

# The Value of Being a Missouri 4-H Camp Counselor



**Missouri 4-H**  
4-H Center for Youth Development

A study of the  
experiences and  
personal growth of  
Missouri 4-H Camp  
Counselors

Summer, 2007

Complete Report

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*“Everybody paddles through pleasures in their lives: marriage, success, and children. And everybody paddles through storms as well, facing economic difficulties, fighting off adversaries, stumbling through unpleasant relationships, struggling with disease, moving on from a death in the family. How one deals with such disruptions in life... how one perseveres is a mark of who that person is....Summer camp is where the tools to fend off the hard times are acquired. They are tools that have worked for generations of campers, and they will work forever.”*  
(Eisner, 2005)

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## Introduction

Many Extension faculty, staff, and volunteers have felt in their hearts for generations that 4-H Camp has an important, positive impact on the development of young people. Parents report how their children have grown noticeably as a result of a mere three or four-day stay at camp. 4-H leaders report that their club members return from camp with higher capacity for caring, are more capable, more competent, and of stronger character.

Is camp really responsible for such growth with any consistency? These anecdotal reports of good feelings or personal growth are insufficient. Some individual camps have evaluated various aspects of their own camp, but rarely with any consistency or depth. Until recently the effectiveness of camp environments in developing life skills among campers has seldom been evaluated in a consistent manner across statewide camping programs. Bari S. Dworken, Ed.D., (as cited by Garst and Bruce, 2003), points out that, "Unfortunately, the majority of evaluations conducted in camp settings have been internal process evaluations aimed at program improvement and identifying levels of participant satisfaction."

It is important to be more intentional and systematic in determining the impacts of the program on youth participants (Astroth, 2003; Guion & Rivera, 2006). Given the investment of Extension faculty time, resources, and facilities to produce a residential camp experience it is appropriate to examine the outcomes of the camp experience to measure what value, beyond a few days of fun and games, there might be.

In recent years research on the value of camping has been on the rise nationally. That research is beginning to document and prove the ways in which camping is a context for positive youth development. Camp participation has been found to affect youth in multiple ways, enhancing many forms of growth (Garst & Bruce, 2003).

4-H Camps are now documented as developing important life skills in youth. 4-H campers in Missouri were studied in 2005 and again in 2006 and the results were overwhelming; campers and parents both report that the 4-H Camping experience is highly effective in developing life skills (University of Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development, 2007, p. 7). The Missouri 4-H Camp environments have been proven to develop life skills relating to Head (managing and thinking), Heart (relating and caring), Hands (giving and working), and Health (living and being) as defined by the Targeting Life Skills Model (Hendricks, 1998).

In Missouri, as well as nationally, 4-H Camping programs often utilize the leadership and energy of teenage camp counselors (ages 14-18) to plan and conduct local and area 4-H Camping programs. Since the value to campers has been well-documented in Missouri recently, one must ask the next logical question: ***What value does serving as a 4-H Camp Counselor hold for teens?***

Not only is it important to evaluate the value and relevance of camping and the 4-H Camp Counseling experience for program improvement and general public information, it is increasingly important that the teens themselves learn in advance what value and benefit serving as a counselor may have (Garst & Johnson, 2005).

Parents and other adults in the lives of teens also need to be aware of the long-term benefits of serving as a camp counselor. Those positive life-benefits have been documented in a few other states recently by Brandt & Arnold (2006), Digby & Ferrari (2007) and Garst & Johnson (2005). The decisions regarding competing priorities in the lives of teens are often guided and influenced by key adults. Knowing the long term benefits of service as a camp counselor can encourage those significant adults to help teens to choose whether or not to serve as a camp counselor, and support them as they are called upon to focus on preparing to serve in that role.

The 2007 Missouri study was designed to answer these questions:

1. Do Missouri 4-H Camp Counselors report positive growth experiences within personal and interpersonal domains resulting from their training and experiences as a camp counselor, and do they experience negative pressures associated with serving as a Camp Counselor?
2. Does the duration and depth of preparation for the Missouri 4-H Camp Counseling experience affect personal, interpersonal, and negative domains?
3. Is there a relationship between skills 4-H Camp Counselors gain in other organizations and their perceived success as a 4-H Camp Counselor?
4. Does the 4-H Camp Counselor experience have an impact on career goals and aspirations of teens?

5. Do 4-H Camp Counselors perceive expectations to be reasonable and attainable? Do they perceive that they have had sufficient training and do they feel prepared for their role as camp counselor?
6. How do camp counselors assess their own level of proficiency, and what do they identify as their own significant accomplishments as a counselor?

After learning the preliminary results of the descriptive analyses, 4-H faculty across the state were invited to identify questions that arose in their own minds as they studied the data. An additional twelve questions were developed and MU graduate students conducted inferential data analysis to reveal any possible relationships that may exist within the data. Those additional analyses are covered in various places throughout this report, and appear in complete form in Appendix 1.

### ***Background on Missouri 4-H Camping Programs***

The University of Missouri Extension 4-H field faculty conducts several 4-H resident camps throughout the state each summer. The 4-H Camping programs in Missouri vary widely throughout the state regarding camp facilities, the administrative structure, and the specific educational content. Some camps are planned and staffed by regional camp associations responsible for multiple sessions at a common facility utilizing hired camp staff. Others are single-session camps that are planned on a county or multi-county level staffed by volunteers and local Extension faculty only.

The content and style of each camp session is determined by each local or regional planning group. No state-wide camp curricula or state-guided training programs have existed for camp counselors, Extension faculty, or adult volunteers that work with any of the camping sessions.

Some camp groups in Missouri engage their camp counselors in a process of training and planning that spans several months prior to camp. Others select their camp counselors immediately prior to camp, with a training period lasting through a brief but intensive overnight orientation process. Among those camps reporting, the total number of faculty-reported hours counselors spend in orientation and planning range from a low of 6 hours, to a high of 30 hours.

In Missouri, an estimated 2,000 campers participate annually in 4-H residential camp experiences conducted through 23 camp sessions. An estimated 375 teen camp counselors are involved each year in conducting the 4-H camp sessions.

Thirteen camp groups use a State Park group camp facility, eight use church-owned camp facilities, one uses a non-profit group-owned facility and one uses a camp owned by the Boy Scout program.

The camp counselors reported on within this study served as counselors at either a two-night or three-night resident camp.

## ***The Study***

The core of the questionnaire was the 70 questions of the Youth Experiences Survey (YES) 2.0 (2005), developed by Larson, Hansen, and Jarrett; University of Illinois, and measured counselors' experiences in the following domains:

- Identity Experiences
- Initiative Experiences
- Basic Skills (such as dealing with temper, stress and improving academic skills)
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Teamwork and Social Skills
- Adult Networks and Social Capital
- Negative Experiences

The portion of the instrument developed by the Missouri design team gathered additional information such as demographics and involvement in other youth organizations. It also asked counselors to respond both quantitatively and qualitatively in terms of:

- The training and orientation they participated in as they prepared for their roles as camp counselors.
- The expectations of them as camp counselors versus their ability to carry them out.
- How the camp counselors gauged the level of their own importance in conducting 4-H Camp.
- The perceived value of their camp counseling experience to them personally.

The survey instrument was piloted with a sample of 66 counselors distributed throughout six different camps in Missouri during the 2006 camping season. Final revisions to the document were made. The revised survey instrument and administration process were reviewed and approved by the MU Campus Institutional Review Board.

### Instrument Validity:

On the final instrument, the overall Cronbach's Alpha for the seven domains in the YES portion of the instrument was .851. For each of the domains: .706 in the Identity Experiences domain, .880 in the Initiative Experiences domain, .866 in Basic Skills domain, .765 in Interpersonal Relationship domains, .817 in Teamwork and Social Skills domain, .816 in Adult Networks and Social Capital domain, and .895 in the Negative Experiences domain.

### The Process:

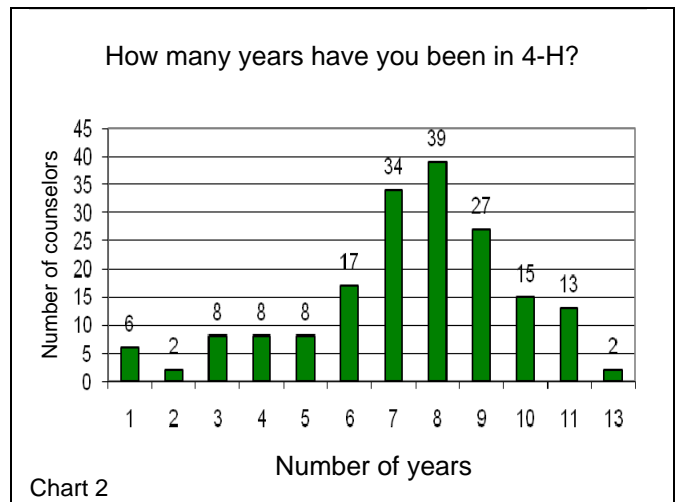
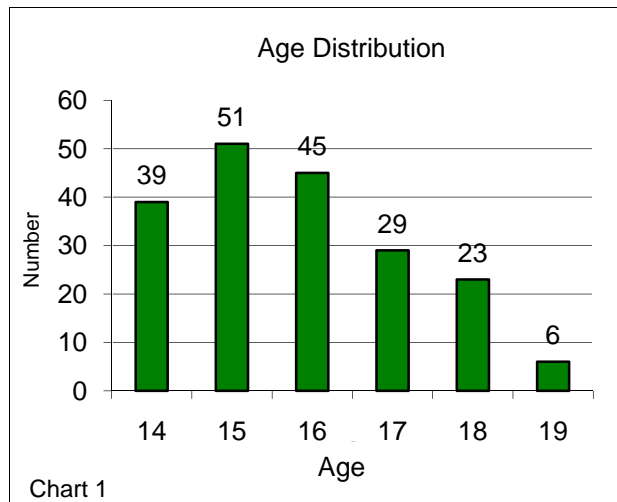
With parental consent secured, 193 4-H Camp Counselors in the summer of 2007 gave their assent and completed the questionnaire either at or near the end of their respective 2007 camp sessions. The instruments were gathered by MU Extension

faculty/staff, who then forwarded them to the MU 4-H Center for 4-H Youth Development for data entry.

## Results

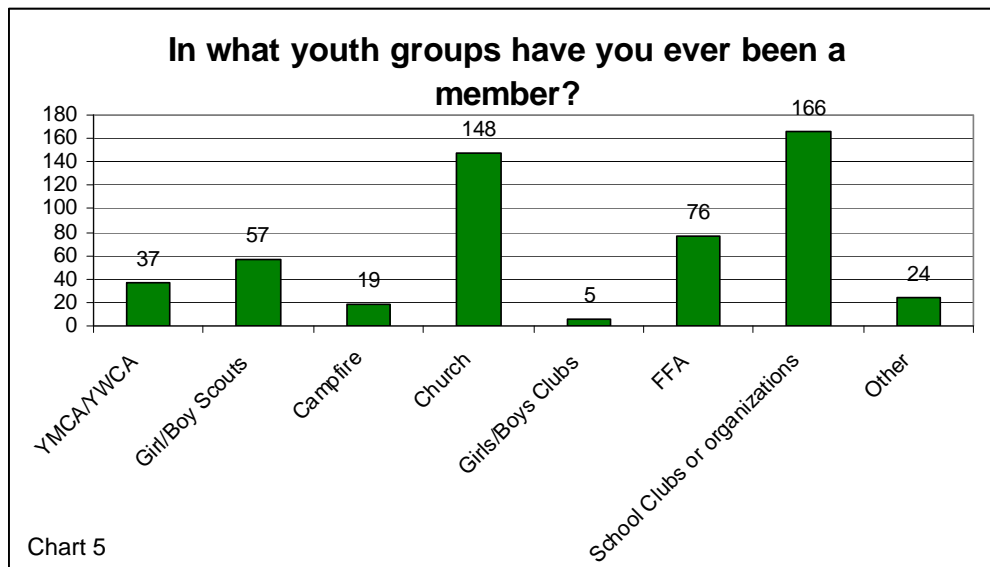
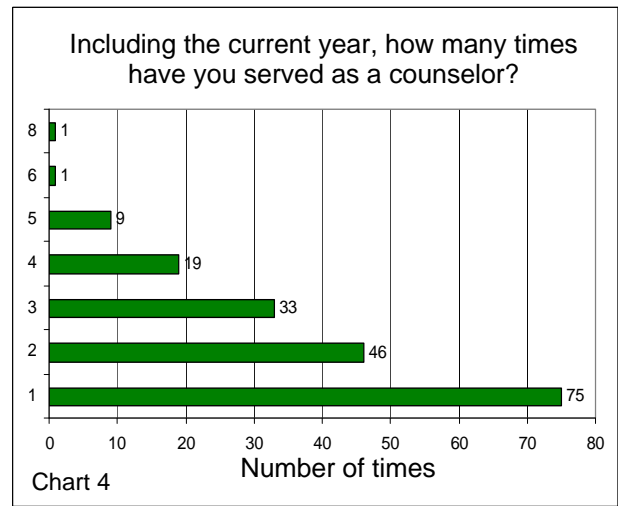
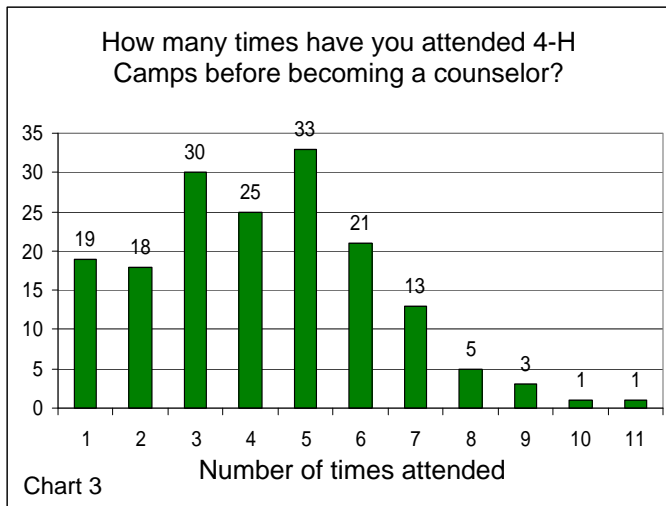
### Demographics

193 surveys were completed by 4-H Camp Counselors, aged 14-19 years old, representing 17 camping sessions conducted throughout Missouri. Sixty-eight (68) males and one hundred twenty-five (125) females participated in the study.



One hundred eighty-six (186) were a 4-H member at the time of survey. The number of years of self-reported 4-H membership ranged from one to 13 years prior to the current year.

Years as a camper: One hundred seventy (170) had attended 4-H camp before as a camper. Twenty-one had not. Two gave no answer. Among those that had attended camp prior to becoming a camp counselor, forty percent (40%) of the camp counselors were serving in their first year as camp counselor.

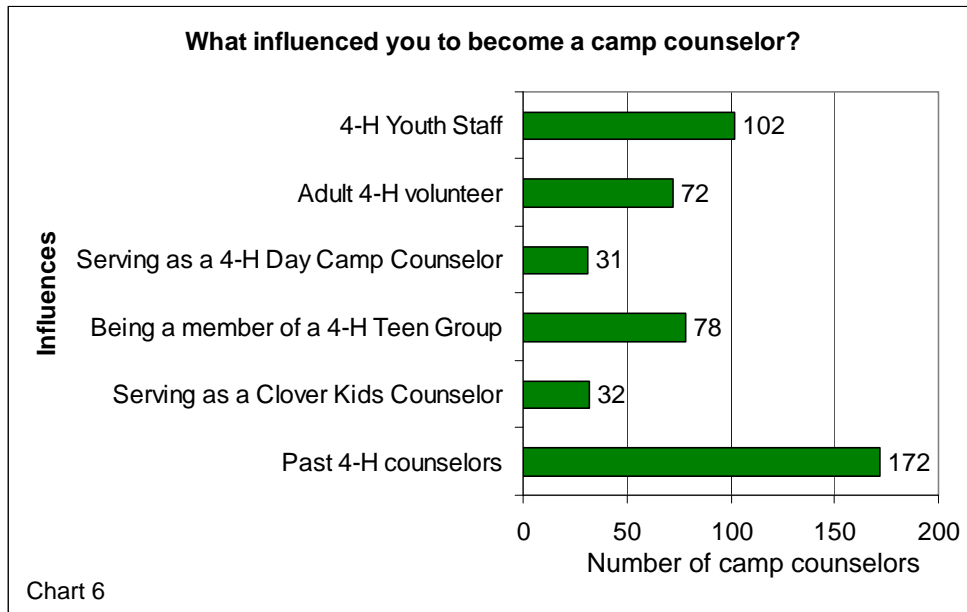


Thirty-five (35) had previously served as a camp counselor for at least one non-4-H camp; 152 had not.

Camp counselors were asked to indicate people, events or experiences that influenced their decision to become a camp counselor. Nearly 75% (74.9%) reported two or more influences on their decision (Table 1). Previous camp counselors and 4-H Youth staff were the most likely to have played a role.

Number of Influences Reported:	1	2	3	4	5	6
Counselors Reporting:	43	36	45	17	11	8

Table 1



### ***Youth Experiences Survey***

The results shown in the table below are a summary of responses to the 70 questions from the YES portion of the survey grouped by domain. A mean close to 4.0 indicates the majority of camp counselors responded that “yes definitely”, they had positive experiences and had increased their skills and abilities in that domain. The low mean in the "Negative Experiences" category indicates that negative experiences occurred virtually "Not At All".

Table 2		Domain Mean	4 = “Yes, Definitely” 3 = “Quite a Bit” 2 = “A Little” 1 = “Not At All”
<b>YES 2.0 Domains</b>			
Identity Experiences		3.06	
Initiative Experiences		3.30	
Basic Skills		2.71	
Interpersonal Relationships		3.27	
Team Work and Social Skills		3.48	
Adult Networks and Social Capital		2.90	
Negative Experiences		1.27	

The domain means above show the strong positive impact of the camp counseling experience for teens in all domains. Very few negative experiences were reported by the Missouri 4-H Camp Counselors.

The broad domains shown in Table 2, contained sub-scale groups containing the individual questions. The means for specific questions and sub-scales are shown in Tables 3-9.

Table 3

<b>IDENTITY EXPERIENCES</b>		<b>Question Mean</b>	<b>Sub-scale Mean</b>	<b>Domain Mean</b>	
<b>Identity Exploration</b>					
1	As a 4-H camp counselor... I tried doing new things	3.46	<b>3.17</b>	<b>3.06</b>	
2	I tried a new way of acting around people	2.82			
3	I did things at camp that I don't get to do anywhere else	3.23			
<b>Identity Reflection</b>					
4	I started thinking more about my future because of camp	2.59	<b>2.96</b>		
5	Camp got me thinking more about who I am	2.87			
6	Being a Camp Counselor has be a positive turning point in my life	3.40			

4 = "Yes, Definitely"  
 3 = "Quite a Bit"  
 2 = "A Little"  
 1 = "Not At All"

Table 4

<b>INITIATIVE EXPERIENCES</b>		<b>Question Mean</b>	<b>Sub-scale Mean</b>	<b>Domain Mean</b>	
<b>Goal Setting</b>					
7	As a 4-H Camp Counselor I... Set goals for myself	3.15	<b>3.20</b>	<b>3.53</b>	
8	Learned to find ways to achieve my goals	3.13			
9	Learned to consider possible obstacles when making plans	3.30			
<b>Effort</b>					
10	Put all my energy into being a Camp Counselor	3.67	<b>3.53</b>		
11	Learned to push myself	3.45			
12	Learned to focus my attention	3.47			
<b>Problem Solving</b>					
13	Observed how others solved problems and learned from them	3.23	<b>3.18</b>		
14	Learned about developing plans for solving problems	3.15			
15	Used my imagination to solve a problem	3.17			

4 = "Yes, Definitely"  
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<b>Time Management</b>			
16	Learned about organizing time and not procrastinating	3.21	
17	Learned about setting priorities	3.27	
18	Practiced self discipline	3.35	<b>3.28</b>
			<b>3.30</b>

Table 5

<b>BASIC SKILLS</b>				<b>Question Mean</b>	<b>Sub-scale Mean</b>	<b>Domain Mean</b>
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>						
19	Serving as a 4-H Camp Counselor... I learned about controlling my temper	3.10				
20	I became better at dealing with fear and anxiety	2.82				
21	I became better at handling stress	3.14				
22	I learned that my emotions affect how I perform	3.32		<b>3.10</b>		
<b>Cognitive Skills</b>						
23	Because of camp I have improved my... Academic skills	1.87				
24	Skills for finding information	2.59				
25	Computer/internet skills	1.40				
26	Artistic/creative skills	2.82				
27	Communication skills	3.40				
28	Athletic or physical skills	2.67		<b>2.46</b>	<b>2.71</b>	

The lowest sub-scale mean (excluding the Negative Experiences domain) was the Cognitive Skill development sub-scale within the Basic Skills domain (Table 5). That was not surprising. Questions in that sub-scale dealt with the degree to which counselors improved their academic skills, computer/internet skills and athletic skills—none of which the study committee expected to show strength because those items generally fall outside the annual scheduling or implementation of the camp experience. Yet within the Basic Skill sub-scale there was strength in the “Because of camp I have improved my skills for finding information” (2.59) and their improved artistic/creative skills (2.82). Not surprisingly, the counselors indicated their camp experience had very clearly improved their communication skills (3.40).

Table 6

**INTERPERSONAL  
RELATIONSHIPS**

		Question Mean	Sub- scale Mean	Domain Mean	
<b>Diverse Peer Relationships</b>					
29	As a 4-H Camp Counselor I... Made friends with someone of the opposite gender	3.73	<b>3.23</b>	<b>3.27</b>	
30	Learned I had a lot in common with people from different backgrounds	3.43			
31	Got to know someone from a different ethnic group	2.49			
32	Made friends with someone from a different social class	3.27			
<b>Prosocial Norms</b>					
33	Learned about helping others	3.54	<b>3.31</b>		
34	Was able to change my camp for the better	3.27			
35	Learned to stand up for something I believed was morally right	3.31			
36	Discussed morals and good character	3.10			

4 = "Yes, Definitely"
3 = "Quite a Bit"
2 = "A Little"
1 = "Not At All"

The Team Work and Social Skills domain was the strongest in the entire study (Table 7). This was not surprising to the design team. A great deal of time is typically dedicated in orientation and pre-camp training session to the techniques of team development, patience with younger members, and accepting responsibility in appropriate and constructive ways.

Table 7

**TEAM WORK AND SOCIAL SKILLS**

		Question Mean	Sub- scale Mean	Domain Mean	
<b>Group Process Skills</b>					
37	As a 4-H Camp Counselor I... learned that working together requires some compromising	3.58	<b>3.46</b>	<b>3.28</b>	
38	Became better at sharing responsibility	3.41			
39	Learned to be patient with other group members	3.49			
40	Learned how my emotions and attitude affect others in the group	3.42			
41	Learned that it is not necessary to like people in order to work with them	3.39			
<b>Feedback</b>					
42	Became better at giving feedback	3.27	<b>3.28</b>		
43	Became better at taking feedback	3.28			

<b>Leadership and Responsibility</b>			
44	As a 4-H Camp Counselor...I learned about the challenges of being a leader	3.66	
45	Others at camp counted on me	3.69	
46	I had an opportunity to be in charge of a group of peers	3.65	<b>3.68</b>
			<b>3.48</b>

One of the surprises within the data was the realization that serving as a camp counselor has strengthened teen’s desire to stay in school (Table 8). In general, camp counselors in Missouri are usually perceived to already have a strong goal orientation and assumed to already have a high commitment to staying in school. If that fact is indeed true, discovering that serving as camp counselor has strengthened that resolve to even a moderate degree was unexpected. Additional discussion of this outcome is presented in the Career Aspirations and Exploration section of this report.

Table 8

<b>ADULT NETWORKS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL</b>			<b>Question Mean</b>	<b>Sub-scale Mean</b>	<b>Domain Mean</b>
<b>Integration with Family</b>					
47	As a 4-H Camp Counselor... Working on camp improved my relationship with my parents/guardians	2.34			
48	I had good conversations with my parents/guardians because of camp	2.64	<b>2.49</b>		
<b>Linkages to Community</b>					
49	As a 4-H Camp Counselor I ...got to know people in 4-H	3.85			
50	Came to feel more supported by the 4-H community	3.53	<b>3.69</b>		
<b>Linkages to Work and College</b>					
51	Being a Camp Counselor has opened up job or career opportunities for me	2.70			
52	Being a Camp Counselor helped prepare me for college	2.65			
53	Being a Camp Counselor increased my desire to stay in school	2.59	<b>2.66</b>	<b>2.90</b>	

4 = “Yes, Definitely” 3 = “Quite a Bit” 2 = “A Little” 1 = “Not At All”
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Included in the YES portion of the survey were seventeen (17) questions designed to measure what, if any, negative experiences were associated with serving as 4-H Camp Counselor (Table 9). A low mean on any of these items indicated that little of their experience was negative. It is not surprising to the investigators that the highest means in this area were indicators of stress, cliques among the camp counselors and the fair distribution of responsibility. In fact in those three areas, it was surprising that the means were not higher due to normal developmental stages and behaviors of most teens in the counselor age group.

Table 9

<b>NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES</b>		<b>Question Mean</b>	<b>Sub-scale Mean</b>	<b>Domain Mean</b>	
<b>Stress</b>					
54	Demands were so great that I didn't get homework done	1.41	<b>1.56</b>		
55	Being a Camp Counselor interfered with doing things with family	1.60			
56	Being a Camp Counselor has stressed me out	1.67			
<b>Negative Peer Influences</b>					
57	As a 4-H Camp Counselor... I felt pressured by peers to do something I didn't want to do	1.22	<b>1.14</b>		
58	I did something in camp that was morally wrong	1.14			
59	I was ridiculed by peers for something I did as a Camp Counselor	1.16			
60	Other Counselors or campers got me into drinking alcohol or using drugs	1.02			
<b>Social Exclusion</b>					
61	I felt like I didn't belong as a Camp Counselor	1.09	<b>1.32</b>		
62	I felt left out	1.11			
63	There were cliques among the Counselors	1.78			
<b>Negative Group Dynamics</b>					
64	I get stuck doing more than my fair share	1.51	<b>1.28</b>		
65	Other Counselors made inappropriate sexual comments, jokes or gestures	1.30			
66	I was discriminated against because of my gender, race, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation	1.05			
<b>Inappropriate Adult Behavior</b>					
67	Adult leaders involved with camp are controlling and manipulative	1.44	<b>1.15</b>		
68	Adult leaders "hit" on me	1.04			
69	Adult leaders made inappropriate sexual comments or jokes	1.05			
70	Adult leaders encouraged me to do something I believed morally wrong	1.06			
			<b>1.27</b>		

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A process was and is in place to follow up with individual camps if there were reports of negative experiences on the questions where possible illegal or unethical behavior on the part of other counselors or adult staff was reported. In those cases, the State 4-H Program Leader has worked with the supervising 4-H Youth Development Specialist to identify circumstances relating to the report, take necessary steps if called for, and to do so while protecting the anonymity of the respondents.

There was no significant difference in responses from counselors who felt that adults at their camp were “controlling and manipulative” and those who did not feel adults were controlling on the two questions regarding personal value of the counseling experience, and the importance of counselors at their camp.

Respondents who felt socially excluded (Q61-63 on the YES Negative Experiences domain) had a significantly different response rate on other YES domains. A strong positive correlation between feelings of social exclusion and low positive means is found in all seven of the YES domains. (See Appendix 1.)

Conversely, those that indicated any degree of social exclusion reported a clearly diminished value in all other aspects of their camp experience. The negative correlations related to social exclusion were among the strongest correlations in the entire study.

There are probably various reasons that some counselors reported a feeling of being excluded, and the reasons likely vary from camp to camp and individual to individual. In some cases the social exclusion may, in part, be related to that counselor’s own choices and behaviors.

Regardless of the reason, if a counselor reported feeling that they are excluded at even mild levels, it is clear that that counselor will not derive the full value of the counseling experience attained by those that did feel welcomed, validated, and accepted. No other single correlation had such a pervasive correlation on the overall value of the counseling experience. The number of counselors that reported feeling excluded was fairly low. However among those that reported feeling excluded to any degree, the correlations were clear and pervasive.

Extension faculty, adult camp staff and the counselors themselves all share group and individual responsibility for mitigating these conditions at every camp.

### ***Counselor Preparation and Involvement***

The camp counselors generally indicated that they were well-prepared for their role. Though the actual roles fulfilled by counselors may vary from camp to camp, the degree and depth of preparation for what actually happens at camp seems to be on target throughout the state. Nearly 70% of the counselors reported that there was little about camp for which they were unprepared.

Are there things about being a counselor that you now wish you had been better at or better prepared for?

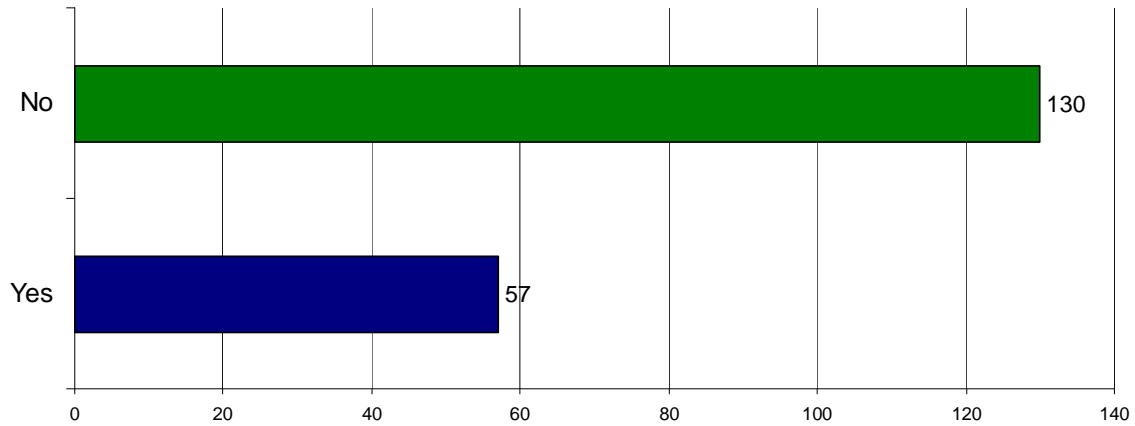
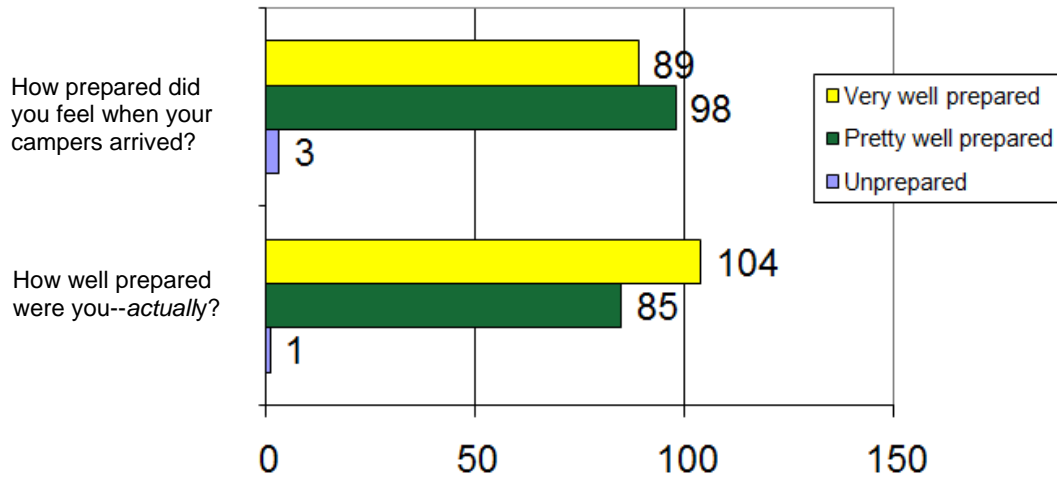


Chart 7

Camp counselors were asked how prepared they felt when the campers arrived, and additionally asked how prepared they actually turned out to be as the camp program progressed. Those responses are summarized in Chart 8. It is clear that the counselors felt prepared for role and responsibilities when camp began, and learned that they were even better prepared than they realized once camp got underway.

Chart 8



A significant decrease existed in responses before vs. after camp; the results show that counselors reported after camp that they were actually more prepared for their role than they felt just prior to the campers' arrival at camp. (See Appendix 1.)

Counselors who felt overly-confident prior to camp and realized afterwards they weren't so well prepared, reported negative correlations in their responses to each of the following specific questions:

Q5 = "[As a 4-H Camp Counselor] *Camp got me thinking more about who I am*"

Q16= "[As a 4-H Camp Counselor I] *Learned about organizing time and not procrastinating*"

Q27= “[Because of camp I have improved my] *Communication Skills*”

Q61= “*I felt like I didn’t belong as a Camp Counselor*”

There was a significant positive correlation among counselors who reported a decrease in confidence with Q42: “[As a 4-H Camp Counselor I] *Became better at giving feedback*”

At the sub-scale level, only the Basic Skills domain was significantly affected by responses to feelings of preparedness. In other words, counselors with higher basic skills tended to gain confidence in their own preparation as their camp progressed. (See Appendix 1)

Respondents were asked six questions to ascertain the types of resources they used in preparing for their role, and the degree to which the training they received was congruent with skills and knowledge they needed during camp.

Table 10

Which resources did you use to prepare for camp?	Yes	No
Web Resources	41	147
Guides provided by Extension Staff	138	51
Printed materials purchased by the Counselor	28	158
Reference guides from other camps	40	146
Video or DVD programs	9	175
People in the Community	101	87

In three of the seven YES domains (Adult Networks and Social Capital, Initiative Experiences, and Basic Skills), responses showed a strong positive relationship ( $p < .01$ ) with the number of resources counselors used to prepare. (See Appendix 1.) There is a significant positive correlation ( $p < .05$ ) between the number of resources that the counselors used to prepare for being a camp counselor in Identity Experiences. The results illustrate that counselors who used more resources in preparing to be a camp counselor also reported higher Identity Experiences, Initiative Experiences, Basic Skill experiences, and Adult Networks and Social Capital experiences as a result of serving as counselor. It would seem that counselors will gain more during the counseling experience if successfully encouraged to draw upon a wide range of resources as they prepare for their role.

Fifty-one percent (51%) of those responding to the question: “*How many hours did you spend, not in planning sessions, but on your own, or with just one or two others . . . to prepare yourself for the role of counselor*” indicated that they had spent between one (1) and three (3) hours in that self-preparation. Thirty-six percent (36%) invested four (4) hours or more.

*“I liked knowing that the time and effort I put into my workshop really worked to help them learn.”*

Camp counselors were asked to respond to the question: “*How many hours did you spend in planning sessions learning skills to be a counselor?*” The camp counselors themselves reported taking part in an average of 11.94 hours—with a low of 0 hours, to a high of 60 hours. The

answers to that question were problematic to the study committee. There was wide variation among camp counselors within almost every camp group, even though faculty reported that most all of the camp counselors had taken part in the very same training/planning/orientation session(s). Why? It may be that while Extension faculty in charge of training and planning understand that various aspects of the process such as “getting acquainted” or “showing the counselors around camp” are important steps in the non-formal education process. Counselors may interpret those same things as “fun”. For example, faculty may consider intentional group process activities with the counselors as training and essential to group development—counselors may experience it as “having fun” rather than “training”.

In an effort to still harvest information on any possible effect of the length of the orientation/planning/training process on outcomes for the camp counselors, each camp session identified the probable actual length of the sessions. Extension faculty reported that across the 17 camp sessions taking part in the study, camp counselors were engaged in an average of 17.22 hours of orientation and training (compared to the average of 11.94 hours reported by the camp counselors). For consistency, the 17.22 hour figure was used in the inferential data analysis to measure any correlation between the hours of training on the outcomes for counselors. Staff-reported training hours ranged from a low of 6 hours to a high of 30 hours, with a median and mode of 18 hours. (s.d.=6.342)

The amount of staff reported hours that counselors spent in planning/orientation/training is positively associated ( $p < 0.05$ ) with “Identity Experience”, “Initiative Experiences”, and “Negative Experiences” ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Why is the number of hours spent in planning and orientation positively associated with “negative experiences”? No conclusions have been drawn as yet. This fact is worthy of further study.

As Table 11 below indicates, a vast majority of the camp counselors recognized that they had received training and orientation on many of the important components identified by Missouri faculty as important in conducting a safe and well-conducted camp experience. In no instance does it appear that the camp counselors collectively indicate that they needed information that they did not receive.

Table 11

	YES		YES
During training, did you receive training on . . .	185	Camp ceremonies, songs, games, etc	154
	184	Camp procedures	156
	175	Emergency procedures	136
	186	Handling homesickness	155
	173	Handling confidential information	132
	188	Characteristics of different ages of youth	148
	184	Managing group behavior	149
	188	Managing individual camper behavior	156
	156	The "Why?" of 4-H Camp	115

It was surprising to the investigators that “The ‘Why’ of 4-H Camp” was not covered with more of the camp groups. Equally surprising is the fact the fewest number of counselors indicated that they needed to know the “why” of camp. Those that received training on “The ‘Why’ of 4-H Camp” showed a strong positive correlation ( $p < .01$ ) with the Basic Skills and the Initiative Experiences domains ( $p < .05$ )

Just over 40 percent of the camp counselors taught a planned program at camp (41.5%). A full one-third (33.7%) had the freedom to choose the workshop that they taught.

There is a significant difference in YES response rates for counselors who did and did not teach a planned, educational workshop at camp. Responses from counselors who presented a planned educational workshop at camp are positively correlated ( $p < 0.05$ ) with the Identity Experiences domain. No other domain means were affected by whether or not a Counselor presented a planned, educational workshop.

*“Our workshop needed more material, but we learned from our mistakes.”*

It is clear that camp counselors had high involvement in the various aspects of camp. Some of the percentages reported in Table 12 seem quite low, however not all leadership opportunities are available at each camp. In other cases, differing terms between camps for a very similar type of program may be a reason. For instance, a scheduled camp event known officially as “vespers” in one camp may be known instead as “candle lighting ceremony” in another even though very similar programs are conducted in each. Perhaps the most important message is the very high level of involvement and engagement by Missouri 4-H Camp Counselors in leading and carrying out various meaningful aspects of daily camp life.

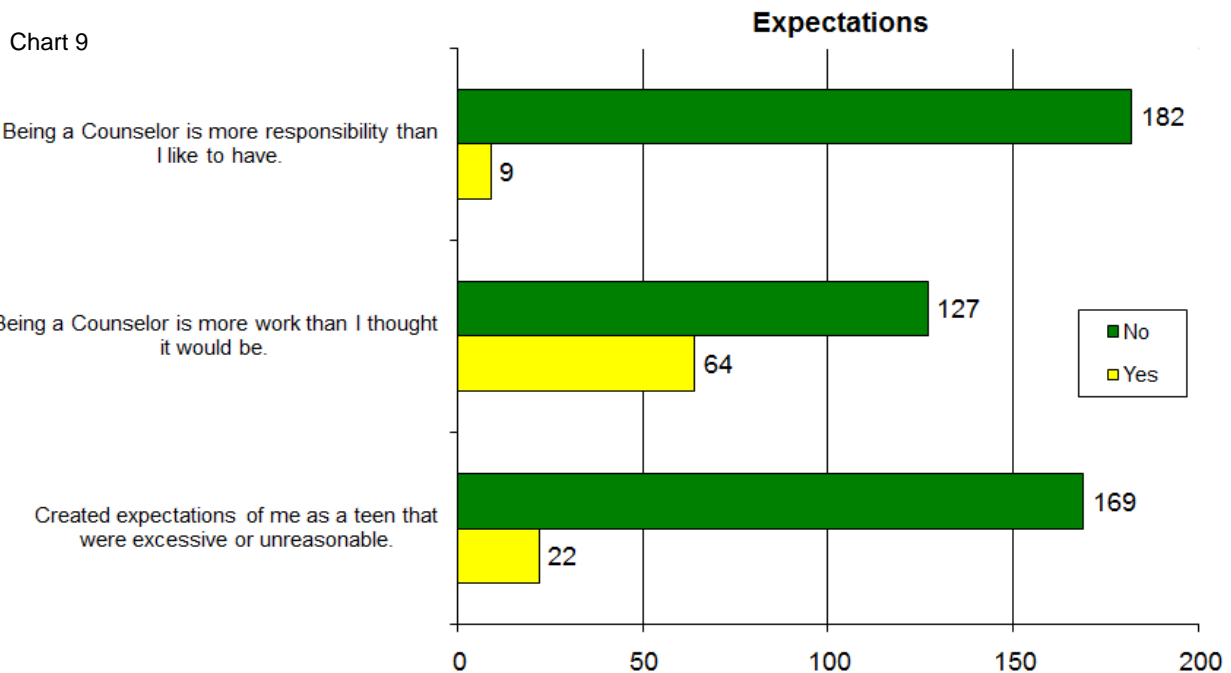
Table 12

<b>Which, if any, of the following did you lead at camp?</b>	<b>%</b>
Flag Ceremony	57.0
Evening program	44.0
Singing	83.4
Vespers	15.0
Group games or sports activities	73.1
Camp fire ceremony	51.3
Meal time/mess hall activity	59.6
Group camp chores	89.6
Leading groups of campers from one scheduled activity to another	91.7
Candle-lighting ceremony	17.1
Informal small group games or activities	82.4
Others	8.3

### ***Expectations of Camp Counselors in Their Role***

A variety of questions were asked to assess the level of the teens’ expectations as it related to their level of ability or comfort level. Camp counselors seemed to be very

comfortable with the amount of work required, the level of responsibility, and the level of expectation. (Chart 9)



## Personal Accomplishments and Self Assessment

Beyond the YES portion of the survey, camp counselors described accomplishments in the areas of leadership, public speaking, role modeling, teaching, helping campers have a positive experience, and making a connection with their campers.

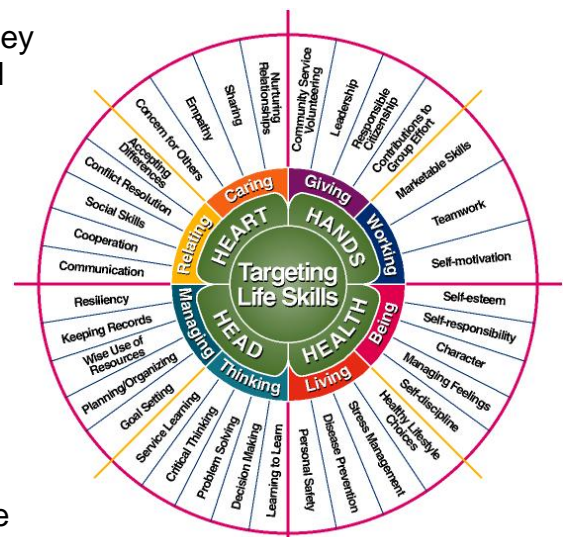
They also reported learning which of their own strategies didn't work for them as a camp counselor. They frequently mentioned learning that yelling and similar attempts at quieting campers and managing unruly behavior simply

*"I tried to mostly leave my cabin to themselves and not baby them. This resulted in mass chaos. Never doing that again!"*

didn't work. By their own assessment, they wish they had been better prepared to lead activities and workshops, manage behavior (especially at lights-out), and be more familiar with the

characteristics of the various developmental stages of children. They would like to increase their own personal skills in the areas of leadership, communication, and patience.

The responses to two of the open-ended questions were coded based upon the general categories in the



Targeting Life Skills Model

Targeting Life Skills Model (TLS) (Hendricks,1998). Those questions were:

- *“In your own words, what things that you accomplished as a Camp Counselor are you most proud of?” “After having had this experience as a Counselor, what personal skills or abilities would you like to improve further?”*

Five additional categories were added to the TLS rubric to encompass the scope of the open-ended responses provided by the counselors.

A comparative summary of those responses is shown in Table 13.

Table 13	<i>“In your own words, what things that you accomplished as a Camp Counselor are you most proud of?”</i>	TLS Category	<i>“After having had this experience as a Counselor, what personal skills or abilities would you like to improve further?”</i>	Skills/Abilities typically mentioned:
Accomplishments typically mentioned:				
	Number of responses:			
Contribution to group effort; general leadership	23	<b>Giving</b>	25	Leadership skills-general
	1	<b>Working</b>	4	
Managing feelings (self); Self discipline; exhibiting good character (role model)	21	<b>Being</b>	27	<i>“I need PATIENCE!”</i>
	2	<b>Living</b>	6	
	3	<b>Thinking</b>	1	
Planning and organizing	12	<b>Managing</b>	12	<i>Managing my own energy level; getting organized</i>
Making friendships; inclusiveness	42	<b>Relating</b>	54	Improved social skills, managing groups and difficult individuals; communication skills; public speaking
Being supportive of campers and nurturing others; Getting to know others.	46	<b>Caring</b>	9	
		Additional Categories		
My workshop or activity went well; "I can teach"	10	<b>Teaching</b>	4	
I helped kids get through/over homesickness	11	<b>Homesickness</b>	1	
I/we helped them have FUN!	19	<b>Fun</b>	0	
<i>"I can DO this!"</i>	29	<b>Personal confidence</b>	5	
	7	<b>Other</b>	0	

The accomplishments identified by counselors in their own words are powerful and profound. Many relate closely to some of the items identified in the Basic Skills domain (Table 5). At the same time, in the areas identified as those in which the counselors would like to improve further, many of these same basic skill needs and desires are

apparent—communication skills, dealing with stress and dealing with frustration among them. (Chart 10)

### Career Aspirations and Exploration

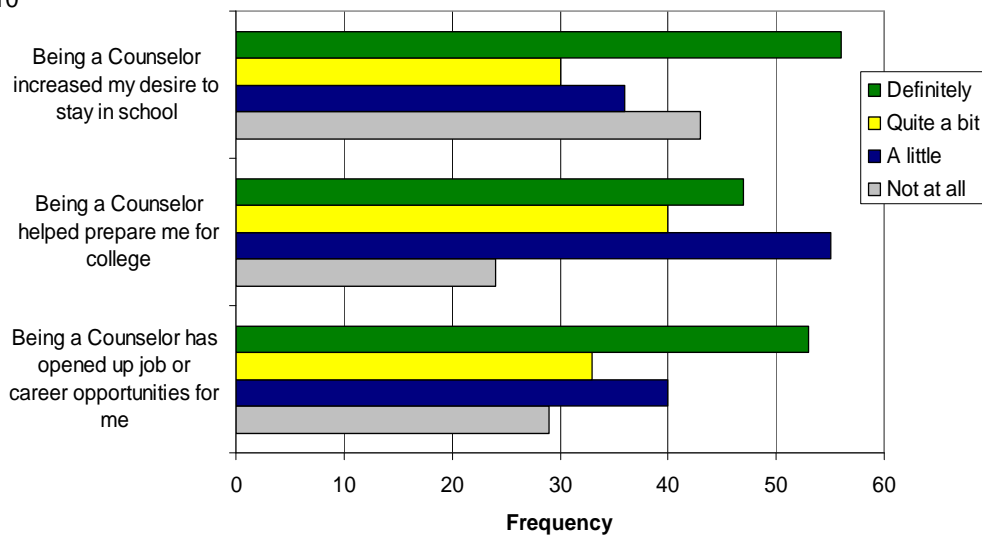
With an eye toward their own future, many reported that serving as a 4-H Camp Counselor had confirmed or changed their career plans. Most responses centered upon working with children and/or people in general. Many others credited their experience as 4-H Camp Counselor with increasing their abilities in areas such as leadership, self-confidence and speaking before groups – skills that they believe will enable them to "follow their dreams" as one counselor stated.

*"Camp has given me more options—I know I can follow my dreams"*

Of the 193 counselors in the study, 141 (73%) indicated that being a camp counselor helped them prepare for college. One hundred twenty-one (62.7%) reported that serving as a camp counselor increased their desire to stay in school, and 125 (65%) felt that serving as a camp counselor had opened up job or career opportunities for them.

**Impact of Serving as Camp Counselor on Career Goals**

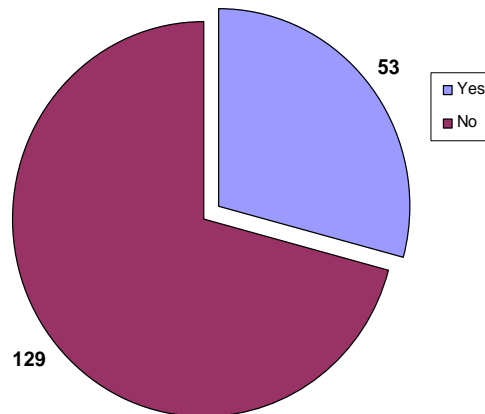
Chart 10



There are no known intentional components of the camp counselor preparation in any of the camps in Missouri that relate to career exploration or career goals. Yet surprisingly, nearly one-third of the camp counselors credited their experience with having changed or confirmed their future career plans.

**Has being a camp Counselor changed or confirmed your future career plans or options?**

Chart 11



The results above indicate opportunities for deepening the value of counseling experience in the future. Since there is already a considerable degree of evolving self-awareness and goal orientation among the counselors, this provides opportunities for camp directors or 4-H faculty to intentionally add value to that process in the future.

**Overall Importance of the Camp Counselor Experience**

Extension faculty and adult volunteers know the pivotal role that camp counselors play in conducting a viable, successful camp. To what degree do the camp counselors themselves recognize their own importance in conducting camp? It seems that they do. Those results are summarized in Chart 12.

Respondents were asked to rate their overall experience as a 4-H Camp Counselor in terms of its personal value to them on a 10 point scale (10=“Very High Value”). The mean of the response to that question was 9.28 (Chart 13). Very high value, indeed.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important are Camp Counselors in conducting your camp?

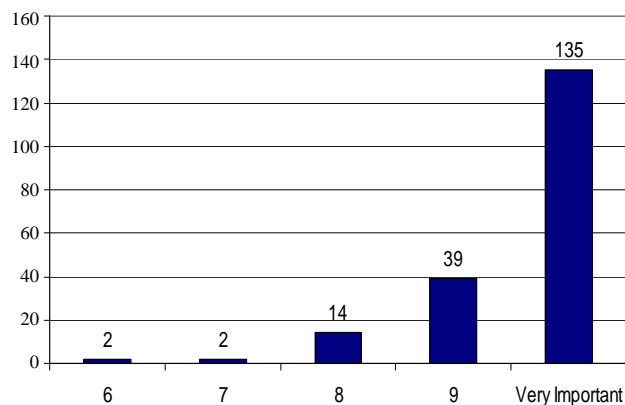


Chart 12

Rate your experience as Camp Counselor in terms of its personal value to you.

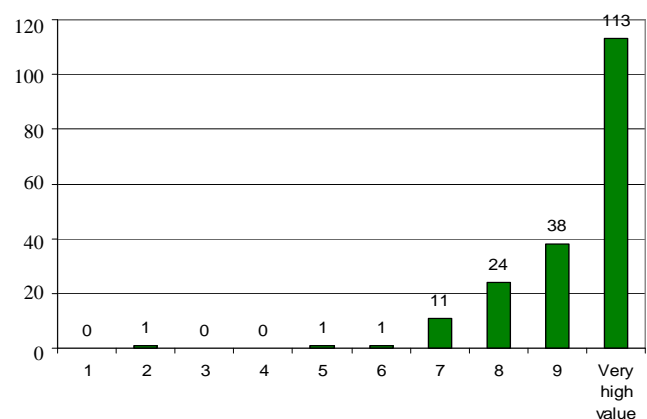


Chart 13

Teens who responded that their counseling experience was of a lower personal value to them, also show statistically perfect correlation ( $p=.000$ ) in the YES domain “Initiative Experiences”. Counselors who reported a higher personal value in their role as a counselor also reported more positive experiences in the Initiative Experiences domain of the YES questions. Stated another way, the higher each counselor rated the value of camp, the higher they rated their experiences in the Initiative Experiences domain.

## Effects of Demographic Factors on Reported Outcomes

Means were calculated for each of the seven domains along with an overall mean of the 70 item measure (Total Mean). These variables were used along with gender, age, number of times served as a camp counselor, and experience at non 4-H camps as a counselor to examine the relationships among these variables.

Results with respect to gender indicate no differences between males and females on the domain means of the YES.

Additionally, no significant relationships were found between age, or prior 4-H Camp Counselor experience ( $p>.05$ ) and means on the YES domains.

**A more complete statistical analysis of the data throughout this and other sections can be found in Appendix 1.**

Counselors that have experienced counseling at camps other than 4-H camp have a higher mean for the Negative Experiences domain than those who have no experience at other types of camps ( $p<.01$ ). (See Appendix 1) The factors or conditions that created this association between a non 4-H Counseling experience and the Negative Experiences domain is beyond the scope of this study; however, this is a question worthy of further study and analysis.

## Observations, Implications and Recommendations

- Individual Missouri camps vary widely in terms of facilities, organization, and specific annual educational content. Yet the results from across the state were surprisingly similar. What led to such pervasive, consistent results across the 4-H Camping programs in Missouri? Perhaps, it is the context of physical and psychological safety plus emotional and moral support that is created within each camping group, as suggested by Martz (2007). The general “culture” of the camp seems to be more of a guiding force than structure, length of preparation, or other factors.
- Possessing basic skills and realistic confidence seems to be key to counselors feeling prepared for camp. Basic skill development seems also to relate to various other outcomes in this study, and was identified by the respondents to be an area in which they would like to improve further. Camp directors may be wise to include orientation sessions designed to increase counselors’ ability to regulate their emotions, handle stress and communicate well.

- There is anecdotal evidence that 4-H Camp planners have often focused their planning on particular details such as camp schedules, supplies, and other necessary details. Yet, it seems that those particular choices may have less to do with positive outcomes for camp counselors than many Extension faculty have believed in the past.
- Counselors are being well prepared for their roles at camp. Current counselor selection, orientation and training programs seem to fit very well with the skills and capacities that counselors find that they need during the camp session.
- The fact that counselors who felt some level of social exclusion also reported experiencing diminished value from camp is a strong indication that this needs to be an area of particular awareness and focus for faculty and for fellow counselors.
- Missouri Extension faculty, staff and volunteers must be proactive in raising awareness of the developmental value of the camp experience among potential counselors, parents, Extension faculty, stakeholders, and Extension administration. Results of this study and the Missouri camper studies in 2005 and 2006 give ample positive evidence to share with others, as well as important information to use for program improvement.
- As pointed out by Digby and Ferrari (2007), Counselors need to be given the opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment during their training and orientation during camp and following camp. Participation in this study may have given counselors an opportunity to increase the awareness of their own growth in themselves as a result of serving as counselor—growth they may not have realized or considered otherwise.
- Future camp counselors should actively be encouraged and coached to use a variety of sources of information as they prepare for their role at camp.
- The camp counselor experience provided an unanticipated positive impact on the counselor's educational commitment and created opportunities for career reflection and exploration—all without any particular intention on the part of most of the camp programs. In marketing the camp counselor position to both prospective counselors and their parents, suggesting that serving as a camp counselor could serve as a valuable career exploration experience appears to be justified. Further, adding a brief career-related component to counselor orientation, training, and post-camp reflection would possibly deepen that benefit.

## Conclusion

Missouri 4-H faculty, staff and volunteers can be justifiably proud of the remarkably positive growth these young people experience as they serve as role models and leaders for the campers (the next generation of 4-H Camp Counselors among them), and as positive role models for each other.

The 4-H Camping programs vary widely throughout the state in regard to how the counselors are selected and trained, the camp facilities, the administrative structure and the specific educational content. Yet in spite of that, each year several hundred 4-H members grow and develop positively in surprisingly similar ways. It is clear, though, that the 4-H faculty and staff throughout Missouri successfully apply consistent, research-based philosophy and practice to equip and empower their teen camp counselors. These capable camp counselors, in turn, create a healthy and progressive culture in which campers grow toward their true potential.

This study documents that Missouri 4-H Camp Counselors themselves clearly mature in substantially positive ways as they lead, guide, mentor and plan for others.

Missouri 4-H Camps and the faculty, staff, and volunteers that conduct them seem to be creating environments where “The Five C’s of Positive Youth Development”: competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring are encouraged and developed in the camp counselors. It has become well-recognized through research by Lerner (2005) and others, that when the Five C’s are being developed and nurtured, positive youth development is occurring.

More information regarding this and other Missouri camp studies can be found at: <http://4h.missouri.edu/resources/evaluation/#camp>.

Individuals or groups wishing to replicate this study in whole or in part, are asked to contact the report authors for additional materials and to obtain consent from the Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development. Additional consent may also be required from Larson, Hanson, and Jarrett; University of Illinois.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1 – In-depth statistical analysis

Appendix 2 – Counselor survey instrument (Available on request)

Appendix 3 – Parental Consent and Counselor Assent documents/ Protocol (Available on request)

Appendix 4 – IRB certificate (Available on request)

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