Adventure Central: An Investment in Impact
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Overview
Adventure Central is a trusted, community-based, positive youth development partnership serving at-risk children and their parents in the West Dayton community for over 15 years. This nationally recognized program has been at the forefront of positive youth development—providing children and families opportunities to change their lives through building positive well-being, higher academic performance, and less involvement in risky behaviors. Using nature, our high quality and diverse staff nurtures participants in life-changing activities that strengthen values, build lasting life skills, and empower youth to explore life’s possibilities.

At Adventure Central, we are unified by our belief that encouraging new experiences, especially in nature, can build life skills and confidence which make children happier, healthier and more productive members of their community. Adventure Central is uniquely qualified to turn these beliefs into action and results through the passion, expertise and resources of its core partners: Five Rivers MetroParks, Ohio State University Extension and 4-H.

Youth are engaged throughout the year in a variety of delivery methods to include after-school, day camp, and residential camping experiences all emphasizing sustained long term relationships. Special programmatic emphasis is also placed on supporting and developing teens through high quality work, service learning and leadership experiences.

Current Initiatives
Reforestation (2014-Present)
Older youth at Adventure Central have “Gone Nuts!” for the last three years and in the process have collected hundreds of gallons of native nuts and seeds, started over 4,000 seedlings (in our basement with confiscated grow lights from local law enforcement), and planted nearly 2,000 of these trees and shrubs in our very own Wesleyan MetroPark. This effort is part of a larger reforestation initiative within Five Rivers MetroParks to proactively combat the threat of invasive species to our forests. This project won the 2016 national NAE4HA Excellence in Natural Resources and Environmental Education award.

Parent Progress Report (2011-Present)
A common concern for youth service providers is effectively engaging adequate parental support. Providers recognize involving families in their children’s learning is critical to academic achievement and overall healthy development but communicating and connecting with parents can be challenging. Adventure Central introduced a Parent Progress Report as a tool to provide families with semi-annual feedback in the areas of communication, youth attendance, submitting copies of youth report cards, parent volunteerism, and attendance at family programs.

Families are given an overall score (1-100) and those with exemplary scores are publicly recognized for their commitment.

Overall, the Parent Progress Report has proven to be an effective method of clearly communicating program expectations with families, holding families accountable for these expectations, and increasing the positive program support available to youth.

Parent progress report scores increased, then stayed consistent over four years
2011-12 Average Score 56 2012-13 Average Score 69
2013-14 Average Score 70, 77% received a score of 60 or above
2014-15 Average Score 68, 71% received a score of 60 or above
2015-16 Average Score 70, 73% received a score of 60 or above

Parent progress reports seemed to have a positive impact on parent volunteer hours (see chart below)

Program Quality (2011)
Source: Ohio State University Master’s Thesis, Ashley Krogel

Considerable attention has been directed to identifying features of high quality out-of-school time programs. Observation instruments are a common way of measuring program quality at the point of service.

Through this assessment pilot, both observers and youth gave high ratings (i.e., mean scores > 3.0 on a 4-point scale) to supportive adult relationships. Observers also gave high ratings to group management and delivery.

Program quality observations have become a regular part of program assessment and improvement, with each group leader being observed 2-3 times per semester, with improvements noted over time.

Impact
Exploring Youth’s Perspectives on Their Long-Term Participation (2009)
Journal of Youth Development, 4 (3), Article 090403FA001

Youth reported experiencing a wide range of opportunities including nature-related activities, jobs at park facilities, and travel. In the process, they learned new skills, such as teamwork and public speaking, and developed personal qualities, such as responsibility, that helped them as they were growing up, transferred to other settings, and would benefit them in the future.

On more than one occasion, youth spoke about being presented with and taking advantage of opportunities to “get out of my comfort zone.” They often took advantage of these opportunities even though they were unsure of the outcome. Their willingness to take such risks implies a sense of safety and trust in the adult staff members.

The youth felt that Adventure Central provided them with a positive alternative and kept them out of trouble and undesirable neighborhoods. As one young person explained, “Coming here has really kept me out of trouble. Where I live, it is nothing but trouble. When I leave from here, I might sit on my front porch for awhile; I refuse to walk around the neighborhood. We do go outside here, and we do learn about decision making and all that.”