The Use of Ripple Effect Mapping as an Evaluation Tool for Extension Programming

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Abstract

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is an emergent group participatory evaluation tool designed to identify the impacts, both intended as well as unintended, of programming such as that conducted by Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). In this project the effectiveness of REM as an evaluation tool was examined using the Stone Soup Rural Workforce Training program (Stone Soup). Project objectives were to 1.) define the process and carry out a REM session for a VCE program, 2.) consider the capacity of REM to measure intended and unintended program outcomes and impacts as compared to the program logic model and as relates to the Community Capitols Framework (Emory & Flora, 2006), and 3.) identify other benefits and challenges associated with using REM as an evaluation method in VCE. Through the implementation of REM, both intentional and unintentional impacts of the Stone Soup program were identified. The REM process also served as a means to connect, re-energize and engage program participants. REM is an effective evaluation tool for obtaining qualitative data on complex Extension programs with multiple partners.
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Introduction

Background and Setting

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is described as “a group participatory evaluation method engaging program participants and community stakeholders to retrospectively and visually map the chain of effects resulting from a program or complex collaboration” (Chazdon, Emery, Hansen, Higgins, & Sero, 2017, p. xi). REM was designed to document the results of program efforts within complex, real-life settings (Chazdon et al., 2017). Chazdon et al., 2017, conducted a series of case studies with previous users of REM. The three most common reasons for using REM were to document program impacts in a means that provided insight from multiple perspectives, to generate enthusiasm and energy for continued work, and to help participants connect their efforts with those of others (Chazdon et al., 2017).

There are varied approaches to implementing REM (Chazdon et al., 2017). Each varied approach contains four core elements: appreciative inquiry (AI), a participatory approach, interactive group interviewing and reflection, and radiant thinking (RT). REM utilizes these core elements to engage program participants and stakeholders to reflect upon and visually map program impacts, both intentional as well as unintentional (Chazdon et al., 2017). Data collected through REM is qualitative, providing greater insight into why participants feel the way they do about the program. This is beneficial in trying to understand why a program works and consider alternative approaches that can be used to build on strengths and overcome program challenges.

The first element, AI, is described as “a process that inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of what is in organizations in order to create a better future” (Coughlin, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003, p. 5). During a REM session, participants interview each other using a series of pre-determined AI questions that focus on their positive experiences. Questions
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are formed to determine the following: 1.) personal achievement or success that has occurred as a result of the program, 2.) the formation and/or strengthening of relationships, and 3.) the new opportunities provided through program participation or relationships.

Participatory evaluation or a participatory approach is the second element. It encourages the active involvement of those with a stake in the program: participants, program staff, board members, community members, partners, and sponsors (University of Wisconsin Extension, 2006). A participatory approach increases the potential for evaluation results to be useful for program stakeholders because it produces realistic, relevant data that is grounded in reality (Chazdon et al., 2017, University of Wisconsin Extension, 2006). Those who take part in a participatory evaluation method, such as REM, often gain a better understanding of the program through shared experiences (Chazdon et al, 2017). The participatory approach of REM also reflects Extension program engagement, characterized by community involvement in all aspects of program development (Vines, 2018). Program evaluation is an area in which increased involvement of participants and stakeholders is needed in order for Extension programs to increase engagement (Vines, 2018). Community engagement is maximized by involving communities in participatory evaluation methods, such as REM, that inform and motivate them (Darger, 2014).

The third element, interactive group interviewing, takes place as participants interview one another using AI questions. Through reflection, REM helps groups to develop new knowledge regarding the type and extent of program impact (Chazdon et al., 2017). Participants work together, with assistance from a facilitator, to identify program effects, or ripples, that then become visualized through mind mapping.
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Radiant thinking (RT) is a fundamental concept behind REM (Chazdon, Flague, Higgins, Kollock, and Paine, 2012). RT refers to the brain’s associative thought processes that derive from a central point and form links between integrated concepts (Chazdon et al., 2012). New ideas emerge when the mind is allowed to think freely or radiantly as is promoted in REM sessions (Rosciano, 2015).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to examine the effectiveness of REM as a tool when evaluating programming conducted by Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). REM will be studied using Stone Soup Rural Workforce Training Program (Stone Soup) to see how effective it is in identifying intended outcomes in addition to identifying the unintended outcomes or ripples. Findings will be shared with VCE and other Extension faculty through in-service trainings, professional meetings, and publications.

The questions guiding this project are:

1.) What are the possible implications associated with using Ripple Effect mapping for evaluation of Virginia Cooperative Extension programs?

2.) How can REM be used to strengthen Cooperative Extension programing?

Project Objectives

There are three primary objectives of this project. The first is to define the process and carry out a REM session for a VCE program. The second is to consider the capacity of REM to measure intended and unintended program outcomes and impacts as compared to the program logic model and as relates to the Community Capitols Framework (Emory & Flora, 2006). The
third objective is to identify other benefits and challenges associated with using REM as an evaluation method in VCE.

**Definition of Terms**

1. **Appreciative Inquiry (AI)** - the co-evolutionary, co-operative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential. AI practice focuses on the speed of the imagination and innovation. Instead of negative, critical, and spiraling diagnoses commonly used in our organizations there is discovery, dream, design and destiny. (Appreciative Inquiry Handbook, 2008)

2. **Community Capitals Framework** - resources and characteristics identified with successful and sustainable communities. The seven *community capitals* are financial, social, built, cultural, natural, political and human. (Emory and Flora, 2006)

3. **Mind Mapping** - a diagraming process that represents connections among ideas hierarchically. (Chazdon et al., 2017)

4. **Radiant Thinking** - refers to the brain’s associative thought processes that derive from a central point and form links between integrated concepts (Kollock, Flague, Chazdon, Paine & Higgins, 2012).

5. **Ripple Effect Mapping** - a group participatory evaluation method that engages program and community stakeholders to retrospectively and visually map the chain of effects resulting from a program or complex collaboration (Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping, 2017).

6. **Virginia Cooperative Extension** - an educational outreach program of Virginia's land-grant universities: Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, and a part of the National Institute for Food and Agriculture, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture.
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Extension programs are delivered through a network of faculty at two universities, 108 county and city offices, 11 agricultural research and Extension centers, and six 4-H educational centers. Our system incorporates the expertise of faculty in the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Natural Resources and Environment, Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, and the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station; as well as the College of Agriculture at Virginia State University. (http://www.ext.vt.edu)

Review of Literature

In surveying current literature, several applications of the use of REM as a tool for conducting Extension program evaluations were presented. REM was used to evaluate TIDE (Turning the Tide on Poverty), a project developed in 2009, by a team of land-grant Extension professionals and research professionals in eight southern states (Chazdon et al., 2017). The program was designed to aid local citizens in high poverty communities in expressing themselves on community matters which were important to them. The REM process allowed those with limited literacy, who may have been intimidated by traditional evaluation techniques such as surveys or questionnaires, to participate fully. In addition, the REM process supported all participants equally, providing low literacy audiences with voice (Chazdon et al., 2017). Participants also noted that the process was engaging as they saw their efforts illustrated through the mapping process, and they developed strong ownership in the process, given the impacts documented were theirs (Chazdon et al., 2017).

The University of Minnesota implemented the use of REM to evaluate a community-driven, Business Retention and Expansion program. Program administrators were looking for an evaluation plan that would display program outcomes in a manner which was useful and easy to understand for both the community members and Extension staff. They were also interested in
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developing an evaluation plan that would be easy and inexpensive to implement and motivating for those who participated. They found that REM fulfilled these requirements (Darger, 2014). Two of the communities involved in these evaluations won international awards after utilizing the comprehensive impact data identified through the REM process to substantiate their accomplishments. Extension staff also found the process to be beneficial for providing anecdotal, qualitative data for use with annual reporting to state and federal funders (Darger, 2014).

The REM process was also utilized by Mike Liepold, a University of Minnesota Extension Leadership and Civic Engagement educator, to evaluate the Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership (MARL) program. It was noted by Liepold that he often collects quantitative data on his programming, but that such data doesn’t tell a story that resonates or is interesting to program stakeholders (University of Minnesota Extension, 2019). Liepold further commented, “REM brings some color and life to the statistics we share” (University of Minnesota Extension, 2019, p. 1). The rich qualitative data obtained through the stories of REM participants help Extension educators to share their program’s story through the experiences of the participants.

REM was used as a tool to document the community change created as a result of the multi-state Marketing Hometown America program. From 2013 to 2014 this program was piloted in seven communities in Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota, with the intended purpose of assisting rural communities with the development of marketing plans to better market their communities to potential new residents. Both intended and unintended changes in the communities were identified through the REM process (Burkhart-Kriesel, 2015). In addition, the process was very revealing to the community members who participated in the process (Burkhart-Kriesel, 2015). Participants knew what happened in their small community action groups, but had a limited idea of the overall impact of the Marketing Hometown America
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program in their community. The ability to document outcomes and inform participants of the impact of these outcomes on their community, make REM an effective tool for documenting community development change (Burkhart-Kriesel, 2015).

In many examples of Extension community development program evaluation using REM, results were analyzed to relate program impact within the community through the use of the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) (Emery & Flora, 2006). Within this framework community development is focused on seven types of capital: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built. “A community capitals approach allows one to view the various elements, resources, and relationships within a community and their contribution to the overall functioning of the community” (Cornhusker Economics, 2015, p. 2). REM serves as an evaluation method that can identify which of the community capitals a program is impacting, and illustrates through the ripple effect, at what level that capital is being developed within a community. “CCF focuses mainly on the assets of a community rather than on community needs and deficits” (Cornhusker Economics, 2015, p. 2). REM, primarily due to the appreciative inquiry approach, also serves to focus on the positive assets of community development programming and allows for a natural relationship with CCF. The end products of REM sessions can also serve as a planning tool to further develop community capitals impacts, as investments in one type of capital can build assets in another (Emery, Fey, & Flora, 2006).

Other programs determine their effectiveness by coding the data identified through REM using their program’s logic model. A logic model provides a description of “if-then” relationships that if implemented as intended lead to desired outcomes (University of Wisconsin-Extension, 2003). A logic model also expresses the program’s theory of change, or how it is believed the program will be effective, by showing what a program intends to do and accomplish.
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(University of Wisconsin-Extension, 2015). The intended program results are represented on a logic model as the short, medium, and long-term outcomes. By comparing the impacts identified through REM with those intended outcomes represented on the logic model, administrators can determine if the intended goals of their program have been met, and if there are unintended impacts of the programing.

REM is an emerging evaluation tool for use by Extension staff to evaluate their programming. Dr. Scott Chazdon, an Evaluation and Research Specialist with the University of Minnesota’s Extension Center for Community Viability states, “It’s an excellent way to encourage reflection, capture what relationships can lead to, and motivate people to continue their work in communities” (University of Minnesota Extension, 2019, p.1). Dr. Chazdon cited the following as additional benefits of REM: it is a simple and inexpensive process, it has the ability to capture the impact of complex work, it motivates and inspires, and is an effective communication tool (University of Minnesota Extension, 2019).

**Theoretical Framework**

REM is guided by AI theory. This theory was developed by David Cooperrider while he was a doctoral student studying physician leadership at Case Western Reserve University. Cooperrider asked physician leaders to discuss their success and failures. He found that the levels of positive cooperation, innovation, and egalitarian leadership increased when physicians identified situations in which they felt they were most effective (Coughlin et al., 2003).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is described as, “a process that inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of what is in an organization in order to create a better future” (Coughlan et al., 2003, p. 5). A basic principal of AI is that an organization will develop in the direction in which they focus their attention. If an organization is focused on its strengths, then identifying those
strengths and building upon them is the direction in which the organization will continue. Coughlin states, that because AI focuses on positive experiences, participants “walk away with a sense of commitment, confidence, and affirmation that they have been successful. They also know clearly how to make more moments of success” (Coughlin et al., 2003, p. 6). AI theory suggests that organizations are centers of “human relatedness” and these “relationships thrive where there is an appreciative eye—when people see the best in one another, when they share their dreams and ultimate concerns in affirming ways, and when they are connected in full voice to create not just new worlds, but better worlds” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 21).

Coughlin et al. (2003) identified the following eight assumptions as the foundation for AI:

1. In every society, organization, or group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

Cooperrider states, “The single most prolific thing a group can do if its aims are to liberate the human spirit and consciously construct a better future is to make the positive change core the common and explicit property of all” (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005, p. 4). Cooperative extension is concerned with making positive change and having communities take ownership of their future. Therefore, it seems using an evaluation model like REM has the opportunity to strengthen Extension programming and the Extension organization.
Project Overview

Project Timeline and Participating Audience

The program used in this project to test REM is Stone Soup. Stone Soup was established after a need for workforce training was determined through community needs assessments conducted by the VCE offices in Culpeper, Madison, and Orange counties in Central Virginia, as well as through collaboration with the George Washington Carver Food Enterprise Center and Culpeper County Human Services. Stone Soup was developed to provide food service workforce training for low income audiences, with the goals of improving their lives through increased employment opportunities and increased health of both participants and their families through nutrition education. The six-session program teaches food safety, customer service, basic nutrition, and budgeting the food dollar. In addition, experiential training in the food preparation skills needed for employment in the food service industry is provided by a professional chef who volunteers his time and expertise. Extension agents, with the assistance of Family Nutrition Program Assistants, Extension Master Food Volunteers, and community volunteers from the Rural Madison organization, work cooperatively to deliver the program. Weekly incentives, including kitchen tools and fresh produce, are provided to participants to encourage the practice of their newly acquired skills at home, as well as to introduce healthy food choices to participants and their families.

A total of 64 individuals have graduated from the six Stone Soup programs conducted to date. These programs reach low income individuals as well as those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and those who suffer from mental illness. Graduates have been offered additional assistance with resume writing and interviewing skills by the Goodwill
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Industry’s Workforce Centers in Orange and Culpeper, and are qualified to participate in paid internships offered through Goodwill.

The decision to use Stone Soup as the Extension program to test REM was made for several reasons. The program has been in existence for several years, and although an evaluation is conducted at the conclusion of each program, the evaluation data collected determines only knowledge gained through participation. The administrators of Stone Soup were interested in determining the extent that participants used this acquired knowledge to not only meet program goals, but to better their lives as well.

In addition, participants in the last three classes included not only low-income individuals, but those with disabilities, as well as those with mental illness. These participants were using the food preparation, food handling, food safety, and budgeting training to develop the skills needed to increase their self-sufficiency. This was an unexpected impact of Stone Soup, whose intended propose was to develop job skills for low income individuals. Identifying this outcome encouraged administrators to determine if there were additional unintended impacts of Stone Soup.

Research Design and Procedure

The REM session was conducted on July 25, 2019, with participants and non-participant stakeholders of the Stone Soup Rural Workforce Training program. Non-program participants may also be invited to participate in a REM session to provide an “outside” view, but were not a part of this project. One participant and five non-participant stakeholders from the six completed Stone Soup programs agreed to participate in the mapping session. Additionally, five individuals, unable to attend the mapping session, were interviewed after the initial session. Participants were
recruited through email, or phone, using contact information available for each participant. The mapping session was held at the Culpeper Extension Office adjacent to the Culpeper Baptist Church, centrally located to Stone Soup class locations, and where three of the six Stone Soup sessions were previously conducted.

There are several methods for facilitating and conducting REM sessions. Which method to implement is determined largely by evaluator choice (Emery et al., 2015). The “Theming and Rippling” method was chosen for the purposes of this project. This method was chosen because it allows for all participants to have the opportunity for others to hear their thoughts and opinions, and to see them displayed on the initial mind map (Chazdon et al., 2017). The researcher felt it was important that everyone involved have this opportunity to provide insight regarding the success of Stone Soup. Also, with this method participants assist with the identification of overall impact themes. The development of these core themes is helpful for later sharing of the mind map, as they provide a focus with major themes and examples of impacts in each (Emery et al., 2015).

Prior to implementation of this project an application was submitted to the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, and the project was deemed exempt. Participants for the REM session were then recruited and introduced to the project via email, or phone, depending on the individual’s available contact information. (Appendix A) Individuals were informed they were going to be a part of a discussion identifying the impacts of the Stone Soup program on them personally, as well as on the community as a whole. It was emphasized that information concerning participation in the REM session would be kept entirely confidential, and that at no time would data from the REM session be released that identified the individuals participating.
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Participants were also informed that the session was not being recorded, and that they could withdraw from the REM session at any time.

As recommended by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, (2012), the REM session was facilitated by a third party, not involved in the program, as a way to prevent close-ended or leading questions that may be asked by the administrators of the program. An additional Extension Educator was present to act as the “mapper,” whose role was to record and map information provided by the participants using XMind mind mapping software (www.xmind.net). In the process, the mapper asked participants to clarify their responses as needed. An agenda (Appendix B) and script (Appendix C) were provided to the facilitator and the mapper prior to the mapping session. Both resources were developed using examples provided in A Field Guide to Ripple Effect Mapping (Chazdon et al., 2017).

The session began with an overview of the program provided by the researcher and facilitator. (Appendix C) Introductions were made, general guidelines were discussed, and a synopsis of the Stone Soup program was provided. Participants were then asked to find a partner, preferably someone they did not know well, to discuss their experiences with Stone Soup, using one or more of the open-ended AI questions previously developed by program administrators. AI questions are designed to have participants share some of their peak experiences with a program (Coghlan et al., 2003). Discussing success stories with a partner elicits many outcomes and allows everyone time to reflect on program activities (Emery et al., 2015). The interviews were conducted for 15 minutes, with participants switching roles of interviewer/interviewee midway.

Those who were Stone Soup participants were asked to provide information using the following AI questions:
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- What is a highlight, achievement, or success you have had based on your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
- What is something about your involvement with Stone Soup that you are proud to share?
- What connections with others—new and/or deepened—have you made as a result of the Stone Soup program?

Those stakeholders present were asked to provide their feedback from the following AI questions:

- What impression do you have of the accomplishments program participants have made as a result of the Stone Soup program?
- What unexpected things happened as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
- What connections with others—new and/or deepened—have you made as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?

Individuals were asked not to deviate from the AI questions, and to practice active listening techniques, including asking questions to clarify their partners’ responses as needed. They were provided with a document to record their partners’ responses to assist with reporting out to the group. (Appendix D) The facilitator was available during the interviews to answer any procedural questions, and to check on each pair to ensure they were following the interview protocol. Following the protocol tends to increase the rigor of the interviews, as the majority of participants probably have had little or no experience conducting interviews (Chazdon et al., 2017).

After completing the AI interviews, participants returned as a large group to share their findings, and to work together to create a “mind map.” As with RT, a mind map begins with a central theme or idea, with connected thoughts radiating from the center. When complete, the mind map visually depicted the outcomes associated with Stone Soup. (Appendix G) The purpose of the group mapping exercise was to engage the entire group, and to help participants see connections among the effects they are describing (University of Minnesota Extension, 2019). Each pair was asked to introduce themselves, including their role in the Stone Soup
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program, and to offer a story from their AI interviews to the group. To complete the group mind map, participants reported and brainstormed the effects or “ripples” of the Stone Soup program, while the recorder or “mapper” inputted this data into mind mapping software.

The software, XMIND, was used during this REM session due to its ease of use and affordability. The map was projected on a screen at the front of the room in which the REM session was taking place. Participants were instructed to review the way their comments were displayed on the map, and to speak up if the mapped comments did not reflect their intended meaning. If the comments they intended to share were similar to those already on the map, they were asked to inform the mapper to place their comments next to those similar in nature. The role of the facilitator during group mapping was to ask probing questions to help identify any connections or cause and effect relationships of the reported data. The following are examples of probing questions (Chazdon, et al., 2017):

- Then what happened?
- Who was involved?
- Did you learn anything else?
- How did that help your community?
- What have you done with that information?

Stories were told, and mapping continued until the group was satisfied that the map captured everything known to have happened as a result of the Stone Soup program. As the “findings” were mapped, they were grouped according to emergent themes. Participants were asked to verify whether or not what they shared fit where it was assigned. In some cases, findings were associated with multiple themes. This provided a form of “member checking” as individuals confirmed that what they said was captured correctly and then categorized appropriately. The REM session ended with group reflection. Participants were asked to identify what they found
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interesting regarding the map, as well as how they felt the REM process could be beneficial to future Stone Soup programing. Participants were also asked how they personally felt about being a part of the REM process. The session closed by thanking participants and informing them that a final map will be shared when complete.

Following the REM session, contact was made with four participants and one stakeholder unable to attend the REM session. (Appendix E) Information was gathered from them using the questions from the REM session, and added to the mind map. The researcher, worked to finalize the map (Appendix H) by ensuring all information generated through the REM session was clearly represented on the final map. The final map was then exported into a spreadsheet (Appendix I), making it easier to code the data as recommended by Extension Community Development, (2019).

The researcher, with assistance from another Stone Soup program administer, reviewed the data from the mind map and assigned codes based on the project’s logic model (Appendix F). Emerging themes were assigned to unintended outcomes. This was done to determine the extent to which the Stone Soup program met its intended goals, and what, if any, unintended impacts resulted from the program. Data was coded according to the short, medium, and long-term goals of the Stone Soup program. Additionally, to determine the impact of Stone Soup on the community it serves, the data was then coded against the Community Capitol Framework. (Appendix G) This framework identifies the resources and characteristics associated with successful and sustainable communities (Emery and Flora, 2006).

Limitations

The sample of individuals who participated in the REM session did not accurately reflect recruitment efforts, particularly of those who were Stone Soup program graduates. Forty-five of
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the 64 Stone Soup graduates were eligible for the REM session and contact was attempted for all those eligible. Despite recruitment efforts, only one graduate agreed to participate in the REM session, which severely limited input from program participants. Reasons for non-participation varied, including having inaccurate contact information and no forwarding information for seven individuals, and movement out of the area for 12 individuals (including two individuals from mental health transitional housing, and five individuals from a homeless shelter for young mothers). Four participants contacted had work commitments. Additionally, four reported having family commitments or being on vacation on the scheduled day. There was no response from 17 individuals, 38% of those for whom contact was attempted. Those who were stakeholders of the Stone Soup program were well represented for the mapping session, comprising 83% of the sample, or five participants. Contact was made with an additional four Stone Soup graduates and one stakeholder after the REM session, and data was collected at that time.

The survey size itself was also smaller than the 8-15 participants recommended by the Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping (Chazdon et al., 2017). Although there were fewer participants than suggested, REM session organizers felt the small sample size allowed for the opinions of all to be shared without restriction within the time allotted. Also, the numbers were sufficient to evaluate the REM process.

Another limitation of REM is that by design it focuses only on positive program feedback. This may prevent Extension faculty from identifying problems associated with the program.
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Summary

Results

Qualitative data on the use of REM as a method to evaluate Extension programing was collected as a result of this project. The objectives of this project were to 1.) define the process and carry out a REM session for a VCE program, 2.) consider the capacity of REM to measure intended and unintended program outcomes and impacts as compared to the program logic model and as relates to the Community Capitols Framework (Emory & Flora, 2006), and 3.) identify other benefits and challenges associated with using REM as an evaluation method in VCE. These objectives were achieved through the following:

Objective 1- REM Implementation

Through this project a REM session was successfully planned and carried out for the Stone Soup program.

Objective 2-Measurement of Intended and Unintended Impacts

The intended short-term outcomes for Stone Soup as included in the program logic model (Appendix F) are: to increase the knowledge and skills of participants in food safety and handling, nutrition, food budgeting, customer service, and food preparation. These short-term goals were all identified as being met in the discussion and resulting mind map during the REM of the Stone Soup program. Medium-term goals, including the acquisition of employment in the food service industry, and the adoption of safe food handling practices were also identified as having been met. “Ripples” which extend the reach of intended outcomes were also identified through the REM process. Through the stories told by participants, it was determined that not only did one participant obtain employment, she was able to save enough money to purchase her
first used car and is now working a full-time government job with benefits. Another ripple identified through the REM session was the development of a job fair for food service positions, created after a restaurant manager spoke to a Stone Soup program administrator concerning the need for employees with food safety training. VCE partnered with the Goodwill Workforce Center to conduct the fair. One Stone Soup student was hired, and has since received her ServSafe Manager certification, which was funded through her employer.

Unintended impacts of the Stone Soup program were also identified through the REM process. The use of Stone Soup information for community outreach was not expected. One participant reported sharing information she obtained with others through her international missionary work, while another created workshops for her church, including scheduling Extension educators to conduct a food safety program. The development of entrepreneurial skills by program participants was another unexpected impact. It was reported by a program stakeholder that a participant used the knowledge and skills provided through Stone Soup to develop her own food related business. She moved from having a small family garden plot to a larger plot which supported the sale of produce at her local farmer’s market. She also received the certification to produce and sell value added products through her farmer’s market stand.

Participation in the Stone Soup program by those with disabilities and mental illness was also an unintended impact. These individuals participated in Stone Soup to not only receive job skills training, but to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to live more independently.

It was also determined when coding findings using the CCF that the majority of Stone Soup’s impacts to the community fell in the human and social capitals. The human capital includes investments that add to the health, education, well-being, and self-esteem of people, while the social capital relates to how people, groups, and organizations in a community work together
Political capital, a measure of social engagement, was identified as Stone Soup participants presented their experiences to public officials in Orange County. Financial capital, which includes the financial resources that allow a community to support civic and social entrepreneurship, was identified as a Stone Soup graduate developed a successful food business based on the knowledge, skills, and connections she acquired through the program. Using the CCF to code the impacts of Stone Soup provided the opportunity to show the public value of the program.

Objective 3-Participant Engagement

REM also served as a means to engage and energize those involved in Stone Soup. According to AI theory, documenting positive progress can be motivating and inspiring, leading to continued work by program participants and stakeholders. All individuals who took part in the REM session enjoyed the process, and felt it was worthwhile, as reported during the reflection period. Participants agreed that the participant-centered approach of REM encouraged great conversation, and connected participants. It was noted that through these conversations, participants built on the stories of others, and uncovered far reaching impacts. One participant stated he really enjoyed the discussion, and was surprised at how quickly time passed. An additional participant reported that he enjoyed sharing with his interview partner during the appreciative interviews, and now has a better understanding of the role his partner plays in the community. Another participant appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with other organizations that have human-services related missions. Participants were excited to see the far-reaching impacts of their work with Stone Soup represented on the visual mind map. They felt encouraged to continue their work with the program after seeing the results of their efforts and participation. After the REM session, a participant offered monetary funds to support a
RIPPLE EFFECT MAPPING AS AN EVALUATION TOOL FOR EXTENSION

future Stone Soup program. The program administrators felt the offer was a result of the stakeholder’s participation in the REM session. Those Stone Soup administrators who participated in the REM session reported that they also enjoyed re-connecting with those who helped to implement the program, as well as the individual who was a program participant.

**Discussion**

The REM process produced qualitative data which identified the positive program effectiveness of Stone Soup. There is value to the use of REM as a tool for documenting the impacts of Extension programming. In the study conducted for this project, REM was proven extremely useful for identifying numerous impacts of the Stone Soup program, both intentional as well as unintentional.

Previously, pre and post surveys were used to document the success of the Stone Soup program. Survey questions assessed the skills and knowledge acquired by participants, and their perceptions of how they would use this information in the future. For example, participants were asked to rate their knowledge of the proper technique for washing their hands on a scale from 0 to 5. Most replied that they knew the technique very well. Through the REM process a story was told documenting not only a participant’s knowledge of the correct hand washing procedure, but evidence of the adoption of the practice. This participant, who obtained food service employment after graduating from the Stone Soup program, reported having her manager comment that he was happy to have an employee who knew the proper hand washing procedures. Her manager then asked her to share her knowledge with other employees by demonstrating her technique. This evidence of behavior change, identified by REM, would not have been identified through the pre-post assessments previously conducted to evaluate Stone Soup.
The narratives provided by participants through the AI interviews and reflection were interesting. The detailed stories told will be useful when sharing the Stone Soup story to potential stakeholders as well as when preparing annual reports, and applying for grant funding. The visual map produced through the REM process is an effective communication tool, which can be easily shared with stakeholders to show the total impact of the Stone Soup program.

REM is easily planned and implemented. Although the sample studied was not that of low literacy, literature suggests that REM is an evaluation tool well suited for use with such audiences (Olfert et al., 2019). The process was easily understood by session participants. Instructions for the process were given to the group by the facilitator, and there were ample opportunities for clarification as the process was implemented. The REM process is flexible, and could be adapted for use with individuals of differing literacy levels and abilities, which is important when conducting programming to meet the needs of diverse Extension audiences.

REM also provides Extension educators with efficient use of their time and resources. Although each REM session is suggested to last approximately two hours, assembling participants for one group face-to-face meeting is less time consuming than conducting individual interviews. Few monetary resources were needed to implement the REM session. The mapping software used, XMIND, is available for free, or for a nominal fee if you wish expanded features. The only cost associated with the implementation of the REM session was for refreshments, which were suggested to help frame the REM session as a celebration. This is recommended to encourage participation and set the tone for a successful REM event (Hansen, Higgins, & Sero, 2018).

The data obtained through the REM session was qualitative, and additional evaluation tools to obtain quantitative data may be needed for a more comprehensive evaluation of Extension
RIPPLE EFFECT MAPPING AS AN EVALUATION TOOL FOR EXTENSION programming. The researcher felt confident, after viewing impact data identified by the REM session, that the short-term goals of Stone Soup had been met, as well as several of the medium-term goals including participant employment in the food service industry. What was not determined was the percentage of the participants who met these goals. Additional evaluation tools such as surveys or questionnaires could be utilized by Extension educators if such quantitative data was needed.

The recruitment of Stone Soup participants to participate in this study was difficult. Although not documented, there are several aspects of REM that may have discouraged participation. First, the process takes approximately two hours to complete. Individuals in a short-term program such as Stone Soup may feel that two hours is a large amount of time to devote to a program they are no longer connected to, especially if their participation in the program was several years ago. Recruitment of program participants may be more successful in the future if the REM session were conducted closer to the completion of each class. A class “reunion” could be held, pairing a REM session to celebrate program success with further in-service training. The idea of getting together to celebrate success and to work on additional skills may encourage greater participation. It was also noted that those participants with mental illness didn’t feel comfortable working with individuals they hadn’t previously met. Conducting a class” reunion” in a familiar setting, would create a “safe” environment for those with mental illness, and may encourage greater participation from this sector of participants.

Risk of bias in participant selection and data collection is a limitation of REM (North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, 2012). The data obtained through REM is limited to the input from those attending the session. Due to the limited number of Stone Soup participants involved in the study, the map produced largely represented the viewpoints of stakeholders only.
This limitation could be overcome by conducting supplementary interviews with other program participants and stakeholders (Kollock, et al., 2012). It would be interesting to conduct a REM session with only Stone Soup participants, or with a more balanced sample of participants for comparison with the study sample.

**Recommendations**

REM is best suited for use with complex community programs that involve multiple partners (Kollock et al., 2012). In addition to identifying program impacts, the REM session studied developed group cohesiveness and created feelings of pride in and “ownership” of the Stone Soup program. It also provided the motivation needed for individuals to continue their work with the program. For those conducting sessions in the future, it is recommended to implement REM as a means, not only to identify program impacts, but to celebrate program success, and/or serve as a team-building exercise.

There are numerous approaches to conducting REM. It is suggested that Extension Educators review the approaches presented in *A Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping* (Chazdon et al., 2017) to become familiar with the REM process and to determine which approach works for them. For all approaches, it is recommended that a team of three individuals conduct the REM session: a facilitator, a mapper, and a recorder. The success of REM is dependent on a skilled facilitator to guide the participants through the process. The mapper records the data on a visual map using either mind mapping software or a large sheet of paper. When implementing the REM process for this study, data was mapped directly into mind mapping software. The map was projected on a wall-mounted projection screen, and was not large enough for participants to read. It is recommended that for future REM sessions using the XMIND mapping software, the map be projected on the wall to enlarge the image. The study
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session did not have a reporter. For future sessions it is recommended to use a reporter to capture direct quotes from the participants that may be missed by the mapper.

REM may also be used as a means to plan for the future of a program. Not only does the mind map developed capture program impacts, it can be utilized to consider what is still needed to be done. After completion of a REM session, it is recommended to schedule an additional meeting for group reflection. Although the focus of the REM process is appreciative, review of the final map may help program administrators and stakeholders to determine aspects of the program which need to be strengthened to provide programming which meet the program’s intended goals.

Through this study, REM was found to have value as a tool for contributing towards the evaluation of an Extension program, but not providing a comprehensive evaluation. Weaknesses of the Stone Soup program were not identified through the REM process. The identification of not only the strengths, but weaknesses of a program are needed to assist in determining changes needed to strengthen current or future programs.
References


RIPPLE EFFECT MAPPING AS AN EVALUATION TOOL FOR EXTENSION


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XMIND: http://www.xmind.net
Dear ________________,

Please join us for an ice cream social to discuss the Stone Soup Rural Job Skills Training program!

To date, six sessions have been held with 64 individuals completing the Stone Soup program! It is now time to talk with you about your experience as a Stone Soup participant or supporter, and to identify and celebrate the impact of Stone Soup on you individually, as well as on our community.

The discussion will be held on July 25th, 2019, beginning at 2:00 PM, at the Culpeper Extension Office, 318 S. West Street, in the town of Culpeper. Please plan on spending about two hours with us.

If you are interested in participating please read over the attached informed consent form, and bring it with you on July 25th. I will answer any questions you may have before you sign the form.

We truly value your input on Stone Soup as we strive to strengthen the program. Please let us know by July 22nd if you will attend by calling Clare Lillard at (540)672-1361, or by sending an email to lclare4@vt.edu. You may contact me as well with any questions or concerns you may have.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Clare Lillard

Extension Agent, Family and Community Sciences
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Appendix B

Stone Soup Rural Workforce Training Program
Ripple Effect Mapping Session Agenda
Thursday, July 25th, 2:00-4:00 P.M., Culpeper Extension Office

I. Welcome and Brief Overview (2:00-2:10 PM)
Virginia Cooperative Extension is hosting this session to better understand the impacts of the Stone Soup Rural Workforce Training Program. Today’s session will use a visual mind mapping method to help you reflect upon and visually map intended and unintended changes produced by the program.

II. Appreciative Inquiry Interview (2:10-2:25 PM)

Participants

- What is a highlight, achievement, or success you have had based on your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
- What is something about your involvement with Stone Soup that you are proud to share?
- What connections with others-new and/or deepened-have you made as a result of the Stone Soup program?

Stakeholders

- What impressions do you have of the accomplishments program participants have made as a result of the Stone Soup program?
- What unexpected things happened as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
- What connections with others-new and/or deepened-have you made as a result of the Stone Soup program?

III. Reporting and Mapping (2:25-3:25 PM)
Now we’ll report out and build from our interviews to generate themes about the ways the Stone Soup program is having an impact. Our questions during the exercise are to intended to help draw out and categorize different types of “ripples,” such as new knowledge or skills, new employment or financial opportunities, and opportunities for improved health.

Guidelines for a Good Map

- Review the way your comments show up on the map. We invite you to speak up if it doesn’t reflect what you have said, either in wording or connections.
- At first, comments on the map are “all over the place.” Over time, it will get clearer as we hear how things are connected.
- Today’s map is only a rough draft. After the session we will review and organize the map. You will receive a copy of the completed map.
IV. Identification of Themes (3:25-3:40 PM)

Take this time to enjoy an ice cream sundae as common themes on the map are identified by session administrators.

V. Reflection and Closing (3:40-4:00 PM)

- What do you find most interesting about the map?
- How might we use the map to help us tell our story to the community about how Stone Soup is making a difference?
- THANK YOU for your help this afternoon and for your participation in the Stone Soup program!
Evaluation of the Stone Soup Rural Workforce Training Program Using Ripple Effect Mapping

Ripple Effect Mapping Protocol

The PI (Clare) and facilitator of the Ripple Effects Mapping session (Karen) will follow a standard protocol that includes:

- Welcome and opening remarks
- Informed consent form review
- Establish REM guidelines
- Appreciative Inquiry interviews
- Reporting and Mind Mapping
- Identification of themes
- Discussion of identified themes and wrap-Up

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS-Clare (10 Minutes)
Welcome, and thank you all for being here today to share with us your thoughts and opinions regarding the Stone Soup Rural Workforce Training Program. We are hosting this session to better understand the impacts of the Stone Soup program in your community. I am Clare Lillard. I along with my coworker, Becky Gartner am an administrator of the Stone Soup program. I would also like to introduce Dr. Karen Vines, an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education from Virginia Tech, who will facilitate our Ripple Effect Mapping session this afternoon. This impact mapping evaluation project will help us better understand the ripple effects of the Stone Soup program on individual participants, groups, communities and regions involved. This mapping process provides a method of visually illustrating the impacts of this program. I also want to introduce Courtney Wesner, Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources, from Virginia Cooperative Extension, who is here to assist as a recorder. She will be mapping the group’s comments to help ensure we don’t miss any details, and may, at times, be asked to summarize the group’s comments to ensure we are effectively capturing your comments.

The purpose of the study is to explore overall (individual, group, community, or regional) changes that have taken place as a result of participating in the Stone Soup program, and to determine if the program is meeting its intended goals. My task is to keep our conversation going, and to keep us on time.

GENERAL GUIDELINES-Karen

- We want an atmosphere of respect for everyone’s opinions, and where everyone has a chance to speak. Let’s talk one at a time, and speak loud and clear.
We would like to spend no more than 90 minutes on this. We have a series of pre-formed questions, but also will leave time for your suggestions. This may cause me to occasionally interrupt you to keep the discussion focused and on track.

- Please do not use your name or names of others during our conversations. You can, however, go by your initials.
- We ask you to please be as honest with us as you can when answering questions.
- There are no right or wrong responses to the questions; we just want your thoughts and opinions.
- If you have a question about the process at any time, please do not hesitate to stop and ask questions.
- If you need to go to the restroom, please feel free to do so, but we would appreciate if you go one at a time. The rest rooms are located in the hallway outside of this meeting room.
- Please silence or turn off all electronic devices. We sincerely appreciate your attention to this mapping process.
- We request that everyone respect the group by not repeating what is said during this focus group outside of this experience.
- Lastly, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to and you can stop your participation at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

Appreciative Inquiry Interviews-Karen (10-15 Minutes)

Before we begin our mapping session this afternoon, I would like to give a brief overview of the Stone Soup program: The Stone Soup program was designed to help low income individuals to improve their quality of life by participating in food service workforce training. The curriculum focus is on hands-on skills in food preparation, food safety and sanitation, nutrition, managing a food budget and customer service. The importance of food safety and personal hygiene is included in each lesson and participants receive a Certificate of Completion from the National Restaurant Association’s ServSafe Food Handler program after completion of the program.

The goal for those completing Stone Soup is that they have increased or improved their job skills for employment in the food service industry as well as adapted the learned skills for use for their personal benefit.

Now let’s begin!

We will begin by asking each other a few questions about Stone Soup. Find a partner who is not already a good friend. Introduce yourselves to each other, including your role in the program.

Share a brief story about the Stone Soup program using one of the following questions:

Participants:
RIPPLE EFFECT MAPPING AS AN EVALUATION TOOL FOR EXTENSION

- What is a highlight, achievement, or success you have had based on your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
- What is something about your involvement with Stone Soup that you are proud to share?
- What connections with others-new and/or deepened-have you made as a result of the Stone Soup program?

**Stakeholders:**

- What impressions do you have of the accomplishments program participants have made as a result of the Stone Soup program?
- What unexpected things happened as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
- What connections with others-new and/or deepened-have you made as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?

Each of you will be given a paper to jot down notes as you speak with your partner. Please practice active listening to not only hear, but understand what your partner is saying as you work with your partner. I will notify you when it is time to switch roles.

**Reporting and Mapping-Karen (60 Minutes)**

Now we will report out and build from the interviews to generate themes about the ways the Stone Soup program is having an impact. Our questions during this mapping exercise are intended to help draw out and categorize different types of “Ripples,” such as new knowledge or skills, new relationships or connections and new financial or economic opportunities. Producing a mind map will allow you to reflect upon and visually map intended and unintended changes produced by the Stone Soup program. Please speak up if the map doesn’t reflect what you said, either in the wording or the connections. At first, comments on the map may seem all over the place. As we work, the map will get clearer as we hear how things are connected. We’ll take time to review the map later, so if you see words or connections that could be tweaked or improved, we’ll give you a chance to do that.

**Each pair will be asked to Introduce themselves, and offer one story from their appreciative inquiry session to the group, going around until all groups have had the opportunity to share. The stories will be placed on the map, welcoming input from all.**

For those of you who participated in Stone Soup, I’ll ask questions about what you have learned, have used, and done for yourself and your community as a result of participating in Stone Soup. As we do, Courtney will map your answers to see what common themes are developing.

For those who didn’t participate in the program but still know how Stone Soup and its participants’ experience led to things happening in the community, we want you to share your observations as well.
Probing questions may include:

- *Then what happened?*
- *Who was involved?*
- *How many people were there?*
- *What is different in the community?*

So, let’s go around the room to hear brief reports from your interviews and we will start to map them as the first ripples. If what you share seems related to something someone else has already shared, please let us know so it can be clustered near that comment on our map.

**Identification of Themes-Karen and Clare (15 Minutes)**

Karen and Clare will review the mapped data to identify common themes.

Participants will celebrate their participation in the mapping session with an ice cream social.

**Reflection and Closing-Karen (15 Minutes)**

After reviewing your comments, the following themes have been identified. Have we missed anything really important? *(Add to the map, or ask participants to write it down for later placement on the map if time is short.)*

I would like you to reflect on the mapping process. What do you find most interesting about the map? How might we use the map to help us tell our story about how Sone Soup is making a difference?

Today’s map is only a rough draft. After the session we will review and organize the map. We may also contact you to get further details on the impact of Stone Soup. A final copy of the map will be sent to you.

Thank you very much for your participation in our mapping session today, and for your participation in Stone Soup!
Notes from Appreciative Inquiry Exercise

Stone Soup Participant

Interviewee’s Name: ________________________________

1. What is a highlight, achievement, or success you had based on your involvement with the Stone Soup program as a participant?

2. What unexpected things have happened as a result of your participation in the Stone Soup program?

3. What connections with others-new and/or deepened-have you made as a result of the Stone Soup program?
Notes from Appreciative Inquiry Exercise
Stone Soup Stakeholder
Interviewee’s Name _____________________________

1. What impressions do you have of the accomplishments program participants have made as a result of the Stone Soup program?

2. What unexpected things happened as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?

3. What connections with others-new and/or deepened-have you made as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
Subject Line: Stone Soup Feedback

Dear ________________,

I am sorry you were unable to attend the meeting last week to discuss the Stone Soup program. Through our discussion we identified the impacts of Stone soup, both intended and unintended, on individuals and on the community as a whole.

There is still an opportunity for you to provide valuable feedback on your experience with Stone Soup! Please take a few minutes to respond to one or more of the questions below:

If you were a Stone Soup participant, please respond to the following:

- What is a highlight, achievement, or success you have had based on your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
- What is something about your involvement with Stone Soup that you are proud to share?
- What connections with others-new and/or deepened-have you made as a result of the Stone Soup program?

If you are a Stone Soup stakeholder, please respond to the following:

- What impressions do you have of the accomplishments program participants have made as a result of the Stone Soup program?
- What unexpected things happened as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?
- What connections with others-new and/or deepened-have you made as a result of your involvement with the Stone Soup program?

Please include your phone number with your response so that I may contact you if clarification is needed. You may also contact me at (540)672-1361 if you would rather reply by phone.

I look forward to hearing from you. Your input will help us to ensure we are meeting the needs of future Stone Soup participants!

Thank you very much!
### Assumptions:
Jobs in food service will be a viable option for those needing employment in the Orange/Madison/Culpeper area.

Food safety and customer service certifications will aid individuals in obtaining employment in food service establishments.

Individuals will attend class when incentives are provided (Cooking equipment, fresh produce).

### External Factors:
Class location in a facility with a commercial kitchen available to provide participants with a simulated workplace.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding/grant dollars</td>
<td>Hands on food preparation</td>
<td>Low income adults over 18</td>
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<td>VCE/Family Nutrition Program staff</td>
<td>Nutritious food tastings</td>
<td>Residents of Orange Apartments</td>
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<td>Master Food Volunteers</td>
<td>Grocery Store tour</td>
<td>Virginia Day Support Program</td>
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<td>Community Partners (Goodwill Industries, Rural Madison, George Washington Carver Agriculture and Research Center)</td>
<td>Power Point and video presentations on food safety (ServSafe), and Customer Service (Customer Service in Action)</td>
<td>Rappahannock Rapidan Community Services</td>
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<td>Existing resources (ServSafe, Customer Service in Action, Cooking Matters at the Grocery Store)</td>
<td>Incentives provided to practice food prep skills at home</td>
<td>Central Virginia Regional Jail</td>
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<td>Time, materials, equipment</td>
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<td>Madison Literacy Council</td>
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<table>
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<th>Short-term Knowledge and skills gained in:</th>
<th>Medium-term Participants employment in food service or related industry</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Food safety</td>
<td>• Adoption of eating habits based on MyPlate for improved health</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Food preparation</td>
<td>• Adoption of safe food handling practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Customer service</td>
<td>• Adoption of appropriate customer service skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• MyPlate nutrition basics</td>
<td>• Participant use of unit pricing to purchase food</td>
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<th>Long-term</th>
<th>• Staffing provided for Carver Food Incubation kitchen and area local producers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Improvement in eating habits of participants and their families, leading to a reduction in nutrition related health issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased nourishment using existing food budget for participants and their families</td>
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Appendix G

RIPPLE EFFECT MAPPING AS AN EVALUATION TOOL FOR EXTENSION

Stone Soup

**Perception of Extension**
- Increased awareness of Extension programs
- Increased relevance

**Food Safety**
- Increased knowledge
- Improved practices

**Customer Service Skills**
- Improved communication
- Enhanced customer satisfaction

**Job Skills Increased**
- Enhanced job prospects
- Increased earning potential

**Reached New Audiences**
- Expanded reach
- New markets

**Strengthening Relationships**
- Improved collaborations
- Enhanced networking

**Relationship Building Among Community Agencies**
- Increased cooperation
- Enhanced partnerships

**Entrepreneurship**
- Increased business skills
- Improved startup potential

**Awareness of Others**
- Increased understanding
- Enhanced empathy

**Life Skills Increased**
- Improved personal development
- Enhanced well-being

**Helped Move People Forward**
- Increased community impact
- Improved quality of life

**Jobs Obtained By Participants**
- Increased employment
- Improved career progression

**Participation Shared Story**
- Improved storytelling
- Enhanced engagement

**Certifications**
- Increased qualifications
- Improved credibility

**Career**
- Enhanced professional opportunities
- Improved job satisfaction

**Personal Health**
- Improved physical health
- Enhanced mental well-being

**Other**
- Increased community involvement
- Enhanced quality of life
### Appendix H

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