Teresa M. Johnson
OSU Extension Educator III
4-H Youth Development – Defiance County

Biographical Statement.

My career with OSU Extension started in 1996 when I was hired as the 4-H Youth Development Educator for Paulding County. In 2004 I transitioned into the same position in Defiance County. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Recreation Management from Bluffton University. I completed my Master of Arts in Professional Communication at Indiana University/Purdue University Fort Wayne. Prior to joining Extension I held a number of positions in not for profit organizations as well as the Federal government. Across a number of previous jobs I developed a broad skillset including volunteer management, programming, youth education, and fund raising. In my current role my areas of specialization are in-school education programming, service to the 4-H profession, and technology adaptation.

Defiance is a rural county in the northwest corner of Ohio. Based on 2020 census information, the county had a population of 38,286 spread over 411 square miles. The population of Defiance County declined by 2% over the past decade. Over the same period of time the population of Ohio as a whole grew by 2%. The county's racial composition is 86% White, 10.4% Hispanic or Latino, 2.1% Black or African American, with the remainder identifying as another race or origin. Defiance has a much higher concentration of White and Hispanic individuals than the overall state, but a substantially lower Black population.

Defiance County contains one city (Defiance, population 17,066) and a number of smaller towns and villages. The county's youth demographic (age 5 to 18) was 17% or approximately 6,500 individuals in 2020. There are five different school districts. Four of the districts (Hicksville, Central Local, Tinora, and Ayresville) are located in rural areas or smaller towns and have a legacy of involvement with traditional 4-H. The largest school district (Defiance City Schools) is urban and historically had few students involved in 4-H.

The 4-H ES237 reports from the 5-years ending 2021 indicated that Defiance County 4-H reached a total of 8,323 youth, or an average of 1,954 per year [1]. The categories and their annual averages are: club members (504 per year in 25 clubs); special interest (626 youth in 5 events per year); overnight camping (129 per year in a single camp each summer); day camps (238 youth in 3 camps per year); and in-school programming (458 contacts across 6.75 events per year). Additionally, an average of 302 community volunteers were engaged per year from 2017 to 2021. The volunteers were involved as club advisors (115), helped with special interest programming (8), assisted with overnight camping (10) and day camps (8), in-school programing volunteers (103), and other events and activities (58). Over the past five years, the Defiance County 4-H program statistically reached 30.1% of the target youth demographic age 5 – 18 annually[2]. The program has also included over 1% of the county's adult population each year through volunteerism.

Major Accomplishments in programming, service to the profession, and technology adaptation.

In School Programming.

The residents and employers of Defiance County rely heavily on skills and knowledge gained through middle school and high school education. The 2020 Census found that 91.2% of county residents age 25 and older had attained a high school diploma. This compared favorably with the overall proportion of Ohio residents who completed high school (90.4%). However, Defiance County lagged the state significantly in the completion of higher education. For the period covered by the census, 28.3% of Ohio's population age 25 and older had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher. For Defiance County the proportion of residents in the same age group with a Bachelor's degree was much lower – 18.0%. This higher education gap represents a potential threat to the long term economic viability of the county.

Before I accepted the role of 4-H Educator, Defiance County 4-H offered few in-school programs. This was a significant deficiency given the county's heavy reliance on secondary education. It also represented an opportunity to expand the breadth of Extension programming into subjects often unavailable in traditional middle school and high school curriculums. I successfully integrated programming into all five county school districts in the areas of financial literacy and life-skill development.

Financial Literacy.

Real Money Real World (RMRW) is a youth centric financial literacy program that was developed by OSU Extension. In the last 5 years I have conducted RMRW programming in each school district in the county. I developed a PowerPoint presentation that replicated the station simulation for middle school Career Education classes at Defiance City schools. This presentation was also used for several Family Consumer Science classes in another school district.   Several props were also developed to help foster greater

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[1] Part of the period of time reported (2020 and early 2021) presented special challenges due to COVID related school closures, OSU Extension health and safety guidelines, and other restrictions which severely impacted the level of programming that could be provided. In 2020 there were no overnight camps, day camps, or in-school programs. The average annual participation rates for these elements have been calculated based on the four non-COVID impacted years. All other elements are averaged over the full 5-year period of time.

[2] Total and average numbers for youth involvement includes a level of duplication. Individuals may have participated in, for example, a 4-H Club plus attended an in-school program. This example would be counted as two contacts.

engagement with students during the simulation. These enhancements included: 1) Clothing booth – a poster using logos from designer brands, department stores, and thrift/discount stores; 2) Food booth – four plates with food replicas to demonstrate the thrifty, low cost, moderate, and liberal food plans; 3) Communication booth – boxes from various cell phones, along with a rotary phone, sparked considerable dialog with participants; and 4) Chance – a roulette-style wheel was created for students to learn their random fate. After success within Defiance County, these enhancements were also used by 4-H Educators in neighboring counties. In the past 5 years 1,022 Defiance County students have participated in RMRW. An additional 156 members of the community served as volunteers.

Life Skill Development.

A second in-school education opportunity I identified was life-skill development. Several programs were developed and presented in cooperation with students from various school organizations. FFA, FCCLA, and National Honors Society students were instrumental in conducting different hands on skills training sessions. In one unique program I worked with a leadership class to teach fellow students table manners and etiquette in preparation for job interviews and social events. The students traveled to Sauder Village Barn Restaurant and ate in groups of four – with an adult – to practice. Other programming was developed to teach life skills by being mindful of life lessons the students complete daily. This program utilized older students to teach groups of 6 younger students such skills as folding a flag, reading a tape measure, button sewing, laundry, how to read food labels, cyber awareness, and how to make change. Other programs focused on job interview skills including how to tie a necktie or scarf, personal hygiene and grooming, manners, and even a hardy hand shake. Over the past 5 years a total of 957 Defiance County students have passed through in-school life-skills development training facilitated by OSUE.

Service to the 4-H and Educator Profession.

Mobile Fair Sale Computer Lab.

In 2000 I accepted a 50% appointment as the statewide database coordinator for Blue Ribbon 4-H software. This role allowed me to meet with 4-H Educators and support staff from every county in the state. While in this position, I volunteered to serve as the "demo" county to use the same company's software that integrated the 4-H software with their county livestock sale software. Interest in this new livestock sale software grew and I created a mobile computer lab.

I obtained a corporate sponsor (Ag Credit) to develop a regional program. Desktop computers, monitors, and peripherals were shared across eight counties in northwest Ohio. I installed software, set up the network, trained county fair board volunteers, and mentored others on how run a successful junior fair livestock sale. Working with the sponsor, I created lease agreements between county fair boards and Ag Credit that required each county to purchase software and renew licenses annually. Over the years, this lab has evolved from desktops and network cables to five laptops, a wireless router, and two printers. I have provided training to the counties, written instructions, and created a mobile transportation system allowing the lab (two large totes) travel from one county to the next.   Ag Credit continues to sponsor the lab and use their purchasing power to buy new equipment every five years. This mobile computer lab was used in the winter months by the ANR Educator to teach Quicken to farmers. By sharing hardware costs and having a single corporate sponsor, small county fairboards could operate up-to-date equipment with lower overhead and technology costs.

Statewide leadership and professional development.

In 2021, I became chair of the Volunteers and Community Club Design Team for Ohio 4-H. This involved working with team members to identify the 4-H club management needs of volunteers and Educators. Working within the team, I developed solutions to address various needs including form creation and revision; branding of resources; revising and editing the Ohio 4-H volunteer handbook; and developing accessible online platforms via Microsoft Teams and the Ohio 4-H Intranet for professionals. While chairing the Design Team I was asked to chair two additional sub committees.

The first sub-committee (Super Users 4-H Online 2.0) focused on a recently updated Ohio 4-H statewide database. The upgrade had a steep learning curve for Extension professionals. I worked to identify "super users" who could serve as "wranglers" to provide assistance to county professionals still learning how to navigate the upgrade. This freed time for the State Database staff to work directly with the software provider to fix bugs and glitches in the upgrade. I also worked with the wranglers to identify what tip sheets were being used and centralize helpful information into a single area for the benefit of all Extension professionals.

The second sub-committee (Strike Force Task Committee) was assigned the task of organizing the shared 4-H Professionals box that was migrated to our 4-H Professionals Microsoft Teams. This involved working with the committee to identify the appropriate channels to use within MS Teams and how that would be "mirrored" on the 4-H Professionals Intranet page. This assignment included a total redesign of the 4-H Professionals Intranet page. I also educated staff as to where to find, how to use, and where to post resources to share with colleges.

Over the past five years I have been asked to develop and provide training to other 4-H and Extension Educators on a number of topics. I recently developed a training called "VITA for the 4-H Professional." This training was provided twice and reached 104 extension professionals. I have also provided training for the 4-H Fundamentals program for new educators. I am a certified Real Colors trainer and facilitated programs for EERA educators, TERSA conference participants, area Extension professionals, and County Commissioners and staff. I was invited to serve on the Ohio 4-H Internal Advisory Committee for two separate terms. I have also served as the photographer for Ohio 4-H professional head shots and the OSU Annual Conference Awards programs.

Technology adaptation.

Defiance County 4-H Mobile Application.

In 2019 I learned of a software provider that developed the mobile application used by the Ohio State Fair. The company was adapting its software for use at county fairs. In early 2020 I secured funding from our 4-H Endowment Committee to purchase the app for the use during the Defiance County fair. Then came COVID – lockdowns, cancelations, virtual meetings, and uncertainty. I set an aggressive, accelerated time line to make the app functional and distributed to 4-H families. I advertised the new Defiance 4-H App during monthly countywide 4-H Zoom meetings and stressed that utilizing the app was the best way to keep up with constant change. Between March and our August 2020 County fair there were four major revisions to livestock show schedules and procedures. The app's functionality and integration with social media allowed for a level of "normalcy" in a chaotic time. The app also allowed us to post showbills and results while reducing the number of paper copies distributed.

Livestreaming.

One of my goals had long been to livestream county fair events, and 2020 provided the perfect opportunity to develop this technology. Due to COVID, the Defiance County Fair went to a 4-H member only livestock show format. To ensure families could remain involved with their member I worked for months to provide an alternative. In cooperation with local television provider Hix TV, I developed the system necessary to provide livestreaming of County Fair events. I secured $1,500 in sponsorships to help purchase equipment. In the lead up to fair I worked to learn the live video streaming software, platform, and Internet requirements. I worked with a local internet service provider to install high speed wired internet in one show arena and worked with the Defiance County Public Library system to borrow hotspots for the other show arena where wired internet was not available. I set up a YouTube Channel dedicated to livestreaming the livestock and fair shows and created a link to the new Defiance 4-H App for families to share. In 2020, the livestream videos had 2,240 views. Given this popularity, we decided to continue the livestreaming process. In 2021 I secured additional sponsorships ($750) continued livestreaming the events. The livestreaming service has been well received. Numerous comments and complements have been received from 4-H family members and other residents. Livestreaming has proven to be a tremendous tool to help 4-H members receive recognition through challenging and constantly changing fair schedules. The reach of the Defiance County fair is no longer limited by geography or capacity restrictions.

Ohio Department of Agriculture Drug Use Notification Form (DUNF).

In 2020 the Ohio Department of Agriculture was testing an on-line version of its Drug Use Notification Form (DUNF). I volunteered Defiance County as a test site since I was working to upgrade internet capabilities at the fair. A link to the DUNF was shared via the County 4-H App. I held a training session for volunteers and Fairboard members on how to help families through the online process. I had Junior Fairboard members with DUNF QR codes walk the line of trucks and trailers to make sure exhibitors were completing their online DUNF. I secured 10 Apple iPads (one for each animal species) and trained 20 volunteers on their use. The iPad system successfully reduced waiting times during the exhibitor check process by being able to verify the completion of the DUNF. We again utilized the on-line DUNF process in 2021 with similar levels of success.

Plans for the future.

I plan to extend non-traditional 4-H programming to the county schools with an emphasis on students and topics not historically reached by Extension. I recently received an Apple Community Education Initiative grant to start the Clovers CODE in Defiance County. This initiative is focused on building computer coding knowledge and skills to help youth prepare for the workforce of tomorrow. The Apple grant provides 25 iPads with pencils and cases, 1 MacBook, 1 Apple TV, and 15 Sphero STEM classroom kits. Sphero's STEAM (STEM + Art) kits are focused on a fun, comprehensive approach to computer science and robotics. Most of the minority youth population of the county is concentrated in a single school district – Defiance City Schools. My principal focus with the Clovers CODE initiative will be to offer computer, robotic, and STEAM training for that school – either during the day or through after school workshops.

I hope to develop a new SPIN Club focusing on entrepreneurism. The Teen Leaders group operates a Shake Shack as a fund raiser during the county fair. Under a SPIN Club format, the group could completely revamp the fund raising process by setting goals, creating a business plan, implementing marketing initiatives, and developing a budget. Local business professionals could help the SPIN Club by providing guidance and mentorship based on real world expertise. This could provide a completely new, business focused option for youth in the county.

Finally, I anticipate developing additional programs to advance the 4-H Profession. It has been my experience that developing training works best when a specific need is identified. Therefore, I hope to have the flexibility to listen to my peers and respond with timely, informative training programs that fulfill a real need. Since there is no way to predict what professional challenges will develop, I can only plan to offer my skills, resources, and time as needs arise.