

Life Skills Develop through Participation in Youth Entrepreneurship Program

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Abstract

Entrepreneur and vocational programs are important in building workforce readiness skills in youth (Fields, Brown, Piechocinski, & Wells, 2012). Recent surveys have found that certain skills, including communications, critical thinking, as well as leadership development are lacking among young people (Pace, 2012). Ninety percent of respondents in a survey by the Center for Creative Leadership indicated that education in leadership should begin before age 18, while 50% noted a need to start in elementary school or before (Pace, 2012). Through already existing program settings that involve youth development professionals, youth have the potential to improve upon certain life skills that will aid them in achieving employment or starting a business of their own. Dedicated professionals in support of these endeavors can positively affect young people in their attempts to simultaneously balance jobs and maintain grades at school.

In this report, the role of entrepreneurship within a 4-H youth development program was examined. Several young entrepreneurial workshops took place in an after school setting to provide youth with tools needed to run their own booth at a local farmers market. Participation in 4-H programs was positively related to youth life skill development. Building communication skills, teamwork skills, and a sense of responsibility in youth are just a few of the ways that Virginia Cooperative Extension programs influence young people on their way to adulthood.

Findings in this report support the claim that youth gained important life skills as a result of their participation in the educational workshops combined with the hands-on experiences during the farmers market. Through entrepreneur activities in positive youth development programs such as 4-H, FFA and Boys and Girls Clubs, young people will be better equipped for life, in general, after high school.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background and Setting

The potential for young people to benefit from entrepreneurial skills through a setting such as a farmers market in Powhatan County are vast and numerous. The number of farmers markets in the United States has consistently grown in recent years (USDA, 2013); therefore, creating additional opportunities for enterprising adults and young people to compete for a portion of the profits being made at farmers markets throughout the United States. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's *2011 National Farmers Market Directory* recently stated, "More than 1,000 new farmers markets have been recorded across the country." This represents a 17% increase since the 2010 directory was published (Jones-Ellard, 2011). As consumers see the benefits of buying local products and produce at farmers markets, the demand for the markets will continue. According to Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, "These outlets provide economic benefits for producers to grow their businesses and also to communities by providing increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other foods. In short, they are a critical ingredient in our nation's food system" (Jones-Ellard, 2011).

As the demand for farmer's markets continues to climb in the United States (USDA, 2013), an opportunity for youth to research possible earnings options opens within this area as well. According to the Department of Labor's Bureau of Statistics, and included in a report by the National Youth Employment Coalition, youth populations between the ages of 16 and 19 years of age noted a decrease in the national unemployment rate of 22.2% by October 2013, compared to the rate of 23.7% in the previous year, October 2012. Unemployment rates by race/ethnicity reported African American teens at a higher unemployment rate of 38% by the end of 2012. This was compared to that of white teens at 19.6 % and Hispanics at a 26.6%

unemployment rate (National Youth Employment Coalition, 2013).

While overall unemployment rates among teens appear to have remained somewhat steady in recent years, Powhatan does not report a large number of employed teens. There was an estimated 2,216 individuals between the ages of 15 and 19, and 1,918 between the ages of 10 to 14, residing in Powhatan County from 2007 to 2010 (U.S. Census, 2010). However, out of this total, there were only 177 young adults in Powhatan employed between the ages of 14 and 18 during that same period of time (Virginia Employment Commission, 2012). No employment statistics were found for youth under the age of 14. There are several reasons why teens enrolled in high school are choosing to work less during the school year, according to an article by Teresa Morisi on youth enrollment and employment. The possible reasons teens are working less include the fact that there are greater school pressures, a slow recovery of teen employment after 2001 recession, low wages, and a decline in jobs held by teens in retail and restaurants (Morisi, 2008).

According to the United States Department of Labor, “Through entrepreneurship education, young people, including those with disabilities, learn organizational skills, including time management, leadership development and interpersonal skills, all of which are highly transferable skills sought by employers” (United States Department of Labor, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

As a “bedroom” community, Powhatan County does not offer youth many employment options. As a result of the lack of employment opportunities, many youth will find jobs outside the county once they are able to drive. To this end, will participating in an entrepreneurship education program provide a viable option for increased income? Secondly, will the basic skills

gained through this educational program make participants more competitive when they enter the workforce?

Project Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this project was to gather insight into whether or not changes in behavior were noted by the participants and their parents following participation in a youth entrepreneurship program in Powhatan County. Specifically, the project sought to evaluate whether or not life skills were gained through an entrepreneur education program. The following objectives guided this project; participants will:

- 1) Start their own business as a vendor in a farmer's market;
- 2) Demonstrate increased knowledge involving money management, communication skills, decision-making, and;
- 3) Demonstrate basic workforce readiness skills to enter the workforce after participation in a youth entrepreneurship program.

Definition of Terms

Readers will discover specific terms used throughout this body of work. In an effort to ensure there are no misunderstandings based on the use of key terms throughout this project, several definitions are provided below.

Entrepreneur: one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

Entrepreneurship Education: involves the use of structured learning environments and support tools to help individuals develop entrepreneurial skills and become entrepreneurs (Cleveland, 2006).

Life Skills: the ability to cope with stresses and challenges of daily life, esp. skills in communication and literacy, decision-making, occupational requirements, problem solving, time management and planning (Dictionary.com, 2013).

STEM fields or STEM education: STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics—the four core disciplines critical to the development of America's technological innovations today and in the future. STEM initiatives are efforts designed to foster the development and expansion of our nation's STEM workforce—individuals who receive sufficient academic and career exploration opportunities so that they can become contributors to our economic innovation and competitiveness (STEM, 2008).

Workforce: the workers of a specific activity or business (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

Youth Entrepreneurship: involves the development of entrepreneurial attitudes, skills and opportunities for young people, from middle school through young adulthood (e.g., 25 years old) (Cleveland, 2006).

The growth in the number of farmers' markets across the country, as well as statistics on teen employment, has been provided to offer background information for this project. Based on the purpose and objectives noted earlier, the following chapter will incorporate a literature review to demonstrate and support the benefits of youth entrepreneurship programs in relation to behavior change and life skills development in young people.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Young people entering the workforce need certain skills to be competitive for jobs (Bell-Rose & Payzant, 2008). Much research has been conducted on the effects of adolescent participation in entrepreneurship programs and their job readiness after high school (Fields et al., 2012).

Employability Skills

Employability skills gained through participation in youth entrepreneurship programs are beneficial to all youth, whether they plan to become entrepreneurs or work for others. As noted in the 2001 report by the D.C. Children and Youth Investment Corporation, *Logic Models and Outcomes for Youth Entrepreneurship Programs*, a logic model was incorporated to determine youth entrepreneurship programs that could be adapted for similar programs. The following outcomes of youth entrepreneurship were cited:

- improved academic performance, school attendance; and educational attainment;
- increased problem-solving and decision-making abilities;
- improved interpersonal relationships, teamwork, money management, and public speaking skills;
- job readiness;
- enhanced social psychological development (self-esteem, ego development, self-efficacy); and
- perceived improved health status.

Young people need to be engaged through entrepreneurship education with hands-on application, experiential learning, and the involvement of adult mentors from the business

community. Fields et al. (2012) conducted a study with 4-H educators in Maryland to determine whether or not youth in their state were developing the appropriate workforce readiness skills. Educators “created an interactive youth and adult train-the-trainer model to implement workforce readiness and entrepreneurship educational programs in local communities” (Fields et al., 2012). Benefits are discovered when incorporating entrepreneurship activities into other 4-H curriculum, rather than simply teaching workforce readiness skills as stand-alone entrepreneurship programs. As demonstrated in this study, many of the workforce readiness skills learned were allowed to overlap into other project areas (Fields et al., 2012). Programs such as this are intended to develop increased life skills in all youth whether they are participating in specific entrepreneurship programs or not.

Although researchers concede that entrepreneurial skill sets are being taught in schools, all students do not have access to this pertinent education (Bell-Rose & Payzant, 2008). According to Bell-Rose and Payzant, “Today’s young people are ‘not ready to work.’ They lack necessary skills, especially in science and math, and, even worse, they often lack the ability to work in teams, think creatively, or to interact effectively with colleagues or potential customers.”

Lack of Job Readiness Skills

There is a growing need to better prepare youth for the 21st century workforce. Employers in the U.S. are finding young adults entering the workforce are not ready for the task at hand (Cochran, Catchpole, Arnett, & Ferrari, 2010). Youth development programs, such as 4-H and FFA, can provide young people the skills needed to be competitive in the workforce. In particular, Cooperative Extension educators are seen as professionals equipped to lead this movement to bring the needed skills to our young people, and future employees (Cochran et al., 2010). “Encouraging youth to look at skills through a workforce preparation lens may help make

a connection between what they are learning now and skills needed for the future, provide a level of urgency and motivation by making a real world connection, and foster opportunities to practice these skills in 4-H” (Cochran et al., 2010). Changes to traditional positive youth development done in the past, along with critical changes to better prepare youth to be competitive in the 21st century workforce, are needed (Cochran et al., 2010).

Recently, the National 4-H responded to the need for youth to gain additional skills in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) related curriculum and programs. A STEM executive round-table brought government officials, and corporate and research partners, along with professionals from six youth development organizations, including 4-H, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Girls Inc., Girl Scouts of the USA, and YMCA of the USA, together to study this issue and implement change (National 4-H Council, 2013).

“Our nation’s young people are not acquiring the skills they need to excel in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math. That needs to change if we want to build a generation of workers who will make America a leader in innovation,” said Donald T. Floyd, president of the National 4-H Council (Sridhar, 2013). “Given the opportunity, today’s youth can step up, become engaged, learn more, and become the inventors, rocket scientists and engineers of the future. And fortunately, millions of youth are doing their part – they are stepping up with the support of adult mentors and quality STEM programs offered through organizations like 4-H.”

Strategies to connect youth to their community are crucial for low-income areas not seeing a return of young adults to the area after entering the workforce full time (Kantor, 2012). Encouraging young people to stay in a community they have grown up in is important to the economic development as well as the future prosperity of the residents. Engaging high school

students in entrepreneur programs can provide youth with an awareness of what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur, increased their awareness of community resources, increased knowledge of social and technical skills, and improved connections with their community (Kantor, 2012).

Theoretical Framework and Project Application

The theoretical framework that guided the development of this project was the 4-H Experiential Learning Model (National 4-H Curriculum, 2008). The sequential steps of the 4-H Experiential Learning Model help youth identify what they have learned and apply it to other situations (Wright, 2004). A five-part process is incorporated into the Experiential Learning Model (see Figure 1) used by 4-H.

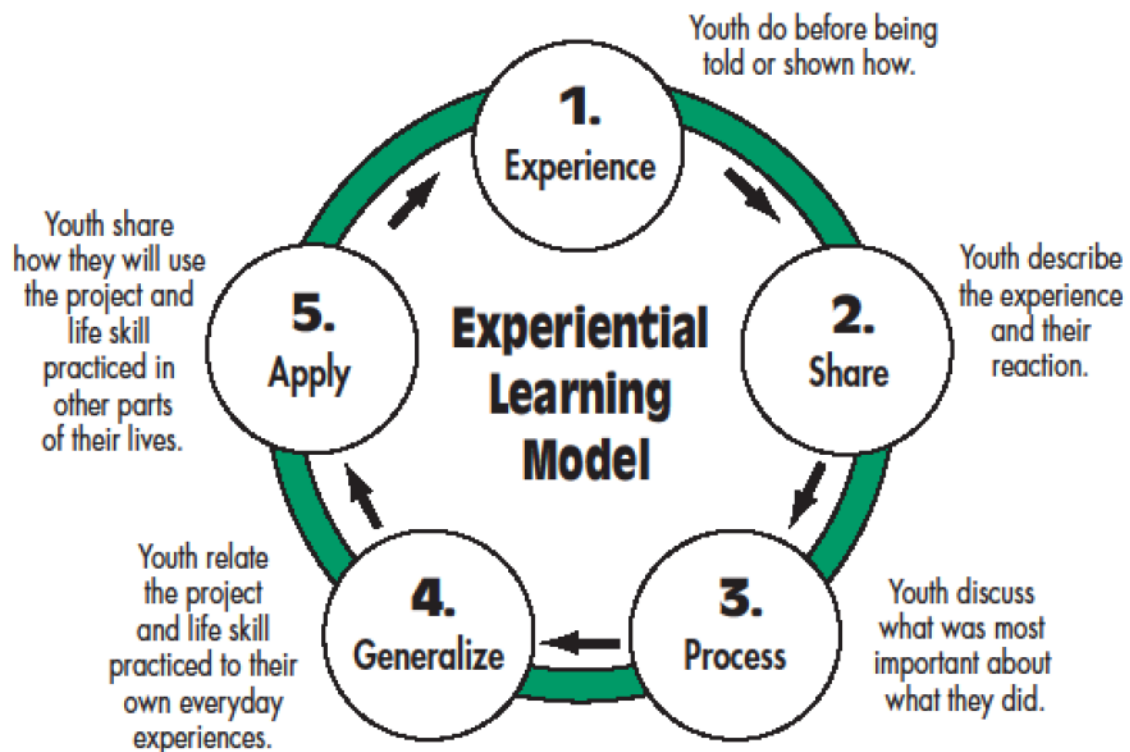


Figure 1. Experiential Learning Model. Reprinted from National 4-H Curriculum. Retrieved from www.4-h.org/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=4258. Copyright 2008 by National 4-H Curriculum. Reprinted with permission.

The Experiential Learning Model provided a guide for the youth entrepreneurship program featured in this study. Following are the five steps incorporated into this model (Wright, 2004).

- **Experience:** participants conduct a planned “experience” or activity without prior instruction;
- **Share:** participants tell about their experience and are encouraged to provide their reaction;
- **Process:** participants demonstrate or describe that they understand the importance of what they did;
- **Generalize:** participants begin to determine what they learned and how it relates to what they already know; and
- **Apply:** participants are asked “now what” and how they plan to use new knowledge in their everyday life.

Planned experiences were provided throughout the young entrepreneurship program to increase students’ knowledge of the key topics and set the stage for completing the Experiential Learning process. For example, youth were provided paper and craft supplies then asked to design a flyer to promote their business. No additional information was provided during this particular workshop segment on marketing. After the flyers were completed, participants were asked several questions regarding their flyers in an effort to encourage sharing of ideas within the group. Eventually, they began describing why they chose specific colors and fonts; how the design and color scheme made them feel; and what they liked and didn’t necessarily like about their own artwork.

After each participant had an opportunity to share their reactions and observations, advertisements from the local newspaper and magazines were spread out around the room. Youth were then instructed to walk around the room to view these examples and how their artwork was similar or different. This served as an introduction to step three, or the “process”, in the Experiential Learning Model (Wright, 2004). The group as a whole looked at the professional artwork to identify items that stand out in the advertisements, common design themes observed on the ads, and colors that “pop”. One by one youth were encouraged to identify possible improvements they could make to their own artwork, and how it might be addressed to better promote the product they plan to sell. Step four in the Experiential Learning Model is the “generalize” step. Participants were asked what they learned from this experience and how this new knowledge may help in other areas of their life – in particular as an owner of a business trying to market a product. The final step in the Experiential Learning Model involves the “apply” process (Wright, 2004). Youth were asked how they might be able to apply, or use, this new information when designing their booth and displays for the farmers market.

This is just one example of how the Experiential Learning Model was used during an activity incorporated into this youth entrepreneurship program. Each activity the youth experienced culminated in the final step of this model by the youth having the opportunity to apply what they had learned and set up a booth during the Kids Market at the Powhatan Farmers Market.

Summary and Significance of the Problem

Educators can use the knowledge gained through this project to improve entrepreneurship education for youth prior to high school graduation. With the combination of classroom

instruction along with the hands-on experiential learning, youth can gain the life skills needed to work or own their own business during or after high school graduation.

Chapter 3: Project Overview

Targeted Population

The target population included youth between the ages of 9 and 15 residing in Powhatan County. This population was selected for the project because they were less likely to already be employed and may have an interest in participating in a long-term project. The Powhatan Kids Market was initially developed as a result of a request made by the Powhatan Farmer's Market advisory committee in 2011. The committee suggested that targeting this age group might also provide future opportunities to track the youth assuming they opted to continue involvement in the farmers market prior to high school graduation. The participating audience in 2012 involved 15 young people.

Project Methodology

This project was conducted by the 4-H extension agent in Powhatan through six hours of classroom, hands-on education within an afterschool 4-H program setting. Youth attended young entrepreneurship workshops after school during several weeks in April 2012. A young entrepreneurship curriculum developed by the New England Cooperative Extension Task Force on Workforce Development was utilized for the program (Valiquette, Weber, Guyott, Cheever, Gregory, Bancroft, & Lacroix, 2001) (see Appendix – Curriculum/Planning Guide, a). This curriculum guided participants through the steps needed to create a business (see Appendix – Guide Workshop Agenda, b).

During several weeks, young people learned the importance of determining start-up costs, developing a budget, record keeping, and pricing merchandise. The program also assisted youth

in understanding how to market their business onsite as well as in advance through signage, displays and the creation of business cards.

Each participant received a copy of the curriculum (see Appendix – Curriculum/Planning Guide, a), which served as a planning guide to complete as an aid in preparing for their business venture. The potential entrepreneurs were encouraged to discover their hidden talents while increasing their agriculture marketing experience. Adolescents were invited to bring their baked goods, crafted items or homegrown products to sell at the weekly market. Program participants were given guidance in conducting a business, while they learned how to develop marketing/advertising options, create business plans and commit to saving a portion of the profits.

Following the completion of the classroom portion of the study, participants were given the opportunity to participate as vendors in a newly created Kids Market once a month during the Powhatan Farmers Market. Guidelines for participating in the Kids Market noted that youth participants must produce or make all products they sell during the market (see Appendix – Market Application, c). Youth were expected to manage their own booths without assistance from adults. They also paid a small vendor fee each week. The 4-H extension agent attended each Kids Market to support the youth and assist as needed.

Data Collection

On the first day of the classroom portion of the workshops, youth were asked several questions to determine what previous knowledge they had about running a business and what they plan to do with the knowledge gained. Following are several questions that were included:

- *What do entrepreneurs do? Why do you want to be an entrepreneur?*
- *What kind of business would you like to start and why?*
- *Have you ever sold a product to someone other than a family member?*

After completion of the classroom trainings, groups of youth were given the opportunity to sell items they produced or made during the Kids Market each month. A post-market online survey was sent to the participants' parents at the end of the 2012 market season and again one year later in September 2013. The online survey tool was accessed through survey.vt.edu to determine the perception of an increase in workforce readiness skills, including knowledge involving money management, communication skills and decision-making (see Appendix A).

Chapter 4: Summary of Outcomes, Discussion and Recommendations

Project Outcomes

Project objective one was to facilitate participants starting their own business as a vendor in a farmer's market. Fifteen youth registered and participated in the young entrepreneurship workshops in April 2012. At the start of the classroom program, youth were asked if they had produced or sold products previously. Only one set of brothers had raised eggs and sold them to their neighbors. None of the other youth had any experience in this area. After completion of the training workshops, groups of youth sold items they produced or made during the Kids Market each month. The number of vendors ranged from three to eight each month. During the summer, the market manager accepted applications from two youth to participate as vendors in the Kids' Market without the proper advanced training. This increased the total number of youth vendors to 17.

Project objective two was to demonstrate increased knowledge involving money management, communication skills, and decision-making. At the culmination of the Kids Market season, youth participants were asked if they gained new knowledge from the entrepreneurship experience. One fourth grade participant said, "The biggest thing I learned is that the amount you sell something for is not the amount you make because it costs money to create the stuff you sell. So you have to deduct the supplies to find out how much you really get out of it." Another youth said she was more comfortable talking to adults than she was before the market experience. The online market survey sent to the parents of the youth participants resulted in the following responses:

- 100% said their son or daughter gained life skills as a result of participation in this program.

- 100% said their child definitely demonstrated an increased knowledge in the following life skills: Money Management; Communications Skills; Decision-Making; and Sense of Responsibility

Parents also had the opportunity to provide written comments to several questions in the survey. The first question asked parents for comments concerning the change in their child's life skills as a result of participating in the entrepreneurship activities. One parent stated, "This activity increased both of my children's sense of reality over all. They gained knowledge in all the areas stated above, marketing, manufacturing and deadlines, and mostly a great sense of pride in themselves. They participated every month so far and are making plans to participate again next year."

When parents were asked what they believe worked well during this youth entrepreneurship program, a parent noted, "The classes in the spring were fantastic for helping the kids conceptualize what their booths would be, what they'd look like, and what they'd accomplish. The fact that it was entirely child-driven gave them ownership and an incredible sense of responsibility on a level that children very rarely get to experience for themselves."

Project objective three was to demonstrate basic workforce readiness skills to enter the workforce after participation in a youth entrepreneurship program. All the youth demonstrated these skills as a result of their successful participation in the Kids Market and generating sales based on their products. A set of brothers said they are more confident in their business skills and plan to continue selling eggs throughout the winter months. They added that they hope to build a stronger customer base and that these same individuals will seek them out during the market next spring. One 4-H club member in Powhatan participated in the entrepreneurship training program and recruited her fellow club members to make items to sell at the market. She

said they learned the importance of managing funds and determining the cost per item.

Unfortunately, they also found that they spent more money than they earned during the market experience.

One homeschool parent explained, “From deciding what to sell all the way through to learning customer service, these are things that my child will carry with her into adulthood. The motivation and confidence she gained was priceless.” Results provided by parents from the online survey following the market experience included the following responses that related specifically to their children’s workforce readiness.

- 100% of parents reported their child definitely developed the following skills as a result of this program and it will assist them when seeking a first job (or run their own business): Record Keeping; Wise Use of Resources; and Social Skills
- 67% of parents reported their child definitely developed the following skills as a result of this program and it will assist them when seeking a first job (or run their own business): Critical Thinking; Goal Setting and Leadership Development
- 33% of parents reported their child definitely developed skills in problem solving as a result of this program and it will assist them when seeking a first job (or run their own business).

Project Analysis

The purpose of this project was to learn whether or not changes in behavior were noted by the participants and their parents following participation in the youth entrepreneurship program in Powhatan County. Specifically, the project sought to evaluate whether or not life skills were gained through an entrepreneur education program. Based on the responses provided by parents in the online surveys, the majority of the youth did demonstrate increased knowledge

involving money management, communication skills, and decision-making. The youth participating in the entrepreneurship program demonstrated basic workforce readiness skills but due to their young ages are probably not ready to enter the workforce at the present time. It would be beneficial for these youth to participate in the young entrepreneurship program a second and/or third market season to better track and determine if they have continued to improve upon the life skills learned in 2012.

The sequential steps of the 4-H Experiential Learning Model were incorporated into this youth entrepreneurship project to help youth identify skills learned, while ensuring they are equipped to apply this new knowledge in other real world situations (Wright, 2004). The skills gained through the steps of the 4-H Experiential Learning Model in this project can provide youth with real experiences that can be applied to future job opportunities. Overall, this program was positively received by youth and parents alike, as well as the community.

Recommendations

Young entrepreneurship programs can provide the necessary training for youth to gain life skills, as well as workforce readiness skills, as preparation to owning a business or gaining employment. Based on the outcomes of this entrepreneurship program, the following recommendations have been addressed for future projects.

Recommendation one is to develop a newer version of the curriculum. A curriculum was not available in Virginia that covered what the specific goals envisioned for this youth entrepreneurship program. A fellow 4-H agent in Virginia provided a copy of this curriculum that she was familiar with, since she was from New Hampshire and had used it previously herself. Although the curriculum appears dated since an original copy was not available, it does

have good information and a useful format that could be incorporated if updating the existing data.

Recommendation two is to require all youth complete the entrepreneurship program prior to participating in the market. The market manager allowed two young people to participate in the 2012 market without previous entrepreneurship training. The young people who came into the Kids Market later in the season did not gain the knowledge and skills they had the potential to acquire had they participated in the spring workshops. They entered the market at a disadvantage compared to those youth who did participate and had a better understanding of what was expected.

Recommendation three is to increase the number of times youth are allowed to participate in the market. Several youth voiced an interest in participating as vendors more than just once a month. A possible consideration is to make it a year-round program for youth to improve their skills and then allow them to participate as regular vendors on a weekly basis.

Recommendation four is to incorporate a 4-H project record for youth to capture goals they hope to achieve as participants of the program. This would also be an appropriate tool to track expenses and record sales in one place, as well as encourage them to document their experience through a 4-H story and photographs.

A final recommendation is to conduct a repeat of this project and incorporate the other recommendations noted. It would also be beneficial to add some type of study to aid youth professionals in other communities seeking similar programs.

As a result of this project, educators can use the knowledge gained to improve entrepreneurship education for youth prior to high school graduation. With the combination of classroom instruction, along with the hands-on experiential learning, youth gain the life skills

needed to work or own their own business during or after high school graduation. The results of this project also positively impact participants' workforce readiness when the time comes to seek employment as an adult.

The Powhatan Farmer's Market advisory committee requested that the youth entrepreneurship program be included as part of the market on an annual basis. Recruitment of potential and returning vendors for the Powhatan Kids Market will resume in February with the classroom portion of the program starting in April. As a result of this program, area youth will now have the opportunity to own a business and learn skills needed to enter the workforce.

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