely powerful, especially when considered within the context of the interaction occurring. Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2010) found nonverbal communication to be important for understanding deeper shared meaning between the interviewer and interviewee. This is critical for the researcher to be aware of and acknowledge when considering the development of reciprocity and power within the relationship. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for later coding.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Proper Institutional Review Board practices were followed for this project (See Article 4 in Appendix D). Before beginning any interview, the participant was provided with information about the aims of the study and how the content of the interview was to be used. They were given the opportunity to confirm their voluntary participation through informed consent. These forms have been stored in a secure file cabinet at the researcher's office. While anytime someone is interviewed there is the potential that personal issues may arise, the premise of this study was not one of a potentially harmful or particularly vulnerable nature. Participants, however, were given the opportunity to conclude their participation at any time. Interviews and all forms were in English as the participants were all native English speakers.

Ethics are intrinsic to the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). Additional ethical considerations when preparing for this study included the recognition of participant values and perceptions shared through their interviews. From an axiological standpoint, it is important to recognize the values or biases that the researcher may bring into the research as well. Those biases can impact the questions asked, the ways the researcher approaches those being researched, and the way the data is interpreted. For example, I have worked in 4-H Youth Development for over 18 years and have certain ideas about the impact 4-H involvement has on a young person's understanding of citizenship and civic engagement. From a rhetorical perspective, the subjects' own words help tell the story of civic engagement and illustrate common themes and notable findings. Those words help the reader understand directly how themes developed through the stories and accounts of the study participants. In addition, direct participant quotes provide a check to my interpretation of their perspectives and lived realities.

### **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

Trustworthiness and rigor are addressed through attention to the voice of the participants and critical reflexivity (Lincoln, 1995). As the researcher, I have worked to be sensitive and aware of my own psychological state and reactions before, within, and following interviews. In addition, I attempted to pay special attention to the participants' verbal and nonverbal reactions throughout the interview experience.

Guba (2014) encourages qualitative researchers to address truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality in their work. Addressing these issues helps others to understand the rigor addressed through a qualitative research project. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) define credibility as the degree to which the researcher has accurately represented what the participants think, feel and do. One might also consider credibility similar to internal validity when

completing qualitative research (Franz, Piercy, Donaldson, Richard, & Westbrook, 2010). Guba (2014) suggests techniques such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, and peer de-briefing to strengthen a study's credibility. Answering questions of credibility or truth value can be addressed through member checks. I was able to check accuracy of interpretation through follow-up questions, ensuring that I interpreted correctly what the participant just stated through clarifying questions and summations at the conclusion of the interview. Conducting multiple interviews also helped to gain various perspectives and contributed to the opportunity for triangulation—comparing information across several sources. In addition, I shared my interpretations of the results with the participants and offered them an opportunity to provide feedback as a member check and confirm the accuracy of my interpretations. Finally, I utilized two individuals who had deep engagement with the data to assist with triangulation by independently assessing the themes I had identified for consistency in interpretation.

It is also important to address trustworthiness. Franz et al. (2010) equate trustworthiness in qualitative research to external validity in quantitative work; it ensures that readers know the findings can be trusted. Lincoln (1995) argues that true trustworthiness in qualitative research is developed through reflexivity and reciprocity. Biases can be built into certain measurements and processes, which need to be checked (Guba, 2014).

Carolan (2003) explains that reciprocity, the exchange of things with others for mutual benefit, is the key to making interviews work. By investing in the interview relationship, I was able to create trust, leading to more honest and morally sound interviews. Lincoln (1995) also argues that reciprocity is a characteristic of high-quality, rigorous qualitative work because of the person-centered nature of qualitative inquiry. Reciprocity focuses on the relationship quality between the researcher and participant; it is important that it be marked by a sense of trust and

mutuality (Lincoln, 1995). Greater reciprocity, then, provides the opportunity to collect richer, more authentic data. Developing rapport with participants and the semi-structured interview process provided flexibility and created a comfortable conversational environment of mutuality.

Trustworthiness also refers to whether one can track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This is addressed through an audit trail. Bloomberg & Volpe (2016) suggest that being transparent throughout the process through an audit trail assists the researcher to confirm whether the findings are consistent and dependable with the data collected. I took field notes throughout the research process, which included detailed accounts of how the data was being analyzed and interpreted, and my reactions and reflections to it, as a part of chronicling the process. I also used journaling as a tool to check my own interpretations and increase trustworthiness by reflecting on my interpretations and perspectives of the data and how those influenced the research process, acknowledging the reflexivity that had occurred.

Finally, transferability must be addressed. Transferability ensures that readers know the findings can relate to others' experiences; this is also known as reliability in quantitative circles (Franz et al., 2010). Transferability can be ensured through triangulation efforts, acknowledgement of research bias, and field notes or audit trail documentation (Franz et al., 2010). While qualitative researchers recognize that their findings cannot be generalizable to all settings, it is important for quality research to identify how lessons learned could be applied or useful to others. Efforts to increase transferability were taken through member checks, triangulation of the data, audit trail documentation and reflexivity efforts.

A researcher's demonstration of reflexivity helps the reader to understand more clearly the deeper meanings of the phenomenon under review and the particular lens through which the

researcher used when conducting the study (Carolan, 2003). As Guillemin and Gillam (2004) explain, reflexivity is not a single act, but an ongoing process that must be a part of every stage of the research process. It includes critical reflection on the kind of knowledge being produced by the researcher and how the knowledge is generated. Reflexivity involves critical reflection of various factors influencing the researcher's construction of knowledge, the influences on planning the research, conducting the research, and even writing the findings and analyses. When attempting to improve reflexivity, it is important for the researcher to have high self and other awareness to understand subtle differences in both personal and psychological states of others, as well as one's self. I utilized journaling throughout the research process to assess and critically reflect on my own feelings, insights, and perceptions throughout the process. Reflexivity includes being sensitive to processes in research practice as well as what role the researcher plays in the process. In many ways, practicing reflexivity through the process of ensuring credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability in a qualitative research project leads to a more rigorous and intentional product than some quantitative studies.

### **Data Analysis**

A transcriptionist was hired to transcribe 13 of the 14 interviews and I completed one transcription myself as the researcher to gain a better understanding and feel for the data. Transcription data has been stored on a password-protected computer and secure cloud storage system. Based on recommendations in Creswell (2007) and Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003), after transcribing the interview data, data were coded by question, then data categories were created, followed by analysis of the data to assess for themes and their implications.

To increase trustworthiness, I followed a systematic approach to data analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). To assist with reflection on the coding process and prepare to

synthesize and interpret the data, memoing was also utilized. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) explain that memoing can trigger thinking processes and provide a venue for the researcher to record some of the internal dialogue that occurs in the research process. This helped to create an audit trail and strengthened my ability to be succinct in my insights from this process. Major and Savin-Baden (2011) encourage researchers to first analyze, then synthesize, interpret, and finally construct meaning from the data. While this is a rigorous and complex process, Major and Savin-Baden (2011) explain that by going through each step in the synthesis process, it creates greater contextual integrity, respects individual identities, and allows for variation and differences in categories. To explain this process in more detail, one can look at coding processes suggested by Saldana (2013). From initial sorting of responses by question, I summarized the responses by category or research question and then identified themes within those groupings of responses. This process follows the model suggested by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) and led to patterns of more general, higher-level concepts that helped to create meaning from the data. The synthesis process goes beyond analysis to the aggregation of information through the identification of patterns evident in the findings through the coding and categorization process (Major & Savin-Baden, 2011). This occurred first through my own journal reflections and analysis of the data, but then also through search of specific quotes to explain the identified themes, and finally through triangulation with content experts.

This synthesis process was guided by the assumptions made by my guiding theories of PYD, ecological systems, and experiential learning theories, including evidence of youth voice, engagement in both learning and decision-making, and relationships with adults and peers and their impact. I looked both for patterns among participants, but also between similar experiences. In addition, to be true to the synthesis process, according to Major and Savin-Baden (2011), I

made every effort to respect the individual voices of the participants throughout the process of constructing greater meaning from the aggregate of data.

### **Findings**

This study provides a comprehensive look at the value, understanding, and practice of civic engagement for fourteen young adults from across the United States, living primarily in the Midwest. Each of the participants in the study articulated a high internal sense of responsibility to be involved in their community or something larger than themselves as young adults. As Jason, a 28-year-old participant, currently involved as a United Way volunteer and president of a youth-serving non-profit board of directors, articulated, “It’s extremely important; it’s expected. It is just what I do and I feel like it’s part of being a member of the community. It’s part of who I am.” George, 25, is the director of advancement for a national fraternity, volunteers with American Royal and is a member of Eastern Star, a military family organization. He articulates, “Being involved in the community is important because it helps you understand your community.”

The experiences the participants had as youth significantly shaped their current prioritization and practice of civic engagement. Those influential experiences included involvement in PYD programs, specifically 4-H opportunities at local levels and beyond, but also relationships with peers, volunteers, and parents. Participants identified such key experiences in the development of their understanding and practice of civic engagement as actively participating in monthly business meetings, helping younger youth with projects, doing record books that included the process of goal-setting and reporting on achievements, and carrying out service learning projects that were determined by the local 4-H club. Additionally, experiences on a broader scale included participating in Citizenship Washington Focus and

National 4-H Conference where delegates served on various committees with youth from other states and met directly with national legislators to discuss relevant issues, the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference where youth engaged in service learning projects with peers from across Iowa and gained leadership skills through break-out sessions, and the State 4-H Council, where youth worked together to plan and lead the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference for their peers while also serving as ambassadors for the 4-H program in their counties. A summary of findings, including participants' definitions of civic engagement and citizenship, is found in Table 2. Following, each research question is dissected for greater inspection and understanding.

### **Research Question One**

*How do young adults define civic engagement and what value do they place on being involved in the community?* Research literature uses the term civic engagement to indicate community involvement, civic participation such as voting or involvement with the government, service, advocacy or contribution, the 6<sup>th</sup> C in PYD (Lerner, 2004; Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013). In the 4-H program, youth typically enroll in the project area of citizenship, defined as “the opportunity, right, and responsibility to contribute to shaping the world around you and provide service to others,” (Allen et al., 2005, p. 5). When asking the young adults who were former 4-H participants about civic engagement and citizenship, it was clear that their 4-H experiences impacted their understanding; they often used the two terms interchangeably. Broadly, participants believed that civic engagement or citizenship included a responsibility or duty to the community—further explained as an importance of giving back, helping to create a better place or experience, sharing skills or expertise with others. While both terms led to the general concept of contributing to one's community, the two terms also conjured slightly different meanings, important to distinguish for understanding of the value and practice of this idea of contribution or

civic engagement. When asked to define civic engagement, participants initially used words like “active member of the community,” “advocacy,” “involvement in government-related things,” “being informed,” “bettering the community,” “responsibility,” “being a leader,” and “helping others.” Citizenship brought to mind “being a member of something larger than oneself,” “a duty or responsibility,” “doing what’s right,” “contributing to the community,” and “helping others.” When asked to compare the two terms, it became evident that the participants’ 4-H experiences influenced their understanding. “Civic engagement...is just the act of being involved and participating in your government...citizenship...can go beyond government, but also involves your community and your country,” shared Louise, a 25-year-old non-profit development director and volunteer with her local young professional’s group, United Way, and the 4-H program. Another related perspective came from Sally, 32, a farmer and stay-at-home mom who currently serves her church as a Sunday School teacher and education director, is involved in the community groups of 4-H, FFA, Farm Bureau, and volunteers as a Make-a-Wish granter. She shared, “Citizenship is a bigger picture...taking pride and ownership for your community, state, country, and world.” There were more ideas related to engagement in government or policy in relation to civic engagement, whereas citizenship was typically seen as more of a responsibility to give back to others and the community. “4-H completely shapes the way I think about citizenship because when I think about citizenship, I think of the project area citizenship in 4-H, but I think of citizenship being something that you are doing for your community,” explained Amy, 25, who volunteers with her local 4-H program, chamber of commerce, and a regional Land and Legacy Group while working as a commercial banker.

Research question one included the examination of participants’ commitment to the community as part of their understanding and practice of civic engagement, so it is first

important to understand what community means to the participants. While many (10) acknowledged that community is typically defined as a geographical place, even a neighborhood, the idea of a group of people coming together for a common goal which may or may not be defined by geography was also shared by a majority of the young adults (9), and four people considered community to be the people with whom one is, or chooses to be, connected. Mason, 32, who served in the Peace Corps in Central America after college and now works as a social entrepreneur and engineer, explained, “I have a very, very close relationship with people in very different geographic and cultural places and so I define community as the people I connect with the most.” His civic engagement involvement today includes serving on a local division of The World Economic Forum and a U.S. global leadership group. Technology plays a role in this expanded understanding and definition of community for this generation, as explained by David, a 26-year-old software engineer who now participates in community musical groups and volunteers in his state’s 4-H program both at the local level and as the state 4-H advisory group chair,

It doesn’t necessarily have to be physical or local. It can be an online thing, for example, but more typically it is a group of people you interact with and it tends to be in close proximity to you, but increasingly that’s not the case.

Sally, too, referenced communities she has become engaged with as a result of technology, explaining,

Community can be based on location, it can be based on gender, similar likes and interests; I think with how much we can have interaction with people around the world now, community doesn’t have to be people that live down the road. I have my local community of people that live in the area...I have a community of being proud to live in

my county and (region)...and then I've gotten involved with some women in agriculture groups so that's a whole community in itself, and I have friends that I've met through different things related to those Ag advocacy groups. Some of them I've met in person, some of them I never have...so you can build community whatever way I guess seems to fit for you.

This broader sense or understanding of community did not lessen the participants' feelings of responsibility toward it. All 14 participants indicated that they feel a great deal of responsibility to be involved in their communities, however they defined the term community. When probing in regard to what that level or meaning of responsibility included, answers varied more. Some (3) believed community responsibility included knowledge of community initiatives, voting, and more legislative types of efforts. Some (4) felt they had a responsibility to be a leader in the community. Many thought community responsibility meant giving back or providing service to others within the community (11). A good illustration of this concept came from Amy, involved both in her home community's 4-H program, but also in the community where she has become a working professional,

I feel like I have a sense of needing to give back or wanting to give back for the things they gave to me when I was growing up so that future generations also experience some of the things that I've experienced.

To others, the responsibility to give back focused on that connection and sense of place, even a sense of community pride. Becky, 34, expounded,

It's where I'm choosing to raise my children, so if we don't continue to put both time and effort and money and resources back into our community, they are just not going to last forever and I want my kids to be able to choose live here...that's why I give back to my

community and make sure it thrives so that it can be here in twenty years when they have the choice to come back.

Becky works as a grain merchandiser and has become involved with her local Farm Bureau Federation and serves on the State Young Farmer's Advisory Group, in addition to being engaged in her local Parent Teacher Organization and county 4-H program.

Adam, 32, is a high school teacher engaged in his community, serving as a youth sports team coach, a local festival committee member, and a school leadership team committee member. He explained responsibility as more of a demonstration of character,

You have to have some sort of integrity when it comes to your community...you have to live a life that you can say "that's me—I am that person." And for my community, I wanted it to be someone that people can turn to for help and I can be relied upon. I can be a leader in lots of different areas to help a lot of the community members out.

The importance of character and responsibility was also shared by Ella, 29, currently a stay-at-home mom who has started a local mom's group and volunteers with conservation and recreation groups has a slightly different take on that sense of character and responsibility,

I've always wanted to make the world better and change the world and I still have this optimistic view that (to do that) you have to start with your personal actions in all of your communities that you are in, in order to even kind of comprehend some of the larger problems of the world or even imagine things changing.

## **Research Question Two**

The second research question included three parts: *How do the participants define leadership? What relationship do they see between leadership and civic engagement? And, what*

*influence did PYD experiences have on their definitions and connections between civic engagement and leadership?*

*Leadership defined:* Examining the participants' definition and understanding of leadership, common themes included empowerment and motivation of others toward a common goal (11), being a role model or example by seeing or doing what needs to be done (5), and listening and communicating effectively to understand and assist the group (3). To further understand leadership, the words of the participants tell it best. "Leadership is leading by example and stepping up and being a positive role model and taking charge of a situation in a positive manner," explained Marci, a 29-year-old high school teacher and advisor to the school's Key Club, 4-H volunteer, and member of her state professional association. David shared, "Leadership is the things you do to affect change and to empower others to make change themselves." Ella, 29, offered, "Leadership is listening to a group that you are a part of, but then you have a specific role to curate and then lead that action or idea or group."

Participants gained their understanding of leadership from many different sources, but 12 out of the 14 specifically named 4-H as a key contributor. Additional responses included role models and mentors, experience as a leader, and both positive and negative observations of coaches, teachers, or peers. Specific youth development experiences were key in shaping ideas of leadership for these young adults, including relationships with caring adults who served as mentors and leaders. Mentors served as a "sounding board, always an encourager, always pushing to say 'you can do more, can you think more broadly, can you maximize the amount of time that you would spend,' challenging my thinking of leadership," shared Jason, 28 and currently serving as a non-profit board president. Jay, 35, works as a gymnastics program

director and volunteers as a youth sports team coach and tumbling association judge. He further expounded,

You learn from them (mentors); the ones I looked up to were the ones that reflected qualities that were respected and so you learned that those qualities are beneficial to whatever you are doing and ones that should be held in esteem.

4-H experiences were often individuals' first exposure to leadership. "I learned so much just on leadership, within the 4-H experience but then pulling it into school and getting involved in leadership in my high school and then college," Mason shared. Joy, 30, now works as an executive manager for a communications company and serves as the president of her local young professionals' organization. She reflected, "4-H, probably at the beginning (taught me about leadership) and then the more I was involved, particularly at Iowa State in the president's leadership class, we learned a lot about that." It was obvious that experience played a great role in leadership understanding and development. David remarked, "Lots and lots of failure over the years. So, I have had the wonderful experience of having lots of formal and informal leadership opportunities..." These examples support the previous research (Priest & Clegorne, 2015; Nistler, 2016; Kolb, 1984) and the framework of the study, emphasizing the value of experiential learning for the development of leadership and civic engagement skills.

Leadership is still a part of most of the participants' lives today. When asked how they determine when to lead, the question became more about time availability or deciding when not to lead based on previous commitments and balancing the needs of the group, rather than whether or not they *could* lead. "It is just in my nature that I have that desire," shared Joy, "I guess I feel like I have something to contribute."

*Understanding the civic engagement and leadership relationship:* The relationship between civic engagement and leadership is a close one. It often takes leadership in order to make change in the community, reflected the participants. In addition, the act of being involved shows and takes leadership. “You can be engaged civically and not maybe necessarily be a leader, you can be involved...in your community,” said Louise, but “leadership to me is kind of the top of the pyramid, if you are being active in your community I think you are showing leadership there.” Amy articulated, “If you are doing things in your community you are doing civic engagement or citizenship activities, you have to be a leader or take on a leadership role if you want something to succeed.” Chamber of Commerce marketing and leadership director, Grace, 30, explained,

They (leadership and civic engagement) are pretty intertwined because I feel like it takes leadership to be an active participant in your community. You have to choose to participate and play an active role in your community and whether that’s directly leading (or not), I think it’s a sign of leadership if you are involved.

In addition to her work teaching and preparing leaders within her community, Grace serves as financial secretary at her local church and participates in the local Jaycee’s.

Leadership was not defined by title for the participants. Rather, it was clear that leadership was about the difference one made, connecting it back the participants’ commitment to the community. “If you are providing leadership within the group, I think that equals engagement, equals civic engagement,” summarized Mason. Jay’s perception was that “people who are responsible citizens do take on a lot of leadership roles within the community or organization,” including volunteering to chair a committee or fundraiser or leading by example.

*Connections with PYD:* This connection of civic engagement and leadership and their understanding of these responsibilities was definitely developed over time and through various relationships and experiences. Jason shared that both leadership and civic engagement are inherently a part of his life today because they were ingrained in him from an early age in 4-H. “So, leadership and citizenship and civic engagement are not fourth grade concepts, right?” he explained,

So, thinking about how you can take those concepts and implement the programming that has an impact on fourth, fifth, sixth graders... “Think about how you can help others. How can you make an impact? And when you see a need, kind of jumping at the opportunity to help others.” It was that mentality, at a young age, that kind of started to develop it in my head and at that point it was just ingrained in what I was doing.

Jason wasn’t the only individual that acknowledged these youth experiences as shaping his understanding of leadership and civic engagement. Participants talked about the role of volunteer leaders serving as role models or examples and having opportunities at a young age to make decisions in regard to the service work they did in their communities as also having an impact.

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question investigated was: *What is the long-term impact of PYD experiences, specifically 4-H, for the value development of civic engagement or contribution?*

Each of the fourteen participants is involved in one or more community organizations, efforts, or leadership roles today. Community involvement and feelings of responsibility toward their communities were consistent themes throughout the interviews. Each of the participants was also asked where and how those feelings and that level of commitment or responsibility, that practice of civic engagement was developed, and when. It was consistently reported that this

value and practice began as a youth. While there were various additional responses that were shared, the most consistent influence by all 14 respondents included their involvement in 4-H. Digging more deeply, it was the act of participating in service projects as a part of a 4-H club, holding leadership roles or officer positions within a club or county group, personal goal setting and reflection through individual projects and record books that first introduced the concepts and practices of civic engagement. Also important, but supplementary to local experiences, were opportunities to participate in leadership roles beyond the local level, including county council and 4-H committee responsibilities, and state or national opportunities such as the Citizenship Washington Focus Trip or State 4-H Council, that developed the desire and commitment to invest in one's community to make a difference. The 4-H experiences identified as significant are tallied in Table 2. Following are the personal examples by the participants to help explain their impact. They really emphasized the initial opportunities provided to them in their local club experience as being most influential in their development and led to a desire, confidence, and effort to take advantage of further opportunities at greater levels as they grew. These successive opportunities at various levels within the 4-H program as they grew up and expanded in scope further ingrained these values to be life-long parts of their daily lives and demonstrated to them that they did in fact have the power and ability to make a difference.

Mason: "I think 4-H was by far the biggest introduction to citizenship or civic engagement, involvement in community service, involvement in my community. It was a lot of skill building."

I was involved in a lot of things, but everything else I was involved in, whether it be sports or music, was very focused on that particular activity. 4-H was...big picture and

there were so many different avenues that 4-H can take you and teach you, and I spent, I devoted a lot of time to 4-H so for me that was the biggest impact. (Grace)

Everything about 4-H prepared me to be a leader in a community, to want to be involved in my community, to communicate in my community, to work with others, every skill that I use in community, I just think it all ties back to being in 4-H...The multitude of opportunities to pursue projects would be one (reason). Another would be the quality of the leaders in the program...the third would be the reflection that you need to do in order to succeed in 4-H so you need to reflect on your goals and write about them. (Ella)

Jason: “It’s just the structure of involvement with other youth...we can have fun by doing community service or being involved in the community that I learned at a young age (in 4-H).”

It (4-H) gave me the ability to lead those meetings. It wasn’t just ‘I’m going to give you the agenda and you just have to read through it’ (when I was an officer in my 4-H club). It was more, “this is your meeting, you come up with the things that you want to talk about that you feel like are important; we will help you if there are things that you don’t know what you should talk about”...they really empowered me to do that. (Amy)

The first time in my life where I got to plan something and see it through (State 4-H Council)—through a full activity that I got to be part of planning the different things and then really seeing it executed and seeing...other youth really get something out of it. You could see you made a difference. (Marci)

Simply exposure to activities and opportunities or ways of doing things. I got really used to doing community service and going out and volunteering (in 4-H) and so I naturally look for things like that and have experience being in those contexts. (David)

Experiences that impacted youth's involvement beyond 4-H included church youth group and mission trips, student council or other school leadership group experiences, and being a part of school government classes. Three additional impactful experiences worth noting were being a Page in the Iowa legislature as a high school student, participating as a member of the State of Iowa Youth Action Team, a statewide leadership opportunity supported by the governor, and the National Council on Youth Leadership Conference. Participants also reflected that parent modeling and families played a significant role in developing a desire and aptitude for civic engagement.

I'll add the support I got from 4-H, you know the support from my family—they would drive me to meetings, drive me down to state interviews when I didn't have a license, but they were also there to challenge me...and support me. (Louise)

Marci shared,

My parents told me that my job was to help out with whatever activity they needed help with and that didn't necessarily mean around the farm. That meant whatever 4-H thing mom was doing I was expected to be there...but they viewed it more important for me to expand my horizons by being involved in clubs and activities.

Finally, George, a member of the Eastern Star, reflected,

My father's involvement in the military, certainly having an early connection and passion for military support, patriotism...that was instilled in us at a very young age...Having parents who were, especially my mother, and others who were intimately involved...also led me (to value and practice) civic engagement.

Additional experiences mentioned included experience with local church youth groups, mission trips and conferences. Mason attended World Youth Day and found it to be an eye-

opening experience to see a global approach to his faith. Similarly, Jay was engaged in a church youth group that included service projects that were community-based and meaningful as well. Adam also was involved in a church youth group and a vivid memory included visiting a homeless shelter and providing meals as an early introduction to serving others.

Participants also mentioned high school experiences and opportunities that expanded on 4-H experiences. Jason attended the National Council on Youth Leadership that offered opportunities to connect with professionals and have conversations with them that were impactful for him. Ella, Joy and George all were legislative pages in high school. Ella also participated in the State of Iowa Youth Action Committee (SIYAC), a youth advisory group to the governor. This experience influenced her civic engagement,

After being on SIYAC, then I would go and look locally at, well, there was a coalition in town about underage drinking and policies around it, so I would say SIYAC was about civic engagement and (got me involved in) government...I would say that 4-H (taught me more) about volunteering and being part of a group, explained Ella.

### **Additional Relevant Research Findings**

There were additional themes that emerged from the research beyond the basic research questions specifically explored. These findings were both relevant to the original questions and in some ways enhanced understanding, as well as lead to opportunities for further investigation. The first included the participants' discussions around the definition and understanding of civic engagement versus citizenship addressed above and how that was both impacted by participants' 4-H experiences and potentially influences one's decisions regarding involvement in the larger community. As researchers working with 4-Hers specifically, but also for other young adults, it may be important to define civic engagement or explore other terms that are also used to equate

the ideas of civic engagement to be sure the researcher and participants are speaking the same language and referencing the same types of community involvement.

In addition, as a part of the discussion around leadership development, the role of mentors was explored. Volunteer leaders and other caring adults impacted youth by taking time to listen and challenging or pushing youth to go beyond their current involvement or perceived limitations. This definitely happened as a part of the PYD experience, but also sometimes seemed to be a part of separate relationships with adults who modeled the way of leadership and civic engagement, either parents or family members, or even school personnel. The reflections shared by the participants supports the PYD philosophy of the Eight Essential Elements emphasizing Caring Adult as the most important element of a PYD group experience (Gleason, 2012; Arnold & Silliman, 2017; Peterson et al, 2001). Adult leaders played the role of a cheerleader, and set an example for Grace, who shared,

I try to lead as those who have led before me like the good mentors that I've had; of course, I want to emulate what they've done that has been successful so I can hopefully have that same impact on someone else.

Marci described one of her 4-H leaders as someone who “motivated me and put me in roles where I had to be a leader, taught me how to not be a leader and how to let others step up.”

Communication was also not specifically a part of the research questions explored, but a skill that was identified as necessary in the participants' leadership, civic engagement, and career efforts, and was a key skill that had been developed through 4-H. For George, communication included “public speaking and building self-confidence and self-worth. Having the confidence in what you are going to share with others. Having the confidence to speak in front of a large or small group.” Jason saw communication tied to learning,

I would say the ability and interest to ask questions and always push to do more...So there's an "always learning" element there that I think 4-H developed, but there's also a communication element there, and there's also an interacting with adults element because all of those pieces come together...are extremely important, and I think 4-H really helped to develop those and they are all so intertwined and interconnected.

Many additional life skills beyond leadership and civic engagement were identified as being developed through PYD programs, particularly 4-H, that have been critical to current success in the participants' professional and community roles, such as time management, organizational skills, project planning, goal-setting, and working with others. Amy shared, "The (4-H) meetings, getting your write-ups done, doing your projects, helping younger kids, doing record books. I'm a very organized person today and I feel like 4-H is what shaped that" through those various experiences. "It was a monthly meeting so when I have meetings with the bank I feel way more organized because I'm prepared...4-H really prepared me for that and probably more than I knew coming out of high school." Adam identified the importance of building relationships as the skill he gained through 4-H that has been most transferable and applicable life long, sharing,

Caring relationships that I started in fourth grade with club members that were at my school, but I really didn't know them on that level, all the way through meeting guys in high school that I now look forward to seeing on RAGBRAI once a year...that I wouldn't have ever known if it wasn't for 4-H. If you can build a positive relationship with someone, even if you might not have agreed right away, it's going to be the biggest impact on my entire life is having that relationship and building that relationship with a different person.

The participants seemed to feel that these opportunities for practical skill development weren't available to them in the school system in the same way as they were through 4-H. Adam, currently a teacher, shared this powerful insight regarding available learning experiences for all youth, as well as the impact that our volunteerism and community engagement can have on others,

4-H gives a lot of opportunities to people that sometimes don't have opportunities and the school I teach in has a lower socio-economic status and so you have to look for ways to help those kids to level a bit of the playing field. At county fair, they don't ask you what your parents do, there's none of that. You come into conference judging or talk to someone (and share) 'this is what I did because of these reasons' and a lot of kids that I work with, maybe they live on that poverty line and they do a project that may not be as fancy, but they understand it better and it means more to them and they've really invested in that.

Finally, participants in this study were involved at local, county and state levels of the 4-H program. When asked what impact that multi-level involvement had on their development, all acknowledged that it was great, but previous examples shared throughout the interviews were frequently about their local 4-H experiences. It appeared that the state and national opportunities provided the participants opportunities to increase the intensity or depth and scope of their involvement. It provided new audiences for the youth to learn from and with and created a greater sense of both responsibility and impact for their actions. It also provided a place to apply the initial skills learned at the local level in a new and different environment with the potential for greater consequences and farther reach. The opportunities at the state and national level that were mentioned most included State 4-H Council and planning the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference,

the Citizenship Washington Focus Trip, and National 4-H Conference. These opportunities appeared to have a greater influence on leadership development than on the development of civic engagement. They helped to motivate participants to seek opportunities to make a difference on a grander scale as a result and helped them to see the “big picture” when it comes to impact and involvement, as well as provided an opportunity and exposure to more diversity and understanding its value on teams. Finally, these scaffolded experiences at the state and national levels helped to solidify for the participants that their actions could, in fact, make a difference for others and gave them confidence that they had the ability to lead.

Louise offered this about her State 4-H Council experience,

(It) taught me in real life you are going to get people of all different styles and personalities and have to learn to work with them and you have to learn how you can best contribute and I think whether that’s intention or not, it was a really good thing for people to learn and myself, especially, but also I think challenging us to be an ambassador and visit counties and volunteer at the fair...and some of the reflection tools we were taught in State Council, after we reflected and we would learn on our experiences, I see why this is important.

Jason said his statewide experiences gave him

the ability to see the big picture. To think about how you interact with others at a statewide level or how your single decision can have an impact on an entire conference delegation...4-H really teaches you throughout your career to think bigger and to think about things broader than oneself, but that (state council) was the chance to put that into play and practice.

## Discussion

Civic engagement not only improves the communities in which we live, but also impacts the individuals who are engaged. An active and engaged citizen, as defined by Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, and Lerner (2010), is someone who has a sense of civic duty, feeling of social connection to their community, confidence in their abilities to effect change, and who engages in civic behaviors. Each of the individuals interviewed demonstrated the characteristics of active and engaged citizens. Their stories, while varied, share very identifiable themes that contribute to both academics' and practitioners' understanding of the meaningful experiences and influences the participants engaged in as youth that can lead to best practices to continue a culture of civic engagement in our communities and beyond throughout adulthood.

Through their interview responses and stories, participants identified the value of exposure to service within the community beginning at an early age to develop the practice and culture of civic engagement long-term. Becky reflected,

I think back to the citizenship activities we did at our 4-H club meetings...going to pick up trash, planting flowers, going to the nursing home, all of those things that don't just come second nature that you don't just go do because it kind of takes an organization and somebody to...lead and be the go-between to get it done.

Sally expanded,

Our club did citizenship projects every year...and when I graduated (from college) I got the citizenship award. As I look back, the most important skill I gained from 4-H is the responsibility of citizenship. No matter your age, or where you are in life, you can always do something to give back to your community and 4-H helped me realize that doing little events or activities could really, I guess, make an impact on a lot of people.

Jason further explained how these service experiences in 4-H model the experiential learning model and why that was meaningful for him,

Building civic engagement (through 4-H) happened through thinking sessions, discussion questions, thinking a little more broadly about community impact and what you could do to be a better citizen in your community...it's absolutely the experiential learning model. It's a lot of reflecting about your experience over 4-H in general or over the past year as a youth member...and goal setting, looking ahead to the future. What's one goal you have for the next year that can have some level of personal or community impact?

In addition to exposure or the experience of doing service for lasting impact and the development of long-term practice, it was clear from the participants' responses that PYD experiences need to provide opportunities for reflection and application, inherent in the experiential learning model. They must also provide opportunity for participant voice. A recent example of this practice comes the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension's efforts to engage youth and young adults in sustaining communities. As the small towns in Florence and Iron Counties in Wisconsin lost population, particularly in the young adult demographic, they were intentional about partnering community development and youth development philosophies to create more thriving communities (Andresen, Dallapiazza, & Calvert, 2013). Much like those Extension professionals, we must continue to find ways to engage our youth in meaningful experiences that offer opportunities for community engagement, decision-making, and responsibility if we would like to see them participate in our communities now, but also if we hope to see them as future leaders and be active citizens in their communities later.

A concrete example of youth's meaningful engagement in decision-making and responsibility from the study includes Becky's reflection of her State 4-H Council experience.

She had the opportunity to “see something through from beginning to end and actually have to own it and be a part of it and have (my) own responsibility,” which motivates her today to empower and support others in her community to have similar experiences. Marci also recognized a shift from her earlier days to her time in high school and the increase in decision-making she experienced,

When I was younger it was mainly some sort of service learning or community service project, but we usually were learning a new skill at the same time. Then, as we got older, our leader would tell us we needed to decide what should be done...she would ask what was bothering us, what priority did we think that needs change...so then we started to take on the role of identifying what needed to be done in the community and what we felt should be priorities...so taking it from identifying what needed to be done and leading the charge and making that happen to having it get done was next.

These scaffolded experiences, which started out for younger 4-H'ers as exposure to service, then stepped up to opportunities for needs assessment, planning, action, and even evaluation, present a model for consideration in a longitudinal experience, such as the 4-H program, to develop and sustain the lifelong practice of civic engagement.

In short, the participants in this study not only confirmed previous research that indicated 4-Hers are more likely to contribute to their communities (Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013; Bobek et al., 2009), but also provided solid evidence that youth who are engaged and exposed to meaningful leadership and service opportunities as youth, particularly through 4-H, will maintain that commitment and desire to be civically involved long into adulthood. This small sample demonstrates that young adults are involved and making an impact in their communities today. They are civically engaged. But, their current involvement also did not happen by accident. It

was fostered through intentional experiences, opportunities, and modeling by adults in their youth that fostered the understanding of the importance of being engaged in one's community, of bettering the environment around them. Practitioners and researchers alike must take note of the concrete examples these young adults shared, including the role that caring adults played in the development of their aptitude for civic engagement. Adults not only must serve as role models regarding involvement, but they also play a critical role in providing meaningful opportunities and support for youth to have and take responsibility in goal-setting, decision-making, planning, and carry-out of group projects and service experiences and in stretching themselves to seek opportunities beyond their norm. The reflections of these participants also further support the assertions by Sherrod et al. (2010) that aptitude for and practice of civic engagement typically develops through socialization.

In addition, when measuring young adults' involvement in their communities today, one must be aware that the definition of community is changing. Today's youth and young adults are connected to individuals from coast to coast and beyond. As a result of their exposure to new and different opportunities through technology and broader experiences in their youth that have taken them beyond state and national borders, today's youth and young adults' commitment to involvement also looks different in some ways than those of previous generations. They may be working on a project with peers from other states or even nations, but their efforts are viewed as community engagement because they are engaging in a meaningful effort around a common interest and identified need. So, how we measure the level or practice of civic engagement by today's citizens may need to look different than it did previously.

In order to foster a lifetime commitment to community involvement, one can easily listen to those who are doing it and see the best practices in PYD that can set the stage for a value and

practice that will not only last a lifetime, but also create impacts that affect a wider and wider circle. David summarized,

It was simply exposure to activities and opportunities or ways of doing things. I got really used to doing community service and going out and volunteering and so I naturally look for things like that and have experience being in those contexts.

Jason reflected,

The structure of involvement with other youth...tying fun into it...We can have fun by doing community service or by being involved in the community...but also reflecting on it. In addition, we as youth, as small groups would be responsible for coming up with an idea and then executing it...we interacted with adults. These all provided a chance to build skills.

There was very little shared by any of the participants about their understanding of the reach or result of their community involvement for others. Instead, the focus by both the interviewer and the respondents was more about the preparation or development of skills and aptitude related to their involvement. This could lead to future studies as the impact of youth's efforts in their communities is considered, examining both how the creation of a lifestyle of civic engagement can impact the larger society and also what participants' perceptions or understanding are of their reach or impact of their service. Additionally, since all participants in this study were not only involved at the local level, but also participated in 4-H at the state and sometimes national level, further study might involve a comparison or similar interview process or focus group with individuals who had only been involved at the local or county level to see if strictly having a local 4-H experience has a similar impact on future civic engagement as does those scaffolded opportunities from local to state experiences and beyond.

Finally, one participant, Adam, had the perception that 4-H created learning experiences for all youth, providing opportunities for equity in treatment and development of Life Skills that are sometimes missing in the public schools currently. This raises an additional opportunity for future study to examine whether the 4-H program is reaching a diversity of youth in regard to varying socio-economic classes, providing the opportunity for development of the 5 C's, so important for future school performance, closing the achievement gap, and future levels of contribution as we know is a measure of quality PYD (Lerner, 2004; Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013; Phelps et al., 2009).

Previous research (Zaff et al., 2010; Lerner, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001; Bobek et al., 2009; Sherrod, 2007) has identified that when young people are actively engaged in improving the well-being of their communities and their country, their own development is enhanced, as is the impact for one's family, community and society. The testimonies of the fourteen participants in this study both support and further demonstrate that truth. In addition, they expand the literature as they illustrate the impact PYD experiences can have on shaping values and practices of service and civic engagement that last a lifetime. Their own words articulate it best. Ella summarized,

Everything about 4-H prepared me to be a leader in a community, to want to be involved in my community, to communicate in my community, to work with others, every skill that I use in my community, I just think it all ties back to being in 4-H. I can't think of another organization that I was a part of in my youth that made the most impact on people skills. It was the multitude of opportunities to pursue projects, the quality of the leaders in the program, and the reflection you need to do in order to succeed in 4-H.

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### Supplemental Tables

Table 1: Interview Participant Demographics

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Vocation</b>	<b>Current Community Involvement</b>
Jason	Male	28	Business Consultant	Non-profit board president, United Way volunteer, church member & community event volunteer
Louise	Female	25	Development Director for non-profit youth org.	Marketing chair of young professionals' group, Soroptimist club, United Way committee, 4-H volunteer
Amy	Female	25	Commercial banker	4-H volunteer, chamber of commerce ambassador, Land & Legacy Group
Mason	Male	32	Social Entrepreneur & Engineer	World Economic Forum, US Global Leadership Group
Becky	Female	34	Grain Merchandiser	Farm Bureau Federation member, 4-H Volunteer, State Young Farmer's Advisory Group, PTO
Joy	Female	30	Executive Manager for communications company	Young Professionals' Organization President, church nursery volunteer
Grace	Female	30	Chamber of Commerce Marketing & Leadership Director	Church financial secretary, Jaycee's, community bond initiative advocate
Marci	Female	29	Teacher	Advise Key Club, State Professional Association, 4-H volunteer
Adam	Male	32	Teacher	Youth sports team coach, Local festival committee, School leadership team
David	Male	26	Software Engineer	County and state 4-H volunteer and advisor, community musical groups
Jay	Male	35	Gymnastics Program Director	Youth sports team coach, Tumbling Association Judge
Ella	Female	29	Stay-at-Home Mom	Mom's group organizer, bike trail foundation member
Sally	Female	32	Farmer & Stay-at-Home Mom	Church Education Director, Sunday School teacher, Farm Bureau Federation, Make-A-Wish granter, Social Media in Agriculture Group, Community initiatives, FFA community advisory board, 4-H volunteer
George	Male	25	Fraternity Director of Chapter Advancement	4-H volunteer, Eastern Star, American Royal, Scholarship Advisory Board, church member

Table 2: Summarized Results of Key Research Question Concepts

<b>Responsibility Toward Community</b>	<b>Civic Engagement or Citizenship Defined</b>	<b>Leadership Defined</b>	<b>Meaningful PYD Experiences</b>	<b>Meaningful 4-H Experiences</b>
Give back/provide service (11)	Active role in bettering community (12)	Motivate others toward a common goal (11)	4-H (14)	Club service learning projects (10)
Be a leader (4)	Participate in government/ community issues (12)	Be an example (5)	Local church (7)	Individual projects (7)
Knowledge/awareness of community issues (3)	Give back/Help others (4)	Listen and communicate effectively (3)	Student Groups: Student Council, NHS, Think Tank (4)	Mentorship by leaders (6)
	Do what's right (2)		Legislative Page (3)	Experiential learning (5)
			FFA (2)	State 4-H Council (4)
			Individual Youth Leadership Conferences (2)	Goal setting, record books (4)
			School—government class (2)	National 4-H Conference (3)
			Boy Scouts (1)	County Council (3)
				Club meetings, officer roles (2)
				Communication responsibilities (2)

**Notes:** The sample (N) included 14 participants. The number after each response indicates the number of separate participants who identified the theme as a response for the respective category. These categories were created and tallied by the evaluator through a qualitative coding process to identify themes.

## CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

Positive Youth Development (PYD) includes a holistic view of helping youth reach their full potential, emphasizing their unique talents and strengths and recognizing the contributions they can make to society and their environments today (Dymnicki et al., 2016; Lerner, 2005; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). PYD programming can also play a critical role in the development of civic engagement understanding, practice, and value for youth. In fact, it must. Civic engagement of youth is important as it is both helpful for healthy youth development and for the health of our society (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009; Brandt & Klein, 2016). The two studies included in this paper examine the development of civic engagement skills, values, and aptitudes through PYD experiences, specifically 4-H experiences, at both the local and state levels.

The PYD framework that guided this effort is informed by developmental theories of resilience, plasticity, and competence building. This context informs the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for the development of civic engagement with youth. A critical component of that theoretical framework, as exemplified by the results, is the experiential learning model. Participants gain skills through opportunities that provide meaningful engagement, but intentional time and effort must also be spent on opportunities for reflection and application of those experiences to future opportunities and roles (Gleason, 2012; Peterson et al., 2001; Nistler, 2016; Kolb, 2015). As participants in the State 4-H Council program evaluation and the participants involved in the civic engagement qualitative study shared, both experiencing and processing those experiences were important to the development of Life Skills, particularly those that lead to civic engagement.

There were themes in both studies in regard to the connection between leadership and civic engagement. A State 4-H Council participant shared that a significant learning experience was to “learn how to lead in conversation, but also how to listen to others’ conversations. This is very important because in the future I need to know how to listen as well as lead.” This is especially true when engaging partners and volunteers in community-wide efforts. As George from the qualitative civic engagement study affirmed, “Developing understanding that we all come from different walks of life, but have similar desires and goals (is important). I guess self-awareness is the skill. It takes a lot of different individuals and their ideas to make something happen.” Whether participants had just recently completed their experiences in the 4-H program or had been alumni for more than fifteen years, all were able to reflect and then connect their learning experiences from 4-H to responsibilities and opportunities in their communities or careers today and in the future. Participants confirmed that building leadership, communication, citizenship and learning skills positive impacts individuals’ abilities to contribute to their communities.

Key themes between the two studies included the value of the statewide experience in bringing individuals together with different backgrounds to learn how to communicate and work with one another. In addition, participants in both studies identified growth in their aptitude for and understanding of civic engagement or citizenship. They also currently have plans to continue contributing to their communities as a result of their 4-H experiences, supporting the work of Lerner and Lerner and colleagues (2013) in their comprehensive longitudinal *4-H Study of Positive Youth Development*, who also found that youth who were involved in 4-H were more likely (than participants in other youth organizations or activities) to contribute to their communities. The qualitative study on civic engagement takes the Lerner and Lerner (2013)

study farther by also providing evidence that the influence of PYD experiences on contribution does not stop at adolescence, but continues into adulthood.

Additionally, growth in the ability to communicate effectively and work with others was identified as significant skill for participants in both studies and relevant for them to make an impact in their communities and careers. There was also a sense of improved self-awareness as a result of opportunities for reflection throughout their 4-H experiences. A respondent to the open-ended questions from the State 4-H Council study shared, “I need to listen and ask questions because I am not always the most knowledgeable one in the discussion many times.” Another council member identified that through their State 4-H Council experience he or she “learned a lot about myself, my personality and my leadership style. This has allowed me to become a more confident leader and work more seamlessly with others.” A Life Skill that one participant acknowledged was the ability to relate and work with both youth and adults. Another highlighted the ability to listen and talk to people, which carried over to communicating with neighbors and community members and colleagues, a much-needed communication skill both in work, but also in service and partnership with others to create community action.

Finally, and most relevant to this study on civic engagement, included the participants’ reflections on both their growth in aptitude for civic engagement as a result of 4-H, and their desire to continue participation. When asked what citizenship or civic engagement meant to them as a result of their State 4-H Council experience, participants in the first study talked of community involvement, investing in something bigger than themselves, and doing what is right. Further, they indicated that they would apply the Life Skills they gained on the State 4-H Council in their roles in student groups, working better with others, serving in leadership roles, giving back to 4-H and involvement in their communities. In fact, many already had. One

participant responded, “I use the skills gained on State 4-H Council in every aspect of my life. Whether it is with friends or peers. I am able to step up and take the lead in any situation.”

Another shared,

I have used a lot of the skills I learned through 4-H now that I’m in college. I hold several leadership positions on campus, and I attribute this to my years in 4-H and the leadership skills I gained from State 4-H Council. It helped prepare me for working in a large team of people and understanding the viewpoints and perspectives of others.

The participants of the qualitative study expanded some of those ideas, sharing that 4-H experiences taught them they needed to be involved and step up to the plate to ensure their communities were strong. One individual reflected, “I learned that if you are part of helping others and making that community to be a good place to live and good place to grow up, that’s what it means to be a good community member.” Participants in both studies identified meaningful skills they gained through 4-H and how they are applying them to their lives outside of 4-H.

### **Expanding the Literature and Future Studies**

Not only did the participants identify areas of growth and outcomes as a result of their experiences, but possibly even more significantly, the participants in the two studies were able to articulate the experiences within their PYD opportunities and specifically the 4-H program that led to that growth. While previous 4-H studies explored state 4-H leadership experiences across the country and their impact (Boleman, Merten, & Hall, 2008; Bruce, Boyd, & Dooley, 2004; Astroth, 1996; Maass, Wilken, Jordan, Culen, & Place, 2006; Garst et al., 2006; Kleon & Rinehart, 1998; Seever & Dormody, 1995), none included a youth definition or explanation of either their interpretation of the outcomes’ meanings or the specific experiences that led to those

desired outcomes. These two studies shed light and expand the story on best practices in PYD that can foster the outcomes of leadership and civic engagement through the participants' specific examples. Consistently, the participants referenced the importance of their hands-on experiences in meaningful leadership roles, opportunities to practice and take responsibility, being able to have a voice in relevant decision-making and planning, and working with caring adults that listened and valued their ideas and opinions and provided opportunities for youth to expand their level and scope of responsibility.

One participant shared, "Group discussions were the most important (learning experience) to me (on State 4-H Council) because they helped me realize the importance of other people's opinions and how they can help create a better solution." A participant in the civic engagement qualitative study reflected,

Being on the state level...and planning a big event, such as state 4-H conference, really kind of seeing that side. We're planning an event for other people and the impact that it can have, it was just kind of a cool eye-opening experience of how that service can go a different direction.

Another participant follows a similar theme,

It (State 4-H Council) was the first time in my life where I got to plan something and see it through (state 4-H conference). I got to be part of coming up with the ideas, planning the different things and then really seeing it executed and seeing other youth really get something out of it. You could see you made a difference.

This was true not just at the state level, but also for some participants as they reflected on their experiences at the local level through their service projects. "Seeing is doing," shared one participant,

Because we did service, you got the sense that it was a really cool thing because you saw how much it (visiting a nursing home) brought joy and excitement to the residents and remembering that feeling that even though you don't always want to go do some of these things at first, but knowing that when you do, you would remember that feeling.

A qualitative study participant, Amy shared,

The (4-H) meetings, getting write-ups done, doing projects, helping younger kids, doing record books. I'm a very organized person today and I feel like 4-H is what shaped that. It was a monthly meeting so when I have meetings with the bank today I feel way more organized because I'm prepared...4-H really prepared me for that and probably more than I knew coming out of high school.

Participants were able to articulate and provide a window into those best practices that had the most significant impact on their growth and development, such as large group discussions and decision-making opportunities led by their peers, opportunities to determine projects and see them through from beginning to end, having the opportunity to work with individuals (peers and adults) who they don't see every day and that expose them to different ideas and perspectives, leading their peers, taking time to reflect and process activities and experiences to determine what one has learned or what should happen differently next time, and taking time to do goal-setting and create a plan before implementing a project. These may seem like natural or logical opportunities for PYD programming, but if not done with purpose and intention, youth may not have the same learning experience or growth opportunity as intended.

Additionally, this work expands the literature on the role of PYD programming in developing life-long civic engagement. Previous research (Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013; Bobek et al., 2009) had confirmed that 4-Hers were more likely to contribute to their communities than

non-4-Hers. Participants in these studies provide solid evidence that youth who are engaged and exposed to meaningful leadership and service opportunities as youth, particularly through 4-H, will maintain that commitment and desire to be civically involved long into adulthood. As one qualitative participant shared,

It's extremely important (for me to be involved in the community); it's expected. It is just what I do and I feel like it's part of being a member of the community. It's part of who I am. And, I learned that, it was ingrained for me, through 4-H.

All 14 of the qualitative study participants credited their 4-H experiences for their current understanding and commitment to civic engagement today. In addition, the State 4-H Council evaluation respondents also acknowledged an increased understanding and growth in citizenship as a result of their participation in that experience. All of the participants in both studies had been involved in the 4-H program at both local and state levels. Further study should be done to compare perspectives of those who have been involved at only the local level to those with multi-level involvement to gain a fuller understanding of the impact of those scaffolded experiences. In addition, following up with the participants of the State 4-H Council program evaluation in a few years may provide greater insights into the growth they identify from that particular experience after they have had time to apply their skills in real world experiences. Based on some of the qualitative participants' reflections, it may still be too soon to tell the impact of the State 4-H Council experience for those in the quantitative study who just recently completed their terms.

### **Implications**

One can observe themes between the two studies in regard to the development of civic engagement and leadership within youth and the identified best practices to foster that

development. The State 4-H Council experience is one unique experience, but can play a significant role in crystallizing and increasing the depth of skill and learning from the opportunities youth have had at a local level by expanding the scope of responsibility for participants. The State 4-H Council experience also serves as a real-world opportunity to put skills that have been gained at the local level to use in a meaningful leadership role, as recommended by MacNeil (2006) and Wagner and Mathison (2016). Both participants in the program evaluation of State 4-H Council who have been away from the State 4-H Council for three years or less and those young adults who have been away from their 4-H experience from anywhere from seven to seventeen years, were able to reflect on and identify meaningful components of 4-H that impacted their current involvement and value of civic engagement. Youth who have been involved in 4-H on many levels came into their State 4-H Council experience already at a relatively high aptitude in the Life Skill areas being measured, such as citizenship, leadership, communication, and learning skills. Growth was demonstrated in each of the constructs between Pre-Test and Post-Test scores; when one looks at the data from the qualitative interviews, it might also lead to an interpretation that the State 4-H Council experience likely serves as an opportunity for enhancing and refining those skills and interests, stretching the scope and level of responsibility, that were first developed and fostered at the local level.

Scaffolded experiences at the state and national levels provide opportunities for broadening and deepening the scope and understanding of the importance of such skills as leadership, citizenship, communication, and learning. Those participants who had been out of the program and reflected back on their experiences ten years prior identified the great influence it

had, but also acknowledged that they may not have understood the impact at the time. One participant explained,

My 4-H experiences gave me a sense of purpose and I think it enabled me with some of the very basic skills to be effective within the community and I think that is maybe even some of the more important parts—like seeing what’s out there and how you can make a difference, but also enabling you with some very basic skills to make that impact.

Youniss (2009) identified the need to reach youth at a developmentally appropriate time in the life cycle and provide structure through organized action and participation in a meaningful and just cause as critical factors to create civically minded adults. Marci, one of the qualitative study participants provided a good example of the scaffolded approach that meets youth where they are at a developmentally appropriate time,

When I was younger it was mainly some sort of service learning or community service project, but we usually were learning a new skill at the same time. Then, as we got older, our leader would tell us we needed to decide what should be done...she would ask what was bothering us, what did we think should be changed...so then we started to take on the role of identifying what needed to be done in the community and what we felt should be priorities...so taking it from identifying what needed to be done and leading the charge and making that happen to get it done was next.

These scaffolded experiences, which started out for younger 4-H’ers as exposure to service, then stepped up to opportunities for needs assessment, planning and action, present a model for consideration in a longitudinal experience, such as the 4-H program, to develop and sustain the lifelong practice of civic engagement.

In later work, Youniss (2011) shared that the greatest predictor of adult membership in voluntary groups was participation in high school extracurricular activities, including participation in school government. Based on the findings from these two studies, one would argue that participation in 4-H experiences is also a significant contributor to the development of civic engagement into adulthood, perhaps even more significant. When asked how they would apply the knowledge or skills gained from their experience on the State 4-H Council, one participant responded,

The leadership, citizenship, organization, hard work and reflecting that I did in 4-H have helped me immensely in school, work, and life in general. Being on council also gave me the heart to encourage and help youth grow into their potential just like the State 4-H Council members did for me as a younger 4-Her.

If the interviewees' stories are any indication, this practice is likely to continue long into adulthood. The fourteen civic engagement interview participants all shared experiences and positions they currently hold in leadership and community betterment. They are truly engaged citizens. Louise reflected,

The big thing for me was that service and passion component (of 4-H). I stayed involved in 4-H because I was passionate about the mission and the organization and everything it taught, but also, like the pledge, "I pledge my hands to larger service and my heart to greater loyalty." That stuck with me far and kind of led me to going into the non-profit service field as an adult.

Empowering youth to have a voice and share in decision-making builds confidence in the youth themselves and their ability to make those decisions. Additionally, it gives them real and meaningful practice in doing so in ways that are significant and long-lasting. It also develops a

life-long commitment and belief that not only can make a difference in their communities and beyond, but in fact, they should. This is what want PYD experiences to be. We hope all PYD experiences can have a similar impact as they did on this participant, who shared, “The experiences I had in 4-H still drive me to be a better leader and drive me to be a better communicator and citizen, just a better person and a better version of myself.”

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Beyond academia, I am a full-time Iowa State University Extension and Outreach professional in 4-H Youth Development. I am grateful for the professional growth experiences this position has afforded me, particularly having the opportunity to work with so many outstanding youth over the years, which moved me to conduct the research I have done. So, thank you to the current and former 4-Hers who participated in the studies, but also to all of the 4-Hers who have impacted my life, inspired me to be a better person, and moved me to want to tell their stories through this research. One of those former 4-Hers even served as my transcriptionist. A special thanks to Ashley Wenke for all of her work, including being a reviewer of themes to assist with my triangulation efforts in my qualitative work.

I would not have had the drive, fortitude, or confidence to be where I am today without the love and support of my family and friends. My parents are two of the most amazing people I know and I am lucky to call Nancy and Roger Allen “Mom” and “Dad.” They not only have encouraged and supported my education as an investment in myself, but they have also understood when I did not have time to visit as much over the last five years because of school commitments. Most importantly, they have been incredible examples for me in regard to educational and career paths, but also in life as they serve and participate in their own community to make it a better place and have made a difference in the lives of many, many youth over the years—and still today through their own community involvement. This example has influenced my own choices in regard to civic engagement and leadership. My extended family, which includes my brother and family, especially a very special niece and nephew, my cousins, aunts and uncles have all provided love and support, laughter, diversions, prayers, and encouragement along the way and have been greatly appreciated. I am blessed to have a strong army of support.

I am also blessed with a terrific group of friends and colleagues. They include individuals within 4-H and Extension & Outreach, Human Development and Family Studies, my church community, the ISU community, and beyond. Thanks to those current and former colleagues who have been tremendous resources, served as sounding boards for ideas and suggestions, provided technical assistance, and mentored me throughout my career, and especially through the graduate school process. A special thank you goes to both Lexa Janes and Mary Kay Litzel for formatting assistance with my dissertation.

My friends have provided dinner, sent encouraging notes, given sweet treats as motivation to keep going, and helped with projects so I could study. Most of all, this support

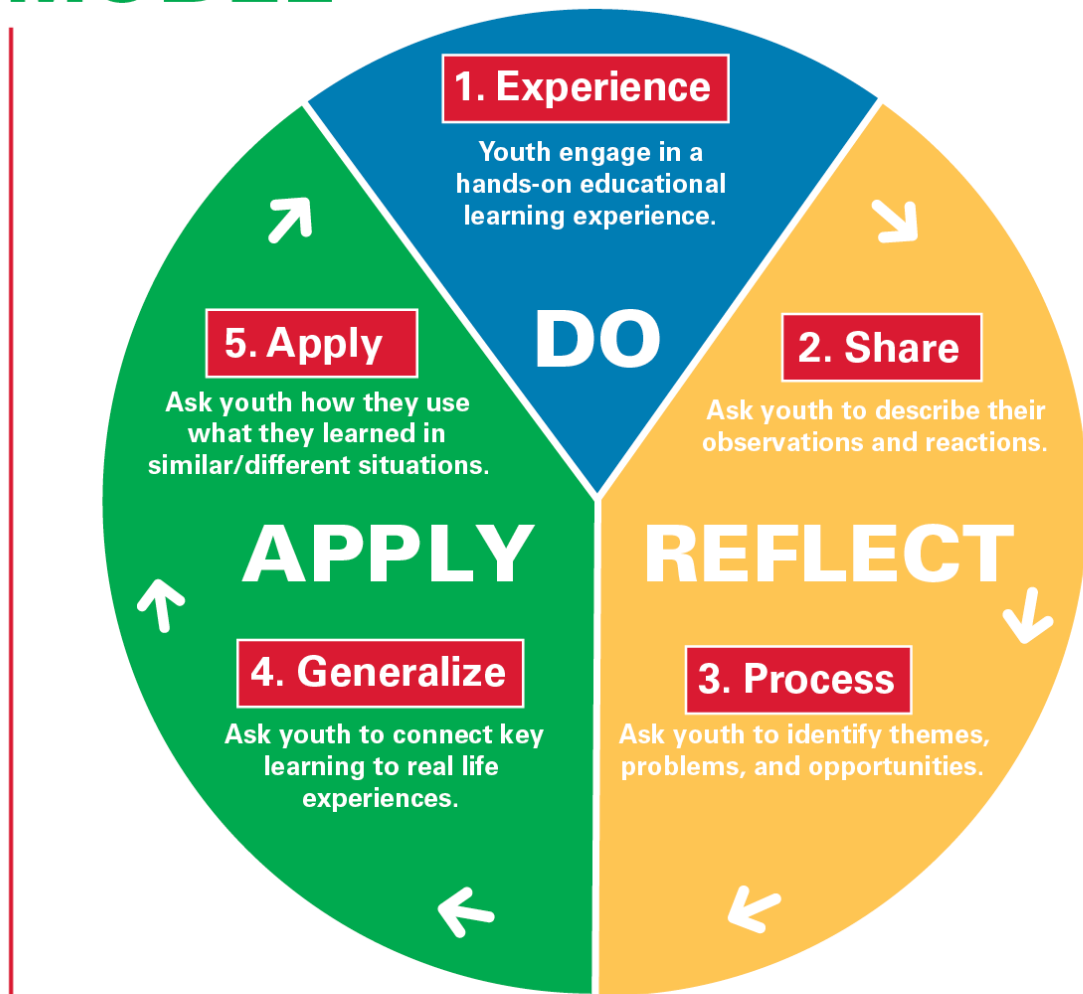
group has cheered me on, been patient with my determination and occasional lack of availability, celebrated my successes with me, listened when I needed it, and showed interest in my work.

Thank you!

I am grateful to each and every one of the people who have been a part of this process, challenging and cheering for me, occasionally commiserating and often celebrating with me. Each of the individuals specifically listed, but also the many who are recognized by group affiliation mean more to me than I can express in this short acknowledgement. Thank you for your love, support, encouragement, prayers, empathy, and comfort when I needed it. Most of all, thank you for opportunities to learn from and with you, and for being important people in my life!

## APPENDIX A: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL

# 4-H EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL



Based on the Kolb Learning Model (1975) and Bybee's Learning Cycle (1977)

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**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Extension and Outreach

## APPENDIX B: CONTINUUM OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT MODEL

## The Youth Engagement Continuum

The youth engagement continuum helps situate youth-led social change relative to other prevailing approaches to youth work.

Each of the five strategies described in the continuum offers services and programs to young people and plays an important role in supporting their healthy growth and development as individuals. Communities benefit most, however, when young people also have meaningful opportunities to engage in civic leadership and youth organizing. The development of strong and vibrant cities, communities, and states requires the intentional cultivation of organizations at each level of the continuum.



Source: Chart excerpted from *A New Role for Connecticut Youth: Leaders of Social Change*. Perrin Family Foundation, 2015. The youth engagement continuum originally appeared in "An Emerging Model for Working with Youth: Community Organizing + Youth Development + Youth Organizing," *Occasional Papers Series on Youth Organizing*, Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2000.

Chart accessed at: <http://www.perrinfamilyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/YouthEngagement.pdf>

## APPENDIX C: STATE 4-H COUNCIL PROGRAM EVALUATION ARTICLES

### Article 1: Parental Informed Consent Document

**Title of Study:** Iowa State 4-H Council Program Evaluation

**Investigator:** Brenda Allen

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to conduct a program evaluation of the Iowa State 4-H Council. We are interested in what life skill outcomes our participants gain from this experience. The information will be compiled and shared with others to provide insight regarding best practices and lessons learned when creating a leadership council. Please take your time in deciding if you will grant permission for him or her to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

Your child is being invited to participate because they were a member of the Iowa State 4-H Council. He or she should not participate if they don't feel comfortable.

Your child will be asked to complete a program evaluation that will be sent to them via e-mail link that will take about 10 minutes. All questions are in regard to their experience on State 4-H Council—what they learned and how they will apply those experiences to other parts of their life.

#### Benefits, Risks or Discomforts

If you allow your child to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you or your child beyond the opportunity to reflect on his or her experience. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by strengthening our programmatic efforts regarding State 4-H Council and other leadership development groups. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts at this time from participating in this study.

You and your child will not have any costs from participating in this study. Your child will not be compensated for participating in this study.

#### Confidentiality

To ensure your child's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, responses will not be tied to any one individual and email addresses will not be linked to surveys so the participation is anonymous.

#### Participant Rights

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose not to give consent or you can withdraw consent at any time without any penalties or negative consequences. Your child may also choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties or negative consequences. Your child can skip any questions that he or she does not wish to answer.

If you have any questions *about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury*, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

If you would prefer that your child NOT participate in the study or you need further information **about the study**, contact Brenda Allen at 515-294-1567 or [bsallen@iastate.edu](mailto:bsallen@iastate.edu) or by mail at:

Brenda Allen  
Extension 4-H Youth Building, ISU  
1259 Stange Rd.  
Ames, IA 50011-1002

## **Article 2: Recruitment E-Mail Letter**

Dear Iowa State 4-H Council participant:

Thanks for participating in the State 4-H Council! We hope you had a positive experience throughout the year. We'd like to learn a little about what skills or knowledge you may have gained while on the State 4-H Council.

I would like to invite you to participate in a brief survey, which will take no more than 15 minutes for you to complete. This survey is confidential. We will be compiling results and using it to make the council better for the future as well as share with others the benefits of participating.

Here's the link if you agree to participate: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about the survey or the State 4-H Council, please contact Brenda Allen, the State 4-H Council coordinator.

Thanks for sharing your opinions and telling us what you learned!

Brenda Allen  
State 4-H Youth Program Specialist  
Extension 4-H Youth Building, ISU  
1259 Stange Rd.  
Ames, IA 50011-1002  
515-294-1567  
[bsallen@iastate.edu](mailto:bsallen@iastate.edu)

**Article 3: Youth Assent: First page of Online Survey**

Welcome to the 1<sup>st</sup> page of the Iowa State 4-H Council evaluation survey.

This survey should take you no more than 15 minutes. You will not receive any compensation for completing this survey, but you will help us to make informed improvements for the State 4-H Council in the future and help us to share best practices with others.

All responses for this survey are completely confidential. In addition, there are no risks related to participating in this survey. It is completely voluntary.

If you are willing to continue and complete the survey, please click **Yes** and you will be taken to the first survey questions.

Thank you for sharing your opinions. If you have any questions about this survey or the Iowa State 4-H Council, please contact Brenda Allen, the Iowa State 4-H Council advisor.

Brenda Allen  
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515-294-1567  
[bsallen@iastate.edu](mailto:bsallen@iastate.edu)

#### **Article 4: Reminder e-mail**

Dear State 4-H Council Participant:

Thanks for participating in the Iowa State 4-H Council! We hope you had a positive experience. Our records indicate you haven't filled out our program evaluation survey yet and we'd really like to know your opinions. We'll be using the results to make the council experience better for the future as well as to share with the others the benefits of participating.

This survey will take no more than 15 minutes to complete and it's confidential.

Here's the link if you agree to participate: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about the survey or the State 4-H Council, please contact Brenda Allen, the Iowa State 4-H Council advisor.

Thanks for sharing your opinions and telling us what you learned!

Brenda Allen  
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## Article 5: State 4-H Council Program Evaluation Survey



## Iowa 4-H Program Priorities Self-Assessment

## Iowa State 4-H Council

**Instructions:** Thank you for participating in this survey about the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference. Please mark your responses for the following questions clearly and honestly.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Grade in School:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Current Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Council Year:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years in 4-H: 0      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Where do you live: Farm    Rural(non-farm)    Town (10,000-49,000)    Suburb    City (50,000+)

Race/Ethnicity:	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	White	White
	Black	Black
	American Native	American Native
	Asian	Asian
	Hawaiian/Pac.Island	Hawaiian/Pac.Island
	White & Black	White & Black
	White & Am. Native	White & Am. Native
	Black & Am. Native	Black & Am. Native
	White & Asian	White & Asian
	Other/Mixed(specify)	Other/Mixed (specify)

For the following section, please note that on the left hand side of the question, you are to share your thoughts regarding your skills “now” after participating in the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference. On the right hand side, you will share where you would rate your skills or knowledge “before” you attended the conference.

<b>NOW</b> <i>Now after participating in the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference, how much do your actions show</i>						<b>BEFORE</b> <i>Before participating in the Iowa 4-H Youth Conference, how much did your actions show you</i>				
Not at all	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal	<b>NOW and BEFORE:</b> Circle the number that best represents your level of agreement.	Not at all	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	1. Apply knowledge in ways that solve “real-life” problems through service learning projects	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	2. Work on service projects to meet a need in your community	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	3. Gain skills through serving your community that will help you in the future	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	4. Listen to everyone’s views whether I agree or not	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	5. Enjoy learning about people who are different from me	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	6. Work together in a team	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	7. Listen and talk to others before making decisions	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	8. Handle conflict respectfully	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	9. Feel confident when speaking in front of others	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	10. Use good listening skills when others are talking	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	11. Ask questions	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	12. Create learning goals	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	13. Review a variety of resources related to a topic	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	14. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of different ideas, solutions, or approaches	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	15. Identify what is going well and what needs to change to achieve goals	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	16. Apply what was learned to new or different experiences (for example: applied you learned to a school project, used your knowledge to fix something at home, used what you’ve learned to help you make a decision)	1	2	3	4	5

**Open-Ended Questions: Please share your responses to the following questions.**

1. What was the most important skill or knowledge you gained from participating in the Iowa State 4-H Council?
2. What does leadership mean to you after participating in the Iowa State 4-H Council?
3. What does being a responsible citizen or civic engagement mean to you after being on the State 4-H Council?
4. What specific experiences on the State 4-H Council would you identify as being the most influential in developing your leadership or citizenship skills and why?
5. How will you use the skills or knowledge you gained from the Iowa State 4-H Council in other parts of your life?

## Article 6: IRB Approval for State 4-H Council Program Evaluation

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202  
Ames, Iowa 50014  
515 294-4566

**Date:** 5/22/2017

**To:** Dr. Brenda Allen  
Extension 4-H Youth Bldg, ISU  
Ames, IA 50011

**CC:** Dr. Brenda Lohman  
2330 Palmer, Suite 6230  
Keli Tallman  
State 4-H Office, Ext 4-H Youth Bldg, ISU

**From:** Office for Responsible Research

**Title:** Iowa State 4-H council program evaluation

**IRB ID:** 16-254

**Approval Date:** 5/22/2017      **Date for Continuing Review:** 7/24/2018

**Submission Type:** Modification      **Review Type:** Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingland, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.

## APPENDIX D: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STUDY ARTICLES

**Article 1: Letter of Invitation**

Dear Former Iowa 4-H'er:

I hope you had a positive experience in the Iowa 4-H Youth Development program. We'd like to learn a little about what skills or knowledge you may have gained related to civic engagement while you were involved in 4-H and other Positive Youth Development organizations as a youth.

The purpose of this study is to identify the impacts 4-H experiences have had on the development of civic engagement understanding, skill, and practice as a youth and in current involvement in local communities for young adults. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a former 4-H'er who was involved in the program beyond the local or county level.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview, which will take no more than 60 minutes for you to complete. The interview will be recorded. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher or hired transcriptionist and will be erased following the transcription (within one month). The interview will be conducted as your schedule allows. You may also be contacted later for a member check of data and analyses.

It is hoped that the information gained in this study has the potential to benefit future 4-H and even broader Positive Youth Development programming.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Brenda Allen, the primary researcher.

Brenda will be following up with a phone call or e-mail to set a potential date for an interview if you are willing able to participate.

Thanks for sharing your opinions and insights regarding civic engagement!

Brenda Allen  
State 4-H Youth Program Specialist  
Extension 4-H Youth Building, ISU  
1259 Stange Rd.  
Ames, IA 50011-1002  
515-294-1567  
[bsallen@iastate.edu](mailto:bsallen@iastate.edu)

## **Article 2: Informed Consent**

**Title of Study:** Acquisition of citizenship skills/civic education in youth  
**Investigators:** Brenda Allen (researcher), Dr. Brenda Lohman (supervisor)

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study is being conducted by a graduate student at Iowa State University as part of her doctoral dissertation research requirements. In addition, this study will be shared with the larger research community through a published manuscript.

The purpose of this study is to identify the impacts 4-H experiences have had on the development of civic engagement understanding, skill, and practice as a youth and in current involvement in local communities for young adults. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a former 4-H'er who was involved in the program beyond the local or county level.

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last about 60 minutes in the form of a one-on-one interview and will involve you allowing the researcher to interview about your experiences in 4-H as well as your understanding and development of opinions, values and practices regarding civic engagement. The interview will be audio recorded. The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher or hired transcriptionist and will be erased following the transcription (within one month). The interview will be conducted as your schedule allows. You may also be contacted later for a member check of data and analyses.

### **RISKS**

The risks of this study are very minimal. While participating in this study you may experience possible discomfort at disclosing information during an interview.

### **BENEFITS**

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study has the potential to benefit future Positive Youth Development programming. This information may lead to future studies regarding the development of civic engagement through Positive Youth Development programming.

### **COSTS AND COMPENSATION**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

### **PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and you may stop answering questions at any time. You may decide not to participate in the study or leave the study early for any reason and it will not result in any penalty.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential and will not be made publicly available. To ensure confidentiality the following measures will be taken: The subjects will be assigned a code name which will be used on forms and in writing instead of their names. Any other identifying details obtained in the course of an interview or observation will be altered to protect confidentiality. All data gathered will be kept in a password coded computer file. The persons who will have access to the individual data and/or summarized data are the researcher and her supervisor. Your name and identifiable information will remain confidential.

## QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact: Brenda Allen (researcher) by phone (515-294-1567) or by e-mail at [bsallen@iastate.edu](mailto:bsallen@iastate.edu)

## PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant's Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Person Obtaining  
Informed Consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

### Article 3: Schedule of Questions

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Theoretical Framework</i>	<i>Interview Questions</i>
Demographic information	Background and identity development are important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How old are you?</li> <li>• Where are you originally from?</li> <li>• Where are you living now?</li> <li>• What is your current vocation?</li> <li>• Where did you go to school?</li> <li>• Share your top level of education.</li> <li>• What are you currently involved in your local community, professional organization, church, or other?</li> </ul>
Research Context	PYD experiences, and specifically 4-H, have been found to impact the development of civic engagement for youth (Lerner & Lerner et al., 2013).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were you involved in 4-H?</li> <li>• How many years were you a member of 4-H?</li> <li>• What activities/projects were you involved in throughout your 4-H career?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--local?</li> <li>--county?</li> <li>--state?</li> <li>--national?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What activities were you involved in during high school beyond 4-H?</li> </ul>
1. How do young adults define civic engagement and what value do you place on being involved in the community?	<p>Davis (2014) investigated the Idaho 4-H program's impact on citizenship and leadership life skills.</p> <p>Zaff et al. (2009) found that youth engagement in their communities enhances their development, but also the larger community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What responsibility do you feel toward your community?</li> <li>• What does "being involved" in your community mean to you?</li> <li>• How do you define community?</li> <li>• How would you describe your involvement in the community?</li> <li>• How do you make an impact?</li> <li>• What motivated you to get involved in your community as a young professional?</li> <li>• What does civic engagement mean to you?</li> <li>• What is citizenship to you?</li> <li>• How are these the same or different?</li> <li>• How has your understanding of civic engagement changed or remained the same over time?</li> </ul>
2. How do the participants define leadership? What relationship do they see between leadership and civic engagement? What influences did PYD experiences have on	Leadership and civic engagement development are intertwined in ways that enhance each; learning collaborative leadership skills prepares students to more effectively engage in their communities (Wagner & Mathison, 2015).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is leadership to you?</li> <li>• What influenced your definition of leadership?</li> <li>• Tell me about any key mentors that were important to you.</li> <li>• What role did any mentors or advisors play in your leadership development?</li> </ul>

<p>their definitions and connection between leadership and civic engagement?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were there other instances where adult leaders/volunteers/staff helped you build skills and understanding as a leader?</li> <li>• How do you determine whether to lead within the organizations you are currently involved? How are leadership and civic engagement related for you?</li> </ul>
<p>3. What is the long-term impact of PYD experiences, specifically 4-H, for the value development of civic engagement or contribution?</p>	<p>Lerner &amp; Lerner et al., (2012) identified factors that lead to contribution for youth. But, very little research has been done exploring long-term civic engagement impacts for those participating in PYD experiences (Fox, Schroeder, &amp; Lodl, 2003).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how citizenship or civic engagement and leadership are part of your life today?</li> <li>• What organizations or experiences as a youth prepared you for your community involvement today?</li> <li>• What activities or experiences did you have in your youth that led to your understanding of civic engagement?</li> <li>• What other influences helped to shape your definition of civic engagement (family, school, church, etc.)?</li> <li>• Were there specific programs or activities in 4-H that you felt helped build your leadership or citizenship skills?</li> <li>• How did they prepare you? What happened? Why was it meaningful or influential?</li> <li>• How did any of your 4-H experiences impact your current activities, involvement or leadership roles?</li> <li>• What skills do you think you developed through 4-H to prepare you for these roles?</li> <li>• How do the skills, knowledge or attitudes you gained in 4-H relate to your performance in your current role?</li> <li>• How important is it to you to be involved in your community?</li> <li>• How do you determine what to get involved in civically within your community?</li> </ul>

## Article 4: IRB Approval for Civic Engagement Qualitative Study

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202  
Ames, Iowa 50014  
515 294-4566

**Date:** 5/8/2017

**To:** Brenda Allen  
Extension 4-H Youth Bldg, ISU  
Ames, IA 50011

**CC:** Dr. Brenda Lohman  
2330 Palmer, Suite 6230

**From:** Office for Responsible Research

**Title:** A qualitative study of civic engagement development through Positive Youth Development Experiences

**IRB ID:** 17-183

**Study Review Date:** 5/8/2017

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

**Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form.** A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. **Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that **approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**