

Ohio Parks and Recreation Association Foundation
Program Development Grant Report

The Embers Program

Reviving a Civic Desert: Fostering civic engagement in Appalachian youth through outdoor,
recreation experiences

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Overview

The name of this positive youth development program is The Embers Program. The primary objective of the Embers program is to provide an outdoor, adventure program that engages youth in nature and their surrounding community through first hand experiences. The participating agencies include Ohio University (OU), the Hocking Valley Community Residential Center (HVCRC).

As a current graduate student in the Recreation Department at Ohio University in the Patton College of Education, every student is *called to lead*. This statement – called to lead – is the centerpiece of the PCOE and my own personal core values. After finishing fall semester of graduate school at OU and attending the OPRA Conference in January, I realized a troublesome gap in outdoor, recreational programs provided to youth in the southeast Ohio region. If the objectives of OPRA are to educate, advocate, and collaborate, the southeastern Ohio region has a great deal of room for development and growth. I spent time reflecting on this realization, and spring semester networked around the Athens county region to determine the community’s need. I was inspired after my meeting with the passionate staff of the HVCRC. This organization provides a residential, corrections facility for male juvenile offenders from 12 counties in Southeastern Ohio. The staff provides rehabilitation services to the residents and believes in providing transformative experiences through wellness and life skills programs. Their campus facility has a garden, pond, and recreational space for games of all sorts, and in addition, transportation services to off campus settings. My meeting the HVCRC director and program coordinator seemed to be the perfect equation for a pilot program. I have chosen to commit my OU Graduate Studies Professional Project towards planning and implementing a program during the 2017-2018 school year; my intentions are that this program sparks a sustainable relationship between the OU Recreation Department and the HVCRC. Lastly, I believe the mission and values of Ohio University, Hocking Valley Community Residential Center, and the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association strongly coincide. With a pilot program like Embers, these organizations can bring youth in southeastern Ohio closer to nature and their communities.

The Embers program was developed from my research on outdoor and recreation education coupled with youth civic engagement. Following the framework of Lerner’s 5 C’s model of positive youth development, studies have shown that if youth are instilled with the 5 C’s – competence, confidence, connection, character, compassion – they may have reduced risky behaviors and are more likely contribute positively to themselves and to their community. The

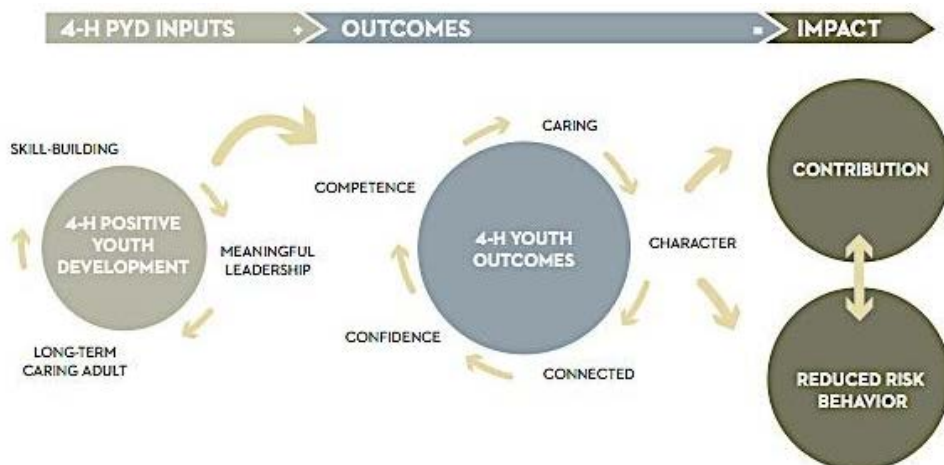


diagram shows an example of the 5 C’s framework from a 4-H youth program with program inputs, youth outcomes from the programming, and impacts to the participants. (site)

Background and Justification

Youth in rural Appalachia are challenged with many obstacles beyond those of a developing teenager. Rural areas that provide access to minimal communal resources, or only one, are classified as Civic Deserts (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Sullivan, 2017). Civic Desert is a new term coined to describe places characterized by a dearth of opportunities for youth programming, civic learning, and engagement (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Sullivan, 2017). Rural youth that live in civic deserts lack opportunities, and this puts rural youth at a significant civic disadvantage to witness, advocate, learn, and participate in civic opportunities, and develop a civic identity.

Civic Deserts are most prevalent in rural areas, suggesting it is important to strive for expanded access to civic engagement opportunities in these areas (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Sullivan, 2017). Research suggests that when youth are civically engaged there are a number of positive outcomes including attachment to prosocial norms (Caldwell & Smith, 2006) like reciprocity, social responsibility, altruism, and volunteerism (Siu, Shek, & Law, 2012).

Adventure and outdoor education has included aspects of civic engagement and character building (Outward Bound, 2017). Factors first promoted by Kurt Hahn are still present in many outdoor education programs including leadership and character development, and importantly service learning (Breunig, 2005; Nicholas, 2015; Outward Bound, 2017). Well-facilitated adventure and outdoor education programs can lead to beneficial outcomes for those involved (Sibthorp, Paisley, & Gookin, 2007). As a result, adventure education programs in nature should offer a wide variety of activities that foster different forms of youth development, and also more specifically engage students in outdoor, service learning opportunities. With this knowledge and the beautiful outdoor setting of southeastern Ohio, there is a calling for such an opportunity that provides youth a program that engages and activates their connection to one another and their community.

Timeline

Fall 2017 through Summer 2018

As stated previously, the Embers program followed the framework of Lerner's 5 C's model. The group met for 5 main sessions in the Fall and 5 in the Spring, with intermittent focus group meetings for effective communication and reflection activities. Each main session was geared towards a particular outcome from the model - competence, confidence, connection, character, or compassion. The main sessions was held as a full day or half-day experience either on the HVCRC campus or at another outdoor location in southeast Ohio. The focus group meetings prior to and/or post the main session days included a snack/meal, a group debrief, and a reflective or team-building activity. A HVCRC staff member, youth participants, and myself were present at every meeting, with the potential for additional adult leaders as well.

Below is a timeline that outlines the sessions, themes, and associated activities. The order of themes was specifically chosen to build upon one another to foster personal transformations as well as group relationships. In addition, the activities were intentionally chosen to accompany the weekly theme. Participants were guided through an activity and facilitation that exposed them to each theme. For example, Spring Session 2 has the theme of connection and compassion. The activities is the OU Challenge Course because this experience requires a group to work alongside one-another, communicate, encourage, and trust each group member. Each session and theme is planned cohesively in the same manner.

The Embers Program – Fall 2017 Schedule

Date	Time Frame	Activity	Location	Theme
October 21 st , 2017	12:00pm-6:00pm	Canoeing and Fishing	Strouds Run State Park	Character and Competence
October 27 th , 2017	10:00am-4:00pm	Low Ropes Challenge Course and Ridges Hike to Radar Hill	Ridges and OU Challenge Course	Connection and Compassion
November 3 rd , 2017	12:00pm-3:30pm	Rock Challenges	High Rock Adventures – Rockbridge, OH	Confidence
November 11 th , 2017	9:00am-12:30pm	Guided Hike with Park Naturalist	Lake Hope State Park, Yosemite Falls Trail	

The Embers Program - Spring 2018 Schedule

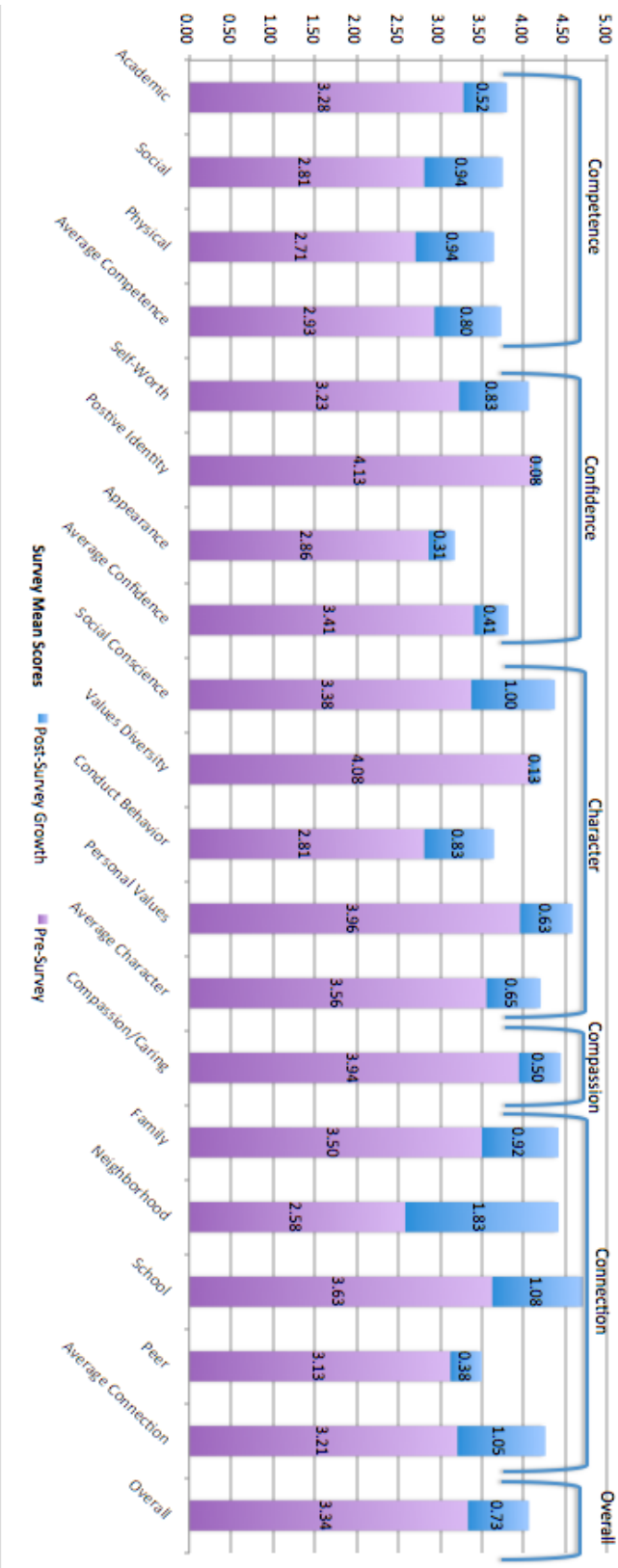
Date	Time Frame	Activity	Location	Theme
Feb 24th, 2018	Saturday 9am-noon	Contingency Plan (Volleyball and Racquetball)	Ping Recreation Center	Character
March 2 nd , 2018	Friday 1-4pm	Mountain Biking	Ridges	Competence
March 18th, 2018	Sunday 6-8:30pm	Climbing	Ping Recreation Center	Confidence
March 30th, 2018	Friday 10:30am-5:00pm	Challenge Course and Ridges Exploration	Ridges	Connection
April 7th, 2018	Saturday 5:30-8:30pm	Contingency Plan (Ultimate Frisbee)	Walter Fieldhouse	Compassion

Evaluation of Outcomes

To evaluate the program, surveys were given to each youth participant from HVCRC. Each participant had the opportunity to complete a pre and a post survey about their experience in the Embers program. The survey included structured questions about the activities, leadership team, and program logistics, and open ended questions for participants to fully express their opinions and feelings. The post survey was created to determine if the goals have been met. Partnering agency leaders and facilitators were given a chance to give the Embers leadership team feedback on the activities, facilitation process, schedule, and program logistics. With this information, the Embers leadership team can collaborate and assess how to create a more effective program for future years. As seen from the figure below, the purple bar represents the survey results prior to the Embers Program. The blue section represents the change score; the total of purple and blue bars added shows how the participants increased in character, compassion, confidence, competence, and connection! This graph is a summary of the successful program.

Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Mean Change Scores for Positive Youth Development (Embers) Program

Chart Area



Conclusion

Effective youth engagement and development comes from nurturing and believing in the capabilities of youth. The value of positive youth development programs lies in the multitude of benefits, not only to the participants but the wider community as well. The findings of this study stretch beyond the mean scores of each participant, but rather in the unique impact and power a confident, competent, and compassionate youth has when connected to their community and when acting with good character. As stated previously, the increase in scores for each individual C and overall average show that utilizing outdoor education and recreation programs can foster contribution and civic engagement in youth. Though there was a small sample size and participants had greater change scores than others, overall the data showed a positive impact on *every* participant. In addition, Lerner's Five Cs Model is a suitable framework for developing PYD programming. With an integrated framework and appropriate outdoor recreation and education activities, youth development programs have the ability to engage a neglected youth population in Appalachia. These programs can develop youth as individuals and support the growth of an entire community.

Commitment to the Future

During the 2017-2018 academic school year, my role will be the main leader of the Embers program along with guidance from my OU advisors, Danny Twilley and Annie Frisoli, and the HVCRC program coordinator, Neil Sommers. For the future and with the completion of a successful program, the intentions of the Embers leadership team will be to continue the program for years to come. The Embers Program sparked a strong, sustainable collaboration between the OU Recreation Department and HVCRC. In addition, the Embers Program leadership team and HVCRC has plans like to include the Wayne National Forest in future programming to increase the impact.

To create a sustainable team and program, Dr. Twilley and I plan to include OU undergraduate and graduate students in facilitating the Embers recreation and outdoor activity sessions. Undergraduate and graduate students will have the opportunity to earn credit and/or facilitation experience as an academic incentive. Faculty members in the Recreation Department will be able to have OU students implement activities and practice leadership skills learned in the classroom. With the commitment from the OU faculty and a solid foundation of programming, the Embers Program can continue to serve the residents at HVCRC. Furthermore, with a successful pilot program, upcoming undergraduate and graduate students will be encouraged to offer a Embers program in the local schools and other youth development organizations in the southeast Ohio region.

Future Implications and Recommendations

As discussed by Lerner and colleagues (2010), there is a future need for PYD research that includes older youth and young adults. Most of the studies thus far within the realm of youth civics and PYD have focused on youth below the age of 15. In addition, youth civic engagement research calls for more demographically diverse samples of youth, particularly those of various income levels. Furthermore, possible studies for future implications may consider determining which activities of recreation programming and outdoor education may foster more significant levels of civic engagement and contribution: are certain activities or experiences better suited to

develop competency, and other activities more productive in developing youths' confidence or compassion?

Additionally, there are recommendations that ought to be stated about the partnership between the Ohio University RSP Department and the HVCRC. As stated previously, the program leader should confirm a person of contact at the HVCRC that works every weekday, and it would be more productive to have two persons of contact at the HVCRC, one who works weekdays and the other who covers weekends. In the same regard, establish near the beginning of the program what day and time slot the program leader can be present in the HVCRC weekly or bi-monthly. The leaders should also be present in the HVCRC before the program sessions begin. The process of knowing participants, staff, and the culture of the HVCRC prior to the program start date allowed for the leader to establish legitimacy and respect at the organization. Also, allowing OU students to do a recreation internship at the HVCRC would provide consistency and sustainability to the partnership.

Civic deserts are most prevalent in rural areas, and this puts rural youth at a significant civic disadvantage to participate in civic opportunities and to develop a civic identity. With this knowledge, it is important to strive for expanded access and programming to civic opportunities and education in these areas (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Sullivan, 2017; Ripberger, 2008). As alluded to extensively in this report, when inspiring youth through a lens of development rather than deficits, they evolve to become confident, competent, and compassionate community members who act with good character to better their communities.

The Embers Program Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Objectives

Mission: The Embers Program is committed to promoting positive youth development through adventure and outdoor-based experiences.

Vision: The Embers Program represents a leading and sustainable youth development program in the SE Ohio region with active participants and innovative programs that engage in the community.

Core Values: Lerner's 5 C's Model of PYD
Competence, Character, Connection, Compassion, Confidence → Contribution

Goals

1. Personal Development – provide youth diverse experiences to learn new skills and competencies through self-discovery, peer relations, and role responsibility
 - Objective A – Participants will engage in new activities during their experience
 - Objective B – Participants will gain confidence in their new skills and abilities
 - Objective C – Participants will positively challenge themselves

2. Social Development – provide youth inclusive experiences that inspire open and honest conversations and foster meaningful relationships with peers and associated adults
 - Objective A – Participants will interact with peers to form connections and team-building skills
 - Objective B – Participants will share in facilitated discussions about their shared experiences
 - Objective C – Participants will be provided with a safe space to develop emotionally through compassion and integrity

3. Environmental Development – provide youth experiences that intentionally develop a personal connection with and a stewardship towards the environment
 - Objective A – Participants will develop a sense of place
 - Objective B - Participants will be involved in making a difference for the community
 - Objective C - Participants will engage in environmental stewardship

Budget

<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Ref. #</i>	<i>REVENUE</i>	<i>Total</i>
9/17/2017	STARTING BANK			\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00
10/16/2017	Funds for guides	150.00	1506		\$ 2,350.00
10/16/2017	Youth outdoor trip	175.00	1507		\$ 2,175.00
10/24/2017	Anna Refund for food for trip	52.57	1508		\$ 2,122.43
11/3/2017	Anna High Rock Course	500.00	1510	\$ -	\$ 1,622.43
11/3/2017	REFUND FORM TRIP	0.00		\$ 15.00	\$ 1,637.43
11/3/2017	Ohio University Outdoor Pursuits	120.00	1511		\$ 1,517.43
11/3/2017	Anna Travel Reimbursement	54.57	1512		\$ 1,462.86
2/23/2018	Ares Sportswear	413.32	1517		\$ 1,049.54
3/23/2018	Ohio University Outdoor Pursuits	135.00	1519		\$ 914.54
4/4/2018	Ohio University Outdoor Pursuits	320.00	1520		\$ 594.54
4/20/2018	Misc Reimbursements	45.25	1522		\$ 549.29
4/20/2018	Travel Reimbursement	98.10	1523		\$ 451.19
4/20/2018	Embers Dinner	136.40	1521		\$ 314.79
4/27/2018	Frames for program awards	22.72	1525		\$ 292.07
7/1/2018	July Final Recreation Outing	292.07	n/a	-	\$0.00

The Embers Program - Activity Day Lesson Plan (GENERAL)

Goal: To define and practice the Core Value (C of the Day)

Objectives: Participants will...

1. Define the Core Value
2. Practice at least 3 characteristics of the Core Value
3. Reflect upon at least 1 way to act upon the Core Value in daily life

Outline

A. Welcome and Introduction

- Familiarize the group and briefly discuss itinerary for the day

B. Define Core Value of the Day

- Ask participants their definition of “Core Value”
Affirm critical thinking and participation
- After participants have shared their thoughts, discuss and obtain group agreement on definition

C. Ask participants what “Core Value” might look like, i.e. what actions or words can be examples of that behavior or trait.

- Ask, “How can we practice “Core Value” in the activity today? Provide specific observable ideas to get the discussion started, then affirm participants’ comments and ideas. i.e. Keeping track of gear, staying with group, etc.

D. Throughout the day, verbally recognize participants for these and other “Core Value” behaviors observed. Also, mentally note responsible behaviors for the end-of-day evaluation and discussion.

E. Evaluation and Discussion

- Gather group together in a location that allows for discussion and reflection. Remove distractions.
- Ask participants to review their original definition of the Core Value. Has their definition changed? Stayed the same?
- Compliment circle – What specific examples of the Core Value have you observed in someone else today?
- Finally, ask participants for at least 1 idea for how they can transfer this Core Value in their everyday lives. Encourage specific relevant examples.

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