PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE OHIO 4-H CLOVERBUD PROGRAM IN RELATION TO LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to understand the perceptions of parents whose children were in the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program in relation to life skills development. Specifically, the focus of this study was to explore parents’ perceptions of life skills and their children’s life skill development, program benefits, the factors contributing to the attainment of these skills and benefits, as well as parents’ perceptions of the organization and structure of the 4-H Cloverbud program facilitating the introduction and participation of members.

A qualitative research design was employed. Three focus groups were conducted, one in each of three selected Ohio counties. The twelve parents who volunteered to respond to the questions composed the focus groups. Some parents were also in a role of adviser. Open coding, the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, and categorizing data, was used to analyze the data. To add to the reliability of the focus group findings, 4-H Cloverbud-related documents (written materials and a video) were reviewed and several 4-H Cloverbud-related events and activities were observed.

Parents understood the concept of life skills although they may not have used the word life skills in the definition. They understood how life skills played an important role for their children’s development and how the skills are carried over into the future and would be used throughout life. Parents mentioned how life skills
are in everything you do. Successful interaction, where children learn to communicate and socialize with others, was the most important life skill. Parents addressed how the program was beneficial because it is a group just for young children. Parents believed that it was important for their children to learn and to have fun while they were learning. Factors that contributed to life skills included several types of activities where the Cloverbuds engaged in learning skills together and communicating with each other. Parents agreed with how the program flexibility and non-competitive structure are good for the children. Information addressed by parents during the focus group interviews was parallel or consistent with information in 4-H Cloverbud materials and observations.

Life skills were learned and developed by the children and that was important to the parents. However, only half of the parents in this study had heard of life skills in their contact with the Cloverbud program. If life skills are an important emphasis within the program, then more education and promotion is suggested. In terms of promotion, there is reason to focus on parents because they are typically the ones who determine, in a large part, what activities or clubs their children engage in. Placing an emphasis on life skills through means of training agents, volunteers, and advisers is suggested. Parents addressed different means by which they learned of the Cloverbud
program. Because many know about 4-H through personal experience, developing
different ways to attract those who do not know of 4-H or Cloverbuds is
recommended.

Future research should focus on those individuals who were involved as
Cloverbuds and are current 4-H members. The Cloverbud alumni could provide their
perceptions of the program relating to life skills development, the benefits, the
activities that facilitated life skills, and the structure of the program. Direct
observation of children participating in Cloverbud meetings and activities would
provide yet another perspective.
Dedicated to my husband, family, and friends
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ohio’s 4-H program began in 1902 when A. B. Graham, school superintendent of Springfield Township, Clark County, Ohio, held the first meeting with boys and girls in the basement of the county courthouse. The founders originally designed the voluntary educational 4-H program for youth ages 9 to 19. The 4-H program provides age-appropriate learning experiences for youth and helps them develop to their fullest potential through projects, activities, and other educational experiences. The program focuses on the needs of youth and the community and adapts teaching methods to best reach the members. Today, 50 states and 24 countries benefit from the 4-H program (Graham, 1994).

Although the 4-H program originally focused on 9- to 19-year-olds, younger youth have actively participated in the past alongside older 4-H members without regard to whether age-appropriate curriculum and activities were used. Many states have expanded 4-H programs for young children, known by names such as Mini 4-H, Primary 4-H, 5 to 8, K-2, and Cloverbuds (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995).

Prior to this trend in programming, the 5- to 8-year-olds participated without active enrollment. When the idea of including youth aged 5- to 8 as part of 4-H was
developed, no formal 4-H educational program existed that dealt specifically with this age group. The expansion of a program more specific to younger children’s developmental needs would be more appropriate than trying to adapt the programs currently used for 9- to 19-year-olds because 5- to 8-year-olds differ in significant ways from older youth.

Several state and county staff developed policies to define the Ohio Cloverbud program (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995). In October 1994, the Ohio State University (OSU) Extension faculty introduced a specific Cloverbud curriculum for 5-to 8-year-olds, consisting of 24 lessons developed around a national research-based subject matter matrix (Cutler, Safrit, King, & Clark, 1994). One intention was to recruit and retain members in a positive manner (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995). A second curriculum, Cloverbud Series II, was introduced in 1999 (Scheer, 1999). The goal of the program is to provide developmentally appropriate materials that enhance life skills through subject matter content (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995). In its first year with state approval, 37,018 members under the age of nine were enrolled (Powelson, 1993-1994). By the year 2000, 44,531 4-H members participated in the program (Johnson & Murawski, 2000). As the Ohio Cloverbud program begins its eighth year, promoting more research on programs for 5- to 8-year-olds is appropriate, and will aid in better serving its membership.

The Cloverbud 4-H program is designed to be nonformal, non-competitive, and educational. The program helps children learn to get along with others, explore many interests, learn subject matter skills, and build self-confidence and self-esteem
through healthy learning experiences. The children participate in activities and opportunities specifically designed for their age level. Focusing on children at a younger age helps them get a head start on enhancing life skills needed for healthy development.

The 4-H Cloverbud program emphasizes the development of life skills. Safrit and Gibbons (1995) identified life skills as abilities, attitudes, and behaviors required for success and happiness. Life skills enable people to adapt to and master their life situations. As they develop life skills children learn to live with others, express feelings, love life, and welcome new experiences. Learning life skills helps individuals cope with life's challenges and gain a sense of satisfaction from the decision making and risk taking involved. These skills become useful throughout life. Furthermore, skills learned in one situation carry over into other settings. Ohio 4-H has identified five basic life skills for Cloverbuds: self-esteem/self-confidence, social interaction skills, decision making, learning to learn, and physical mastery (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995). These five life skills were determined to be age appropriate for youth in the Cloverbud program.

Different life skills models exist with both commonalities and differences from one model to the next. One particular study identified 55 different life skills (Cantrell, Heinsohn, & Doebler, 1989). Two life skills models commonly used for youth program development in 4-H are the Targeting Life Skills Model (Hendricks, 1996) and the Four-Fold Model (Barkman & Machtmes, 2000). Hendricks intended the Targeting Life Skills Model (TLS) to include all possible life skills. The model
serves as a framework for those who develop programs and curricula that provide educational opportunities where youth learn important life skills. The model allows those developing curriculum to incorporate specific skills that youth programmers wish to address (Hendricks, 1996). The Four-Fold Youth Development Model assists youth development professionals in designing and evaluating youth curriculum and programs (Barkman & Machtmes, 2000). Development of the model became important because evaluating life skills is an area with which Extension educators struggle. Each state 4-H program may use different evaluations and reporting systems that then create problems when searching for a standard national practice. Such problems provided justification for the development of a cost-effective research-based model that is easy to understand and use, establishes the critical link between program design and evaluation, and encompasses all the skills needed for youth to become confident, capable, caring, and contributing adults (Barkman & Machtmes, 2001). Although there is no consensus on which model to use, the development of life skills is considered a cornerstone of 4-H Youth Development programming.

Problem

Life skills are an important component of 4-H Youth Development programs. However, most research with 4-H Youth Development and life skills has focused on older 4-H members between the age of 13 and 19 (see Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992; Cantrell, Heinschn, & Doebler, 1989; Seervers & Dormody, 1995; Ward, 1996). The one study conducted related to 5- to 8-year-olds surveyed
volunteers, advisers, or parents rather than the youth themselves (Scheer & Lafontaine, 1999). Scheer and Lafontaine (1999) used a quantitative research design, which asked stakeholders to respond whether they thought children who participated developed each of the five life skills targeted in the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program. The participants thought that life skills were attained through involvement in Cloverbuds, but were not questioned about the process involved in developing these skills. Scheer and Lafontaine’s study (1999), while informative, provided limited understanding of what benefits those stakeholders perceived. There was no chance for them to express their own views or to discuss other aspects of the program. A study designed to elicit parents’ perceptions on different aspects of the program would contribute valuable information.

Determining the best source of data is of concern to the researcher. Because collecting data from younger children may be more difficult because of children’s level of cognitive and physical growth, children may not be the best source of information regarding processes contributing to their development. It may be difficult for the youth to understand directions, to understand the intent of the questions, or to read a survey instrument without assistance. Another reason for the lack of research with 5- to 8-year-olds in 4-H may be because life skills involve learning over time and it is harder to measure life skills development in younger children who are in the process of learning and developing those skills. Perhaps, because of these difficulties, few studies have focused on 5- to 8-year-old youth, and instead have used adults as sources of information on 5- to 8-year-olds. This
approach is valid, as adults, and parents in particular, are a valuable source of information regarding skill development.

Emphasis on Cloverbuds and life skills development still needs to be addressed and studied. The Cloverbud program is relatively new in 4-H. The program has a different type of curriculum than the older 4-H youth in regards to meeting the children's developmental needs and learning life skills. Although there is an emphasis placed on life skills within the Cloverbud program, are those life skills being achieved? If so, to what extent? In addition, what are other specific aspects, if any, of the program that are not being addressed?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the life skills developed by children participating in the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program. To accomplish this purpose, the objectives are to:

1. Identify parents' definitions and perceptions of life skills.
2. Describe parents' perceptions of the benefits of the Cloverbud program.
3. Describe parents' perceptions of factors that contribute to youth experiences in the program that facilitate life skills development.
4. Describe parents' perceptions of the organization and structure of the 4-H Cloverbud program that facilitate the introduction and participation of members.
Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined for this study:

1. 4-H - is a youth nonformal education program of the Cooperative Extension Service that serves youth ages 5-to 19 years old (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

2. Cloverbud is:
   a. the name used in Ohio for 4-H programs for children between the ages of 5 to 8 years old. Cloverbuds is a nonformal, non-competitive, educational program conducted by the 4-H component of the OSU Extension System, to help children ages 5 to 8 (grades K-2) learn to get along with others, explore many interests, learn subject matter skills, and build self-confidence and self-esteem through healthy learning experiences (Grawemeyer, Gibbons, & Horton, 1994).

   b. the name used to refer to the 4-H member in Ohio who is age 5 or in Kindergarten through age 8 and in the second grade (Grawemeyer, Gibbons, & Horton, 1994).

3. Life skills - are the abilities, attitudes, and behaviors that must be learned for success and happiness (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995). Specific life skills included in the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program:

b. Social interaction skills - are the skills that enhance the desire to be with, work, and talk with others to enhance social development (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995).

c. Decision making - is the ability to take actions, learn step by step in problem solving, and understand influences on decisions (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995).

d. Learning to learn - is having real-life experiences on which to base one's learning in order to understand what is learned and how it is learned (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995).

e. Physical mastery - is developing muscle coordination and the ability to handle materials skillfully (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995).

4. 4-H Club Adviser - is any individual who works with a 4-H club that involves youth who meet regularly; the adviser works with the members to conduct club business and plan the club program, and oversees and leads 4-H members in the program (Cutler, Safrit, King, & Clark, 1994).

5. Parent - is the primary caretaker of the child in the Cloverbud program.

6. Perceptions - are one's views about a topic.

7. Stakeholder - is anyone involved with an organization, whether internally or externally, who has a share or an interest.
Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The study has the following assumptions and limitations:

Assumptions

1. Parents can accurately report skills developed by their children.
2. There are other possible influences on life skill development in addition to 4-H.
3. Using multiple sources of data will enhance the credibility of the study's design and allow for greater confidence in the application of the findings to the Cloverbud program.

Limitations

1. The study was based on parents' perceptions of their children's life skills development at the time of study and may not represent their child's actual life skills development.
2. Research is limited to selected parents of participating Cloverbuds in Ohio. The results are not a representative sample of all counties in Ohio or other states and therefore cannot be generalized to all Cloverbud programs.

Significance of Study

Educators across the nation know the Ohio 4-H program for its leadership in building strong youth development programs (Sommers, 1999). Ohio is not just a leader in 4-H, but in Cloverbud curriculum, products, and training materials. Not
only is the Cloverbud program well known in Ohio, programs around the country currently benefit significantly from this educational program for 5- to 8-year-olds. Ohio has demonstrated this leadership by developing programming resources such as two Cloverbud curriculums (Cutler et al., 1994; Scheer, 1999), the Cloverbud Connection newsletter (Zimmer & Shriner, 2002) and the 4-H Cloverbud Volunteer Video (Reed & Scheer, 2002). Studies of the Cloverbud program come from Ohio. Because of these efforts, there is justification to further study specific areas of the Cloverbud program.

This study was designed to describe parents’ perceptions of the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program regarding life skills developed by their children. It builds upon past research with a focus on life skills. While Scheer and Lafontaine (1999) used a variety of stakeholders, this study will focus only on parents of Cloverbuds. This study will add to the current body of knowledge by using qualitative research techniques to focus on parents’ perceptions pertaining to the Cloverbud program and life skills development. Open-ended questions, rather than predetermined survey response categories, were used. Specifically, the focus of the study was to explore parents’ perceptions of life skills, their child’s life skills development, program benefits, and the factors contributing to the attainment of these skills and benefits. Such information should enable those who work with the Cloverbud program to understand its strengths and identify areas for improvement.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present study was designed to obtain an understanding of life skill development associated with participation in Cloverbud programs. To help understand the context of the 4-H Cloverbud program, the history of the development of 4-H programs for 5-to 8-year-olds was addressed. Furthermore, because this study was conducted in Ohio, this review includes specific information about the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program. Also included is a comparison of programs for 5-to 8-year-olds and those designed for older 4-H members. Four domains of developmental were discussed. The importance of clubs and organizations in enhancing development was addressed.
Definitions and understanding of life skills and the research done with life skills as well as two life skills models were also reviewed. Finally, the appropriateness of parents as a source of information on issues related to their child’s development is considered.

4-H Programs for 5- to 8-Year Olds

4-H programs developed as a grassroots approach for youth that included educational and family-centered experiences. Although 4-H was originally developed for 9- to 19-year-olds, a review of national data showed that for over 25 years younger children had actively participated in 4-H activities (National 5-8 Curriculum Task Force, 1992). In 1992, approximately 1.3 million youth under the age of nine were actively involved in 4-H programs (National 5-8 Curriculum Task Force, 1992). In some cases,
these activities were not specifically meant for younger participants, and therefore were not necessarily developmentally appropriate for this age group. The National 5-8 Curriculum Task Force (1992) asserted,

It is no longer a question of whether to involve kindergarten to third grade youth in the 4-H program, but rather, which methods and curriculum should be used to ensure that youth in this age group have positive, age-appropriate, and relevant experiences. (p. 1)

With this national emphasis, the 4-H program began to address the particular needs of these children in a more coordinated way.

Many states have started 4-H programs that provide educational and activity-centered opportunities for 5- to 8-year-olds, which are referred to by various names such as Mini 4-H, Primary 4-H, 5 to 8, and K-2. The Ohio program for younger youth is called Cloverbuds and is consistent with the national guidelines for curriculum designed to nurture the beginning life skills in young children. The Ohio Cloverbud program focuses on five particular life skills: self-esteem and self-confidence, social interaction skills, decision making, learning to learn, and physical mastery (Safrit & Gibbons, 1995). Life skills evolve from the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical developmental domains of growth and the particular needs of children in this age group. The skills can be learned through activities. These skills are important to learn and develop at an early age as they will be used throughout life.

Programs that are developmentally appropriate focus on the needs and interests of the children according to their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth. Those four domains of development are enhanced in programs such as the 4-H Cloverbuds by providing opportunities for youth to gain life skills in each domain. Child psychologists
agree that children are best nurtured when all four domains of development are addressed (Hurd, Lerner, & Barton, 1999).

During the first five years of life, children physically develop and learn physical mastery skills. As children get older, beyond five years of age, they begin to develop more steadily with occasional growth spurts (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). They gradually develop better coordination in their movements and will begin to refine motor skills, developing better control of their bodies. Reaction time improves as the child continues to use those skills and perform activities. Children’s slower reaction time is one reason for the recommendation that children engage in activities that are non-competitive. Children can easily be injured at this age because their muscles are still developing.

Cognitive development, or decision making and learning to learn skills, focuses on how children comprehend, make decisions, and learn and remember events or objects. Youth will engage in activities involving thinking and learning through role-playing, distinguishing social rights from wrongs, sorting out roles and goal-directed behaviors, understanding cause and effect, and learning to adjust to difficult situations. Michigan State University Extension 4-H Youth Development (2000) claimed that school-age children are "here and now thinkers" meaning they have not mastered abstract thinking.

Language is a powerful tool in cognitive development and understanding (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 1993). Children will develop a bigger vocabulary and more complex speech. Role playing and social interaction promotes language and understanding as one grows cognitively. As they develop cognitively and improve their language skills, children will begin to master problem-solving abilities.
Social development or social skills is established early in the life of children. Children begin to build relationships, figure out where they fit in groups, and may prefer associating with those of the same gender. While making friends and being social, the child develops a sense of self-discipline and a concern for the needs of others (Michigan State University Extension 4-H Youth Development, 2000).

Emotional development and self-esteem skills involve seeking support, approval, and having personal feelings. Children may have difficulty sharing their feelings. They tend to communicate problems through acting out or by withdrawing from others. Children begin to compare themselves to others, and competition can interfere with feelings about themselves (Michigan State University Extension 4-H Youth Development, 2000).

**Programming Parameters For Cloverbuds**

Although 4-H provides opportunity for youth of all ages, the Cloverbud program provides developmentally and age appropriate activities geared for younger children. Scheer (1997) proposed 10 programming parameters for the Cloverbud program (see Table 2.1). These parameters are consistent with the recommendations in K-3 Youth in 4-H: Guidelines for Programming (National 5 to 8 Curriculum Task Force, 1992). The Ohio parameters are consistent with developmentally appropriate practices in the primary grades serving 5- through 8-year-olds (Scheer, 1997). The 10 program parameters help Extension professionals develop age-appropriate programs for Cloverbuds.
Table 2.1
Program Parameters for Cloverbuds

1. activity based
2. cooperative-learning centered
3. non-competitive
4. events such as fairs are open to participation for Cloverbuds, but for exhibit only
5. activities are developmentally age appropriate
6. activities are safe for children
7. Cloverbud activities are distinctly different from 9-to-19-year-old activities
8. curricula are success oriented
9. animals and animal subject matter should contribute to Cloverbud objectives and parameters
10. activities are fun, positive, and focus on the five general life skill areas through the experiential learning cycle

Source: Scheer, 1997

When following these 10 programming parameters, it is important to understand how young people go through developmental tasks—different tasks that arise during certain periods in the child’s life (Thomas, 1992). When youth are successful in achieving these developmental tasks, it is believed to lead to happiness and success in later tasks, whereas failure to learn tasks leads to unhappiness and difficulty in later tasks. Thomas (1992) recommended that in raising children one should focus on recognizing the nature of the child’s tasks at particular ages, provide opportunities to practice solutions to the tasks, and be patient with the child’s ability to solve such tasks. In furnishing the child with information and educational experiences, one promotes accomplishments with these tasks. When developing activities for children, the program parameters help identify if the activity is developmentally appropriate for the child in learning tasks and skills necessary for life. Those parameters identified earlier are recommended to help the child develop in each domain—physical, emotional, social, and cognitive. Educators working with children should have an understanding of what those
parameters are and how they can relate to the four domains of development through activity-centered learning. Children enjoy activities they are able to master and understand, and where they can interact with others without much difficulty.

There are similarities and differences between programs for Cloverbuds and older 4-H members. The differences help make the Cloverbud program unique and special for 5- to 8-year-olds. Using the appropriate curriculum, 4-H members engage in activities and interact with other members. However, Cloverbuds follow different curricula from that of older 4-H members. The curriculum is activity centered where the activities can be completed in a shorter span of time as opposed to project centered. The emphasis on activity-based learning is important because it enhances physical and social development during the younger years. In contrast, older youth are more able to grasp and take on long-term projects. The Cloverbud program follows an activity manual, while the older 4-H youth follow project manuals. The Cloverbud program is leader directed, while the 9-to-19-year-old’s project work may involve significant self-study. Cloverbuds equally participate without creating a leadership structure. At first, adult leaders model organizational tasks; later, youth are given gradual responsibility under the adult’s guidance. When youth are older they elect officers to perform these functions.

Cloverbuds are recognized for participating in activities and being involved in the process versus the product of that activity, whereas older 4-H members are recognized for their achievement and may participate in competitions. These differences help guide opportunities for the Cloverbud to develop physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Program parameters help guide learning just as clubs and organizations provide a structure in which learning can occur.
Clubs and Organizations

In 1990 over 17,000 youth organizations, both public and private, existed at the national level (Quinn, 1999). These organizations focus on enhancing youth development, but vary in structures where youth gather, how they are linked to adult mentors, and whether they focus on one or many activities. Quinn (1999) reported results of a survey by the U.S. Department of Education that acknowledged a majority of parents would like to have their child involved in after-school programs and that those programs should focus on educational enrichment. The children have reported similar interests as the parents and wanted to be involved in activities that enhance their minds and bodies as well as provide a safe place to hang out. Quinn (1999) discussed that learning is enhanced through out-of-school activities that are provided in a structure different from a school setting.

Clubs and youth groups fostering social interaction are critical resources focused to meet the needs of youth. Pittman (1992) believed that well-run youth programs provide youth with five important benefits: (a) increased contact with adults; (b) teaching and learning of useful, practical skills; (c) practice in formal leadership and organizational roles; (d) opportunity to practice community responsibility; and (e) increased family involvement in their child’s education. Overall, Pittman believed that a successful organization is caring. Alumni of youth programs felt their participation contributed to their personal development in eight areas: pride in accomplishment, self-confidence, ability to work with others, ability to communicate, ability to set goals, employment skills, leadership skills, and community involvement (Quinn, 1995). Youth want the opportunity to be involved in physical activities, achievement, positive social
interaction, and meaningful participation that meets their basic needs for a safe, caring environment and at the same time building skills needed in life (Quinn, 1999).

4-H programs offer developmental and age-appropriate activities that are monitored by adult volunteers and staff, providing the opportunity for social interaction, character building, leadership, and citizenship. 4-H clubs provide positive opportunities for youth outside formal school settings. A club is "an entity that is youth centered and adult guided, has organizational sponsorship and a stated mission or purpose, and exists independent of the formal, credit-giving structure of the schools" (Walker, Dunham, & Snyder, 1998, p. 23). Dubas and Snider (1993) explained how clubs enhance learning and achievement by providing youth with a safe place to be with friends, where they have a sense of belonging and self-worth, as well as being able to develop reliable relationships with others.

Youth want a sense of belonging and individual attention, and being involved in clubs and organizations is one way to help develop this. According to Walker, Dunham, and Snyder (1998) "one-to-one relationships are essential" (p. 22). Children feel comfortable having a caring adult in a program where there is an opportunity to interact one-to-one and in small groups of varying youth and adults of all ages. The interaction helps develop trust and respect, which enhances success in life and decision making. Group work is a way to bring individuals together where they feel a sense of belonging, develop the opportunity to build friendships, and feel important and confident in decision making as well as feel free to converse about ideas without risk of ridicule. Overall, youth want to feel useful and contributing to what they are involved in (Walker, Dunham, & Snyder, 1998).
There are many clubs and organizations where youth can learn and develop a sense of belonging. Several of these organizations specifically have adapted their programming to reach youth younger than they had served previously. In addition to 4-H, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts also developed programs specifically for younger children ages 5 to 8 years old. A review of these organizations shows that they deliver education and information in a variety of ways, all focusing on the needs and interests of the child.

The Tiger Cubs program developed in the 1980's for 7-year-old boys (BSA, 2001). The Foundations for Growth study survey was developed to see if and how Scouting could meet the needs of 7-year-old boys and their families. Those younger boys wanted to be a part of the program and to participate with their family. The parents wanted a program where they could work directly with their children and where they could be exposed to a variety of activities and experiences. Tiger Cubs was field tested and approved. Those members are part of the original Boy Scouts of America but participate in more age and developmentally appropriate activities. The program is filled with fun activities, ideas, and projects that the Tiger Cub and family can participate in and be together (BSA, 2001).

The Daisy Girl Scout program was also developed in the 1980's for girls aged 5 and 6. Sue Shilling, Assistant Executive Director, Membership Services, with the Girl Scouts - Seal of Ohio Council, Inc., explained how the program was designed to help girls adjust to Kindergarten and its more intense academic nature (personal communication, July 17, 2001). The girls participate in activities that are age and developmentally appropriate that enhance skills and leadership. The Daisy Girl Scouts
program, just as other levels of Girl Scouts, helps to develop girls to their full potential through teaching values, character, and citizenship.

The programs of these three youth groups work because they provide opportunities for youth in building relationships, help develop valuable skills for life, and allow youth to feel they contribute to their community. The clubs offer individual attention where youth develop a sense of belonging. All three organizations recognized that their programming could be adapted to serve the needs and interests of younger children. As discussed in the next section, 4-H programs provide the setting for development through experiential education to grow socially, physically, emotionally, and cognitively so that youth learn life skills beyond the school curriculum.

**Life Skills**

The 4-H Cloverbud program emphasizes the development of life skills. Safrit and Gibbons (1995) stated that life skills are abilities, attitudes, and behaviors required for success and happiness. Life skills enable people to adapt to and master their life situations. Through activities that foster life skills development, children learn to live with others, express feelings, love life, and welcome new experiences. Learning life skills helps individuals cope with life’s challenges and gain a sense of satisfaction from the decision making and risk taking involved. These skills become useful throughout life. Because different conceptions of life skills exist, different models have been developed to help clarify categories for those life skills. Consequently, life skills may be worded differently as well as overlap with other life skills models.
Life Skills Models

Different life skills models exist with both commonalities and differences from one model to the next. Two models that categorize life skills in 4-H will be discussed further (see Table 2.2). Both models organize life skills by placing them in one of the four H's (head, heart, hands, health). They differ in the total number of skills they include in each of the four H's. The Targeting Life Skills model (TLS; Hendricks, 1996) was developed at Iowa State University focusing on the four H's and what life skills are learned in each of those four H's, such as head (thinking and managing), heart (relating and caring), hands (working and giving), and health (being and living). The TLS model helps simplify and coordinate life skills into programs or activities to achieve desired outcomes. In addition to identifying specific skills, it provides youth program developers with a process for (a) assisting children to reach their full potential through a positive approach to life skill development, (b) delivering information and skill practice at the appropriate developmental level for the target audience, (c) writing specific learning objectives that allow measurement of life skill development, (d) completing an instructional plan that creates experiences based on experiential learning theory to achieve life skill development, (e) identifying observable indicators of change, and finally using (f) these indicators to effectively evaluate program impact (Hendricks, 1996).
Table 2.2
Comparisons of Two 4-H Life Skills Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOUR FOLD MODEL</th>
<th>TARGETING LIFE SKILLS MODEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hands</strong>- mastering technology</td>
<td><strong>Hands</strong>- marketable skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through community service</td>
<td>Community service/service learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a responsible citizen</td>
<td>Responsible citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in a team</td>
<td>Teamwork/contributing to group effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercising leadership</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing a project/task</td>
<td>--^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating yourself</td>
<td>Self-motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heart</strong>- communicating</td>
<td><strong>Heart</strong>- communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting socially</td>
<td>Social skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating</td>
<td>Cooperating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolving conflicts</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing social justice</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing diversity</td>
<td>Accepting differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
<td>Nurturing relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for others</td>
<td>Concern for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being empathetic</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong>- being responsible</td>
<td><strong>Health</strong>- self responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing self-esteem</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing yourself</td>
<td>Managing feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing integrity and character</td>
<td>Self-discipline/character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a sense of purpose</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a positive view of future</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing resistance skills</td>
<td>Resiliency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being resilient</td>
<td>Stress Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing stress</td>
<td>Healthy lifestyle choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making healthy lifestyle choices</td>
<td>Personal safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing personal injury</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing emotions positively</td>
<td>Disease prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing disease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Head</strong>- utilizing scientific methods</td>
<td><strong>Head</strong>- --</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing information</td>
<td>Marketing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding systems</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing resources</td>
<td>Wise use of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing creativity</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making decisions</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 (Continued)
Table 2.2: Comparisons of Two 4-H Life Skills Models (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solving problems</th>
<th>Problem solving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing information</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to learn</td>
<td>Learning to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking critically</td>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping records</td>
<td>Keeping records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and organizing</td>
<td>Planning and organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving goals</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating in your environment</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with numbers</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Barkman & Machmates, 2000; Hendricks, 1996

*This indicates the skill was not included (--)*

The Four-Fold model (Barkman & Machmates, 2000) is another framework used for the design and evaluation of youth development programs. The Four-Fold model includes 47 different skills that will help youth to become confident, capable, caring citizens. The Four-Fold model uses the four H's of 4-H to categorize life skills, incorporating four existing models. The model uses the National Network for Science and Technology science process skills (Horton & Hutchinson, 1997), workforce preparation skills (Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991), TLS Model (Hendricks, 1996), and the Search Institute Developmental Assets Model (Scales & Leffert, 1999).

Studies Addressing Life Skills

Several studies were identified that focused on 4-H and life skills development. Most of these studies used older youth and examined how those participants viewed life skills. Participants included 4-H members, non 4-H members, and stakeholders (i.e.,

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parents of Cloverbuds, 4-H agents who are professional educators in each county Extension office, program assistants, and volunteers). However, only one study specifically focused on Cloverbud life skills (Scheer & Lafontaine, 1999). A review of these studies follows.

Cantrell, Heinsohn, and Doebler (1989) questioned 4-H youth between the ages of 13 and 19. The questions youth responded to focused on 4-H participation and involvement and perceptions of their life skill development. The study found that participation in 4-H activities was positively related to life skills development especially in the areas of leadership, personal development, and citizenship. Life skill development increased as the member experienced leadership roles beyond the 4-H club level.

Boyd, Herring, and Briers (1992) used both 4-H and non 4-H members who were between ages 13 to 19 to answer questions based on their perceived leadership life skill development. They studied individuals' perceptions of leadership life skill development and its relationship to participation in 4-H and non 4-H activities. They found that 4-H is positively related to perceived leadership life skill development and that 4-H youth described having higher ratings of leadership life skills than non-4-H members.

Seevers and Dormody (1995) questioned senior 4-H members. They studied whether involvement in activities that included leadership life skills was significantly related to leadership skills and effective planning, implementing, and evaluating. The 4-H members in their study indicated having positive perceptions of leadership skills developed through their activities and participation in the 4-H program.

Ward (1996) surveyed 4-H animal science alumni members to determine the relationship between participation in 4-H animal science projects and the development of
valuable life skills. Members identified having positive influences through particular 4-H activities such as judging events, skillathons, shows, and quiz bowl events. This participation has helped some individuals in developing a career through their experiences in 4-H animal science. Ward (1996) concluded that 4-H programs like animal science provided positive experiences and encouraged the development of valuable skills for living.

A study conducted at Montana State University identified how 4-H participants in the 5th, 7th, and 9th grades were more likely than other children to succeed in school with more A’s, to be involved in leadership activities in school and the community, to be looked upon as role models, and to help others in the community (Astroth & Haynes, 2001). Experience in 4-H helped youth become confident, caring citizens. The researchers concluded that “4-H is a proven, research-based program that is making a difference in the lives of today’s youth and families” (Astroth & Haynes, 2001, p. 16).

On the same note, information from the final report of a Cornell University study focused on understanding the difference 4-H club participation made in youth’s life and the ways 4-H influenced and contributed to positive youth development (Rodriguez, Hirschl, Mead, & Goggin. 1999). For example, 4-H club members felt they had “gained skills that would support them throughout their lives” (p. 57). 4-H youth expressed in their own words comments such as “I have learned how to be a leader and take on challenging tasks” (p. 58). One youth identified that “4-H has given me opportunities to grow and have fun doing so” (p. 60). Another youth mentioned that “as a member, I feel that I have gained many important values. Some of these values include leadership, citizenship, and self-confidence” (p. 61).
Scheer and Lafontaine's (1999) study with Cloverbuds is the only one that examined 4-H life skills development of 5-to-8-year-olds. In this study five life skills were reviewed: self-esteem/self-confidence, social interaction/making friends, decision making/making choices, learning to learn, and physical mastery. They surveyed stakeholders including Extension Agents, program assistants, volunteers, and parents of Cloverbuds. Those stakeholders answered questions based on their perceptions of the Cloverbud program to determine if the 5-to-8-year-olds learned life skills through their participation. Stakeholders reported that the program was positive for the child in regard to learning skills necessary for life and that it was effective in improving life skills for 5 to-8-year-olds. Scheer and Lafontaine concluded that the Cloverbud program is beneficial because it enables children to learn life skills.

Overall, each study provided support for relating 4-H participation and life skill development. Each of the studies identified life skills that were gained through participation or activities to enhance those life skills. Of those individual studies a few did address the perceived definitions of life skills, the perceptions of the benefits of the programs, or factors that contribute to youth experience in the program facilitating life skill development, but not for Cloverbuds. The studies identified life skills learned and that the program is positive for members. Although five life skills were addressed in Scheer and Lafontaine's (1999) research, numerous skills were identified in other studies. Those skills identified may be worded differently in other studies, overlap with other defined life skills, and may be labeled differently from the five skills identified in Scheer and Lafontaine's (1999) research. No one model of life skills was used as the foundation
for the studies and therefore is a potential source of confusion when attempting to compare the results of the studies.

Scheer and Lafontaine (1999) asked about those specific skills that were already targeted as part of the program rather than asking which skills parents thought their children learned. Although Scheer and Lafontaine (1999) collected data from stakeholders rather than the individual Cloverbud member, the stakeholders’ levels of understanding and experience in observing younger members helped provide more complete answers regarding the Cloverbud program. Five-to-8- year-old are able to answer questions but developmentally may have difficulty reflecting on an ongoing process of which they are a part. They are not experienced enough to make such comparisons. Although the other studies focused on the 4-H youth themselves, Scheer and Lafontaine used 4-H stakeholders rather than the participants. The decision to use stakeholders may be due to the Cloverbud age and the difficulty of having younger youth accurately complete written surveys.

**Parents as a Source of Information**

Children are special people in the way they describe and understand the world. When researching children, the researcher should be cautious when trying to understand and predict the way children understand and think. The researcher should have an understanding of what youth are going through in relation to life skills development and have an understanding of evaluation measures when making judgments on analyzing research with children. Because children are at different developmental levels of understanding, asking questions and doing research with children is a skill that needs
cultivation and may require training and dealing with issues at all levels of research (Greig & Taylor, 1999).

Parents are the ones who observe the changes and skills their child learns through their experiences. Stone and Lemanek (1990) and Vandell and Su (1999) described that most adults are able to provide adequate information through interview procedures whereas children have been viewed as unreliable perceivers and reporters. The accuracy of children's self-reports will depend upon their cognitive and social development. The child is able to describe the behavior of others but not necessarily provide an explanation for the behavior, nor distinguish cause and effect for their own or others' actions (Stone & Lemanek, 1990). Hurd, Lerner, and Barton (1999) clarified how parents, teachers, and neighbors are key individuals engaged in the process of teaching, nurturing, and caring for children. Whitehead and Ginsberg (1999) explained that when parents feel welcomed in an environment, they are more apt to give information, support, and ideas on programs regarding their children's education. Parents then feel their information is of value to the program. Whitehead and Ginsberg (1999) suggested "acknowledge[ing] parents as the people who know the most about their children and [that they] are the primary people in their children's lives" (p. 9). Researchers seeking information and participation from parents should ensure that parents have an important role in the study by offering ideas, suggestions, and information about their child. For these reasons, parents are an appropriate source of information regarding the study of children. With these considerations in mind, asking parents about their child's experiences in the Cloverbud program can be expected to provide valuable information regarding his or her life skill development.
Summary

4-H youth programs are designed to enhance life skills. A focus on young school-age children ages 5 to 8 has extended the benefits of these programs to younger children. The Ohio Cloverbud program follows national guidelines that promote positive youth development and opportunity for life skills development. While the literature provides several studies on the importance of life skills with 4-H youth, fewer studies have been conducted examining life skills of 5- to 8-year-olds in comparison to studies of life skills in older youth. The one study of Cloverbud-age youth used adults as the source of data (Scheer & Lafontaine, 1999). The study provided a general sense that these adults (i.e., parents, volunteers, Extension professionals) believed the program was beneficial. They used survey techniques without determining the parent’s understanding of life skill development and the factors that they believed contribute to it. Parents of the Cloverbud participants have important knowledge to provide regarding their child’s involvement and the observed learning and life skills development. They initially are the key providers for their child and the decision makers in their child’s involvement in activities, clubs, and education. A qualitative study designed to solicit parent’s perceptions would contribute to the existing literature on this topic.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative methodology was selected for this study in order to obtain parents’ perceptions related to the 4-H Cloverbud program. Qualitative research involves a detailed description of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behavior, using direct quotations from participants and the information they share about their experiences (Patton, 1980). Open-ended questions are used in an attempt to collect information and capture the participant’s own words. This allows the respondent to see the world, as they know it, not how the researcher determines. Taking this into consideration, the researcher has to be able to understand the respondents’ points of view. Qualitative research does not predetermine the outcome of the information. Qualitative research also uses natural settings for participants to help them feel comfortable in providing information. With qualitative research, however, the process can be longer and more detailed, and the results require different methods of analysis.

Both quantitative and qualitative research rely on instruments to collect data. The instruments used in quantitative research are less open-ended, unlike those used in qualitative research. Quantitative research measures information that is systematized, and standardized, whereas qualitative information can take longer to collect. Quantitative research predetermines the scope of responses and
the amount of data that will be collected. The information collected is fit into pre-established categories and numerical values are attached. The data in qualitative research are collected in the form of words rather than numbers. There is a greater emphasis on description and capturing the participant’s perspective. The data are analyzed inductively. Patton (1980) explains that

It makes sense to count the number of people who enter a program, the number who leave the program, the number who receive or report some concrete benefits from the program. There are many attributes of programs, however, that do not lend themselves to counting. Even the scaling of quality attributes is an inadequate way of capturing either program quality or the effect of a program upon the quality of life experienced by participant following the program. (p. 73)

Both a qualitative and quantitative approach can provide important information. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that while there are different ways to look at data collection, the researcher determines the best way to collect information based on the research questions.

There are many types of qualitative methods and using focus groups is one of those. Focus groups are defined as a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures (Krueger, 1988). Focus groups serve as a chief means of collecting qualitative data (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups help provide insights into individuals’ attitudes, perceptions, and opinions on the subject matter (Krueger, 1988). Therefore, perceptions and values can be obtained in a qualitative manner by asking parents questions about their child’s participation in the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program.

Focus groups are helpful for public or private organizations and institutions for planning, organizing, and setting goals (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The researcher can intentionally listen to what individuals have to say about the
organization and where the organization should head. The focus group results help identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and what is missing in an organization. Focus groups provide qualitative information useful for developing and maintaining value within organizations, and they are used to define quality, test procedures or solutions to ideas, and gather an understanding on issues relating to an organization. Using focus groups will help provide valuable information from participants as well as convey the needs of an organization. The participants feel a sense of importance by being asked questions and by having someone listen to them. It is recommended to work with an individual who is willing to give permission to contact those participants and to help in the data collection process (Morgan & Scannell, 1998).

Participating in research places an emphasis on the individuals involved in the community, organization, or event. These participants provide information to the organization by communicating their perceptions and helping improve utilization of programs and services. Through using focus groups, useful information has helped assess needs, obtain general information, develop plans, test new ideas, and improve existing programs.

Just as with any method of data collection, Morgan (1997) emphasizes there are strengths and weaknesses associated with conducting focus groups. Focus groups are low cost to carry out and quick results can be obtained. By using the participants own words, they provide high face validity. The ultimate test of credibility or face validity is how others respond to it and the extent to which they perceive that the results are believable (Patton, 1990). Focus groups are flexible, and the technique is a socially-oriented research method. The
Weaknesses include difficulty in analyzing data. The moderators and assistants require special skills, the differences between groups may be troublesome, the groups may be difficult to assemble, and the discussion must be conducted in a conducive environment.

Morgan (1997) explained the rules of thumb in the planning process for conducting focus groups. Where compatibility is a key concern, focus groups should use homogeneous participants so that participants perceive each other as fundamentally similar (Morgan & Scannell, 1998). Morgan (1997) identified how the researcher should rely on a structured interview with high moderator involvement. Additionally, a focus group should have six to ten participants in each group, with a total of three to five groups per project. Because some will not be able to attend, Morgan (1997) recommended inviting 20% more participants than expected. When preparing for the focus group, it is important for the participants to be comfortable when asked questions. Krueger (1998b) recommended having a well-lit room that is comfortable and suggested finding a location familiar to the participants and simple to locate. Participants in familiar areas tend to be more comfortable in providing information. With consideration to the guidelines recommended by Morgan (1997), parents of children in the 4-H Cloverbud program were selected as participants for this study. Although they may or may not know each other, these parents or guardians have a child or children in the Cloverbud program and are from the same county. The parent is also capable of understanding the questions and providing accurate answers.
The primary data collection method was focus group interviews. However, the research design evolved during the course of the study. The following section describes the process of data collection from these sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Location/Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>County A, November 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County B, December 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County C, December 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>4-H Rally Night, February 2002</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cloverbud Clinic, March 2002</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4-H Ohio Volunteer Conference, March 2002, session titled “Utilizing the Cloverbud Connection newsletter: A learning tool for volunteers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Review</td>
<td>Print articles: newsletters &amp; brochures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electronic: 4-H Cloverbud Volunteer Video</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus Groups**

**Instruments**

The original goals and objectives of the study were used to develop questions to guide the focus groups. Krueger’s (1998a) recommendations helped in constructing the specific questions to be used for the focus groups. Krueger (1998a) identified specific types of questions—opening, key, transition, and closing questions. Krueger (1998b) identified how an opening question is an
icebreaker. The researcher's goal is to get the participants comfortable to converse with each other and to help guide the study. The opening question used in this study was "If you would, tell us your name and one thing you would like us to know about your child and one thing that your child does that makes you smile." Transition questions lead to the key questions and link the two. An example used was "List three activities your child has participated in with the Cloverbud program." These questions go into more depth than the opening questions. Key questions help drive the study and consist of two to five questions (Krueger, 1998a). Key questions require more time to answer. An example of a key question used in the focus groups was "Have you heard the word life skills within conversation or reading about the program?" The researcher also probes participants for detailed answers. Ending or closing questions usually involve asking if anything has been missed. Before the final questions there is a short overview of the material. An example of ending questions was "Of all the life skills we mentioned today, which one is most important to you? The least important? Why?" This was shortly followed by the final question, "Have we missed anything?" The complete instrument is located in Appendix A.

Data Collection

Three counties in Ohio were chosen representing a small, medium, and large population in Ohio. Having participants from varied backgrounds allowed for a variety of perspectives. In consultation with the state specialist responsible for the statewide Cloverbud program, counties with a workable, active Cloverbud program were considered over counties that were new to the Cloverbud program. Those counties with new agents or currently without an agent were not
considered. Counties that had experienced recent staff transitions were also excluded from consideration.

Approval for the study was sought and obtained from the University’s Office of Research Risks Protection Institutional Review Board. The participants in the study were recruited from parents whose children were actively involved in the Cloverbud 4-H program in the county. The potential participants were identified from 4-H Youth Development Agents in the three selected counties in Ohio. Agents were called and asked to provide a list of possible participants who had varied background, ethnicity, income level, and education along with home contact information (Appendix B). The agents were also asked to send a letter to the Office of Research Risks Protection verifying permission to contact the list of participants in regard to the study. These parents were mailed a letter explaining the nature of the study, stating that calls would be made the following week to ask for volunteers for the focus group (Appendix C). Parents were called, given an explanation of the project, and asked to participate in a focus group (Appendix D). I also considered the idea that parents would want to make connections as to how their home and family information was received. I made it clear to the potential parents how their county agent sent me a list of parents whose children were in Cloverbuds. I also reminded the parents about how I obtained their information when I called to recruit participants for the focus groups. Therefore, it was important to emphasize the connection to the county program and Ohio State University Extension (OSUE) when contacting parents. After calling and obtaining participants, a letter was mailed to those agreeing to participate in the focus group with verification of time, date, location, and nature of the study.
(Appendix E). A reminder call was also made to those participants the evening before the focus group (Appendix F). I carried out a mock focus group with four individuals prior to the three focus groups interviews. The participants in the mock focus group helped by providing ideas and suggesting changes to the format and wording of the questions for clarity. Minor changes were made before the first focus group was conducted.

I conducted three focus groups, one in each of the selected counties. Each focus group interview was held at the County Extension Office, a familiar area to the participants. Refreshments and beverages were provided to the participants. This was an opportunity for me to socialize with the parents and for everyone to get to know one another. A microphone was set in the center of the table to record responses to the questions. In addition to facilitating the group, I operated the tape recorder, took notes in case of technical difficulties, and probed parents to discuss and add to the conversation. I had an assistant for the largest focus group and no assistant for the remaining two smaller focus groups. I explained to the participants that they may agree or disagree with other focus group participants’ comments throughout the focus group and that they should feel free to share their views within the focus group interview. The moderating script I used is located in Appendix G. Throughout the session, I facilitated discussion and clarified questions. The focus groups were approximately 90 minutes in length.

Participants

From a total of 42 participants who were contacted, 25 parents were interested in participating in the focus group. Several parents who were contacted
could not attend due to personal or family-related events. Only a few parents had mentioned that they were not interested in participating. From those 25 parents who had originally agreed to participate, 12 attended. Lack of attendance was due to illness or last minute conflicts with childcare.

Those parents who volunteered to respond to the questions composed the focus groups. There were twelve parents in all who participated, a total of three males and nine females. Some parents were also in the role of adviser. Characteristics of focus group participants are reported in Table 3.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Adviser</th>
<th>Non Adviser</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>12</td>
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**Analysis**

After each focus group was completed, I transcribed the data and began the analysis. Focus group analysis is systematic and planned. Krueger and Casey (2000) recommended analyzing data along the way by transcribing between focus groups. By transcribing between focus groups, the researcher can adjust questions and probe for more information in subsequent sessions if necessary.
All the information obtained from the focus group sessions was reported without identifying the parent. To protect the participants' identity, individuals were identified in the transcripts by a code consisting of a letter and a number (e.g., A1, B2). The transcription was single spaced with double spacing between participant responses. Whatever the researcher said was bold in the text. This format allowed the reader to easily spot who is speaking. The interpretation of the audiotapes was reported in narrative form. I used the notes taken during the focus groups while transcribing the tapes. The peer reviewers, my adviser, and I were the only ones with access to any raw data. Transcriptions were coded, sorted, and reduced to produce categories and themes.

Using a process known as open coding (Straus & Corbin, 1990), I developed categories to reduce the data to a more manageable form and to give meaning to it. Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, and categorizing data (Straus & Corbin, 1990). There are a variety of approaches to open coding. I began by analyzing my first focus group transcript with a line-by-line analysis. In doing this, I created categories, which helped me to focus on my next focus group interview. I later coded by sentence or paragraph by asking myself, “What is the major idea addressed in this sentence or paragraph?” I finally reviewed the entire document and re-examined the data from the three groups collectively, developing more specific categories as needed. Several themes emerged from this analysis. I grouped participants' comments under the theme headings. The tapes were destroyed after the data analysis reports were completed.
Peer review. The process of establishing validity and reliability in a qualitative study is important. To establish validity, qualitative researchers are advised to go through a process of peer review (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). For the researcher to have credibility in his or her findings, the researcher should ask, "How confident are you in the researcher's observations, interpretations, and conclusions? Are they believable?" (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002, p. 451). Using peer reviews is one way to add credibility. Reviewers are given the raw data along with the researcher's interpretations and explanations to read through and determine if they consider the interpretations to be reasonable. The reviewers are asked if, given the evidence presented, they considered the interpretation to be logical. The peer reviewers may identify problems or suggest changes. Two youth development agents with experience in research methods and with the 4-H Cloverbud program agreed to be peer reviewers. Overall, they supported the themes developed during the data analysis, suggesting only minor points of clarification. These points were resolved in consultation with my adviser.

**Triangulation**

While the focus group interviews provided a major source of qualitative information, with qualitative data it also recommended to obtain information from more than one source, a process known as triangulation (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). Triangulation may include a combination of data sources such as interviews, observations, and relevant documents (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). Patton (1990) identified how by combining multiple observations, methods and data sources, the researcher can hope to overcome fundamental bias.
that comes from single methods or single-observer methods. Certain kinds of research questions can be answered through observation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). A researcher can observe how people act or how things look. An observer can be identified as the researcher only and not participate with the group. In addition to the focus group interviews, I collected written materials and observed three Cloverbud-related meetings involving adults. These additional sources of information helped with the analysis. Triangulation helped me to examine whether the data from focus group interviews were supported through additional sources and were consistent in my data. The combination of data collection through focus groups, observations, and documentation helped validate the information gathered from the focus groups regarding parents’ perceptions of the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program.

Documents

Because parents had mentioned having heard about life skills through papers, brochures, and other forms of printed material, I asked the 4-H Agent in the county for copies or samples of the information for verification and to help identify with the parent’s perceptions of life skills. A video was also viewed. I looked to see if anything that was described by parents was portrayed in the video and documentation. I also looked for the words “life skills” in the documents.

Observations

I observed a 4-H rally, a Cloverbud training session, and a session at the statewide Ohio Volunteer Conference. A key leader in a county in Ohio led the 4-H Rally and the Cloverbud training session. I looked for instances of
conversations involving life skills development, as well as how the program was presented to parents. I observed questions and comments the parents had about involving their child and about the program. I made notes of the observations and compared those observations to the focus group results.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Data from several sources was used to address the research questions. First, findings from three focus groups are presented. Next, a review of written and electronic publication documents containing Cloverbud organizational material and life skills information is presented. Finally, I discuss observations of specific 4-H activities related to Cloverbuds.

Focus Group Interviews

During the focus group interview, I asked questions specifically focusing on the study's four research objectives. The focus group interviews provided a major source of data in relation to the original goals and objectives of the study. The major themes are listed in Table 4.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1</th>
<th>Respondent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions and Perceptions of Life Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Knowledge of Life Skills | Some had heard of life skills  
Others had not heard of life skills |
| Definitions | Learning life skills is a forward process  
Parents identified 3 life skills learned that are targeted in the Cloverbud program: learning to learn, social skills, self-esteem |

(Continued)
Table 4.1: Respondent Themes (Continued)

Parents identified 2 additional skills: community awareness, accountability/responsibility

**Perceptions of Life Skills Learned**

Self-care type skills: Safety
Independence

Social interaction type skills: Social interaction
Group work
Communication

Self-directed type skills: Patience
Responsibility
Self-worth

**Perceptions of Least Important Skills**

All skills are important as long as children are comfortable
Entertainment is least important, learning is more important

**Perception of Skills Not Addressed**

Program is positive and there are only so many skills a child can learn
Program does not address diversity
Health is not addressed

**Perception of the Benefits of the Cloverbud Program**

**Perceptions of Benefits**

A group just for the children
Cloverbuds learn to communicate and socialize

**Perception of Factors That Contribute to Youth Experiences That Facilitate Life Skill Development**

**Perceptions of Cloverbud Activities**

Hands-on activities
Fair activities
Cloverbud camp activities
Community service activities
Craft skills

**Activities Helpful in Developing Life Skills**

Learning skills together
Activities focusing on communication

(Continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Organization and Structures of Cloverbud Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning About Cloverbuds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agents</td>
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<tr>
<td>County volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family members</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Born into 4-H”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal Ways of Learning of Cloverbuds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flyers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly county newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cloverbud Connection newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events (e.g., superclinic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining Cloverbuds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs help keep the children out of trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program is positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program is flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents enjoy socialization with other parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents assume there is structure with the rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is structure with the activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is more of an introduction to get children involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children keep busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloverbud Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents need to feel comfortable to allow their child to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know and trust the leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With caring, nurturing people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to know if transportation is involved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1: Respondent Themes (Continued)

Continuing the Cloverbud Program
Continue welcoming new members and activities
Continue bringing in new ideas and teaching methods
Continue networking and interacting with others
Address interests of children
Continue with noncompetitive structure

Parent Involvement
Assist as advisers
Helping hand
Bystander
Parents enjoy social time with other adults

Research Question 1: Definitions and Perceptions of Life Skills

Knowledge of Life Skills

Parents were asked if they had heard of life skills within conversation or reading in relation to the Cloverbud program. Some parents had heard the word life skills while others had not. Approximately half of the parents had heard of life skills. Parents indicated, “I’ve heard of life skills,” followed by, “that is supposed [to] be what we’re teaching them.” One participant explained that the “Cloverbuds have a chance to learn life skills.” Parents contrasted life skills versus working on project skills. They explained that they would not bother with the program if it were only for “entertainment.” Those parents who know of life skills understand that the program should focus on teaching skills as opposed to learning project skills. By project skills, parents meant competition and more advanced learning they thought the children were not developmentally ready for.
For those parents who have heard of life skills, there are specific places they learned of them. Parents have read about life skills in written materials such as handbooks. Participants in one county identified that there is a handbook with research and other information regarding the program, and information on life skills is in one section of the handbook. Another written source parents mentioned was a newsletter known as the *Cloverbud Connection*. Parents mentioned how the newsletter includes activities, recipes, upcoming events, and other Extension information.

Some parents have not heard of life skills. One parent stated that life skills are not learned through meetings. Other parents explained that life skills were not in the reading materials. A few parents heard of life skills for the first time that evening during the focus group. Three of those parents who already knew of life skills were parents who were current advisers whereas the other parents were not in this role.

**Definitions**

Parents provided several definitions of life skills. A few parents explained that developing life skills is a forward process needed to succeed in life, as one gets older. One parent said, “What your child would learn throughout [their] lives given [the] skills to get [a] career, job, college, and trade.” Another parent recognized life skills as being “what [the] child is going to need to succeed in life.” The skills learned go beyond the program and will continue with the child as they develop.
In their discussion of life skills definitions, the parents identified three skills that are targeted in the Cloverbud program: learning to learn (e.g., gaining subject matter), social skills (e.g., presenting oneself), and self-esteem. Parents' comments such as "being able to gain knowledge," and "have fun gaining knowledge," were categorized as learning to learn. Related to social skills, parents identified key words such as "ability to get along with others," and stated that "the social skills" are learned in the program. Self-esteem was represented by two comments-- "self-confidence" and "self-esteem."

As they defined life skills, parents also mentioned the importance of community and accountability. Parents recognized the awareness of and the need to take care of the community in their definition of life skills. In developing skills of community awareness, the children began to realize what they were doing for the community, became familiar with it, and realized what was involved in taking care of it. The children begin to know other people who also help with the community. In addition to identifying key words, the parents identified that the program and the community work "trains them young to have awareness of [the] community." Parents also identified accountability as a skill addressed in the Cloverbud program. The idea of accountability was captured in parents' statements that the children, whether they completed a project or not, will be affected and will observe its effect. One parent said his child "works hard, studies, and did it [the project] right." The final outcome for the child was the "gratification" or outcome that resulted from working on their project or craft, or
from participating in activities. Parents believed that Cloverbuds are held accountable for their work and responsibilities in 4-H.

Perceptions of Life Skills Learned

Parents identified three main types of life skills they observed as part of the Cloverbud program. I classified these as self-care type skills, social interaction skills, and self-directed skills. Furthermore, parents gave examples of Cloverbuds learning self-care type skills that I classified as safety skills and independence skills. Regarding safety skills, parents said their child learned about poisons in the house, which drugs to avoid, and when to talk with strangers. The children also learned to memorize their address and phone numbers. Closely related to safety were independence skills recognized by the parents. Once the child learns safety, parents hoped that they could use those skills to become more independent. The parents identified that children have a “chance to do things independently” through what they are learning in the program. They learn about the world around them. According to parents, the child learns to become resourceful and accountable, learns responsibility, and learns money management.

Another major skill the parents have observed their children learning is social interaction. The children interact socially in a group as well as interact through working together. Parents used the terms “social interaction,” “social skills,” “successful interaction,” “interaction with strangers or with each other,” and “talking with groups,” to describe this life skill. In their discussion of interaction and working together they used the following terms: cooperation,
non-competitive, sharing, teamwork, how to be successful as part of a group, focus on group, learn how to fit into groups, and how to get along. These terms confirmed the idea that they placed emphasis on working together and interacting with others as opposed to individual work.

Parents were asked to identify those skills most effectively learned in the program. Cloverbuds have learned communication. One parent acknowledged, “We focus strongly on communication. . . . [and we] work to break them out of [their] shell to talk.” Another parent stated how he enjoyed that his daughter was “able to speak in public and be comfortable with it.”

The Cloverbuds engage in group activities that promote skills such as teamwork, cooperation, and taking turns to enhance communication skills. One parent acknowledged that working together and teamwork are skills effectively addressed in the program. Two parents recognized that the program was effective in developing cooperation. Three additional parents stated how taking turns is an effective tool used in the program. They acknowledged that “learn[ing] to take turns and successful interaction” are important.

Parents also identified several other skills, which I grouped under the category of self-directed skills. One parent said that they thought “patience is a big thing because kids have to learn to wait to do a craft.” Another parent stated his child is “responsible” and learns “self-worth.” Another acknowledged “self-control” as a skill effectively learned in the program.

The parents recognized that skills learned now can carry over into the future. One parent mentioned that the program skills are “something to look
forward to, something they can get involved in [during the] next 8-10 years throughout college and life.” The children become “responsible learning about project completion and taking the project through completion to where they are satisfied.” Once these skills are learned, they can be used beyond the 4-H program, carrying into the child’s future.

Parents were asked to identify which skills were most important to them. Parents identified that it is important to them that the learning is not limiting but goes beyond 4-H. One parent stated that you have “to understand their learning isn’t limiting but expanded.” Another parent identified that life skills is in everything you do. Being involved in the program helps in church and in school and “unlike church and school, you break up and meet ones never met before.” One parent stated, “Life is a series of things you can learn.” Another parent said that accountability is an important skill. Another said that there is a need for a balance of honesty and responsibility and that honesty is important. When taking projects, the completion of that project is an important skill.

Successful interaction was another important skill to parents. Successful interaction is an effective way to develop life skills. Parents’ comments regarding interacting with others, sharing and cooperating, communicating, and respecting others were classified as successful interaction. That their children had opportunities for interacting and socializing with others was important to several parents. The Cloverbuds begin to respect adults, relate to others and learn how to get along, learn to work together, and learn to play. Making friends helps, explained one parent. Cloverbuds are exposed to other relationships. They learn
to interact through these activities and engagement in the program. Two parents acknowledged that “if [they] can’t get along with others it’s no good” and “[having] no social skills limits you.” Two parents stated that it is important to share and cooperate and to do things together. Two different parents acknowledged how Cloverbuds “have to communicate” and another stated how parents “encouraged getting up and talking to someone.” One parent identified twice how Cloverbuds learn to respect themselves.

**Perceptions of Least Important Skills**

Parents recognized that some skills were least important for their Cloverbud. The parents also identified that it is hard to determine the least important skill, in their opinion, when all are important. One parent acknowledged, “There is really no skill [that is not important].” He also mentioned, “You want [your] child to be comfortable” in addition to there “needs to be a balance.” Parents also stated “does a life skill happen if [it is] not important?” Each of the parents felt the program addresses important skills for their child to learn and that each skill learned seems to be important for the child.

The parents did address that the entertainment value is least important; instead, parents see the program as a learning experience. One parent acknowledged that the “entertainment is least important,” while another said, “It is fun, but they are learning while having fun.” Therefore, based on the parents’ opinions, the entertainment is least important unless the child is actually learning skills in the process.
Two different opinions were expressed about craft skills. Some parents questioned the value of craft projects. One parent stated, "Craft skills probably are not as important." But parents who were advisers understood how crafts fit into the curriculum. One parent acknowledged, "We try to tie in crafts to what is learned," and that "the crafts is learning by doing." The crafts are also considered "hands on learning to fit Cloverbud age."

Skills for running meetings may not be as important for the Cloverbud. According to one parent, "They learn how meetings are conducted just from being there and that's not as important."

**Perceptions of Skills Not Addressed**

Parents recognized skills that are not currently being addressed in the program but that may be important. A few parents identified that there is only so much a child can learn. Parents recognized skills not being addressed but added that the children enjoy any 4-H activity. Although I asked them their perception of skills not addressed in the program, the parents reiterated that the program is positive. The Cloverbuds get "real satisfaction from it" and a sense of "self-esteem," stated one parent. It may have been easier for the parents to address positive perspectives of the Cloverbud program before addressing a negative.

According to parents, the program does not provide experience with diversity. One parent explained that racial diversity is not experienced in the program. In addition, her children "aren't experienced with diversity in school, church, or 4-H." On the other hand, another parent acknowledged that racial diversity is least important to learn. He did not see this as an issue or skill needed
in the program. A third parent mentioned how the program “doesn’t teach preference of religion” but that “it respect[s] religious participation.” She also stated that there is nothing about sexism. A final skill not being addressed is health skills, although one parent acknowledged that the children “have health reports at each meeting from older members.” Parents commented that at the age these children are, there is only so much they can learn. However, according to the parents, they did not have much education or experience in the area of diversity or health in the Cloverbud program.

**Research Question 2: Perception of the Benefits of the Cloverbud Program**

**Perceptions of Benefits**

In addition to life skills learned, parents were asked to identify other benefits of the program. Parents’ overall impression of the program was positive. One parent acknowledged that the program was a “positive influence.” Another parent said her child “asks about Cloverbuds each week.” Several parents identified how their children feel special because they have a group of their own, separate from their siblings. Having this special group appears to meet their needs. Often, even though they meet at the same time as the older 4-H’ers, the Cloverbuds have a separate room for their own meeting and do different project activities. The children are also with their own peers. Overall, several parents stated that the program is a “group just for them [children].” In having their own special group, parents perceived that the program was geared toward the children’s needs, particularly regarding their “short attention span.” Several
parents stated that there is a “lack of things for five-year-olds to join.” The
Cloverbud program is one group for children of this age group.

The parents saw positive results from their child’s participation. The
children communicate and socialize. One parent discussed how his child shares
with the group at the fair about projects and what the Cloverbuds have learned.
The same parent explained how his child discussed individual projects and is
encouraged to talk about them. The parents felt that the communication and
socialization their children experience in Cloverbuds helps them feel comfortable
and able to speak more openly. A second parent discussed how her child met
other children to become friends with through participation. Having the same
interest as other children in the 4-H group (e.g., horses) facilitated the
development of friendships. A third parent mentioned that the activities are
positive and knew 4-H was a “good opportunity for kids.” Overall, according to
parents, Cloverbuds is appropriate for their children because they feel that it is
positive, fits their needs, and helps them feel special by having their own little
group.

Research Question 3: Perception of Factors That Contribute to Youth
Experiences That Facilitate Life Skill Development

Perceptions of Cloverbud Activities

Parents gave examples of different types of activities. The Cloverbuds
engage in hands-on activities. Examples of hands-on activities included dealing
with food such as making cupcakes, making snacks, and learning about the food
groups, snacks, and menus. The skillathon is another hands-on activity. The
Cloverbuds role play and learn parts of the animal for the skillathon. They also identify meats, parts of the animals, breeds, medicines, and housekeeping of different animals. The children also get involved with nature activities. The Cloverbuds go hiking, go down to streams and look at rocks, leaves, and nature. Other hands-on activities included Cloverbud show and tell where the children got up and discussed something they brought to the meeting. The Cloverbuds also launched rockets, hatched eggs, folded flags, went horseback riding, went skiing with the family, and experimented with limitations others may have in life.

Cloverbuds engaged in fair activities as well. They worked on the fair booth to display their projects, got involved in the peewee showmanship for fun, made a pop bottle pig from a plastic pop bottle and presented a show for the judge, and gave reviews at the fair. The children also got involved in fundraisers. One club sold tickets to a monster truck show to raise money. Camp is another activity Cloverbuds engage in. Cloverbud camp was mentioned five times by the parents.

Several community service activities were mentioned. Five parents mentioned that their club picked up litter at camp and in the community. The Cloverbuds helped plant flowers at the care center and decorated buildings with flowers, they raked leaves, pulled grass, and planted trees. Some held a petting zoo at the nursing home and also performed bingo at the nursing home. Cloverbuds recycled products. One county held a superclinic in the community that advertised 4-H and what it had to offer. Parents commented that the Cloverbuds “liked community activities,” and were “made aware of their
community.” The Cloverbuds realized “they’re helping the community.” Parents also stated that the “community service is important to Cloverbud activity.”

Cloverbuds participated in craft activities. Four parents mentioned crafts. One parent said her son’s Cloverbud group has a Mom and Dad Day where the children made crafts for the parents. A few other parents mentioned particular crafts such as sewing, making a toss pillow, and making parts of a quilt.

Parents explained that the overall results of activities were positive. Parents acknowledged that the program is “fun,” the children “love it,” and it is “very successful,” and the overall results are “great.” The Cloverbuds have a great opportunity to talk with others and speak publicly. Children get up in front of others to present activities and what they have learned. They also experienced public speaking by saying the 4-H pledge. The children get experience talking in front of the judge even if the program is non competitive. The president in one club makes it a point to call on everyone to share opinions and have the opportunity for discussion. With that, the younger ones get the chance to speak up. There are opportunities to interact with older children and take care of each other when sharing meeting and group activities. The children participate in role-playing as well. The program helps build confidence through these interactions and public speaking. The 4-H program acts as a mentoring program where the older ones teach the younger ones. Camp is another fun activity that Cloverbuds like. Only one parent mentioned how her child’s club is not as organized.
Activities Helpful in Developing Life Skills

Parents identified activities that helped Cloverbuds develop life skills. Those activities that involved learning skills together through interaction and involvement were helpful. Learning things together included interacting with older 4-H’ers, having game night with older and younger members as well as with the advisers playing together.

Another helpful type of activity to develop skills is “speaking up.” One parent recognized that communication occurred by sharing opinions, getting children to talk, having them share information at the meetings, having older members ask the young ones their opinions, asking the Cloverbud to identify things they like or dislike about the fair, and having younger ones have a voice. These activities were all important for the Cloverbud in regard to developing communication skills. An additional parent said that speaking up at meetings is helpful in developing skills.

Research Question 4: Perceptions of Organization and Structures of the Cloverbud Program

Learning About Cloverbuds

Parents identified ways they learned about the program. There are informal ways parents are learning about the program. Parents learned from word of mouth in general, from agents, from county volunteers, and from family members. One parent stated that most learn about the program from “word of mouth.” Another parent said that “it’s a people connection.” Individuals in the community refer others to the program in the area. If people are not “born into
4-H," then they may hear about the program from others in the area, identified one parent. Parents talk to other parents. A few parents named specific names of people who introduced them to the program. Another parent read through a list of clubs and recognized names of people she knew.

Some parents found out about the program through the county 4-H Agent. Others found out through county volunteers or advisers, while some learned about the program through family members. One parent mentioned that her children saw how much fun their cousins were having in the program and how they enjoyed the projects. Her sister, who had children in 4-H, informed them of the program.

Another informal way of learning about the Cloverbud program is by being "born into it." Most parents were in 4-H growing up or were advisers when Cloverbuds began. One parent said most of the 4-H members were born into 4-H.

There are also formal ways of learning about the Cloverbud program. Much of the information about the program is read through papers or learned from information available at public places and events. Information about the program is learned through flyers, newspapers, articles, and weekly county newspapers, or the Cloverbud Connection newsletter.

Parents learned about the program through several places: school, fair, and special events (e.g., superclinics). Some parents said that the flyers come from schools. The schools promote 4-H and refer parents to call the Extension office for more information. The program is promoted through preschool as well
as for the older grades. Papers are sent home from school that sometimes get lost in the shuffle. That is something the parents have to watch for.

Some parents learned about the Cloverbud program while at the fair. One parent acknowledged, “I overheard what people say while at the fair about Cloverbuds.” Another parent said, “Lots of parents call and say they were at the fair and want to have [their] kid be in 4-H.” Children observe the Cloverbud booth at the fair and notice how the members appear to be their age and then think they should be able to be in and ask about the program. Another parent said that the 4-H office displays information of Cloverbud activities to raise awareness.

Another place parents learned about the Cloverbud program is at superclinics. One county used a superclinic that is held in the county once a year to advertise 4-H to the community. The parents commented that is it a great way to let people in the community get involved and learn about 4-H. The superclinic has little focus on livestock, but more on what goes on in 4-H and the activities and events one can get involved with. The parents stated that the superclinic is “good to bring in 4-H’ers,” and that “lots of new people go through there [the superclinic].”

Parents have recognized that if you were not introduced into 4-H at a younger age you may not know about Cloverbuds. A parent identified that “many parents don’t realize the stepping stone in 4-H, only about 4-H with cattle and older ones [4-H members].” Another parent did not realize all that 4-H can offer. A third parent mentioned that one “may not know about 4-H Cloverbuds if not [at the] fair, [in] FFA, or [in] Grange or other rural root organizations.” Another said
they “probably wouldn’t know about Cloverbuds if not in 4-H as a child.” The parents recognized that the program started by having little siblings being at meetings and wanting to join the program like their older sibling. This gave families an opportunity to work together when 4-H expanded to allow younger children in as members.

Parents identified ideas or questions about how to promote Cloverbuds. One parent explained that Girl Scouts advertise at Kindergarten registration. The same parent was not sure if 4-H sent flyers home from school but knew that Girl Scouts did. Another parent recognized that communication could be better in advertising the program. The parent was not sure how well the program was advertised in the public school but added that giving a presentation to show about Cloverbuds, then having papers sent home with the children to share, would be an idea for advertising. Another parent claimed that the community is so sport oriented that the Cloverbud group is one for those not so sport minded. One parent addressed that there is always a number to call for information regarding the program.

Joining Cloverbuds

Parents identified many reasons for having their child join Cloverbuds. There is exposure through the family that influences the promotion of 4-H. One parent said that 4-H is “genetic.” Another said, “I don’t know if my kids could say no.” One parent said that 4-H was “born in the blood” and depended on a “family history.” The younger siblings want to “be like their older brother because they make money at the fair,” said one parent. “The older ones can be role models if
the young ones are scared of animals,” said one parent whose younger child is 
better being around animals after seeing the older siblings with them. There is 
also exposure through the county 4-H program that influences promotion. One 
parent acknowledged, “Our county is really strong in 4-H.”

One parent mentioned that the “DARE program says to get [your] child in 
other activities before they get astray, in trouble.” This was a reason to get 
children involved in organizations at a young age. Another parent said her child 
is gone from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. in school, then fair, homework, then to bed 
during the summer, implying that the child was kept busy and did not have time to 
get into trouble because of this involvement. Another parent mentioned that you 
learn when you are young. One parent said, “If you wait until the child is 9-10 
they’ve [another club or organization] already got them in something else.” The 
parents love Cloverbuds because it gets their child into an organization early. 
One parent promotes Cloverbuds in school by showing activities to Kindergarten 
teachers. The parent thought it was a good way to get children involved in the 
program.

Parents recognized that the program is positive. This was another 
important reason for the parents to allow their children to join Cloverbuds. The 
program has positive role models, claimed one parent. Two other parents agreed. 
Another parent stated that “with 4-H they never fail, it’s positive.” One parent 
explained that when they were in 4-H it was a “good experience” for them.

Parents identified that 4-H is flexible. If a child wants to join after the 
deadline to join the club, the advisers do not turn them away. Some clubs even
allow younger ones to participate, younger than five. The advisers just make adjustments where needed. Another parent said that 4-H is flexible because the club can focus on more frequent meetings during certain times of the year for more socialization.

Parents enjoy the socialization. One parent recognized that she felt Cloverbuds would help her child make friends by meeting other children. Her child went from shy to interacting “real well with others.” One parent said that the child gets to experience a wide variety of people such as politicians. Another parent said that “if you don’t attend church, play sports, or 4-H, no one meets you, no one comes over, you’re alone.” That parent enjoys when the 4-H’ers recognize who he is. Camp has much to do with meeting others and traveling, claimed another parent.

Parents identified that they like the interaction with other parents. One set of parents was considering joining a national pony organization but there was no parent interaction. They were not happy with the parents’ inability to interact with the children. They were introduced to 4-H, which allowed parents to interact with their children. The parents enjoyed how in the 4-H program there is enough to keep the children interested but not too much that they have to run all over the place. Cloverbuds also have an opportunity to travel. One parent said there is “opportunity to travel to meetings.” Another said their “kids get to travel all over the county.”
Program Structure

Parents identified what they understood as the structure of the program. There are some rules but the program is flexible. The parents assumed that the county follows state rules. The parents have to sign a disclaimer and know that the child has to be in Kindergarten through second grade to be in Cloverbuds.

There is structure with the activities. One parent liked the non-competitive group activities. The children know they cannot compete. The "structure teaches them without reading a book," explained one parent.

The learning is more of an introduction to activities and ideas to get children involved. Parents notice this introductory structure and identify with it. The Cloverbud program introduces skills but not too detailed because they will be addressing those particular skills or activities as they get older. The structure is also a stepping stone to get the children into group activities and to facilitate learning.

Parents recognized a structure that most clubs teach to members. The parents acknowledged that the children learn punctuality, how to get up and go to places on time, and to follow directions.

Parents identified that the ideas for activities come from different places and are shared with others. Each month a variety of activities for lessons and topics can be shared with the Cloverbud leader. Some of the parents identified that these activities can be obtained from the Cloverbud Connection newsletter. The Cloverbud members learned from a Cloverbud book, resource books, other topics and ideas for activities, and information sheets.
Parents recognized that there are several things for children to get involved in to keep busy, interested, and out of trouble. The parents like that the children do a good bit of learning and activity but it is not too much for parents to run everywhere. One club adds an extra non-competitive project that children have on their own. The children can achieve by themselves where the parents or adults are not doing the work for them but helping them. The program gives the children something with structure to work with. The level of activity appears to be good for the child. The program gets the children involved, gets them started, gets them interested, and keeps them out of trouble. One parent said her child was “ornery” and stated that “4-H is a structured environment for him.”

In some cases, the structure could focus more on the Cloverbud and their needs to avoid getting off track. One parent mentioned how the Cloverbuds are pushed aside in her club because the older ones needed more help with projects. She also mentioned that there were not enough volunteers. The two advisers for the club are not always there and one adviser has older children in the club and thus becomes more involved with them. Sometimes the Cloverbuds did not have meetings. Because of the lack of parental volunteers, the Cloverbuds end up watching the older ones. The Cloverbuds look forward to meetings and then get disappointed when they do not get to do anything. The parent thought that there needed to be more structure and organization in that particular club.

Cloverbud Participation

Parents identified what they need to know to feel comfortable to allow their child to participate in Cloverbuds. Knowing and trusting the leaders helped
parents feel comfortable enough to allow her child to participate. One parent put
her child in a group in which she personally knew the adviser and the advisers'
children. Because she knew the adviser the parent acknowledged, "I felt
confident, I was confident in the beginning." Another parent knew the adviser of
her child's club for several years, and she felt comfortable with her. Two other
parents mentioned that they trusted the leader. Another liked "roles women take
on with leadership and creativity." The parents felt safe with the clubs in which
they chose to enroll their child. Again, parents recognized that the program is a
positive one. A parent addressed that he knew 4-H is wholesome. There was
nothing negative about the program in his eyes.

Parents wanted to be sure their children are in a safe environment. The
type of atmosphere is important. The parents wanted someone who is caring and
nurturing, who will teach the child something (not just to have fun), and they want
to know who is working with their child. Parents also wanted to know who is
going to be at the meeting and what they will be doing. Another made the
comment, "Are you transporting them anywhere else?" These are all important
things the parents feel they need to know to keep their child safe and happy.

Continuing the Cloverbud Program

Parents would like to continue the welcoming of new members and
activities into the program. One parent would like to see the program bringing in
new faces, new members, and new teaching methods. The same parent
mentioned that it could be difficult to come up with new ways of doing things.
One parent said their club may break the rule a bit but that they let younger ones,
even if siblings, into the program. Another parent agreed about bringing in new members but thought that it was important to bring in more children other than family members. The same parent also mentioned that it might be a good idea to have more events and gatherings for Cloverbuds only, such as an afternoon where all Cloverbud in the county can get together. One mentioned that more publicity may spark the program or would help advertise the Cloverbud program.

The parents would like to continue the networking and interacting with others. One parent addressed that keeping the spark and interest is important for the program. If the interest is lost then membership may decrease. The program should address the interests of the children and have them learn responsibility and have interaction with others so that when ready to compete they will have the skills to carry on through 4-H. The major goal is to get them started. Another parent said that the networking helps the Cloverbud with social skills. Interaction with adults and different age groups was identified as important. It is also important to meet others aside from the family, and Cloverbuds gives children the chance to meet a variety of individuals. They are not limited to just interacting with schoolmates. Keeping the 4-H interest allows the Cloverbud to learn communication. Life-long friends are developed through the interaction with others. Program promotion needs to convince parents the program is good for their children. Three parents addressed that the program should stay as an organization for Cloverbuds and parents. The children enjoy activities and go home to share their experience with mom and dad. The parents bring in leadership.
The parents enjoy the introduction of structure for the child in a non-competitive program. One parent said that the program gives the child a feel for 4-H, where they can begin to think what they want to do in the program. This parent did not feel that his child is ready for a competitive program. Another parent agreed with the non-competitive part. Cloverbuds gives the child a taste of 4-H without the competition. The Cloverbuds have the opportunity to compete in open classes if they choose to. Another parent recognized that her child will be more prepared being in Cloverbuds and more aware by the time they are an older 4-H member; she thought it was a wonderful stepping stone into the program. They will know what is going on with the flags and projects.

Parent Involvement

Parents assisted in different ways, how and when they can do so. Parents assisted in the adviser role. Four parents mentioned that they are a main adviser for the club. One parent’s favorite way to get involved is through teaching leadership themes. Parents are also helping hands at meetings, at home relating to Cloverbud projects, or at functions or campouts. One parent said that “most [parents] volunteer.” Some parents volunteer at meetings or ask if they may assist. Other parents may help by picking up the children from a meeting or activity or offer to chaperone or ride along for special projects. Parents help their child at home by overseeing chores done including cleaning bedding, feeding and discussing the feeding usage, helping load the trailer, working with the family to get animals ready for the fair, or helping to create a poster of their project.
Sometimes parents take children to do group things with other 4-H'ers. They go to shows such as the fairs or horse shows.

While some parents volunteer or offer assistance, others may be bystanders. These parents tend to occasionally be pulled in to help or assist. One parent stated, "Those who stay [at meetings] usually help out or are pulled in." The same parent mentioned how there is much parent interaction and individual help. Some bystanders only observe at the meeting. These parents may stay at the meeting and only observe because they have a little one to care for while the meetings and activities are going on. Some parents do not volunteer at all because they have to be home with their younger children and are unable to attend. Other bystanders like to watch and observe.

Being involved gives parents time to socialize with other adults and be with their child. One parent mentioned how interacting with adults at the petting zoo in the nursing home was enjoyable. It gave the parent "social time." Another parent likes to interact with others because they do not get to see the other parents as often. An additional parent enjoys visiting with others and enjoys interacting with others in the horse group. Aside from socializing with others, when he goes to the meetings he acknowledged, "I never see children without their parent."

The parent enjoys taking his son to meetings just to be with him.

**Document Analysis**

Parents had mentioned having heard about life skills through papers, brochures, and other forms of printed information. Therefore, such documents were viewed as an important source of information about the Cloverbud program.
4-H Agents in the focus group counties were asked for copies or samples of the information to help identify with the parent’s perceptions of life skills. I also obtained a video that was recently distributed to all County Extension offices in Ohio. Although this video was too new to have been viewed by any of the focus group participants, it was yet another source of organizational information about Cloverbuds.

**Cloverbud Video**

I viewed a 4-H Cloverbud training video that was released in the winter of 2002 (Reed & Scheer, 2002). Information on the history of the program, how the program works, the life skills targeted, ways parents and children can participate, and program development were addressed in the video.

The video reinforced that the goal of the program is to teach self-understanding skills (self-esteem), social interaction skills (getting along with others), decision-making skills, learning skills (learning to learn), and mastering physical skills. Information in the video reviewed how the program is developmentally age appropriate for Cloverbuds. Parents’ views were congruent with information presented in the video. Parents had identified how the program was appropriate for their child: fun, activity based with many types of activities, non-competitive, success oriented, group-centered learning, and positive. These concepts were also presented in the video.

The video also addressed how children can participate in the Cloverbud program. During the focus group parents listed several activities in which their child participated. Similar activities were addressed in the video. Parents noted
that the children participated in separate groups from the older members. They also helped with community projects. The Cloverbud members engaged in trips, community service, field trips, tours, hikes, day camp, and the fair (where they participate and exhibit only and receive equal recognition).

Parents who participated in the focus groups identified several ways they involve themselves. Ways parents can assist with the program were also addressed in the video. First of all, in the video the parents are encouraged to attend the first meeting. Several parents in the focus groups mentioned how they observe, give a helping hand, or assist during their child’s meeting. The video addressed ways that parents can be involved such as hosting meetings, donating supplies, providing refreshments, chaperoning tours, planning community service activities, making phone calls, transporting children, or even sharing skills with the children. Parents addressed several of those in the focus group, including chaperoning tours, transporting children, and helping with meetings.

Finally, the last subject addressed in the video was the Cloverbud program parameters. The parents addressed how the program was positive and agreed on the non-competitive rule. They also felt the importance of safety in the program. However, life skills and program parameters were addressed more specifically in the video. The parents’ perceptions were not influenced by the information in the video since it was not released to Ohio Extension offices until after the focus groups were conducted. Parents perceived an accurate understanding of life skills and program parameters, as well as an accurate perception of what the program intended.
County Brochures

Information addressed by the parents during the focus group interviews was parallel or consistent with information I read in brochures, papers, and other handouts obtained from county programs. There were numerous ways parents learned about, were updated on, and knew what events were going on with the 4-H Cloverbud program. A Cloverbud key leader in another county handed out a bulletin regarding a Cloverbud Clinic during the county 4-H Rally night. A county newsletter contained additional information regarding the Cloverbud Clinic. The 4-H Rally was advertised in two papers, and letters were sent home with children in the schools. Several handouts were available at the 4-H Rally giving information regarding 4-H and all it entails. One particular brochure had a list of clubs in the county with contact information and what each club focused on (i.e., Cloverbuds only, general). Another brochure contained general information about the Cloverbud program listing contact information, curriculum subject matter, events and activities one can participate in, and life skills learned. An additional brochure advertised ways that parents can be involved in the program. Some of those include volunteering your home for meetings, using your car for transportation, providing refreshments, attending events with your child, supporting the child’s interests and allowing them to complete his or her own project, and encouraging 4-H work as being family work. A parent can become a volunteer or an adviser. Such involvement as a leader may include project volunteer, short-term special project volunteer, school group volunteer,
community service volunteer, or club adviser. The parents who participated in the focus groups were involved in several of the ways listed above.

**Observation**

I observed a 4-H rally, a Cloverbud Clinic, and a session at the statewide 4-H volunteer conference. A key leader in a county in Ohio led the 4-H Rally and the Cloverbud Clinic. The 4-H volunteer conference was for all Ohio agents, program assistants, volunteers, or anyone interested in attending the conference. I observed questions and comments the parents had regarding the program and the involvement of their child. These additional sources of information helped with the analysis.

**4-H Rally**

A 4-H Rally night was held in February 2002. This event welcomed anyone with an interest in 4-H to become a volunteer or to learn more about what 4-H has to offer. This two-hour event allowed individuals to walk to each booth containing information on areas of 4-H, learn how to join and what activities and events older and younger youth can participate in, ask questions, and collect information and brochures. The children were able to make a small craft project while their parents asked questions and looked over informational materials about the program. The agent who ran the Rally spoke briefly about the Cloverbud program stating how 4-H is for 5-to 19-year-olds. She explained how Cloverbuds are separate from the older 4-H’ers and take different projects. The agent focused more on the older 4-H’ers and events one can become involved in. The agent also mentioned how volunteers are needed. She did not explain how to become a
volunteer or the incentives of becoming one. She did, however, say how “parents are important to 4-H.” She also mentioned several things one can become involved in as a 4-H member. The event gave a broad overview of 4-H, what it entailed, and how to become involved. The event takes place in the county each year and has been going on for over 10 years. The agent also mentioned ways to learn more about 4-H: sending e-mail, calling the Extension office, putting letters into a drop box, or visiting the Extension office. Parents in the focus groups addressed similar ways of communication. This was an event where parents and children can learn what 4-H had to offer. Although information on life skills was not addressed, information on advertisement, informational materials, activities, and how Cloverbuds and their parents can get involved were shared. Parents had mentioned how advertising Cloverbuds was important. The 4-H Rally was a good example of promotion.

**Cloverbud Clinic**

A Cloverbud Clinic was held in March 2002. The two-hour session included parents and their Cloverbuds. The clinic was a hands-on meeting and it explored Cloverbud project areas. The parents learned how to participate with their child, to utilize older 4-H’ers, to incorporate themes, and to include recreational activities with meetings. The parents were encouraged to participate with their child. Approximately 20 attended; the participants were a combination of key leaders, current advisers, parents interested in becoming advisers, and Cloverbuds. The parents watched the *4-H Cloverbud Volunteer Video* (Reed & Scheer, 2002) as part of their training for Cloverbud adviser. The children
participated in games and painted Easter eggs. The parents observed and assisted with their craft project. This was a chance for the parents who were interested in volunteering to get hands-on experience. Parents were given informational handouts about the Cloverbud program. Overall, the Cloverbud clinic was a general overview of the program, and a great opportunity for the parents and children to be together. The children brought their crafts home. Parents who participated in the focus groups addressed how they become involved with their children by observing and assisting with activities. They also mentioned they enjoyed being there as well as socializing with other parents. The parents at the Cloverbud Clinic appeared to enjoy themselves and the opportunity to be with their child and with other adults.

**4-H Volunteer Conference**

A statewide 4-H Volunteer Conference was held in March 2002. I observed a session titled “Utilizing the Cloverbud Connection Newsletter: A Learning Tool for Volunteers.” Approximately 30 adults and youth attended the session. The presenters handed out samples of the Cloverbud Connection newsletter (Zimmer & Shriner, 2002) and the website address. Those in attendance discussed how they utilized the newsletter, what type of ideas and activities they use, and how they read and enjoyed the articles. Then individuals addressed things to change in the newsletter such as adding a comments section, and they gave other comments for future use. The session allowed an opportunity for those interested to stay informed and updated on the Cloverbud program. During the focus groups, parents had mentioned the newsletter and how it was
useful for ideas regarding activities, reading on current events, as well as other useful information.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with the purpose and objectives of the study. Major themes are discussed for each research question. The results and implications, the limitations of the study, and implications for future practice and future research are also considered.

The overall purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of life skills from parents of Ohio 4-H Cloverbud members. The objectives were to: (a) identify parents’ definitions and perceptions of life skills, (b) describe parents' perceptions of the benefits of the Cloverbud program, (c) describe parents' perceptions of factors that contribute to youth experiences in the program that facilitate life skills development and (d) describe parents’ perceptions of the organization and structure of the 4-H Cloverbud program that facilitate the introduction and participation of members.

To address the research questions, I carried out focus groups, reviewed materials, and observed activities where information regarding life skills and Cloverbuds was discussed. Several themes emerged from the analysis of the focus groups. Similar responses emerged from the focus groups as well as from observations made at 4-H events and documented materials. However, new ideas emerged such as additional life skills, ideas for promoting the program, and ideas
for maintaining the program. Important qualities of the program were also addressed.

The first objective of this study was to identify parents' definitions and perceptions of life skills. When asked questions relating to their definition and perceptions of life skills, surprisingly only half of the parents had heard of life skills. Despite that, they understood the concept and had a general understanding of what life skills are. Those who had not heard of life skills mentioned how it was not something they had encountered in meetings or reading materials.

In general, even though half of the parents had not heard of life skills specifically in relation to the Cloverbud program, they had an overall definition of what life skills are. They understood how life skills played an important role for their child’s development, as the skills are carried over into the future, and would be used throughout life. Those who were advisers knew about life skills perhaps from having more contact through written materials and training. One parent who was an adviser brought along her Cloverbud Curriculum notebook and reflected on materials from the notebook. Despite not having heard of life skills, parents mentioned three of the five life skills targeted in the Cloverbud program, which were learning to learn (e.g., gaining subject matter), social skills (e.g., presenting oneself), and self-esteem. The parents added two additional ideas they identified as skills they perceived their child was learning which included skills that could be categorized as self-care and self-directed skills. Self-care included safety and independence skills. Self-directed type skills included patience, responsibility and self-worth. This was new information gathered from the parents.
Two life skills targeted in the Cloverbud program that were not addressed directly by parents during the focus group discussion were decision making and physical mastery. These skills are targeted in the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud curriculum materials. Although the parents did not discuss the life skill of decision making, it was mentioned indirectly. Decision making involves taking actions as well as understanding the influence on one's decision. Parents discussed how Cloverbuds learn the importance of taking care of their community and the awareness of their actions toward helping others. One parent mentioned how, in completing a project, his child will be affected and will observe her actions. Another parent mentioned that the final outcome gave the child gratification from completing and finishing a project. When Cloverbuds were held accountable for their work and responsibilities in 4-H, they are learning the consequences of their actions, contributing to the development of decision making skills.

When they discussed the types of activities in which their children are involved, parents indirectly addressed physical mastery. Achieving physical mastery is being able to handle materials skillfully. Physical mastery skills are developed when making cupcakes, making snacks, launching rockets, folding flags, and planting flowers, which were some of the activities parents listed. The children engaged in the above activities and those activities would help to develop physical mastery skills.

The second objective of this study was to describe parents' perceptions of the benefits of the Cloverbud program. It was encouraging that the parents found the program to be a positive experience for the children. Also, parents explained
how children benefit from the program because they have fun in the program at the same time it is providing education for the children.

According to the parents, the Cloverbud program offers excellent benefits. The children benefit from learning social skills and communication skills, which the parents feel are important. Parents identified that their children feel special having their own group separate from older siblings. This has helped enhance social and communication skills. The children develop a sense of belonging and thus feel comfortable in the group. Those parents addressed how youth want the sense of belonging and individual attention. They mentioned how the Cloverbud 4-H program is a group to help their children attain this sense of belonging. Clubs and organizations are ways to promote this in ways such as one-to-one relationships that allow youth to feel comfortable engaging in conversation and group work to develop a sense of belonging.

The parents wanted their children to have fun but also wanted the program to be meaningful and educational. The parents did address that the entertainment value is least important to them; instead, parents saw the program as a learning experience. One of the program parameters addressed by Scheer (1997) includes activities that are fun, positive, and focus on the five general life skill areas through the experiential learning cycle. Parents’ comments supported this aspect of the program.

Children benefit from such a positive program and feel special having their own group. Although the impression was overwhelmingly positive, parents did address a few gaps in the program. Some parents indicated diversity as not
being learned in the program and that it is an important skill. While there is a potential benefit of learning about and experiencing diversity in religion and culture, some parents indicated that diversity was not being learned in the program. Some believe it is important to learn about diversity and could be added to enhance the program. An additional skill parents mentioned that is not incorporated in the program is health.

It was a surprise to hear that not only do the Cloverbuds benefit from the program, the parents also feel they benefit personally from the Cloverbud program. Parents enjoyed the social time with other parents while their children are participating in the meetings and activities. The parents reported that they engage in conversation and enjoy themselves.

A third objective was to describe parents' perceptions of factors that contribute to youth experiences in the program that facilitate life skills development. Parents mentioned several activities that their children join in and thus develop important skills. Those activities included hands-on activities, fair activities, Cloverbud camp activities, community service activities, and craft activities. Being involved in a combination of the activities and learning skills together enhanced life skill development as well as those activities focusing on communication, according to the parents.

It was interesting to hear parents discuss the importance they placed on being involved with their child as their child participates in the program. Parents are encouraged to interact with their children in the program. Parents observe
what their child is involved in and have an opportunity to see the activities that enhance certain life skills.

A fourth objective was to describe parents’ perceptions of the organization and structure of the 4-H Cloverbud program. Although parents mentioned how the program is positive and fun for their children, they also identified ways to promote the program to others who may not know about 4-H or know that there is a program for younger children in 4-H. Parents feel the program is important for their children and would like to see other families experience the opportunities in Cloverbuds. They see the involvement of other families as a way to help maintain the program. Parents feel the program has a good structure but gave ideas about ways to promote the program. They addressed how word of mouth is a way to make others aware of the program aside from someone in the program who already knew about 4-H or grew up knowing about 4-H. What their County Extension office was not addressing as well, in parents’ opinions, was the idea to go into the schools and give a presentation on what Cloverbuds is and then give handouts to take home as opposed to the teacher handing them a brochure to take home and the children not knowing the importance of the paper. Given the opportunity to find out what Cloverbuds is all about gives the child more of a need to bring the paper home and tell mom and dad about the program they learned about in school. This then gives the parents who may not know about the program an opportunity to listen to their children talk about it and then be motivated to read the materials. It is possible that this is happening but parents do not know about it.
Similar to past research on the 4-H program and life skills development, parents in this study viewed the 4-H Cloverbud program as positive for the youth who participate. The children have fun and learn important skills necessary for life. However, this study expanded on past research by addressing parents' unique conception of life skills and the factors that contribute to their development. By asking open-ended questions, a deeper understanding of life skills that parents believe that their children are developing was obtained. For instance, while parents mentioned three of the life skills targeted by the Cloverbud curriculum materials, they also identified additional skills that they thought were important and that their children were learning. Rather than simply identifying that the program was beneficial, parents were able to expand on the particular benefits that they saw. Parents mentioned how they enjoy being with their children during the program and enjoy socializing with the other parents. An additional idea addressed was ways to promote the program. Parents enjoy the program and the benefits and suggested promoting the program in order to keep the program going in the future. Because I focused on parents as the stakeholders for this study, I gathered their perspective first hand on what the parents observe their children learning. This also gave the parents opportunity to discuss issues they felt were important.

This study addressed characteristics that help make the program positive for youth. I obtained specific characteristics by asking parents of Cloverbud questions pertaining to their perspective on what specifically makes the program
positive and what the benefits were that contribute to their child’s life skill development.

Several studies focused on older youth members or stakeholders. There is one study that focused on Cloverbud life skills (Scheer & Lafontaine, 1999) and more studies should be conducted to obtain a more comprehensive view of life skills and the 4-H Cloverbud program.

**Limitations**

There are a several limitations to this study. Parents of Cloverbud members were not randomly selected; instead a small group of participants from selected counties who were available to participate on the scheduled dates comprised the sample. This limits the generalizability of the findings to the larger population of Cloverbud programs. To account for the relatively small sample size, the focus group findings were validated through obtaining other data sources and reviewers. Although caution should be exercised in applying the findings of this study more broadly, the data triangulation process improved the applicability of the findings.

In order to gain access to parents, I depended on the agents in the participating counties to provide a list of potential participants. The agents’ cooperation was important for participant recruitment, and they were also consulted regarding the best dates and times to conduct the focus groups. Despite these measures, only half of the parents who agreed to participate were able to attend the given date. Scheduling challenges related to illness and child care issues are hard to predict. Furthermore, although I attempted to recruit
participants of varied backgrounds, education, and income level, I did not collect
demographic data other than gender, so it was not possible to verify this
information.

Although it was a select group of participants, the parents were found to
be a rich source of information about the Cloverbud program because they are the
ones who observe their children's learning first hand. Detailed and descriptive
information can be obtained through qualitative means that is not feasible with
larger samples.

Information was based on parents' perceptions of their children's life
skills development at the same time of the study and may not represent their
children's actual life skills development. That is, no measures were administered
to children to determine their level of skill development in the targeted areas (e.g.,
social interaction). Future research could employ appropriate measure to make
such a determination. However, the challenge will remain to find measures
appropriate for young children.

Implications

This study has several implications for future research and practice.

Implications for Practice

Parents had addressed the need to promote the program more. This gives
reason to focus on raising awareness of the Cloverbud program because parents
are typically the ones who determine, in a large part, what activities or clubs their
children become involved in as opposed to the children deciding. Collecting and
using quotes from parents would be one way to inform others about the positive aspects and benefits of the program. Furthermore, only half of the parents in this study had heard of life skills. If life skills is an important emphasis within the program than promotion is suggested for better understanding of life skills in 4-H Cloverbud programming.

An emphasis on educating about life skills and the importance of life skills through means of training agents, volunteers, and advisers is suggested. The Cloverbud training video that was released in the winter 2002 is another training tool useful in educating others about life skills and qualities of the program. The findings from this study suggest that parents would respond positively to the content of the video.

To address health and diversity, a new curriculum could be added to address the topic in the Cloverbud notebooks used by volunteers and advisers. Those subjects could also be presented and incorporated into an activity in the Cloverbud Connection newsletter.

Carrying out a focus group in individual counties could also be an assessment and evaluation tool to find what parents, advisers, and agents understand in relation to the Cloverbud program and life skills. As well, it would be a means to understanding what the impact the program is having on the youth who participate.

The parents in the focus groups enjoyed being with their children. Being with their children was a benefit mentioned by parents, therefore events which
include parents and their children is suggested as well. The opportunity to bring parents together with their children should be encouraged.

Implications for Future Research

Studies of life skill development currently focus on older 4-H members, in part because life skills develop over time. The accumulation of learning experiences would presumably be necessary to foster life skill development. Existing studies of Cloverbuds focus on children at the time they are participating in the program. Something that has not been done is studying Cloverbud alumni 4-H members. Those children who were involved in Cloverbuds when the program started in 1994 are now in their teens. Studies that target those 4-H members who were involved as Cloverbuds could provide valuable information regarding their life skill development.

Surveys of young children may present problems but observation is an unobtrusive technique. Another idea for a future research study is to do observations of Cloverbud meetings and activities where the parents and children interact would be a way to study types of interactions mentioned by parents in the focus group discussions.

This study had a small sample size that led to an in depth collection of material. Future studies could continue to explore parents’ perceptions employing a larger, more representative sample. Having a larger, more representative study could include having multiple researchers carrying out focus groups. Developing a questionnaire from this study could provide open-ended questions or a more expanded survey form.
Conclusions

Parents perceive that the 4-H Cloverbud program is positive and they agree with the structure. A significant finding is that the parents had an understanding of life skills. They understood the concept of life skills, although they may not have used the word life skills in definition. For the parents in the focus groups, life skills were learned and developed by their children. The program structure appears to help meet the needs and interests of the children in regards to life skills development.

There were some suggestions of ways to improve the Cloverbud program. Parents suggested doing a better job in promoting and making others aware of the program are what can be done in the future. Not only do parents observe their children learning life skills but they want other parents’ children able to obtain this learning experience that Cloverbuds offers.

The 4-H Cloverbud program has continued to have a positive impact on youth. A large majority of parents are happy with the program and want the Cloverbud program to continue. Cloverbuds works to make the best better by having such an encouraging program for youth.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Opening question:
1. If you would, tell us your name and one thing you'd like us to know about your
child—one thing that your child does that makes you smile.

Transition sentences:
As you know, each of you has one or more children in the 4-H Cloverbud
program here in X County.
2. What are some activities your child has participated in with the Cloverbud
program?
3. There are a variety of ways parents can be involved with their child in regards to the
Cloverbud program. What is your favorite way to participate or be involved with the
Cloverbud program?
   A. Do you volunteer with the club meetings?
   B. Do you observe the meetings or activities the children perform?
   C. Do you carpool kids to meetings or events?
4. Do you participate either during their meeting or in any other way? Please
   explain.
5. What are some other ways you have participated in the activities with your child
   that you would like to share?
6. How did you find out about the Cloverbud program?
7. What sparked an interest to have your child join?
8. What do you think about the way the program is structured or organized?
9. What are some things you need to know to feel comfortable allowing your child to
   participate?

Key Questions:
10. Have you heard the word life skills within conversation or reading about the
    program?
    A. If yes, then when you hear the word life skills, what key words come to
        mind? (Get out definition)
    B. For those who have not mentioned having heard the word life skills, what
        would be your definition in your own words?
11. What do you think are the life skills learned through the Cloverbud Program?
12. We’ve talked about life skills of Cloverbuds in the program. The Cloverbud program addresses what life skills most effectively? How so? Give me an example.
13. What activities do you think have been most helpful in developing these skills?
14. What are some other aspects, besides activities, that have been most helpful?
15. In what other ways do you think the Cloverbud program benefits your child?

Ending questions:
16. Of all the life skills we mentioned today, which one is most important to you?
   A. The least important?
   B. Why? Please explain.
17. Can you think of a skill that the Cloverbud program may not be addressing that you feel is important for your child? Please explain.

Summary:
18. After the assistant or moderator has given a short oral summary ask:
   How well does that capture what was said here?

Final Questions:
19. Think about all that we have talked about today. What do you think is most important for the Cloverbud program to keep doing?
20. Have we missed anything?
APPENDIX B

TELEPHONE SCRIPT FOR CONTACTING EXTENSION AGENTS

1. Contacting the potential county
   Hello, may I please speak with (first and last name of 4-H Extension Agent)?

   If not there then identify yourself as a graduate student in the Human and Community
   Resource Development at OSU seeking to do a focus group with parents of Cloverbud
   participants in the county. See if there is a better time to contact him/her.

2. Explaining the project

   Hello, my name is Carrie Whittington-Hogue, and I am calling from The Ohio State
   University. I am seeking counties in Ohio with quality Cloverbud programs to do a
   focus group. I am looking for parents of Cloverbuds whose children have participated
   in the program for at least one year.

   I will be conducting a focus group, which is like a group interview session with 4-10
   individuals to talk about things they have in common. Parents would be getting
   together with other parents from the county whose children are members of the
   Cloverbud program and answer questions. They would only have to meet one time.
   This focus group should last approximately 90 minutes and refreshments will be
   provided.

   Can I tell you a little more about this?

   First of all, the session that we’re trying to set up is during the weeks of (list possible
days/dates) at (possible times). Is that something that could fit into your schedule?

   If the participant is not available, thank the person and end the call.
If the participant is available, continue with:

We want to find out more about parent’s perceptions of the Cloverbud program based on the activities the children participate in and the skills they develop. Again, this focus group would only last approximately 90 minutes. We won’t be selling anything, and we won’t try to sign anyone up for anything else. The information will be confidential and only used for the project. Does this sound like it would work for you?

1. Scheduling the session

In order to identify the counties and agents helping with the data collection, I will need a formal letter stating that you have agreed to participate in the study and that you will provide a list of potential participants for the researcher to contact. This verifies that I have permission to use your county and your participants.

We would like to find a convenient location for the meeting where parking is adequate and most parents will be familiar with the location. Is there a room or building that could accommodate this? We are looking at these dates (list). We would start at (time) and end by (time). If we are able to have a focus group in your county, are you able to provide a list of possible parents of Cloverbuds? Do you have any leads as to who may provide quality information and are trustworthy individuals? It is very important that we have everyone show up.

The group will consist of 4-10 other people, all parents of participating Cloverbuds. Most of the time they will be talking among themselves in a group discussion.

We will tape record the session so that we have a good sense of what people said. We will keep that tape, and anything they say, completely confidential. We don’t expect anyone to be saying anything too threatening, but even so, our first priority is to protect his or her privacy.

Also, I want to emphasize that once they come to this session, anything they do there will be completely voluntary, and they will be free to leave at any time for any reason.

I’d like to thank you for your time. We’ll be looking forward to the list of possible candidates to contact for the focus group. Thanks again.

Good bye.
APPENDIX C

PARENT PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

<date>

<name>
<address>
<address>

Dear <name>,

Hello, my name is Carrie Whittington-Hogue and I am a master’s student at The Ohio State University doing research on the 4-H Cloverbud program. I am working with <Agent’s name> in <name of county> County and have his/her support to contact you. I am looking for parents or guardians whose child or children have been Cloverbuds for at least one year.

I am conducting a focus group session, which is like an open interview, where each of you will have opportunity to answer questions based on your child’s learning and experiences as Cloverbuds. This session will be one time and will last approximately 90 minutes. The information that is obtained will be held confidential. The session will also be audio taped to ensure we collect each person’s answers and to verify this information accurately.

I will be calling you during the week of <date>. I will explain the process in more detail and will welcome any questions, comments, or concerns. Again, I am looking for parents or guardians of Cloverbuds who have been in the program for at least one year.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Carrie Whittington-Hogue
Graduate Student in Human and Community Resource Development
614 871-5694

Dr. Ferrari, advisor
614 292-9606
APPENDIX D

PARENT PARTICIPATION TELEPHONE RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

1. Contacting the potential participant

Hello, may I please speak with Mrs./Mr./Miss (name)?

2. Explaining the project

Hello, my name is Carrie Whittington-Hogue, and I am calling from The Ohio State University. I am a master’s student in the Department of Human and Community Resource Development. (Name), the 4-H Extension Agent, has provided your name to me, among other parents, as a possible candidate for a project I am currently working on for my master’s thesis. I am looking for parents of Cloverbuds whose children have participated in the Cloverbud program for at least one year.

I will be conducting a focus group, which is like a group interview session with 4-10 individuals to talk about things you all have in common. You would be getting together with other parents from the county whose children are members of the Cloverbud program and answering questions about your child’s involvement in the program. You would only have to meet one time. This focus group should last approximately 90 minutes and refreshments will be provided.

Can I tell you a little more about this?

First of all, the session that I am trying to set up is on (day) at (time). Is that something that could fit into your schedule?

If the participant is not available, thank the person and end the call.

If the participant is available, continue with:

I want to find out more about parents’ perceptions of the Cloverbud program based on the activities and skills the children participate in. Again, this focus group would only last approximately 90 minutes. I won’t be selling you anything, and I won’t try to sign you up for anything else. The information will be confidential and only used for the project. Does this sound like it would work for you?
3. Scheduling the session

The focus group will be at (location...probably the Extension office meeting rooms) and, again, it would be on (date). We would start at (time) and end by (time). If I do put your name down, it’s very important that we have everyone show up. Do you feel you can come?

It is also very important that you are there by (start time); will you have any problems getting there on time?

Again, we’ll be providing refreshments.

The group will consist of 4-10 other people, all parents of participating Cloverbuds. Most of the time you will be talking among yourselves in a group discussion. I will be moderating the session and asking questions.

I will tape record the session so that we have a good sense of what people said. I will keep that tape, and anything you say, completely confidential. I don’t expect anyone to be saying anything too threatening, but even so, the first priority is to protect your privacy.

Also, I want to emphasize that once you come to this session, anything you do there will be completely voluntary, and you’ll be free to leave at any time for any reason.

I’d like to mail you a letter confirming your participation in this focus group, along with a map, parking information, and a reminder of the date and time. What is the best address to send that to? (get mailing information)

I will call you back the evening before the focus group to remind you about it and answer any last minute questions. Is this the best number to get a hold of you? When is a good time to call?

I’d like to thank you for your time. I’ll be looking forward to seeing you on (date).
Thanks again.
Good bye.
APPENDIX E

CONFIRMATION LETTER FOR PARENT PARTICIPANTS

$name of parent/guardian>
$address>
$address>

Thank you for accepting our invitation to talk about the Cloverbud 4-H program. I want perceptions of the program based on what the children are learning and the benefits of the program. I am interested in all the parents' comments and ideas. The group will be held:

$day, month, date>
$time>
$location>
$address>
$address>
$room number>

It will be a small group of approximately 4-10 individuals. I will provide refreshments.

If for some reason you will not be able to attend, please call as soon as possible so that I can invite someone else. If you have any questions, feel free to give me a call at 614 871-5694.

I look forward to meeting you next $day>. See you soon.

Sincerely,

Carrie Whittington-Hogue
Graduate Student in Human and Community Resource Development
APPENDIX F

TELEPHONE REMINDER CALL TO PARENTS

Hello, may I please speak with Mr./Mrs./Miss (name)?

My name is Carrie Whittington-Hogue calling from The Ohio State University. I just wanted to remind you that we are looking forward to seeing you tomorrow from <time> at the <location> room <number> to talk about the 4-H Cloverbud program.

I will see you then. Thanks again.

Goodbye.
APPENDIX G

FACILITATOR SCRIPT FOR MODERATING THE FOCUS GROUP

Welcome the Parents
Good evening. Thank you so much for coming out this evening. My name is Carrie Whittington-Hogue, and I am a graduate student at The Ohio State University. Assisting me is (Name).

Overview of the topic- why you’re here
We have invited each of you to share your comments, ideas, and perceptions of the Cloverbud program. You were selected from a list of possible candidates who met the criteria of having (list criteria). We are very interested in what you have to say about the program. I’d like to have all of you take a seat where we’ve provided name tents for each of you.

Guidelines or ground rules

We’ll be discussing your thoughts and opinions relating to the Cloverbud program and life skills development. There are no right or wrong answers and we encourage each of you to comment and answer questions as we move along. Please, feel free to share your opinions even if yours is different from others. We are also interested in positive comments as well as negative ones.

Before we begin I want to mention a few things. Please allow one person to speak at a time. When speaking, please speak clearly and at a level where everyone can hear you. We will be tape recording the session because we do not want to miss any important information you have to share. We will be on a first name basis. In our reports, there will not be any names attached to the comments from today’s group. Your information will be confidential. No one other than the researcher and transcriber will have access to raw data. The data will also be coded when transcribed based on individual responses and counties used. The tapes will be destroyed after analysis. Our time together is voluntary and if for any reason you need to leave, it will not have any consequence on your participation. However, if you remain for the entire focus group, I will assume you have agreed to participate.

My role is to ask each of you questions as well as listen to your comments. I will not be participating in the conversation. Each of you will converse with each other in
answering the questions. Because there are several questions, I may have to move things along when several things are shared. I may also probe some of you for comments because it is important to hear what each of you has to say. So as we begin, I'd like to learn more about each of you.

Opening questions

Tell us your name and one thing you'd like us to know about your child and one thing that your child does that makes you smile. Let's start with you (name of one person).

See list of questions and probes (Appendix A)

Conclude:

After asking for any questions, comments, conclusions, thank the group for their time.

I'd like to thank each of you for attending today, taking time out of your schedules to help provide information pertaining to your child's involvement in the Cloverbud program. I wish each of you a safe trip home and a wonderful evening. Thanks again.

**Remember to pack up all materials and leave the room in better shape than when you arrived!