

4-H Kids Club—Leelanau County, Michigan

ABSTRACT

Michigan State University Extension in Leelanau County, Michigan, has successfully initiated four sustained community-based after-school programs since 1993. This rural northwestern Michigan County has garnered substantial school, parent and community support through their thoughtful process. The initial program, Suttons Bay 4-H Kids Club, opened its doors in September 1993. Leland 4-H Kids Club was established in September 1999. Glen Lake 4-H Kids Club was instituted in June 2005. In September 2006, Northport 4-H Kids Club began operation. Each of the three subsequent programs was modeled after the pioneer Suttons Bay program. All licensed programs are serving youth in grades K-6. All youth in each program are enrolled as Leelanau County 4-H members. Each site has a program director with paid staff based on program size. This is complimented by each program having consistent daily routines. All programs have shown that where there are caring staff with a goal of creating a positive youth development environment, community, school, family and child connections can flourish.

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Program of Distinction Category

- Caring Relationships, Community Spirit
- Diversity & Inclusive Environments
- Healthy Relationships, Good Decisions
- Partnership & Grants

Sources of Funding That Support This Program

The Leelanau County 4-H Kids Club program has been self-supporting due to multiple funding sources during the 13 years of its existence. Fees paid by parents are the base funding source. Parents pay a flat daily fee at the beginning of each

month. Through a variety of funding sources, scholarships are provided based on need to ensure all children are reached and served.

Major funding sources:

- *Leelanau County Family Coordinating Council*—The Leelanau County Family Support Team has secured scholarships, in partnership with MSU Extension, from such organizations as United Way of Northwest Michigan, Women’s Foundation, Children’s Trust Fund, etc.
- *Michigan Department of Human Services*—For families who qualify for state daycare assistance
- *JCPenney Afterschool Fund* (through the National 4-H Council)—Provided scholarships to 39 youth during the 2006-07 school year
- *Leelanau 4-H Youth Association*
- *Leelanau Township Foundation*
- *Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*
- *Suttons Bay-Leelanau County Rotary Club*
- *County Sheriff Department Youth League*
- *Suttons Bay, Leland, Glen Lake, and Northport School Districts*—Significant in-kind contributions ranging from no fees charge for space in the school, janitorial services, bookkeeping services, etc.
- *Individual private donors*
- *Michigan Community Service Commission/Corporation for National Service*—Staffing has been supplemented by an AmeriCorps national service worker
- *Other community volunteers*

Program Content

Knowledge and Research Base

The *Michigan After-School Initiative 2003 Report* (Michigan Department of Education, 2003) showed that 66% of parents/guardians rely on a variety of after-school care options for their children. The Michigan After-School Initiative (MASI) report has been the baseline for Michigan legislation and action to move ahead support for out-of-school programming. MASI documented through two surveys: a general population, random digit dial telephone survey of Michigan households and an internet survey of after-school service providers. The MASI survey showed that, too often, when parents/guardians were not there to interact and supervise, children were left by themselves or in the care of siblings. Thirty-five percent of parents were able to arrange after-school care and activities through a patchwork system. For families who were enrolled in formal after-school programs, an overwhelming 99% reported that they were satisfied with the program. Forty-eight percent of Michigan families who do not have after-school care wish that their children could attend a program; they reported being worried about the consequences of their child not being supervised.

Needs Assessment

There are a limited number of childcare providers in Leelanau County, according to data from the local 4C Child Care Connections organization. A resource and referral staff person shared that in 2007, there were only six providers in the

county's four school districts that accepted school-age children (D. Holstein, personal communication, May 15, 2007).

The creation of each of the four 4-H Kids Club programs was a grassroots effort. Each program was initiated individually after a collaboration of parents and educators asked Michigan State University Extension for help in addressing the need for after-school care for their students.

A needs assessment was conducted during the elementary schools' parent-teacher conferences. The details of the results varied slightly from school to school, but the surveys indicated that parents were struggling to find care for their children in the after-school hours. At one school, 51% of respondents (representing 30 children) said that they would use an after-school program. Comments included: "One reason I quit working outside my home was because of the lack of daycare in the district. I would definitely support a latch key program." "We need a latch key program desperately." A teacher commented, "I see a real need. I know 5 to 10 students who are often in my classroom waiting for siblings after school and many others go home unsupervised."

In addition to the lack of availability, another factor in the equation is cost. According to *Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2006* (Zehnder-Merrell, 2006), the 2005 average wage per job in Leelanau County was \$26,415. Free or reduced lunch rates vary between the four schools from 21% to 45%. Seasonal employment and low wages complicate the picture. School counselors are troubled that children are going home to empty houses or to less than ideal care situations, many due to a lack of financial resources to pay for after-school care. An effort to secure financial support in order to provide scholarships to those families has been a high priority.

At two of the schools, another national youth organization had tried unsuccessfully to provide an after-school care program. Staffing, insufficient numbers of participants and cost were factors that caused the programs to fold.

Program Goals and Objectives

Goal: Provide an engaging, safe, caring and developmentally appropriate community-based environment for elementary school children in the out-of-school-time hours.

Objectives:

- Establish local advisory boards that guide and manage their respective program now and for the future.
- Provide daily age-appropriate experiences that reinforce and support the development of pro-social and peer relationship skills and that help youth gain a sense of belonging.
- Ensure that the program, particularly staff qualifications and adult-to-child ratio, exceeds Michigan's Daycare Licensing requirements.
- Work to ensure the program is self-sustaining within 2 years of establishment.
- Secure a consistent funding stream so as to be able to serve families with limited income who are in need of care.
- Create partnerships with the schools, businesses, foundations, civic groups, local collaborative groups, etc. to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program.

Target Audience

Leelanau County is a rural peninsula in northern lower Michigan with a county population of 22,112; 91.7% are white, non-Hispanic, 3.7% are American Indian and 3.6% are Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). The 2005 youth population of 5- to 9-year-olds was 1,141; there were 1,528 10- to 14-year-olds (Zehnder-Merrell, 2006). In the northern three-fourths of the county, students attend one of four small school districts or a parochial school. The 2006-07 first-grade class size ranges from 11 to 50. Leelanau's economic base is primarily agriculture and seasonal tourism, while commuters make the 20 to 45 minute drive to Traverse City for work. Families are challenged by seasonal employment, variable and unpredictable work schedules and low wages.

The target audience for 4-H Kids Club is youth who go home to an empty home or have limited or detrimental supervision. Youth identified as needing specific support and enrichment (for example, English as a Second Language [ESL] proficiency, speech delay challenges, gross and fine motor skill development, friendship-making skills, a consistent caregiver in their lives, etc.) are sought out to participate. Those with special needs, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, Downs Syndrome, etc., are also sought out.

The program is available to all youth in kindergarten through sixth grade at each of four public schools; students from the parochial school can ride the school bus to either of two programs. Families with limited income are served by a pool of scholarship funds.

Type of Program

School-aged Child Care Educational Program

Delivery Methods

The initial program, Suttons Bay 4-H Kids Club, opened its doors in September 1993, and Leland 4-H Kids Club was established in September 1999. Glen Lake 4-H Kids Club was instituted in June 2005. In September 2006, Northport 4-H Kids Club began operation. When designing the first program, the committee referred to the professional standards for quality after-school program development and implementation. Each of the four programs evolved from a community engagement and development model. Reference materials utilized in these efforts are listed in the Resources section.

Each of the 4-H Kids Club programs are managed by a paid director and additional staff based on the number of youth enrolled. They operate after school until 6:00 p.m. and on teacher in-service days. After 2 years, parents requested and advocated for the program to operate full days during the summer. In 1996, one school principal asked his program director to provide care an hour before school; it continues today.

4-H Kids Clubs are housed in their respective schools; one program transports the children home at the end of the day in partnership with another program. Each is individually licensed by the State of Michigan, Office of Children and Adult Licensing, Child Daycare Division.

Income for the program comes from fees paid by parents, daycare subsidies from the Michigan Department of Human Services, as well as scholarship dollars

from a variety of sources including the JCPenney Afterschool Fund, administered through the National 4-H Council. To ensure that fees remain par with the local rate, a market survey is conducted each year.

All participants enrolled in the program become registered 4-H members, are able to participate in other 4-H activities and events in the county, receive the quarterly 4-H newsletter, and have formal affiliation with Leelanau County 4-H Youth Development.

Curricula and Educational Materials

The programs use a multitude of 4-H curriculum resources covering such topics as citizenship, leadership and community service, global and multiculturalism, foods and nutrition, health and fitness, conflict resolution, team building, character education, rocketry, and literacy. See Appendix E for additional resources.

Innumerable volunteers have enhanced the program with their expertise, joining members to do projects like nutrition, "stranger danger," Petoskey stones polishing, the performing arts, clay animation films, water color artwork, challenge biking, birdhouse building, cake decorating and martial arts, to name a few.

Early on it became apparent that the students needed an intentional focus on the enhancement of their social competencies, particularly friendship-making and conflict resolution skills. After a day in school, they also needed "down time" where they could self-select the activities they participated in, so programming was specifically designed to be youth-centered to foster independent learning and self-initiative. Activities have been designed to build capacity in students by incorporating multiple modes of learning.

The multi-age setting fosters informal mentoring among youth. The value of this was observed by parent, Merry Hawley who stated, "My daughter has been in 4-H Kids Club since first grade (she is now in fifth). When she first started, there were always the 'big' kids to look up to, and now she is that big kid. She loves to play with the younger kids; now she is the role model!" School Counselor, Heather Lowe, commented, "4-H Kids Club gives students a chance to interact and build relationships with kids of different ages, some older, some younger. These relationships and friendships, developed in a structured play environment, are unlikely to happen within the regular school day."

Concerted effort is made to ensure consistent linkages to the school day, both academically and operationally. Counselor, Kay Myers, commented, "4-H Kids Club provides a continuum of care for our students. They offer help with homework, are in communication with the students' teachers, and are aware of the students' needs as they come to or from class. They use the same language for continuity such as 'the conflict resolution process' and 'the Responsible Thinking Process®.' They reinforce and support the child's curriculum by offering projects after school and during the summer that support continued learning."

Curriculum used in the summer to help students maintain skills intentionally imbed academic support and content into enrichment activities. Two examples are Keeping (math) Skills Sharp and D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read), activities that all the members in one program participate in every day.

Community service has been a thread throughout each program, for example, members have cleaned up a local park, made and delivered cookies to

elders, painted and repaired the sandbox on the playground, picked up trash on the school grounds, and conducted a pop-can drive to purchase a seat in the new auditorium.

Teamwork and Collaboration

4-H Kids Club is the best example of Michigan State University Extension meeting an identified community need and providing service in Leelanau County. The program developed from a grass-roots request (soccer Moms joining forces) for help. The Michigan 4-H Youth Development state staff provided technical assistance, training and support; the national Extension network was invaluable by connecting organizers with other state Extension offices working on the after-school child care issue.

Each 4-H Kids Club program is overseen by its own advisory board of parents, school personnel and community members.

Collaborative partners include school administrators, educators and school boards along with the Leelanau County Family Coordinating Council. The “youngest” program, Northport 4-H Kids Club, started in the fall of 2007 in partnership with the Leelanau Children’s Center, a local pre-school child care center.

School counselors and teachers work collaboratively with program staff to enhance student outcomes (for example, behavior plans are consistently applied in the after-school program, educational plans are shared with after-school staff, violence prevention strategies follow the school-day plan, etc.).

A range of funding partners ensures the program reaches limited income families; key partners are identified above.

The four program directors meet quarterly to share ideas and resources. Currently, they are considering working together on a joint fundraiser.

Program Evaluation

Methods

Program staff collected participation data as part of the process evaluation. The resources to do a formal, researched-based evaluation of the long-term impact of 4-H Kids Clubs have not been available, so the current evaluation of the program relies on member, parent and educator feedback. School administrators, counselors, teachers, parents and youth were invited to comment on the value of the program from their unique perspectives as well as on the impact of 4-H Kids Club.

Process Evaluation

Participation data in the Appendices document the number of youth involved in the program between September 2006 and May 2007. Appendix A details average daily attendance records for one program for the 2006-07 school year. Participation, as it relates to school population, is reflected in Appendix B. Intensity of participation is reflected in Appendix C, as members enroll to attend from one to five days per week. Appendix D displays the ethnic diversity of current participants.

A review of the data of the two more tenured programs shows that, of the 45 children enrolled in the Leland program for the 2006-07 school year, 22 (49%)

have been “regulars,” that is, they attend regularly each week and have been involved consistently year after year. At the Suttons Bay 4-H Kids Club program, 35 (64%) of the 55 enrolled this school year are regular, long-term attendees.

The fundamental goal to “provide an engaging, safe, caring and developmentally appropriate community-based environment for elementary school children in the out-of-school-time hours” has been reached, now in four school communities.

The six identified objectives have been successfully met. Each program has its own advisory board and is independently self-sustaining. The desire to address the developmental needs of youth and licensing requirements has also been met. Dorene Radke-Boyd, licensing consultant for a four-county region said, “All of the programs provide positive environments with many creative activities geared specifically for the needs and interests of school-age children. Without these programs, the majority of the enrolled children would be in their homes without adult supervision or in care with pre-school children with minimal age-appropriate activities.”

Scholarships for the program have been garnered through numerous grants and by assisting families in their application for child care assistance from the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Outcome Evaluation

A sample of the comments shared by staff, youth participants, parents, educators and partners about the value of the program follows. [Is this accurate? See where I put “staff” and “partner” entries.]YES! Again, accolades to you. I like the addition of community partner/agency comments.

Staff:

- A new program director has been impressed with the children’s developing skills. “The children have improved their conflict resolution skills. At the beginning of the year, they were unable to discuss problems or find a way to solve problems without shouting or threats. Now most group decisions are made by discussion and vote.”
- Another example, “4-H Kids Club has helped the children gain leadership skills. At the beginning of the year, one fourth-grade boy did not join in any group activities. He isolated himself and resisted any attempts to include him in the group. After working with him, he now has created and led two scavenger hunts for the other children. He joins in activities and often initiates activities. When a new boy joined recently, he was the first to welcome the new child and ask him to play a game.”
- “Peer mentoring is a reality in our program, evidenced by the relationship the older members have with the incoming kindergarteners. The younger child may not know after-school procedures, where materials are, and other related skills, but an older peer will just naturally mentor the younger students without staff intervention,” says one director. “We have also been able to hire former program participants to serve as staff, providing them with workforce preparation and skill-developing leadership experiences. One hundred percent of our youth staff has gone on to college.”

Youth Participants:

- "I like 4-H Kids Club. It's somewhere safe for us to go and play and do our homework before we go home." Caitlin, age 7
- "I like 4-H Kids Club because we get to go outside and play games, and I really like it because I get to do crafts. I really like the snack, too. It helps my family because my mom and dad work late and it gives me a safe place to be." Emma, age 7

Parents:

- A testament to the success of the program is the parent who commented, "For the most part, I have to drag my kids out of there because they are involved in some activity and having a good time!" William Smith, parent and school principal
- "4-H Kids Club has allowed my husband and I to pursue our careers while our children still have the opportunity to be involved in after-school programs like sports and scouts; they just go to 4-H Kids Club afterwards on those days. Such extra-curricular activities would not be possible without the program." Catherine Jasinski, current Board member and attorney
- Parent, Peggy Klein wrote, "As a parent who has faced the problem of after-school day care for the past several years, 4-H Kids Club is an answer to my prayers. There are very few alternatives for child care for school-age children in this area. This gives me the ability to be at work and not worry about whether my children are all right. I now have peace of mind."

Educators:

- "4-H Kids Club has been mindful of extending the standards of conduct from the students' school day into their after school activities while still on school property. To have 4-H Kids Club use the 'Responsible Thinking Process[®]' in their program provides the continuity that children need to be successful in their school and personal lives." Katie Belanger, Focus Room Teacher
- "Without 4-H Kids Club, kids end up taking care of themselves because either parents have no other options or can't afford private day care. Some of our kids live in abusive or neglectful situations; 4-H Kids Club gives us one more option to keep them out of that detrimental environment longer. 4-H Kids Club offers enrichment opportunities for some of our students where little is provided in the home." Kay Myers, Counselor
- "4-H Kids Club has provided our English as a Second Language students the exposure and practice needed to progress with their English speaking skills. Practicing in a fun environment with their peers, they have made significant strides." Heather Lowe, Counselor
- "In this day of 'schools of choice,' if we did not have the 4-H Kids Club after-school program, we would lose students to other schools. That's just reality. It is vital to our school population, financially and programmatically." Mike Hartigan, Superintendent, Leland School

Partner:

- Dorene Radke-Boyd, of the Michigan Office of Children and Adult Licensing, writes, "I have been the licensing consultant for the four 4-H Kids Clubs since

the inception of the first in 1993. They have consistently hired exceptionally qualified program directors and met and exceeded the state licensing requirements. The programs have taken on an important role in the continuum of care of children in Leelanau County." Currently, all four directors are certified teachers.

Communication to Stakeholders

4-H Kids Club has been featured in several publications produced by Michigan State University. In *Weaving Visions of Hope: The Impact of MSU Extension Children Youth & Family Programs* (April 1995) [ADD to Reference List], 4-H Kids Club is highlighted with pictures and text under the Safe Environments category. In the article, the school principal is quoted, "There are some kids involved who I know face risk factors. I was pleased to see they were added to the roster."

An article in the Spring 2001 edition of the *MSU Alumni Magazine*, "How MSU is Helping Youth Succeed in Life" asserts, "the best evidence for this positive approach to youth development are the kids themselves... After seven years, the (4-H Kids Club) program functions like a neighborhood... the children who first started with the group are now in high school and often return to mentor the younger children." (Vaidya, S., 2001)

Since 2002, 4-H Kids Club has been featured in three Leelanau County Partner Reports, which are distributed to key stakeholders, including local and state elected officials (4/04, 5/05, 1/07). Each program distributes a newsletter to the families at least quarterly and program directors are expected to report to the school board annually. To build leadership capacity in the youth, in February 2007, the youth members of one 4-H Kids Club made the presentation to the school board rather than the staff.

Evidence of Sustainability

In the course of thirteen years, the 4-H Kids Club programs have grown from one program to four, serving four public elementary schools and one parochial school. A strength of the program has been that the original director is still on staff; her experience has been invaluable in the establishment of the other three programs. The program has served as a learning lab for teens and young adults as alumnae have returned to serve as paid program staff.

A vital factor in the program's sustainability has been its ability to secure outside funding for families with limited income. Initially the program attempted to absorb those costs; in the 2006-07 school year, scholarships totaling more than \$18,600 were utilized. Most recently, the program was a recipient of JCPenney Afterschool support. In addition, they have been awarded grant dollars from United Way and garnered scholarship dollars from the Leelanau County Family Support Team and others.

Replicability

Each new program was patterned after the original; the director of the Suttons Bay program has been involved since its inception (she was one of the soccer Moms) and has guided the development of each subsequent program.

Several counties in Michigan have visited and used the Leelanau County model to initiate conversations with local school districts and community partners to

create an after-school program. The Michigan State University Extension educator and program staff continue to serve as a resource to Extension staff throughout the state.

The resources used to design and manage the program have been shared at numerous MSU Extension staff in-services, including the Children Youth and Families Series in May 1996; Spring Extension Conference at Shanty Creek in 2003; the Out-of-School Time Conference (sponsored by three states and drawing participants from six states) in East Lansing in spring, 2004; and Fall Extension Conference in October 2005. In addition, the 4-H state leaders from the North Central Region visited the Suttons Bay 4-H Kids Club program in the summer of 2005.

Several components are crucial to the successful replication of the program: a locally driven request and commitment, a thorough needs assessment, an advisory council representative of the community (child care providers, school staff, parents, etc.), administration and school board commitment, and finally the involvement of multiple community partners all working towards the common goal of providing an enriching and age-appropriate youth development program for children in the after-school hours.

Rationale and Importance of Program

The need for quality after-school care for children is a pressing need in nearly every community. Research tells us that children left home alone unsupervised or with less than ideal supervision are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, get into trouble or hurt, or withdraw; that is a cost to all of society.

Engaging, enriching, supportive environments for children in the after-school hours can help youngsters develop life skills, cultivate healthy relationships with adults and peers, and advance their academic outcomes.

Extension has the resources and is a trusted partner in the community with the ability to bring many to the table to address the pressing need of quality care for children after the school bell rings.

References

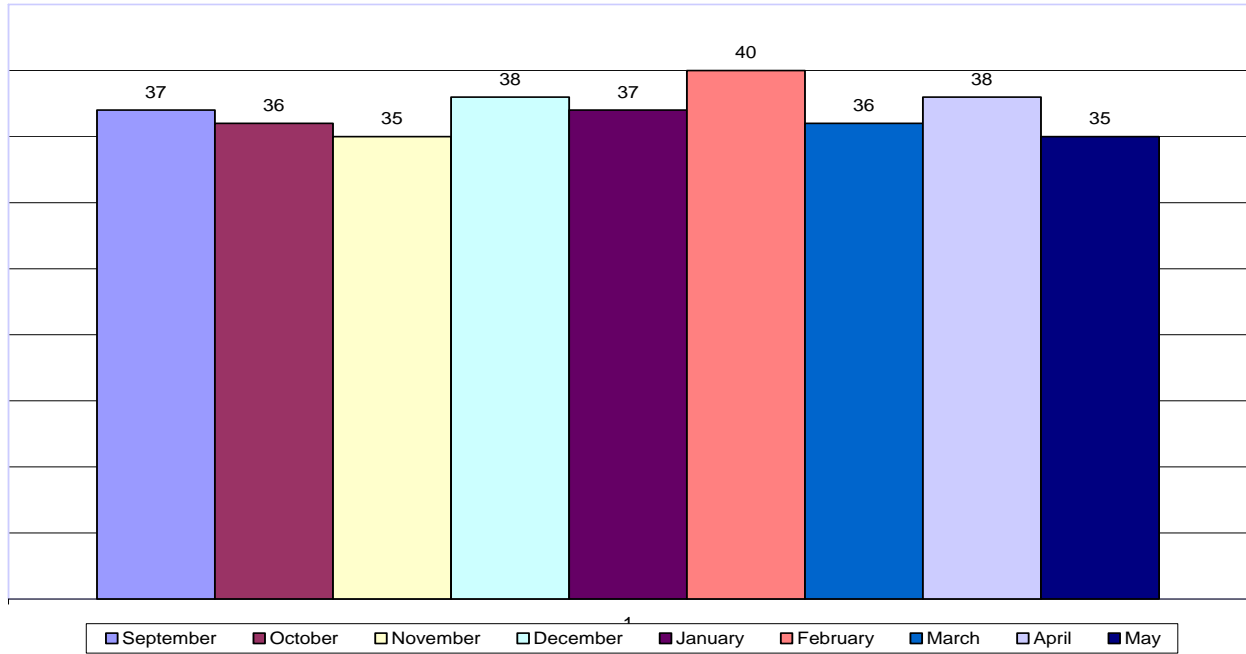
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- U.S. Census Bureau. (2005). *State & county quickfacts*. Retrieved May 21, 2007, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/26089.html>
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Appendices

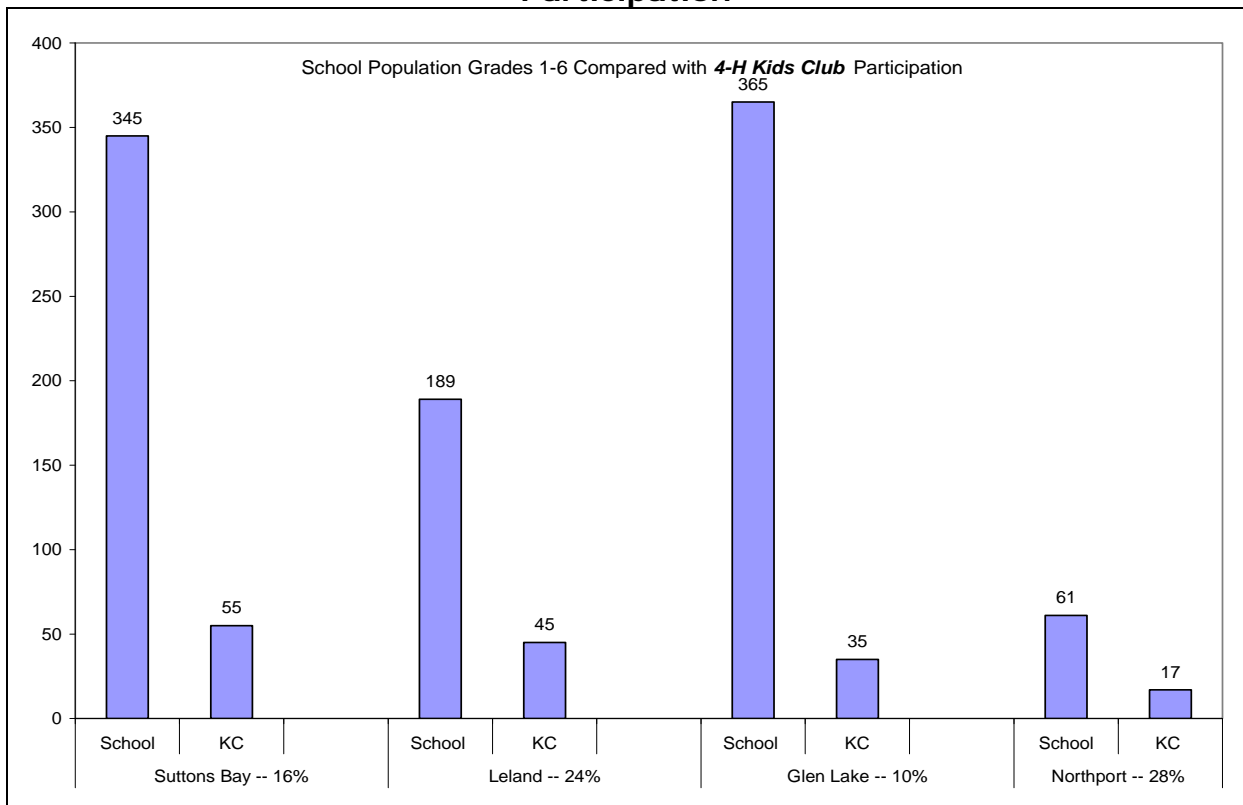
- Appendix A: Suttons Bay *4-H Kids Club* Average Monthly Attendance
- Appendix B: School Population in Comparison to *4-H Kids Club* Participation
- Appendix C: Intensity of Participation - Leland *4-H Kids Club*
- Appendix D: Ethnic Diversity of Current *4-H Kids Club* Participants
- Appendix E: Useful Resources

Appendix A: Suttons Bay 4-H Kids Club Average Monthly Attendance

Table #1: Suttons Bay 4-H Kids Club
Average Monthly Attendance-September 2006 through May 2007



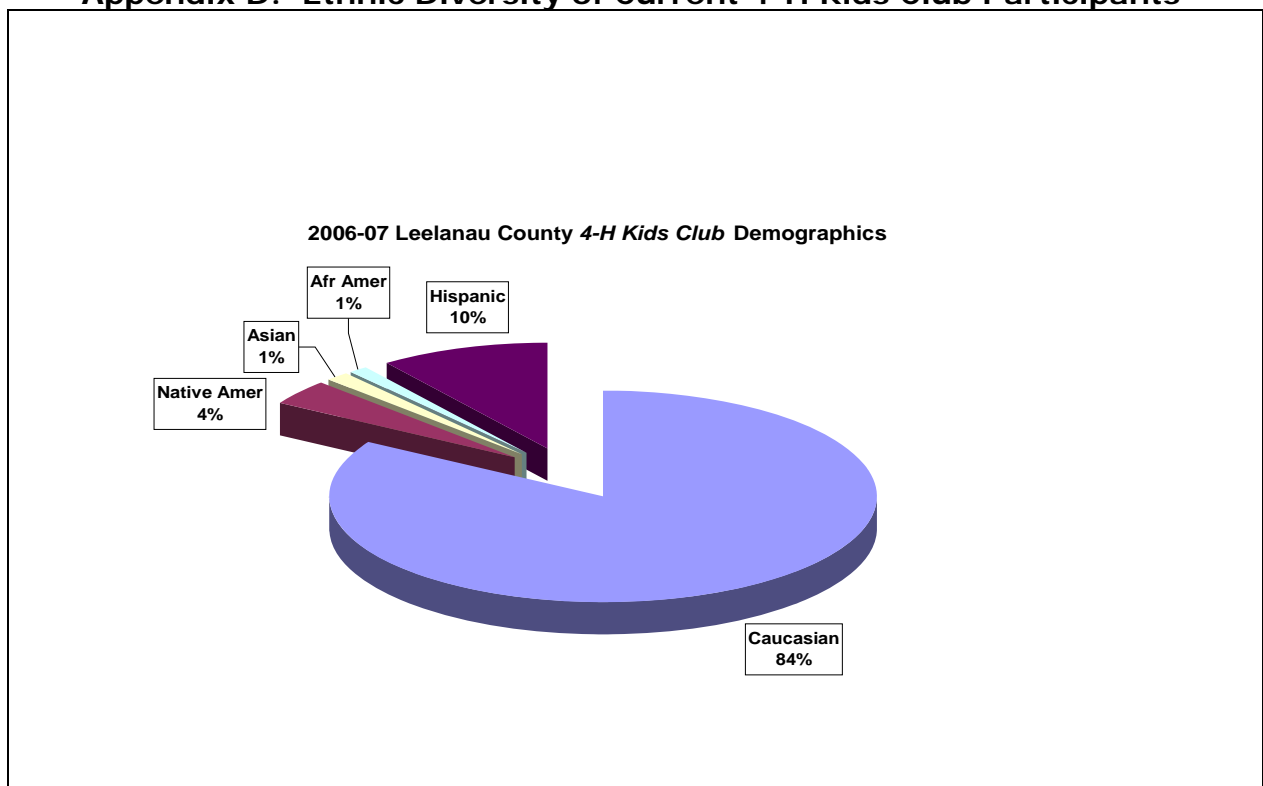
Appendix B: School Population in Comparison to 4-H Kids Club Participation



Appendix C: Intensity of Participation - Leland 4-H Kids Club 2006-2007									
	Sept. 2006	October	Nov.	Dec.	Jan. 2007	Feb.	March	April	May
5 days/wk	20	19	15	11	11	12	11	9	10
4 days/wk	5	6	5	5	5	4	4	3	3
3 days/wk	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	5	4
2 days/wk	5	5	5	2	2	5	5	5	5
1 day/wk	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Drop-in	2	6	10	14	13	12	12	14	14
Youth Days Served: Number of days attending multiplied by number of participants	141	145	124	99	98	105	103	97	99

Comments. Typically, the enrollment numbers drop in November number due to a migrant workforce. Participation of the “regulars” (5 days/week) decreases in the winter months due to seasonal employment. A few families choose to go to a “drop-in” status for flexibility. In addition the program tends to have more drop-ins in the spring because children are involved in sports, club meetings, and other extracurricular activities.

Appendix D: Ethnic Diversity of Current 4-H Kids Club Participants



Appendix E: Useful Resources

- Albrecht, K.M., & Plantz, M. C. (1990). *Developmentally appropriate practice in school-age child care*. Dubuque, IA: American Home Economics Association.
- Ferrari, T. (Director). (1995). *School-age child care: Opening doors to community involvement*. [Video cassette]. Orono, ME: University of Maine Cooperative Extension.
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