

Perceptions of Intermediate Camp and Leadership Skills Development:

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### **Dedication**

This research project is dedicated to Regina Prunty, Agricultural and Natural Resources Extension Agent (retired), who in 2003 hired a Master Gardener Volunteer to support Agricultural and 4-H Youth Development programming in the King George Extension Office and advised her “not to let them make you an agent.” Without her dedication of providing research-based programs and advice to clients, I would not have endeavored to follow in her footsteps in pursuit of the title “Extension Agent.”

This project is also dedicated to Dr. Tiffany Drape, who sees potential in every student she advises. Her support and encouragement have made this research experience positive and shown me how useful research can be in my professional life.

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### **Perceptions of Intermediate Camp and Leadership Skills Development:**

Youth in their last year of camp tend to enjoy the experience less than before because of the repetitive nature of the activities each camp year. The purpose of intermediate camp is to engage these youth through teamwork activities, community service and group living apart from the rest of the camp community, with a goal of having a higher percentage return to camp and continue through to serve as counselors until they age out. The purpose of this research is to determine if the intermediate camp program has affected teamwork and leadership skills of youth participants.

### **Background and Setting**

4-H Junior Camp is one of the largest investments of time and money within the Virginia 4-H program. Youth ages nine to 13 attend as junior campers and youth ages 14 through 18 attend as camp counselors. Camp counselors are responsible for direct supervision of junior campers, and participate in extensive training before attending camp (Virginia Camping Handbook, 2015). While at camp, junior campers attend classes, afternoon and evening programs, and nightly campfires. During the last year as a junior camper, youth have reached the critical middle school age of 12 to 13 years. As youth transition into adolescence, developmental changes in their interests and abilities mean leaving behind some activities that attracted them at earlier ages (Quinn, 1999). Intermediate camp is a program designed specifically for campers in their last year of junior camp. These youths are offered the opportunity to participate in a program designed for them as an alternative to junior camp during the regular camp week. This program takes advantage of the infrastructure of the camping program by using the same transportation and facilities but allows these youth to go off site and spend time together in small group activities.

To conduct the intermediate camp program, trained adult volunteers must be involved in the planning process. For a recent intermediate camping program, four adults volunteered, two male and two females. All have prior experience in 4-H camping and participated in the pre-camp introductory meeting. At this meeting, a preliminary schedule (Appendix B) was introduced and discussed to allow those involved—campers, parents, counselors and adults—to learn about and make decisions on program organization. Youth have input into their camp week and choose activities and times that work for the entire group. This results in a team building activity before the camp week begins.

Two volunteer teen counselors, one male and one female, provide direct supervision and support to intermediate camp. They participate in all regular counselor training activities and complete the required interview and application process. They are housed in the lodges directly with the intermediate campers and are responsible for room organization and activity preparation.

There are multiple sources of evidence-based academic research supporting positive youth development through camping (Garst, 2003; Henderson, 2006; Thurber, 2006). Examinations of these and other relevant literature support the purpose and function of the intermediate camping program. These large studies, periodically conducted on camp youth, help determine the overall value of the camping program (Thurber, 2006). The American Camping Association (American Camp Association, 2018), of which all six 4-H centers in Virginia participate, is one organization that supports studies of this type. Research studied particular components that contribute to positive youth development in the camp setting; one identified component is to have a defined program mission (Henderson, Scanlin, Thurber, Whitaker, & Marsh, 2006). The specific mission of intermediate camp is to provide an alternative camp week

for youth in their last year of junior camping that allows them to develop teamwork and leadership skills in a small group setting. The program design is based on positive youth development and targets life skills development in the areas of thinking, being, working and giving (Hendricks, 1998). The purpose of the intermediate camp format is to provide opportunities for youth to develop stronger bonds with their fellow campers (teamwork) as they learn responsibility (being). Other identified components are to give youth roles in decision-making (managing) when possible and offer a variety of activities (Henderson, Scanlin, Thurber, Whitaker , & Marsh, 2006).

### **Project Objectives**

The question guiding this research is:

How does the intermediate camp program impact teamwork and leadership skills of these youth as they progress through their camp career?

In examining one study, reported in Christopher Thurber's report (Thurber, 2006), a pattern for camp research can be established. Though this research project is for a small group, examination of similar constructs from Thurber's study can determine programmatic impact. One purpose of Thurber's study was to describe the ways summer camp might "foster characteristics that promote healthy development" (Thurber, 2006). Positive youth development is the overall objective of youth development programs, including 4-H programs. Three camp essentials are group living, being away from home and being in an outdoor setting (Thurber, 2006). Camp provides opportunities for physical exercise, problem solving, and socialization (Thurber, 2006). Intermediate camp includes these camp basics along with special activities designed to promote teamwork and leadership skills. Thurber's study focused on changes in positive identity; social skills; physical and thinking skills and positive values and spirituality.

All of these constructs except spirituality, which is not a 4-H component, will be targeted components of the intermediate camp program.

Barry Garst is a former Virginia 4-H Camping Specialist, and has completed multiple research projects on youth camping programs. His research was consulted during the design process for an evaluation plan for Intermediate Camp. The purpose of evaluating camping participants' outcomes, according to Garst (Garst, 2003), is to identify benefits as perceived by youth campers and their parents/guardians. Garst used the Targeting Life Skills model (Hendricks, 1998) to guide development of the evaluation tool. This model serves as the basis for 4-H programming and divides life skills into the four content areas of 4-H: Head (Managing and Thinking); Heart (Relating and Caring); Hands (Giving and Working) and Health (Living and Being) (Hendricks, 1998). Using these content areas as guides, the intermediate camp evaluation will focus on specific content relating to teamwork and leadership skill exploration, as these are the goals of the intermediate camping program.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Positive Youth Development:* Youth Development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. For youth development to be called positive, it must address the broader developmental needs of youth in contrast to deficit-based models that focus solely on youth problems (NASET, 2010).

*4-H:* 4-H is delivered by Cooperative Extension—a community of more than 100 public universities across the nation that provides experiences where young people learn by doing. Kids complete hands-on projects in areas like health, science, agriculture, and citizenship in a positive



environment where they receive guidance from adult mentors and are encouraged to take on proactive leadership roles. Kids experience 4-H through in-school and after-school programs, school and community clubs, and 4-H camps (National 4-H Council, 2017).

*Cooperative Extension:* Extension provides non-formal education and learning activities to people throughout the country — to farmers and other residents of rural communities as well as to people living in urban areas. It emphasizes taking knowledge gained through research and education and bringing it directly to the people to create positive changes. (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017)

*4-H Junior Camp:* This camping program is held (in Virginia) at six 4-H centers across the state, and each unit—county or city—is given one 5-day period each summer in which to hold camp at their designated 4-H center. Centers have lodges, dining halls, and trained permanent summer staff who provide similar programs across the state (Virginia Camping Handbook, 2015).

*Counselor in Training (CIT):* This is a special program for youth who have completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade and are at least age 13 on January 1 of the camp year. These youth complete introductory applications, meet with the camp director and attend monthly trainings in preparation for their camp roles. They are not allowed to have direct supervisory responsibility, but are expected to work with counselors and adult volunteers in conducting camp. They also attend a special CIT class during camp week (Virginia Camping Handbook, 2015).

*Counselor:* These youth are at least age 14 on January 1 of the camp year, complete a lengthy application, are interviewed for the position, and are expected to attend a number of training sessions. At camp, they are able to provide direct supervision to campers and CITs, and

are relied upon to maintain a safe environment while sharing their enthusiasm and love of camp. They can be one of the most memorable parts of a child's camp week (Virginia Camping Handbook, 2015).

*Intermediate Camp*: This is a "program within a program" which occurs as a subset of 4-H Junior Camp for 5 consecutive days each summer. It is geared toward a small (generally less than twenty) group of youth in their last year of regular junior camping (ages 12-13 years) to provide extra opportunities for them to learn teamwork, leadership and responsibility. It is not a standardized program, but has been conducted with King George, Caroline and Spotsylvania campers for a number of years in different manifestations.

### **Review of Literature**

This literature review uses information from *Youth Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership Development in Adolescents* (van Linden & Fertman, 1998), *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), the White Stag Leadership Development curriculum (Phelps, 2001) and information from the website of the National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASET, 2010) with input from Richard Louv's groundbreaking book *Last Child in the Woods* (Louv, 2008). Middle adolescents, ages 12-13 years, are targeted for this particular outdoor education leadership development. In exploring the positive impacts of 4-H camp on youth, Hedrick (2009) found that older youth develop more leadership skills by attending 4-H camp, yet there is a declining interest in camp among teens (Hedrick, 2009). He recommends that camps develop their programs "with an emphasis on attracting and retaining older campers" (Hedrick, 2009).

As youth development professionals strive to design programs which provide positive youth development, opportunities to develop leadership skills should be included, especially for middle adolescents. Young leaders need “the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinion and behavior of other people, and show the way by going in advance,” (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998); and “the ability to analyze one's own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem to carry them out,” (Adolescent Employment Readiness Center, Children’s Hospital, n.d.) (*as cited in* NASET, 2010).

Outdoor education provides an incredible setting in which to learn leadership and teamwork skills. “Teenagers are not passive learners. They select the things they do or do not pay attention to, and they choose how to respond to the demands” (van Linden & Fertman, 1998) of others. Middle adolescents are striving to formulate their own viewpoints and opinions of themselves and the world around them, weighing their opinions against those of peers and adults in their lives. (van Linden & Fertman, 1998, p. 42) Taking middle adolescents into outdoor settings and allowing them to experience nature while taking on responsibilities for their living quarters, meals and activities can provide a trigger event to advance an individual youth’s leadership development process. As a provider of informal education, the youth development professional “can implement strategies to promote the construction of new knowledge, and encourage our clientele to critically reflect on their learning process” (Hanks, et al., 2015).

By providing a setting in which youth in peer groups can be involved in social, productive activities, these programs likely can increase the positive and decrease the negative influence that peers can have in each other’s development. Such experiences are likely to be especially important during the early and middle adolescent years, when there are such dramatic

increases in involvement in delinquent and anti- social behaviors (Moffitt, 1993), and when susceptibility to negative peer influences is at its peak (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). Using this camp setting to separate middle adolescents from the rest of the camp population allows this group the autonomy to develop through the stages of group formation. These stages were identified by Tuckman & Jensen (1977) as forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. During these phases, youth have the opportunity to develop their teamwork skills. Skills such as self-awareness and ability to relate to peers are recognized as foundational for developing leaders (Redmond & Dolan, 2016). As youth set up camp, prepare meals and assist with camp tasks, they increase their teamwork skills through collaborative efforts to address the task at hand.

The positive impacts of camping and camp programs have been noted in the literature. There is a great deal of research on the positive impacts of camping, with three national studies conducted by the American Camp Association between 2003 and 2007 (Garst, Browne, & Bialeschki, 2011). The American Camp Association began a landmark multiyear study in 2004 to measure outcomes of camp experiences (American Camp Association, 2005) at 80 accredited camps across the country with thousands of families of youth ages eight to fourteen. Results focused on helping camps assess strengths, improve their programs and measure results. Another study had nearly 8000 campers between the ages of ten and 18 years and focused on four pillars of camping: supportive relationships, safety, youth involvement and skill building (American Camp Association, 2006b). In 2005, twenty-three of those original 80 camps participated to learn strategies to improve in those four developmental areas selected for the earlier study. (American Camp Association, 2006a). In further academic research, Hedrick examined positive youth development based on gender and years of camp attendance over the

entire age span (Hedrick, 2009); Garton et al's studied West Virginia 4-H camping to find that camp experiences positively affected life skills and leadership development of youth participants (Garton, Miltenberger, & Pruett, 2007); and Karla Henderson's group found linkage of camp to positive youth development (Henderson, Scanlin, Thurber, Whitaker, & Marsh, 2006). The focus of the previous literature is on youth through the age spectrum. No current literature was found on the positive impacts of programs targeting middle adolescents campers.

### **Expectation**

Participation rates drop substantially when youth reach the middle school years (Harder, Lamm, Lamm, & Rose III, 2005). This is especially troubling because these nonparticipating young teens may be particularly vulnerable to a variety of alternative, competing temptations and thus, one could argue, might have the greatest need for the horizon-broadening experiences and safety nets that youth programs can provide (Klau, 2006). Anecdotally, in this researcher's youth development programs, mainly 4-H Junior Camp, youth at the maximum camping age (12-13 years) have experienced most of the class offerings that interest them and are ready for something new. With a goal for these youth to continue in the camping program so they can develop as camp leaders, this camping week is designed with the early adolescent in mind to help him learn teamwork and leadership skills.

The expectation of this leadership development program, designed specifically for this 12-13 age group and with special activities apart from the rest of the camp population, is that they will develop as their own "class" of camp counselors. The plan for the week includes tent camping and meal prep responsibilities. Guided programs with teamwork activities in the great outdoors will allow development of strong bonds of friendship, a sense of personal strengths, and group experiences. These youth are being prepared for their future roles as camp leaders, and

before they are capable of leading others, they must first know their own strengths and weaknesses (Redmond & Dolan, 2016). In addition, this special week scaffolds into the leadership training ladder, providing specialized programs that recognize the age and developmental differences of these youth as they progress in their teamwork and leadership abilities (Garst, Browne, & Bialeschki, 2011). As these are two key characteristics of a strong counselor, this research will focus on development of teamwork and leadership in intermediate campers.

“The great worth of outdoor education programs is their focus on the elements that have always united humankind: driving rain, hard wind, warm sun, forests deep and dark--and the awe and amazement that our Earth inspires, especially during our formative years.” (Louv, 2008, p. 228) The White Stag Leadership Development organization (Phelps, 2001) provides outdoor leadership camping programs and resources for program development. Their approach uses nature as the context for learning leadership skills. Using the outdoors for these reasons:

- Expose youth to their environment
- Help youth understand environmental processes
- Teach youth group living skills: self-responsibility and responsibility to the group
- Provide challenges to encourage group dynamics (Phelps, 2001)

The program does not teach outdoor living skills, but uses the outdoor setting to develop leadership through overcoming various challenges or hurdles. These unexpected challenges are presented to small groups that are required to apply specific leadership skills, moving participants forward and upward in their ability to apply leadership competencies (Phelps, 2001).

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was guided by the theory of Positive Youth Development (PYD). PYD focuses on strengths and promoting positive changes in the lives of involved youth (Lerner, 2005). The goal of this research is to improve leadership and teamwork skills of involved youth during a special program during camp week. The philosophy that guides PYD programming includes experiences that promote resiliency and competency which assist youth in the healthy navigation through adolescence (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Positive youth development is a strengths-based ideology. The universal needs of all children are identified as belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity and these are depicted in the four quadrants of a Native American Circle of Courage design (see Figure 1) (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2005). Belonging relates to teamwork, one of the constructs being examined, as youth develop connections and learn to trust their peers as they accomplish group tasks. Independence relates to leadership, as a young person needs the opportunity to “build self-control and responsibility” in order to confidently lead others (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2005).

In examining the leadership and teamwork development of these youth, we used tools developed by the National 4-H Camping Research Consortium. These tools include eight essential elements synthesized into the four core areas of belonging, independence, mastery and generosity (Garst, et al., 2011).



*Figure 1 - Circle of Courage as designed by Lakota artist George Blue Bird is used to visually depict in four quadrants the universal needs of children.*

As we examine the definition of leadership, there are many authors and many different definitions. Focusing on youth leadership within the camping program, this researcher identified best with Whitehead (Whitehead, 2009) as cited in Redmond and Dolan (2016), in his definition: “an authentic leader is one who (i) is self-aware, humble, always seeking improvement, aware of those being led and looks out for the welfare of others; (ii) fosters high degrees of trust by building an ethical and moral framework; and (iii) is committed to organizational success within the construct of social values,” (Redmond & Dolan, 2016). Parents of campers in a residential camping situation expect ethical and moral behavior, and the camp director’s goal is for organizational success.

Another definition of leadership is as a “process through which a set of learned skills and competencies facilitate a process of change.” (Redmond & Dolan, 2016) This process will continue as these young adolescents grow and develop, especially if they continue to participate in the 4-H camping program.



To develop the intermediate camping program, a logic model was created to define the inputs; activities; and short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. This document is included as Appendix A. A logic model is “a systematic and visual way to present and share your understanding of the relationships among the resources you have to operate your program, the activities you plan, and the changes or results you hope to achieve.” (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004) This simplified, organized picture of the program serves to guide further program development. Logistically, intermediate campers lodge within regular junior camp, but will spend at least one night tent camping on site or at a local state park. This separation allows them to participate in teamwork activities as a small group and develop group dynamics. Participation in outdoor activities such as tubing and hiking test resilience and independence. Through these separate activities, youth are strengthened both as a group and individually.

This logic model (Appendix A) guided the development of the intermediate camp program, and is used in determining the impact of the program as well. The short-term goals of the program are to strengthen the teamwork and leadership abilities of the small group (generally less than 20 members) and help youth participants learn about their own strengths and weaknesses. As a result of the week, it is hoped that these youth will be interested in becoming Counselors in Training (CITs) and Counselors in future camp years. Though there are many influences in the life of a child, a young person’s impression of their camp experiences can be examined to determine long-term impact. This is the goal of including experienced teen counselors in focus group discussions. If these older youth have positive recollections of their intermediate camp week in response to the questions, that could be inferred as positively impactful.

**Purpose**

Intermediate Camp has been part of the local 4-H camping program for a number of years, but this researcher found no research-based information for its support. The campers involved in the program participated in program evaluation with the entire camp group, but specific research into the intermediate program is non-existent. As it continues to be a part of camp week and a link in the path to teen counselor, this research is designed to determine if participating campers value their intermediate experience and if there are ways to improve the experience for future campers. This is accomplished through examination of recent intermediate campers to see if they value their experience. Intermediate campers from previous years provided longitudinal evidence with the goal of showing long-term impacts.

**Project Methodology****Targeted Population and Participating Audience**

The targeted population for intermediate camp is youth in their last year of 4-H junior camping, or ages 12 to 13 years, most of whom have previously attended 4-H Camp and wish to participate in intermediate camp. They are informed of this option via a letter sent with their camp brochure mailing several months before the scheduled camping week. These youth are of the age to become counselors in training for the next camping year and will provide direct supervision for campers as teen counselors in following years. It is critical to the entire camping program that teen counselors work together as a team, provide strong role models for campers, and act responsibly. A strong counselor team is the glue that holds the entire program together and the development of relationships with campers and with each other continue to draw all participants back to camp.

**Reflexivity**

Epistemologically, the researcher identifies with the campers, teens, and adults as a participant in 4-H Junior Camp held in parallel with intermediate camp. Working closely to plan and train the adults and teens who conduct the entire camping program and being directly responsible for the intermediate camp group as camp director, she is personally involved in the study. As camp director for King George 4-H Junior Camp since 2009, she has observed many youth, including her own children, benefit from camp experiences. Her belief is that 4-H camp provides an opportunity for youth to learn independence, responsibility and life skills, and the goal of this research is to discover if intermediate camp has contributed to those benefits.

The worldview of the researcher, as defined by Creswell (Creswell, 2007) is a “basic set of beliefs that guide action.” According to Creswell, this researcher’s worldview would be categorized as pragmatic since it focuses on the outcomes and impacts of the program rather than its methods (Creswell, 2007). It is the intention that through this qualitative research project, the voices of participants will be clear. The key is to learn about the programmatic impact of intermediate camp from the participants’ perspective, focusing on camp segments which provide the most impact and using this feedback to inform future iterations of the program.

While researcher bias will need to be dealt with, it may also be a non-issue. This program has been conducted for a number of years and has its proponents, but it does require extra resources. The camp director’s responsibility is to the entire camp population but also with coordination of intermediate camp, including volunteers, camping equipment for tent camping, scheduling of activities and the pre-camp session and the extra financial burden of some of the activities. If the program does not prove to be sufficiently impactful, it does not need to continue being implemented.

**Methodology**

A case study of intermediate camp was chosen to learn how the program affects the population (Creswell, 2007). During the focus group discussion, intermediate campers shared their stories and what they learned as a result of participating in intermediate camp (Krueger, 1988). Intermediate camping programs are the direct beneficiaries of this case study since the program does not have clearly defined outcomes, and campers are in different stages of personal growth and development (Yin, 1984).

**Data Collection**

The method chosen for data collection was focus groups. Two intermediate camp focus groups were conducted. These discussions were facilitated by the researcher and research assistant and designed to gather information specifically on intermediate camp. This discussion was conducted in familiar surroundings in a conference room (Krueger, 1988).

Intermediate camp is conducted each year with 10 to 20 youth participants. Conducting a focus group with the most recent participants from three of the past four years provided ample information on their perceptions of camp impacts through their “insights, perceptions and explanations” (Krueger, 1988) about the program. These youth are 13 to 18 years of age and are still involved in the local camping program. Twenty local youth have participated in intermediate camp during the past four years.

To collect data, all reasonable efforts were made to reach as many of these local participants as possible, starting from the most recent group of intermediate campers. Two focus groups were conducted by the primary researcher in an attempt to discover youth’s perceptions. These focus groups discussions were conducted face to face in comfortable, familiar settings,

and food was offered to encourage group interaction. A research assistant recorded responses, and these transcriptions were open coded then focused to find themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

For the youth who participated in the most recent iteration of intermediate camp, their recollections of events during the week revealed what portions of the week had the greatest memorable impact, and whether that was positive or negative in nature. These focus groups were guided by specific, repeatable questions to maintain reliability of the study. Documentation of these questions (Appendix C) and procedures provided further reliability and minimized errors and bias in the study (Yin, 1984). Recording of these discussions assisted post-interview transcription and allowed the interviewer to focus on asking the questions and the responses provided by the participants. The research assistant managed the recording equipment and assisted with transcription.

The case being studied and the researcher's involvement with the program allowed her to "take advantage of unexpected opportunities" (Yin, 1984). The more difficult component of the research was guarding against potential bias from the procedures or the resulting inferences (Yin, 1984). Being so closely involved in the program had advantages as well as disadvantages that were taken into consideration and planned for accordingly. To prevent researcher bias, the same set of opening remarks and introductory questions were asked of each audience (Appendix C). These questions were general in nature and served to remind the researcher of the information to be collected (Yin, 1984). The second set of focus group participants were older, and were asked the follow-up questions listed in Appendix C relating to their counselor experience.

### **Data Analysis**

Focus group discussions were transcribed by the research assistant with input from the researcher. These transcriptions were examined for "trends and patterns" (Krueger, 1988)

relating to leadership and teamwork experiences. Other phrases noted in the dialogue indicated a sense of belonging, responsibility or independence. These qualities relate to the youth's ability to be a team player (belonging) and a youth's confidence as a leader depends on both independence and responsibility. Some youth indicated learning in multiple teamwork and leadership areas with the same activity. "We were given knives during meal prep," one camper expressed with a shocked expression. Knives are contraband at camp, and youth realized a sense of independence when charged with the responsibility of preparing their own food. Once the recordings were transcribed and the phrases examined for themes, additional quotes were pulled from the recordings to allow the youth voices to be heard in the research.

### **Results**

A total of ten youth participated in two focus group discussions with four male and six female participants. Seven youth had participated in the most recent occurrence of intermediate camp and all but one is registered to be counselor in training for the coming camp year. Of the other three participants, two participated two years ago and one participated five years ago. Both discussions took place in the conference room of the local Extension Office. The introductory statement was read and youth were asked to recall memories of their experiences during intermediate camp week. The first item recalled was hiking along the Appalachian Trail and signing their names in the official log. They also enjoyed tubing, s'mores, and the freedom of being separate from the rest of camp.

How does the intermediate camp program impact teamwork and leadership skills of youth participants? Transcriptions were made of the recorded discussions and data analysis of the focus group responses revealed three major themes.

## **Skill Development**

Focus group youth concurred that self-responsibility was the most important life skill of the week. This skill was demonstrated time and again during meal prep, setting up camp, cleaning up and camp organization. Teamwork skills were developed throughout the week. One example of this given during the discussion was when the team returned to junior camp and needed to develop an activity for campfire. Their preparation was discussion-based and they observed another group from junior camp whose preparations were more argumentative. The intermediate youth had their “argument moments,” as described by one group member, but “then we got over it and started working together.”

More evidence of teamwork recalled by the youth was when unloading supplies to set up for tent camping:

“We were pushing carts from the parking lot. If you did it by yourself, it would go off to the side and hit the sides and it was really hard. So you had to have someone in the back and someone in the front. It was also really heavy to actually push and move it.” During this effort, youth realized the need to work together to get the carts from the parking lot to the camp site. This challenge was not intentional, but required “a commitment to organizational success” (Whitehead, 2009) in order to complete set up of the camp site.

One youth described himself as a “bad leader” based on his efforts to lead the team in a levitating stick activity. The team was given a long stick and each youth put an index finger under the stick. Youth were to lift the stick using one finger each, and he made the call for everyone to lift. When the stick went awry, he thought himself a “bad leader”, but it was obvious the group felt differently and it had not affected his confidence but was a memorable addition to his experience.

Learning not to fear failure encourages youth to step out and lead. These youth will need to “show the way by going in advance” (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998) as they transition into counselors. Though anecdotal in nature, these recollections are evidence that youth have weighed their personal strengths and weaknesses (Adolescent Employment Readiness Center, Children’s Hospital, n.d.) (*as cited in* NASET, 2010), excellent skills for positive youth development.

### **Group Structure**

The small group format and freedom from the normal camp schedule provide opportunities for group decisions and team bonding. This format is crucial in allowing intermediate campers to develop their small group. As one youth described the experience, “a break from normal camp” helped build their team. “It’s more teamwork than regular camp. You have a pack, but its closer” because of the small group. Being in the small group for the week, they were forced to learn how to work together and get along with those who were different than they were. “If you were there with someone and you didn’t get along, you had to learn to deal with them,” was one sentiment expressed, and one camper realized “As campers, we were learning how to deal with ourselves.”

As focus group participants reflected on their camp week and what they had learned (Hanks, et al., 2015), the need for the small group format was evident. Learning to relate to their peers, a foundation for leadership development (Redmond & Dolan, 2016), is facilitated by the small group size. In taking youth off site, campers experienced environments and activities they might not otherwise be able to partake. These “horizon-broadening” experiences (Klau, 2006) like tubing and hiking on the Appalachian Trail were as memorable as tent camping and swimming in the river for these youth.



**Transitional**

In the leadership development process that is part of the camping program, intermediate camp provides a transition between a youth's time as a camper and the responsibility of being a counselor. New counselors can be intimidated by older counselors who are much more comfortable with their responsibilities. Knowing fellow CITs through the bonding experience of intermediate camp identified them with a familiar group of youth and aided in the transition to counselor. Older focus group participants who had experience as counselors and CITs recognized different benefits of intermediate camp. One said, "I'm still using things I learned at intermediate camp."

Intermediate camp reinforces teamwork skills through challenges that encourage group dynamics (Phelps, 2001). "There is a difference between being best friends and living together," is how one youth summed up the intermediate camp experience. During the week, they moved from "I have to sleep with these people" to "I like them." Their experience in the small group brought them closer, and they learned to rely on their fellow campers through their experiences rather than "follow the leader" or through direct instruction. During their week, youth recognized an increased need for self-responsibility due to less structure and more reliance on group decisions. "Pulling your own weight" is how one youth phrased the increased self-responsibility. Improving group living skills through responsibility (Phelps, 2001) further supports intermediate camp as a transition from camper to CIT.

When asked about leadership skills, one group of youth felt that teamwork was more important, and there were no singular leaders among group members. "We worked as a group" rather than having singular leaders step up. Two older teen counselors "organized activities, and we did them," the intermediate campers agreed. They energized each other as a team to

accomplish goals set for them. Throughout both focus group discussions, it was clear to the researchers that the youth had enjoyed the week and felt their teamwork skills had improved because of the experience. However, one youth summed up the experience, “I think it was a good leadership experience because when you’re not taking classes and you’re going on hikes and tubing, you are forced to take charge of your own actions. You’re not around other people for other people to do the work for you. It was a good experience for responsibility.”

With a purpose of helping these youth “navigate through adolescence” (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), this researcher finds evidence of resiliency and competency (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) in the process. These youth, all of whom are either signed up as CITs or counselors, are moving forward and upward in their leadership competencies (Phelps, 2001), and are able to rely on skills learned at intermediate camp.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **For Further Study**

This initial study of intermediate camp as a method of strengthening leadership and teamwork skills can be advanced through expanding the pool of participants who have experienced intermediate camping programs. Rather than focus groups, evaluation survey tools could streamline provision of further insight into the program through camper feedback and a survey tool is easily shared with other 4-H centers across the state. However, from a camping perspective, focus groups provide a valuable variety of information about the general camping program. Through sharing of this research, it is hoped that other camping clusters will include similar programs to strengthen and encourage intermediate youth to continue their involvement in the 4-H camping program.

Further definition of proposed outcomes of intermediate camp would benefit the design and structure of the intermediate camping program. This research examined leadership and teamwork skills acquired by youth during their intermediate camp experience. Tracking these youth through their counselor years and comparing their growth to those who did not attend intermediate camp could provide insight into specific benefits of the program. Independence and responsibility are also constructs that could be further examined for developmental differences.

### **For Practitioners**

The focus group experience was new to this researcher, and the variety of information produced by these focus groups shows what an important tool a focus group can be in evaluating similar programs. When working with youth, they tend to get nervous in interview situations, and their spontaneous conversation is limited. The focus group allows youth to interact with each other and produces a greater variety of feedback. One such discussion revealed that CITs and new counselors are intimidated by more experienced counselors. One outcome of that revelation is that during camp teen training, small groups of youth will be intentionally mixed-age to strengthen bonds between youth. It is key that CITs and younger counselors be comfortable asking questions of older counselors during camp week, and training programs need to develop trust among different age teens.

Focus groups should be a regular part of camp evaluation. The information provided when five to seven teens get together over a meal to discuss camp develops organically. It was surprising to this researcher the depth of feedback revealed by the youth in the focus group setting. A greater effort to conduct focus groups for evaluation of camp and the counselor training program will provide greater insight into your camping program.

**From Participants**

Participants had several suggestions that included more tent camping, intentional leadership opportunities, and planning a leadership rotational system to involve more youth. Adding another night of tent camping is planned for the next intermediate camping program and had already been suggested by the adult volunteers. The addition of rotating leadership and more intentional leadership opportunities will require more thoughtful planning to implement but can be included in planning discussions with adult and teen volunteer staff. Using leadership games and activities in addition to the responsibilities inherent in the design of the camping program is one method of increasing the opportunities to build leadership skills.

**Conclusion**

In examining the results of the intermediate camp focus group discussion, key elements of the program were identified that should be included when designing a similar program. Intermediate camp youth should be separated from the rest of the junior camp group to allow group dynamics to form along with small-group bonding. Intermediate campers should be free from junior camp classes and schedules to allow the group to make decisions about their week. Intermediate campers should be provided with a separate space and responsibilities such as camp set up, meal prep, off site activities and community service. Teamwork and leadership activities need to be part of the program, and can be similar to those used in counselor training programs or pre-arranged to be provided by camp summer staff (*i.e.* low ropes). Intermediate youth should be encouraged to make group decisions, and these can relate to menu planning, activities and schedules. Youth who plan to continue with camp leadership opportunities of CIT and counselor should be encouraged to participate in intermediate camp.

There is investment in infrastructure in this program with commitment of volunteer staff, funds for the extra offsite camping, activities and camping equipment, but it can make a difference in the cohesion of future counselor teams. This researcher sees it as a sound investment in the future of the camping program. This investment can positively impact the entire camp by strengthening bonds between future teen counselors. Providing a camp week focused on opportunities to recognize the importance of responsibility and getting along with fellow campers makes better counselors.

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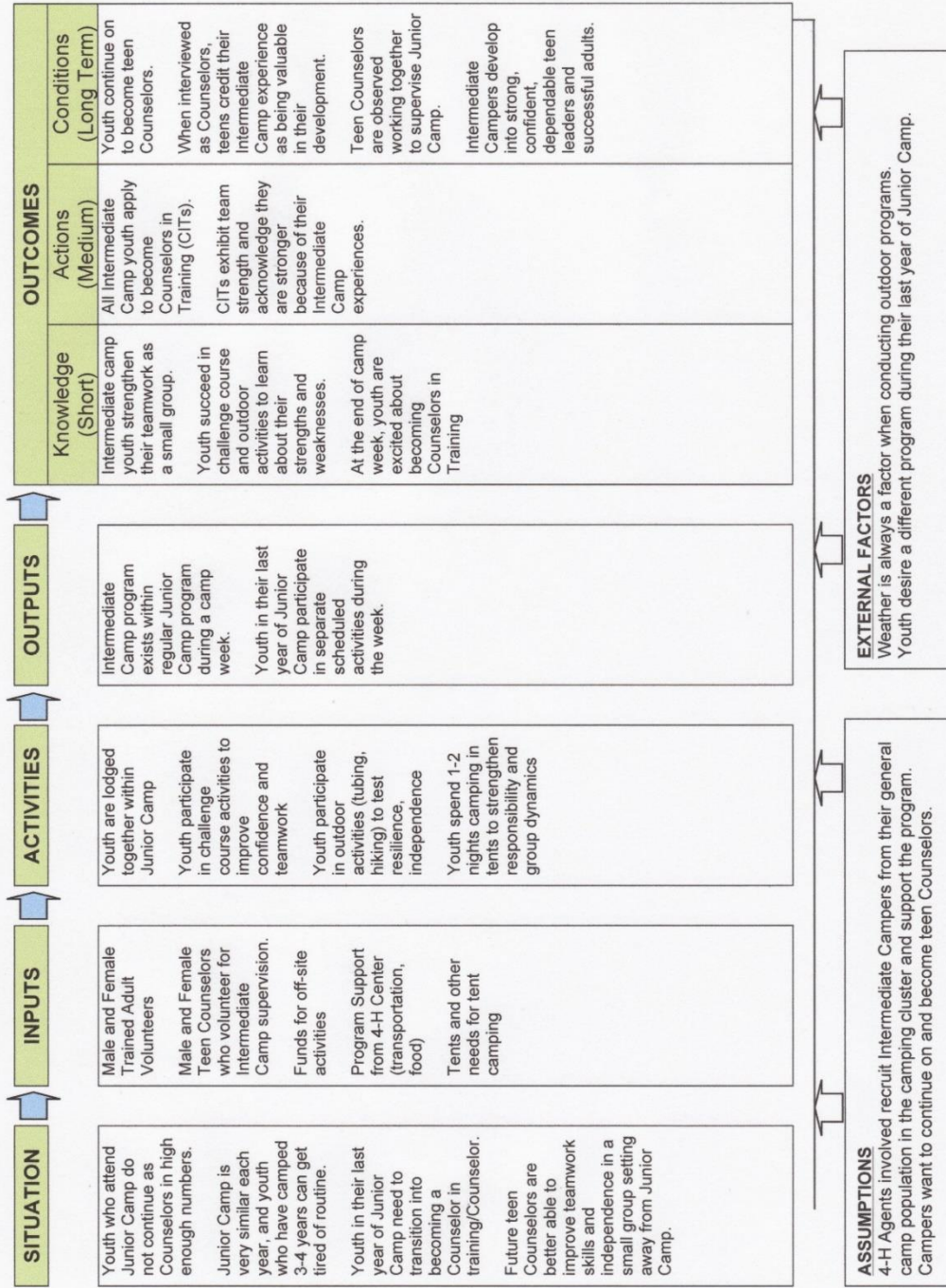
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Appendix A

LOGIC MODEL FOR INTERMEDIATE CAMP



**Appendix B**

**Proposed Schedule for Intermediate Camp**

Sunday	2:00-3:00	Arrive at 4-H Center, unpack, prepare for evening
	3:00 - 3:30	Welcome - Fairfax Shelter (Have everything for Campfire)
	3:30 - 5:45	Divide into packs to decorate boxes
	6:00 - 6:30	Dinner (CITs arrive 15 minutes early)
	6:30	Flag Lowering
	7:00-8:30	Pool Party / Boxcar Races
	8:30	Snack & Change Clothes
	8:45	Line up @ Fairfax Shelter for Campfire
	9:00	Campfire @ Campfire Circle
	10:00	Dorm Meeting
	10:15	Prepare for Bed & Lights Out!
Monday	7:00-7:45	Rise, Shine, Clean up Rooms
	7:45 - 8:30	Breakfast (CITs arrive 15 minutes early)
	8:30-9:00	Pack necessary items for tent camping
	9:00-12:00	Travel to camping site and set up
	12:00-1:00	Lunch
	1:00-5:00	Ice breakers; explore state park; team building activities
	5:00-7:00	Prepare, cook and eat dinner, clean-up
	7:00-10:00	Teambuilding, campfire, showers, prepare for bed
Tuesday	7:00-9:00	Pack up tents; eat breakfast
	9:00-4:00	Tubing on the Shenandoah Return to 4-H Camp
	5:00-6:00	Prepare for dinner and dance
	6:00-6:45	Dinner
	7:00-10:00	Dance and evening activities
Wednesday	7:00-7:45	Rise, Shine, Clean up Rooms
	7:45 - 8:30	Breakfast (CITs arrive 15 minutes early)
	8:45	Flag Raising
	9:00	Hike on the Appalachian Trail
	2:45 -3:40	Swimming/Recreation
	5:00	Return to Lodge / Dress for Dinner & Evening Program
	6:00 - 6:45	Dinner (CITs arrive 15 minutes early)
	6:45	Flag Lowering
	7:00 - 8:30	Evening Program - Talent Show at Amphitheater
	8:30	Snack
	9:00	Campfire - Campfire Circle
10:00	Dorm Meeting	
10:15	Lights Out!	
Thursday	7:00-7:45	Rise, Shine, Clean up Rooms
	7:45 - 8:30	Breakfast (CITs arrive 15 minutes early)
	8:45	Flag Raising
	9:00-11:20	Community Service Project
	11:20 - 12:20	Clean up and pack up
	12:30 - 1:20	Lunch (CITs arrive 15 minutes early)
	1:20 - 2:30	Evaluations - Conference Center / Load Buses Evaluations / Outdoor Rec / Sign T-Shirts
	2:30 - 3:30	Closing Ceremonies
	3:30 - 4:30	Load buses and depart
6:00 - 6:30	Buses arrive at pick-up location	

## **Appendix C**

### **Proposed Questions for Intermediate Camp Focus Groups**

Introductory statement: As part of my Virginia Tech Master's Degree project, I am conducting research on the intermediate camping program. Thank you for coming in to talk with me. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers, and I want to hear your point of view. Please share even if it is different from what others have said. We are interested in both positive and negative comments, and negative comments can sometimes be the most helpful (Krueger, 1988). Do you have any questions for me before we start? Do you mind if I record this discussion so I can use the recording to make notes later?

- Please tell me about the most memorable thing that happened at camp. High and low.
- What did you learn about your own strengths and weaknesses during intermediate camp?
- What responsibilities did you have during the week? Clean-up, meal prep, work projects?
- What was your participation in group activities and decisions?
- How is intermediate camp different from junior camp?

What did you learn about yourself during intermediate Camp? What did you learn about leadership? Teamwork? When did you have to work as a team during camp? How did working as a team help you during the rest of camp? Did you notice others leading or being a good group member? When did you have to lead during intermediate camp? How did it affect the rest of your week at camp?

Some of these questions were based on the NCRC Life Skills Questionnaire (National 4-H Camping Research Consortium, 2007)

How did your teamwork/leadership skills change from junior to intermediate camp?

For youth with camp experience beyond their Intermediate Camp year, further questions could be as follows:

- How prepared were you for your job as camp Counselor?
- Can you tell me about some of your activities during intermediate camp that helped you prepare for becoming a camp Counselor?
- Did you participate as a Counselor in Training (CIT)?
- If so, what were some of the experiences during CIT week?
- Compare CIT training to intermediate camp.