

## ABSTRACT

KOTZIAN, SARAH HARDISON. Volunteer Experiences: A Qualitative Case Study of Volunteer Perceptions of Training and Support. (Under the direction of Dr. Susan J. Barcinas).

This exploratory case study research analyzed adult North Carolina 4-H volunteer perceptions of training and support and the influence training and support on their volunteer experience.

Framed by Kirkpatrick's model of learning evaluation, 13 adult 4-H volunteers, each with 3-10 years of volunteer experience were interviewed. Study findings indicate that volunteers participated in a variety of training and support experiences, varied in both content and delivery. Findings include information about the variety of trainings that were offered as well as training formats, and suggestions on what trainings 4-H volunteers ideally need and want from their organization. Additionally, study findings indicate that 4-H volunteers felt very positive about their roles as a 4-H volunteer, and value the importance of connection to others in terms of support for success in volunteer roles. Study implications include recommendations for the need of the development of a standardized statewide volunteer training which is centralized with the ability for local programs to adapt or add relevant, county specific information and for the development of increased volunteer peer-to-peer and experiential learning activities. Given that 4-H agents are responsible for maintaining the volunteer program in their service areas, agent training and resources to support their implementation of the local training programs are critical.

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Volunteer Experiences: A Qualitative Case Study of Volunteer Perceptions of Training and Support

by  
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**DEDICATION**

To Randy

There are no words to capture the appreciation and total love I have for you. Thank you for being on this journey with me and for loving me through it all. You and June Elizabeth make this life full of adventure and wonder. Thank you for being in my corner.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Sarah Hardison Kotzian was born and raised in a small community in North Carolina. Her childhood experiences and the career paths of her parents led her to a career in education. She has spent her career working in non-formal education, and it was her first experience teaching adults that sparked a passion for adult learning and encouraged her to pursue advanced degrees. The people that she has met along her academic journey have encouraged her to continue this educational path and pursue a doctorate. Her greatest supporters; however, have been her family, who have shown through their examples and sacrifices the importance of grace, love, and humor.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	viii
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	ix
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Problem Statement .....	2
Purpose Statement and Research Question.....	4
Research Design.....	4
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Significance of the Study .....	7
Summary .....	9
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	11
Introduction.....	11
National and State Perspectives: Cooperative Extension Land Grant System and 4-H.....	11
Land grant systems .....	11
Cooperative extension.....	13
4-H basics.....	15
4-H national structure and funding .....	18
What makes 4-H unique.....	22
North Carolina 4-H .....	25
4-H through the years.....	27
Volunteers .....	31
Motivations .....	31
Recruitment and benefits .....	33
Development and training.....	36
4-H Volunteers.....	43
Current Trends in 4-H Volunteer Training .....	45
Theoretical Framework for the Study: Kirkpatrick’s Model .....	48
Summary .....	53
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	55
Purpose and Research Question.....	55
Research Design.....	55
Statement of positionality .....	55
Statement of subjectivity.....	56
Qualitative Design .....	58
Case Study .....	59
Research Process.....	61
Data Collection .....	62
Site selection .....	62
Participant selection .....	62
Participant recruitment.....	62
Data Collection Strategies.....	63
Interview protocol.....	64
Data handling .....	65
Data analysis phase .....	65

Coding strategies.....	66
Ethical issues.....	67
Trustworthiness.....	68
Study limitations.....	69
Study strengths.....	69
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>71</b>
Profiles .....	71
Mary .....	72
Elizabeth .....	73
Tara .....	75
Wanda .....	76
Shannon.....	77
Meredith.....	78
Randy .....	80
Mitzi.....	81
Lily.....	82
June .....	83
Al.....	85
Sue.....	86
Kate.....	87
Findings .....	88
Open code 1: People .....	88
Becoming a volunteer .....	89
Moments to remember .....	90
Support received .....	96
Open code 2: Training .....	99
Training received .....	100
Training needed .....	103
Training applied.....	108
Open code 3: Future training .....	111
Training design .....	111
Improving volunteer experience .....	119
Framework Coding .....	125
Reaction .....	125
Learning .....	128
Behavior.....	132
Results.....	133
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>135</b>
Research Question .....	135
Discussion of Findings.....	137
Reaction .....	137
Collaborative efforts, inclusiveness, and structure .....	137
Need for formal training/resources .....	139
Learning .....	141
Alongside youth – youth adult partnerships .....	141
With other 4-H volunteers .....	143



Behavior .....	144
Lifelong change .....	144
Mentorship .....	145
Summary .....	146
Implications.....	147
Implications for research.....	147
Kirkpatrick model .....	147
Specific context.....	148
Study focus.....	149
Implications for practice .....	149
Standardized training .....	149
Advanced level training .....	153
Resources .....	154
Agent training .....	154
Future Research .....	155
Closing Remarks.....	156
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	158
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	177
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	178

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1	<i>Participant Location</i> .....	63
Table 2	<i>Participant Chart</i> .....	72
Table 3	<i>Study Model</i> .....	136

**LIST OF FIGURES**

<i>Figure 1</i>	North Carolina 4-H Demographics .....	29
<i>Figure 2</i>	North Carolina 4-H Curriculum Areas .....	29
<i>Figure 3</i>	Kirkpatrick Model .....	48

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A variety of organizations utilize volunteers to carry out their work and mission. With increased funding cuts and financial hardships for community organizations that serve the public and the increased need to provide services for people and communities, organizational volunteers play a critical role to deliver programs and information. Volunteers are the heart of many organizations and give selflessly of their time and resources. Volunteering can be defined in many different ways. According to Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth (1996), “too often, the term [volunteer] is a catch-all for a wide range of nonsalaried activities (p. 365). Haski-Leventhal et al. (2018) reference the four dimensions of volunteering. They state:

In 1996, Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth published a seminal article that defined a volunteer and the action of volunteering. Their definition of volunteering included four components: (a) the concept of free will, (b) the absence of tangible monetary rewards, (c) an activity done through formal organizations, and (d) performed for the purpose of helping others. (p. 31S)

The act of volunteering can vary among groups and cultures. As stated in Hustinx, Cnaan, and Handy (2010):

Volunteering continues to be a social construct with multiple definitions; and what is understood as volunteering is a matter of public perception. The boundaries between what definitely constitutes volunteering and what does not are permeable (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Handy et al., 2000). Furthermore, in various cultures there are no terms such as volunteers. (p. 410)

For the purpose of this study, volunteers are defined as a person who freely chooses to give of their time and resources in order to help others through their work.

For 4-H in particular, the challenge of providing relevant, researched-based information to help young people grow into “competent, confident, connected, character-driven, caring” (About Iowa 4-H, n.d.) contributors in their communities can only be met through the help of volunteers. 4-H has tremendous scope, reaching over 6 million youth each year through the help of over 500,000 volunteers nationally (What is 4-H, 2019) and its reach can be found in every part of the United States. As an organization, 4-H is in a unique position to “shape youth to move our country and the world forward” (4-H Youth Development, 2019, para. 2), but can only continue to do so with the help and support of volunteers. Establishing a positive volunteer experience creates a successful and ongoing volunteer program and aligns philosophically with the positive youth development practices within 4-H. A positive volunteer experience is created in part through high quality, consistent, and relevant volunteer training and provides support in multiple capacities to volunteers. Therefore, understanding how volunteers perceive any training and support they receive increases the knowledge and capacity of organizations to offer and support volunteer work. Volunteers in 4-H create life changing experiences for young people, so ensuring that they have what they need in the beginning ensures success for the volunteers, the young people, and the 4-H organization.

### **Problem Statement**

4-H is the youth development component of the Cooperative Extension Service, serving youth ages 5-18. 4-H is “the nation’s largest youth development organization, empowering six million young people throughout the United States” (4-H Youth Development, 2019, para. 1).

For more than 100 years, 4-H has welcomed young people of all beliefs and backgrounds, giving kids a voice to express who they are and how they make their lives and communities better. Through life-changing 4-H programs, nearly six million kids have

taken on critical societal issues, such as addressing community health inequities, engaging in civil discourse and advocating for equity and inclusion for all. (What is 4-H, 2019, para. 2)

Nationally, over 6 million youth (4-H Youth Development, 2019, para. 1) are enrolled in the 4-H program with 229,500 enrolled in North Carolina (North Carolina 4-H, 2019). In North Carolina, there is an average of one youth development professional in each county; therefore, the impact of the 16,978 volunteers is extraordinary (North Carolina 4-H, 2019). As the youth development part of the land-grant system whose role is to bring “vital, practical information to agricultural producers, small business owners, consumers, families and young people” (“Extension”, n.d.), 4-H is built upon the understanding that the work of volunteers is crucial to fulfilling this need. Hoover and Connor (2001) assert, “training gives volunteers the skills and knowledge needed to perform their work well and effectively” (para. 3). Smith, Dasher, and Klingborg (2005) discuss support for training of youth development volunteers and matching the demographics of our volunteers with the youth that are served as vital to a successful youth program. North Carolina 4-H lacks a standard formalized training process, leaving this process up to counties to both create and implement. This lack of training is of concern as volunteers are the main point of connection with 4-H youth, helping to create positive life changing experiences in young people’s lives. Understanding how adults learn and their motivation to volunteer will help provide an effective training and volunteer experience for both the volunteer and the program manager (Murk & Stephan, 1990). “With each volunteer comes knowledge, experiences, and skills which can be taught to 4-H youth and shared with the 4-H program ‘to make the best better’” (“Volunteers”, n.d.). Without 4-H volunteers, the 4-H program would not have the ability to reach youth in every corner of the United States.

One notable aspect about 4-H is the flexibility to shape programs to meet the needs of the community and its residents. This same premise allows 4-H programs to structure volunteer training programs that work best for and meet the needs of program volunteers and the overall program. Just as programs are different in each county in the United States, equally as varied are the volunteer training programs, including content, delivery, and expectations. Understanding volunteers will help program managers meet the critical organizational quality control function that training volunteers provide and structure positive volunteer experiences for organizational volunteers. Knowing this information can help shape the training and support provided by those who work with 4-H volunteers. This study contributes to the literature through sharing data that supports those involved with the 4-H program better understand the role training and support plays in the overall volunteer experience from a volunteer perspective. Thus, this research describes and analyzes how 4-H volunteers perceive their training and articulate their training needs to best serve youth in our communities.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Question**

This exploratory qualitative case study investigated the following research question: What are NC 4-H volunteer perceptions of training and support as they relate to their volunteer experience? Study findings contribute to the gap in literature regarding 4-H volunteer training programs and the perceptions volunteers have of the training and the support they receive. The conceptual framework for this research was adapted from the New World Kirkpatrick Model first developed in 2010 (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

### **Research Design**

This research utilizes an exploratory qualitative case study methodology to explore adult 4-H volunteer perception of training and support as it relates to overall volunteer experience.

The 13 research participants were volunteers from across North Carolina who had been a volunteer with the 4-H program for at least three years and as much as ten years. Participants represented 11 counties from within the five North Carolina Cooperative Extension districts. Qualitative inquiry was a suitable choice for this study because of the interest to understand how 4-H volunteers “make sense and create meaning” (Staller, 2010, p. 1159) of their volunteer training experiences. Qualitative inquiry provided the why and how as well as the structure and the flexibility needed to address the research question. This was done by gathering, analyzing, and presenting data on 4-H volunteers’ perceptions of the training and support they received in this role and how these factors affected their overall 4-H volunteer experience.

Case study was an appropriate approach for this study as “case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). Specifically, this study used the exploratory case study approach. According to Streb (2010), “the exploratory case study investigates distinct phenomena characterized by a lack of detailed preliminary research, especially formulated hypotheses that can be tested, and/or by a specific research environment that limits the choice of methodology” (p. 373). The foundation for this research, North Carolina 4-H volunteer experiences, has very limited research data to build upon. Through this exploratory case study, data has contributed to the groundwork that other researchers can build upon with their scholarly learning. 4-H is a very specific context and North Carolina 4-H is unique within that context. Using the exploratory case study approach allowed the flexibility to make sure the research question was thoroughly addressed. The limited environment of this research created defined boundaries within which to conduct this study.



Research in this study focused on “what is happening or has happened” (Yin, 2013, p. 5) and examined a “phenomenon within its real-world context” (Yin, 2013, p. 5). The data gathered from examining what is happening or has happened in the real-world context of being a 4-H volunteer allowed Cooperative Extension professionals to consider the potential training needs for the future based on understanding current volunteer experiences in conjunction with the training and support they receive.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The New World Kirkpatrick Model (2010), was the conceptual framework for this study. This conceptual model, developed in 1959, was originally designed as a tool to measure training effectiveness. Since its original development, the model has been revised three times, each time keeping the same original four levels. Kirkpatrick’s Model is broadly used and can serve as a structured guide to both create and implement a successful training program. Kirkpatrick’s model is not new; it has been widely used in a variety of settings with much success, specifically when developing training and education programs. It is a simple, yet highly applied approach to understanding training effectiveness. The main difference between the original Kirkpatrick model and the New World Kirkpatrick Model is the addition of explanations and more modern terminology of each level. The basic structure has remained the same. As such, this research sought to understand volunteer training experiences as they relate to Kirkpatrick’s four levels of learning and change.

Participants in this study were asked to think about their 4-H volunteer experience as it related to training and support. Their feedback was coded based on a scheme aligned with the New World Kirkpatrick model:

- Level 1: Reaction – The degree to which participants find the training favorable, engaging and relevant to their jobs.
- Level 2: Learning – The degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training.
- Level 3: Behavior – The degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job.
- Level 4: Results – The degree in which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training and the support and accountability package. (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 10)

J. Kirkpatrick and W. Kirkpatrick (2009) share:

Most learning professionals have heard of the four levels and many can recite them. But relatively few know how to effectively get beyond level 2. When presenting these concepts to groups of professionals, we often refer to current evaluation practices as ‘smile sheets (L1), pre and posttest (L2), and hope for the best (L3 and L4)’. Most of our workshop participants know exactly what we are saying. (p. 3)

When the process stops at a lower level and is not completed, learners do not have a chance to fully benefit from the learning or training experience. By using the New World Kirkpatrick Model, this research gave volunteers an opportunity to purposefully think through, make meaning of, and share experiences that shape their role as a 4-H volunteer.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is limited research literature available that analyzes the relationship among training, support, and the overall volunteer experience, for 4-H volunteers. This study is significant for three main reasons. First, it offers data on 4-H volunteer training and how 4-H volunteers perceive their training and training experience as it relates to their volunteer role.

Secondly, this research offers Cooperative Extension professionals' insight to understand how volunteers experience training and support in relation to their overall volunteer experience.

Finally, this study contributes to the knowledge base about areas of training that could contribute to improved risk management, higher quality programming, and more effective 4-H volunteer trainings.

Volunteers are critical to the success of North Carolina 4-H; therefore, understanding how to best train and support them is crucial to the continued success of the organization. There is literature that relates to organizational training including benefits and delivery; however, there is very little literature related to 4-H volunteer training. Focusing on 4-H volunteers and the training and support they receive is still a new and under researched area in the 4-H community and the training 4-H volunteers receive varies greatly from county to county. 4-H volunteers are in a unique position. They serve as the main connection many youth have with the 4-H program and with that role they have a high level of responsibility. Understanding how to best equip volunteers with the training they need to be successful and safe in their role is crucial for continued organizational success and volunteer preparedness. Without question, 4-H volunteer roles are not limited to the actual delivery of programs, holding of club meetings, or trips to camp; their roles are also necessary to sustain a generational tradition and legacy experience for families and learners of all ages and contribute to community vitality. Many 4-H volunteers are legacy volunteers, a term used to describe those whose family members volunteer from one generation to the next. In fact, the tradition of volunteers goes back to 1902 when 4-H was first founded. By learning about the training experiences of these volunteers, 4-H will be able to strengthen its work, particularly work that depends upon the recruitment, retention, and rewarding of outstanding adult volunteers.

In a variety of fields, it is documented that “volunteers see training as a benefit of being part of an organization. Training teaches them skills that may be helpful elsewhere, and may even help them get a paying job” (Community Tool Box, n.d., para. 9). There are currently varying training programs and opportunities available for 4-H volunteers in North Carolina 4-H. In addition, there is a wide variety and level of support available to 4-H volunteers across the state. This study provides a better understanding about the types and topics of trainings offered for North Carolina 4-H volunteers. Capturing the perception volunteers have of the training and support they receive helps to strengthen local and statewide volunteer efforts.

Though the intended audience for this research study is the 4-H community, specifically 4-H agents and others directly working with 4-H volunteers, other organizations that utilize volunteers in their programs will benefit from the findings. In addition, literature and lay publications are intended audiences for this study to continue the development and support of training needed to facilitate a positive volunteer experience for both the 4-H volunteer and those that manage the volunteer program. This study provides the foundation for continued research related to 4-H volunteers. The information gathered through this study can help practitioners develop resources to better support and utilize volunteers. Supporting and utilizing volunteers helps local 4-H programs grow and expand outreach, thus helping more youth to experience the benefits of 4-H.

## **Summary**

The need for volunteers continues to grow. With increasingly limited budgets and the need for strong communities, having volunteers who can provide youth the opportunity to participate in something positive is more important now than ever. The need for well trained, committed, capable, and passionate volunteers continues to be important in the 4-H program.

(“Volunteers”, n.d.). 4-H volunteers have been an integral part of the 4-H program since the organization’s beginning. 4-H volunteers are the reason 4-H is able to reach so many youth each year and offer the wide variety of experiences to enhance youth development. Understanding more about 4-H volunteers’ perceptions of training and support will help strengthen the 4-H volunteer experience, making it possible for more youth to be able to participate in positive, life changing experiences through 4-H. This study answered this question by using an exploratory qualitative case study with the New World Kirkpatrick Model as the conceptual framework. The data collected and the stories shared benefit other volunteers and those that work directly with 4-H volunteers either on a local or state level. Furthermore, how 4-H volunteers experience their learning through training allows volunteers to share how they teach themselves what they need to know because of gaps in the volunteer training. In addition, the results add to the body of literature to be used by both 4-H professionals and potentially by other organizations that utilize and depend on volunteers to carry out organizational missions and programs.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter is organized in three parts. The first major part focuses on 4-H youth development programs from a national and state perspective. The literature review includes the beginnings and the founding principles for 4-H, a nonformal youth education program that is over 100 years old. After moving from a historical perspective to the present, an overview of 4-H youth development both nationally and within North Carolina is presented and discussed.

The second major area of the literature review examines the role and responsibilities of volunteers, the challenges organizations face to understand and sustain volunteers, and the specific trends associated with 4-H volunteers. This literature review explores volunteer recruitment, volunteer training, and the organizational and volunteer benefits received through volunteering.

The third major area for discussion is the Kirkpatrick Model, which serves as the conceptual framework for this study. Kirkpatrick's Model has a rich history in learning and training evaluation. According to Kurt (2016), the Kirkpatrick Model "is probably the best-known model for analyzing and evaluating the results of training and educational programs. It takes into account any style of training, both informal and formal, to determine aptitude based on four levels of criteria" (para. 1). This section of literature explains Kirkpatrick's Model, including what it is, critiques of this model as found in the literature, today's use of the model, as well as how this model will be used in this study.

### National and State Perspectives: Cooperative Extension Land Grant System and 4-H

**Land grant systems.** Passed in 1862, the Morrill Act authorized the establishment of land-grant colleges across the United States. Land-grant colleges were established through a set

aside “17.43 million acres of land in the public domain committed to finance the land-grant colleges-30,000 acres per senator and congressman in each state” (McDowell, 2001, p. 3). Originally designed for those in society’s working class, the original mission of land-grant colleges was to “teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts as well as classical studies so that members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education” (Washington State University Extension, 2009, p. 1). According to McDowell (2001), “prior to the 1862 land-grant institutions, higher education was reserved for; and helped preserve, the aristocracy of the society” (p. 4). The Morrill Act created a structure where everyone, not only the elite could obtain a higher education. With this law, those from all walks of life had access to college.

Under the Morrill Act, each state received a fixed amount of land based upon their number of senators and representatives. The proceeds from the sale of this land built and supported the land-grant colleges (Morrill Act, 2014). The year 1887 brought the passage of the Hatch Act, which mandated “the creation of agricultural experiment stations for scientific research” (APLU, n.d., para.1). These experiment stations had a direct connection with land-grant colleges and furthered the work of the institutions.

At the time of the Morrill Act of 1862, segregation prevented African Americans from attending the established land-grant colleges established through the Morrill Act of 1862; therefore, in 1890, a second Morrill Act was passed, creating land-grant institutions for African Americans (Comer, Campbell, Edwards, & Hillison, 2006, para. 1). After the passing of this Morrill Act, college became an option for more people than previously thought possible. In 1914, the Smith Lever Act created the Cooperative Extension Service through a federal, state, and county level partnership model (Smith-Lever, 2014, para. 3). The purpose was to extend the

university to the people (Smith-Lever, 2014, para. 3) through agricultural and technological advances (“National Archives”, 2014, para. 2). Its unique and impactful design led President Woodrow Wilson to call it “one of the most significant and far-reaching measures for the education of adults ever adopted by the government” (University of Arkansas, n.d., slide 3). “The unique nature of the Smith-Lever Act brought a systemic process for funding the on-going extension education work that had been started in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by educators” (Smith-Lever, 2014, para. 6) and “these advances helped increase American agricultural productivity dramatically throughout the 20th century” (“National Archives”, 2014, para. 2). Through Cooperative Extension, the course of American agriculture was changed by giving people early access to research-based information and ensuring that all people benefited from the knowledge and work of land-grant universities.

**Cooperative extension.** Cooperative Extension celebrated its 100th birthday in 2014. For over 100 years, Cooperative Extension has made information developed at land-grant universities accessible to all people. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 formally founded the Cooperative Extension system through government legislation.

According to Gould, Steele, and Woodrum (2014) in reference to the Smith-Lever Act:

The act was introduced by Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia and Representative A. F. Lever of South Carolina to expand the vocational, agricultural, and home demonstration programs in rural America. The creation of a formal outreach arm for a university that was supported by federal, state, and local funding was a unique and innovative idea that grew from the land-grant universities, which were founded to provide practical higher education opportunities to the common man (Rasmussen, 1989). (para. 1)



In the beginning, Cooperative Extension took researched-based information from land-grant universities to the people and focused primarily on agricultural pursuits and demonstration farms. Cooperative Extension has been present at some of our nation's most critical times. Through World War I and World War II, Cooperative Extension "helped the nation meet its wartime needs" (Cooperative Extension History, n.d., para. 5) by addressing food and labor shortages. During the Depression era, Cooperative Extension taught families skills from food preservation to sewing that helped "many farm families survive the years of economic depression and drought" (Cooperative Extension History, n.d., para. 6). After World War II, Cooperative Extension, through the sharing and teaching of technology, helped farm productivity increase while the number of farms decreased. "In 1950, one farmer supported the food needs of 15.5 people; in 1997, one farmer supported the food needs of almost 140 people" (Cooperative Extension History, n.d., para. 7).

Over the last century, extension has adapted to changing times and landscapes. Fewer than 2 percent of Americans farm for a living today, and only 17 percent of Americans now live in rural areas. Yet, the extension service still plays a significant role in American life — rural, urban, and suburban. Extension agents help farmers and ranchers achieve greater success, assist families with nutrition and home economics, and prepare today's youth to become leaders. (Cooperative Extension History, n.d., para. 9)

Even today, Cooperative Extension is still meeting the needs of people in the communities it serves. In North Carolina, Cooperative Extension is housed at North Carolina State University and at North Carolina A&T State University. Today, Extension works to:

- Translate science for practical application

- Identify emerging research questions, find answers, and encourage application of science and technology to improve agricultural, economic, and social conditions
- Prepare people to break the cycle of poverty, encourage healthful lifestyles, and prepare youth for responsible adulthood
- Provide rapid response regarding disasters and emergencies. (“Extension”, n.d., para. 6)

For over 100 years Cooperative Extension has been in the business of providing research-based information to citizens in their state. In North Carolina, it reaches every county and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians with a Cooperative Extension office located in each county. Through the work of field faculty, each county in North Carolina has access to information developed through the state’s land-grant system and a connection back to researched based information.

**4-H basics.** 4-H was established as the youth development component of the land-grant university system. In Ohio in 1902, A.B. Graham started the first 4-H clubs known as corn growing clubs and tomato canning clubs and “by 1924, 4-H clubs were formed and the clover emblem was adopted” (4-H History, n.d., para. 6). What started as an effort to spread new agricultural practices to local communities and to adults who were often skeptical and unwilling to change their current agricultural practices, 4-H clubs taught new agricultural practices to youth, who in turn shared these new practices with adults (von der Heide, n.d.).

The tests club members used were originally developed from work done at Ohio State University College of Agriculture where Graham earned the title of “Superintendent of Agricultural Extension” (McCormick & McCormick, 1985, p. 77). In addition, Graham was appointed as the first Extension agent in the nation (McCormick & McCormick, 1985, p. 77). In 1904, John Haines, established 4-H in Indiana and through the work of G.C. Adams, 4-H was

established through corn clubs in Georgia (4-H History Timeline, n.d.). Contests were started, clubs were formed following the model established by Graham, and more and more youth were exposed to what would soon be known as 4-H (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). Between 1905 and 1914, 4-H clubs “were started in nearly all states” (4-H History Timeline, n.d., p. 1).

While this work was taking place, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) noticed what was happening around the country and “began to take an interest in introducing advanced agricultural practices to farmers” (Wessel & Wessel, 1982, p. 10). In 1907, Smith, who had worked in Mississippi trying to create contests to change the agricultural diversity of the region, was established as a “USDA collaborator” (Wessel & Wessel, 1982, p. 12). This work laid the foundation for the work of Cooperative Extension (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

4-H youth development is the youth component of the Cooperative Extension system. (“4-H National”, n.d.). It is a program designed for young people ages 5-18 and provides an opportunity for youth, regardless of background or location, to participate in high quality youth programming (Sherrill, 2016). The organizational mission is to “empower young people to reach their full potential, working and learning in partnership with caring adults” (“About”, n.d., para. 10). This mission guides the way in which 4-H develops programs, establishes partnerships, and plans for the future. 4-H strives to give all youth access to important skills to help them become strong adults.

For more than 100 years, 4-H has stood behind the idea that youth is the single strongest catalyst for change. What began as a way to give rural youth new agricultural skills has grown into a global organization that teaches a range of life skills. 4-H is dedicated to positive youth development and helping youth meet challenges in a complex and changing world. (4-H Today, n.d., p. 1)

Youth involved in 4-H today are involved in areas such as science, healthy living, and citizenship. They learn how to be involved in positive community change, how to speak up, and how to pursue careers in which they are interested. They learn diverse life skills such as “rocketry, GIS mapping, DNA analysis, photography, community service, robotics, agricultural science, public speaking, nutrition, leadership” (4-H Today, n.d., p. 2) and learn how these skills translate into future careers.

The 4-H mission is carried out through a vast 4-H network including 3,500 Extension Professionals and 611,800 volunteers who work together with young people to create positive change in local communities, as well as globally (“About”, n.d., para. 3). In addition, the 4-H network is supported through over 25 million 4-H alumni nationally who give back in multiple ways to 4-H Youth Development (“About”, n.d., para. 3). These three stakeholder groups (professionals, volunteers, and alumni), help position and keep 4-H moving forward and reaching youth across the country. Each of the four Hs, (head, heart, hands, and health), are represented in the 4-H pledge, “I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service and my health to better living for my club, my community, my country, and my world” (“About”, n.d., para. 10). Through the support of the 4-H network, every day across the nation and the world, 4-Hers live out the 4-H pledge through their daily lives and interactions with others.

A popular description of 4-H is “a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills as they work in partnership with caring adults” (“Explore 4-H”, n.d., para. 3). 4-H’ers have these experiences through a variety of programs. Program areas range from agriculture to arts, to foods and nutrition, to personal development, to robotics, and any area in between.

Since its inception, 4-H has placed emphasis on the importance of young people being engaged, well-informed citizens. By connecting to their communities and community leaders, youth understand their role in civic affairs and expand their role in decision-making processes. It's clear that civic engagement provides the foundation that helps youth understand the "big picture" of life and finding purpose and meaning. Healthy food and nutrition have been addressed by the program since its inception in 1902.

Having a long history of promoting healthy living among youth and their families, 4-H has become a national leader in health-related education. The 4-H Healthy Living Mission Mandate engages youth and families through access and opportunities to achieve optimal physical, social, and emotional well-being. The need for science, engineering, and technology education is essential for today's young people. 4-H programs prepare youth for the challenges of the twenty-first century by engaging them in a process of discovery and exploration. (Penn State Extension, 2015, p. 2)

It is said that 4-H is for everyone, and it truly is, meaning if there is an interest area, 4-H most likely has a way to address it. If there is not a program available, programs can be developed by using research based information of the Cooperative Extension network and land-grant universities.

**4-H national structure and funding.** As the youth development component of Cooperative Extension, 4-H is an informal, research-based learning organization for youth. It is a place where youth can come to learn new skills, refine existing skills, and develop a resume of experiences that will help them in future life opportunities.

Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of local or regional offices. These offices are staffed by experts who provide useful,

practical, and research-based information to agricultural producers, small-business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes. Youth development educators from the nation's 100+ land-grant universities and the Cooperative Extension System use cutting-edge research to support volunteers and communities to provide youth with rich, educational, hands-on learning programs and activities. This network provides 4 H youth with the positive environments they need to become fearless leaders. (4-H Leadership, n.d., para. 2).

Today, Cooperative Extension and 4-H can be found in rural and urban settings. "In the early days, Extension educators conceived the idea of involving youth as mediaries [*sic*] between the university researcher/educator and the farmer in the community" (Van Horn, Flanagan, & Thomson, 1998, para. 2). During this time, the focus was on getting information on best corn planting practices developed at land grant universities to the men in the community. Youth proved to be the perfect vessel for disseminating this information through example in their own test plots when adults were hesitant to try anything new. (Van Horn, Flanagan, & Thomson, 1998, para. 2). Today, 4-H is still committed to creating positive learning opportunities and experiences for youth.

Today, 4 H serves youth in rural, urban, and suburban communities in every state across the nation. 4-H'ers are tackling the nation's top issues from global food security, climate change, and sustainable energy, to childhood obesity and food safety. 4 H out-of-school programming, in-school enrichment programs, clubs, and camps also offer a wide variety of STEM opportunities from agricultural and animal sciences to rocketry, robotics, environmental protection, and computer science to improve the nation's ability to

compete in key scientific fields and take on the leading challenges of the 21st century.

(4-H History, n.d., para. 6)

Programs in 4-H have changed throughout history to meet the changing needs and interests of young people through innovative approaches that hold true to researched-based information gained through the land-grant university system (Rasmussen, 1989). Programs might not look the same from state to state or even community to community, but the commonality is that they provide high quality, research-based, age appropriate information to young people.

One of the unique features of 4-H is its structure. Through congressional legislation, “4-H is the only national youth development organization that is federally mandated to conduct positive youth development programs” (4-H Healthy Living Taskforce, 2012, p. 8). This is a unique structure specifically to 4-H and another feature that helps 4-H stand out.

The uniqueness of the 4-H program is its interrelatedness to all facets of the local, state, and national communities. The program is multi-aged, vocationally and professionally diverse, and co-educational, reaching from the USDA through the land-grant universities and state Extension services to the local office then through volunteer staff to the youth in the community (Horrillo, 2013, p. 10).

The program national headquarters is housed within the United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) (4-H Leadership, n.d., para. 3). “NIFA provides federal funding to the system and, through program leadership, helps the system identify and address current issues and problems” (4-H Leadership, n.d., para. 3). Though National 4-H Headquarters (housed at NIFA) leads national programmatic efforts for 4-H, fundraising for the program is conducted through National 4-H Council (4-H Leadership, n.d.,

para. 3). The partnership between these two organizations provides programs and resources to address current and relevant issues and topics in youth development.

Just as National 4-H Council helps to provide funding at a national level, funding has a crucial role in the 4-H program on the state and local level. This funding is important not only with staffing and facilities, but also in giving youth the opportunities to participate in programs. The primary source of funding for 4-H is through Cooperative Extension. Cooperative Extension receives funding through a mix of federal, state, and local funds. In addition to these funds, grants and other resources help provide funding for local 4-H programs (Overview, 2006, pp. 2-3). Fundraising and private donor support provide additional funding for 4-H. Both state and local programs are charged with developing donors and funds to support the overall program. Statewide fundraising helps offer grant opportunities to counties, reduces attendance costs of statewide events for youth, and offers leadership opportunities for volunteers. On a local level, fundraising provides resources for youth such as camper scholarships, volunteer training, and recognition opportunities. Fundraising can be a difficult task but is important to ensure youth can participate in the program.

The organizational structure and reporting lines of 4-H are equally complex. On the state level, there is a State 4-H Leader who is responsible for the entire 4-H program in that state. The State 4-H Leader reports directly to the Director of Cooperative Extension. Under the State 4-H Leader are 4-H specialists who provide state level support, direction, and guidance and manage and create programs and resources related to their areas of responsibility. The state team is also made up of 4-H specialists who are housed in other academic departments but lead and provide curriculum support for 4-H youth and agents. An example of this could be youth programming in horticulture or electricity.



In addition, the 4-H team is comprised of volunteers, agents, and program assistants/associates. At the county level, 4-H agents are responsible for designing and implementing a 4-H program that meets the needs of the youth in their county and volunteer management, which includes recruiting, supporting, and training 4-H volunteers. 4-H volunteers are critical to 4-H programs and are often the hands, feet, and connection of the 4-H program with youth. It is not uncommon for a 4-H volunteer to be part of a multi-generational tradition of volunteering, following in the footsteps of their parents and great grandparents. Once 4-H youth age out of the 4-H program, they often carry on the tradition of volunteering, paying forward to others what they received as a youth. 4-H volunteers are one of the unique and positive parts of the 4-H program. The strong team that reaches across the state is a unique feature of 4-H; however, there are a number of other features that make 4-H unique.

**What makes 4-H unique.** One of the key principles that undergirds 4-H and one of the defining characteristics of the program is the guiding philosophy of positive youth development. Positive youth development (PYD) is an approach which “envisions young people as resources rather than as problems for society” (Damon, 2004, p. 15). This approach “aims at understanding, educating, and engaging children in productive activities...” (Damon, 2004, p. 15). Through the work of Richard and Jacqueline Learner and their colleagues at Tufts University, research has shown that the foundation of 4-H Youth Development is grounded in positive youth development (Learner & Learner, 2013). 4-H was founded on taking research based information to communities to enact change. Over 100 years later, 4-H still has a foundation in research-based information.

A longitudinal study conducted through Tufts University “assessed across adolescence the key characteristics of positive youth development, that is the ‘5 Cs’ of positive development -

- competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring (or compassion)” (Institute For Applied Research in Youth Development, n.d., para. 2). Data collected through the study showed:

4-H’ers in Grades 7-12 are nearly 4 times more likely to make contributions to their communities; 4-H’ers in Grades 8-12 are about 2 times more likely to be civically active; 4-H’ers in Grade 10-12 are nearly 2 times more likely to participate in science programs during out-of-school time; 4-H girls are 2 times more likely (Grade 10) and nearly 3 times more likely (Grade 12) to take part in science programs compared to girls in other out-of-school time activities; and Grade 7 4-H’ers are nearly 2 times more likely to make healthier choices. (Learner & Learner, 2013, p. i)

The results of the Tufts study, which started in 2002 and was repeated for eight years, reinforced the fact that 4-H is making strides to advance the field of positive youth development by helping to create capable, caring, and contributing citizens for our society (Learner & Learner, 2013, p. ii). 4-H continues the tradition of providing experiences that help young people go out and make a positive difference in their communities and in the world.

In addition to Positive Youth Development, another unique and defining characteristic of 4-H Youth Development is the experiential learning process that guides 4-H curriculum and programs. “Experiential learning takes place when a youth is involved in an activity, looks back at it critically, determines what was useful or important to remember and uses this information to perform another activity” (Experiential Learning, 2011, para. 1). Experiential learning is a model in which one step serves as the foundation for the next step. “The sequential steps of the model help youth identify what they have learned from a 4-H experience or activity and to apply that learning to other experiences or situations” (Norman & Jordan, n.d., p. 1). The five steps

that make up this process include: experience, share, process, generalize, and apply with modifications based on the experiential learning model initially developed by Kolb (Norman & Jordan, n.d.). The experiential learning model puts into action the 4-H slogan “Learn by Doing” (National 4-H History, n.d., para. 5). “Benefits for youth participating in the experiential learning process...include: learning from each other by sharing knowledge and skills, working together, sharing information and evaluating themselves and others, taking responsibility for their own learning, relating experiences to their own lives” (Norman & Jordan, n.d., p. 2). By participating in the experiential learning process, youth can take the skills they learn and easily transfer them to other life experiences.

A positive and nurturing relationship between a youth and an adult is important. Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O’Connor (2005) showed that “youth are largely isolated from non-family adults—spatially, socially, and psychologically—in almost all spheres of United States society, yet, research indicates that strong relationships between youth and adults serve protective and developmental functions” (p. 1). This is where youth adult partnerships come into play. Youth Adult Partnerships (YAPS) “are cooperative efforts between youth and adults, usually begin with a mutual need that impacts both youth and adults, benefit both members of the partnership and the community and are built on respect, communication, investment and meaningful involvement” (Mantooth, n.d., para. 1). This intergenerational learning, “is an effective way that people from different ages, learning styles, values and motivations learn together” (Ropes, 2013, p. 714).

From clubs and councils to special projects and advisory groups, 4-H has a strong history of effectively using YAPS. Practice shows that when youth and adults recognize the skills each bring to the table and respect and value the other as a partner, YAPS are both a productive and

effective way to accomplish goals and make an impact. Research has shown that “adults and young people can successfully learn together” (Murdock & Paterson, 2002, para. 10).

Williamson (1998) shares that change “can be successfully planned, implemented and sustained only if there is a true partnership between local adults, youth, and the youth service organizations” (p. 30). YAPS, when conducted correctly, are mutually beneficial to youth, adults, and to the community. Across the nation, 4-H has a focus to create competent, caring, and contributing youth and members of society (Virginia Cooperative Extension, n.d.) and a primary way of achieving this goal is through successful, meaningful, and intentional youth/adult partnerships.

**North Carolina 4-H.** North Carolina 4-H has a rich history dating back to 1909. The first 4-H Club in North Carolina was founded in Ahoskie in Hertford County and was established by I.O. Schaub who served in the role as North Carolina’s first 4-H agent (Clark, 1984, pp. 18-19). In 1909, just as today, 4-H delivered research-based information to young people and found ways to connect and make learning relevant for both the 4-H youth and their families. Today the experiences youth are exposed to range from farming, to robotics, to public speaking, and almost every topic in between, but the focus on relevant research-based information remains. 4-H participants in North Carolina have been using their head, heart, hands, and health to create better communities across the state since 1909 (Dietz, 2006).

Both North Carolina 4-H and Cooperative Extension are supported through county partnerships. This partnership with local government provides nearly 50% of salaries (and in some cases more) in addition to providing facilities, utilities, and other resources for extension agents to perform their job. This partnership also works to ensure the citizens of the county are being served. 4-H Youth Development and Cooperative Extension are housed at land grant

universities and have a presence in every county in North Carolina. As such, both NC State and North Carolina A&T State University have a presence in all 100 counties and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians (Extension Stats, 2015). With its presence in all 100 counties and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, for many North Carolinians, 4-H and Cooperative Extension are the first connections with North Carolina's two land grant universities. This connection to the university and research-based information greatly strengthens both the information and the resources 4-H and Cooperative Extension are able to provide to local communities.

North Carolina 4-H, a program that has no cost to join or uniform to purchase, is traditionally an affordable and easily accessible program in which young people can engage. Activities and opportunities may cost money depending on the event; however, those activities are usually low cost and cost much less than the actual value of the experience. Fundraising, grants, and donations, help maintain reasonable costs for 4-H. The reasonable cost of 4-H combined with locations in every county in the state help make the program accessible for all youth. Youth in any community in North Carolina can access and participate in 4-H. Keeping 4-H both low cost and accessible ensures that all youth have the opportunity to become a 4-H participant.

North Carolina 4-H focuses on creating citizen leaders through programs that teach students about careers, healthy lifestyles, volunteerism, and citizenship (North Carolina 4-H, 2013). School to career programs focus on education and enhance classroom learning by helping prepare youth with employable skills for the future (North Carolina 4-H, 2013). Healthy lifestyle programs such as Hungry to Help raise awareness of hunger in North Carolina and challenge 4-H participants and communities to find real ways to address hunger in their communities (North

Carolina 4-H, 2013). 4-H is successful in its mission to grow citizen leaders because it receives help from volunteers who continue the tradition of volunteering. Also encouraged is community service and helping others as part of 4-H project work and club activities. When these citizen leaders are compared to youth who do not participate in 4-H, they “are 25% more likely to contribute to families and their communities” (North Carolina 4-H, 2013, p. 3).

**4-H through the years.** Throughout history, 4-H has focused on social change. One great example of how 4-H helped communities respond to societal issues occurred during World War I and World War II when 4-H youth answered the call to service. During World War I, 4-H participants grew food to help deal with food shortages (Van Horn, Flanagan, & Thomson, 1998). During World War II, 4-H participants, through an effort called Food for Freedom, “grew essential war crops, raised meat animals, and canned millions of jars of fruits, vegetables, and meats” (Van Horn, et al., 1998, para. 13). 4-H youth served with unwavering support; according to Van Horn, et al. (1998), “it was estimated that from 1943 until the end of the war, 4-H club members produced enough food to feed a million men serving in the American forces” (para. 14).

A mandated federal report known as ES-237 shows that 4-H Youth Development Programs are conducted in “3,150 counties of the United States, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, Micronesia, and Northern Mariana Islands” (4-H Overview, n.d., para. 2). It is also reported that 6 million youth are reached through 4-H each year, and they are reached with the help of over 500,000 volunteers nationally (What is 4-H, 2019). 4-H youth mirror the population in race, ethnicity, and place of residence. As an organization, 4-H has experienced changes from growing in numbers with just over 116,000 youth participants nationally in 1914 (Van Horn, Flanagan, & Thomson, 1999, para. 2) to

growing in the diversity of its membership. According to Van Horn et al. (1999), “before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, some 4-H clubs were segregated. In addition, some school clubs were segregated until 1975 because schools remained segregated” (para. 6). In 4-H today, there is diversity and acceptance among the youth, volunteers, and stakeholders. There remains the familiar unwavering support for social change and making a difference for others that youth have had since the beginning of what is now known as 4-H.

Since 4-H is a federally mandated out of school program and part of the USDA, federal reporting is required. “To receive funding, each county and state must report each year on the race, gender, grade and residence of each participant in these programs” (Knowles & Tesdall, 2014, para. 2). 4-H’s federal report, ES-237, is completed by each county program and compiled statewide each year. The numbers generated show impacts and outreach and provide information for funding. Reports are due in the fall of the year, and numbers are compiled and released at the beginning of the following year. For 2018, 229,500 youth ages 5-18 participated in North Carolina 4-H Youth Development, and 16,978 youth and adult volunteers provided positive youth development experiences for these youth (North Carolina 4-H, 2019). A snapshot of the report data shows that of the 229,500 young people who participated in North Carolina 4-H in 2018, 110,189 of these participated in biological sciences activities, 85,226 participated in projects in health activities, 53,272 participated in projects and experiences related to environmental education and earth sciences, and 52,938 in foods and nutrition (North Carolina 4-H, 2019). School enrichment activities reached 140,161 youth, 87,168 youth were reached through special interest programming, and 18,295 youth participated in 4-H clubs (North Carolina 4-H, 2019). 4-H participants in North Carolina are diverse in ethnicity and location with 67% of 4-H youth identifying as Caucasian, 25% African American, and 17% Hispanic and

Latino (North Carolina 4-H, 2019). 4-H youth live in diverse areas with 45% of the reported numbers of 4-H youth residing in towns under 10,000 people, 28% from small towns/cities, and 5% from farms (North Carolina 4-H, 2019).

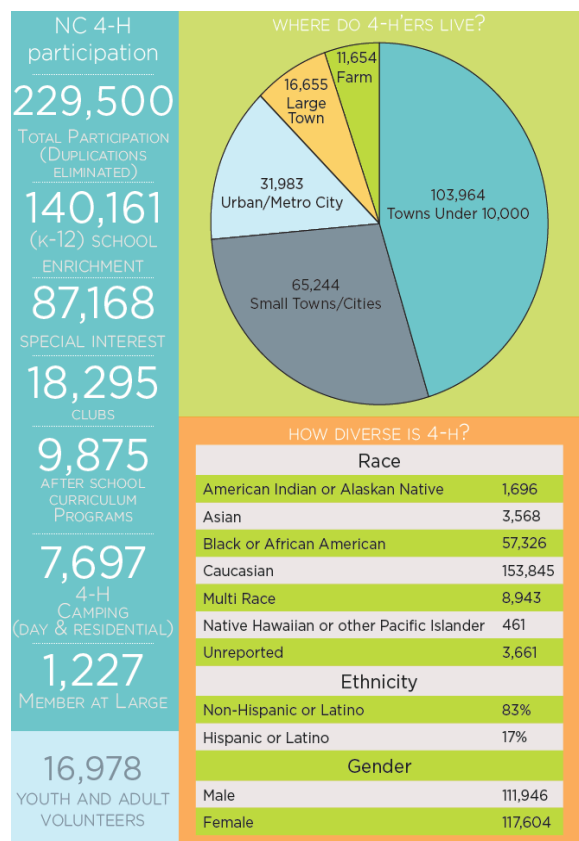


Figure 1: North Carolina 4-H Demographics (North Carolina 4-H, 2019)



Figure 2: North Carolina 4-H Curriculum Areas (North Carolina 4-H, 2019)



4-H is a diverse and multigenerational program, with 4-H participants today participating in some of the same programs as their parents and even grandparents. Many volunteers with 4-H enjoy sharing their personal stories of 4-H camp with youth just as youth today enjoy sharing their experience at 4-H camp. Other programs such as STEM and robotics are new to this generation of 4-H participants and are helping to prepare these youth to live in a technologically advanced society. Though STEM has always had a place in agriculture (a very traditional program of 4-H), its focus on robotics, engineering, and other high tech areas of study make it a new and exciting program for many 4-H youth. Still other programs such as livestock are a blend of the traditional 4-H program familiar to 4-H alumni and meet the expectations of today's youth. The 4-H livestock program is an example of a traditional program that uses up to date research to make the program relevant to the needs of youth today.

North Carolina 4-H has always sought to provide relevant information to the youth of North Carolina. The information provided and the way in which the information is delivered has changed just as the interest areas, needs, and youth have expanded. 4-H Youth Development in North Carolina has grown to develop programs to meet emerging youth needs including 4-H Juntos, 4-H Shooting Sports, and International Programming. These programs were designed to meet the changing face of young people in North Carolina and designed around the focus areas of school to career, healthy lifestyles, volunteerism, and citizen leaders (North Carolina 4-H, 2013). 4-H has evolved from existing only in rural areas with a strictly agricultural purpose to having a large presence in towns and cities. A shift has been made from primarily agriculture and home economics projects to include a broad range of project areas from robotics to environmental stewardship. In 1909, 4-H clubs were the only delivery mode for youth to participate in 4-H. In 2019, there are now multiple delivery modes for North Carolina 4-H.

What has not changed is providing research-based information to North Carolina youth through relevant methods and delivering this information through both 4-H agents and 4-H volunteers. Some of the unique characteristics of 4-H, including Positive Youth Development, experiential learning, growing citizen leaders, and intergenerational learning, are what provide the framework for 4-H today.

## **Volunteers**

**Motivations.** The second major area of this literature review examines the motivations, roles and responsibilities of volunteers, the challenges organizations face to understand and sustain volunteers, and the trends associated with 4-H volunteers. Volunteers are a critical part of many organizations, and the academic knowledge about volunteers is as varied as the organizations and their missions. A good starting point to understand volunteerism and volunteers begins with the question, “who are volunteers?” Volunteers are not non-paid employees, and organizations should not have the same expectations from volunteers that they have for paid employees. Volunteers are not people who fill the role of a paid employee on a long-term basis. According to Carroll and Miller (1991), volunteers are “determined and selfless individuals working to provide the help that is needed, wherever it is needed” (p. 1). Volunteers give their time for a cause or purpose that is important to them. Volunteers are motivated to share their time, talent, and resources for different reasons; they are drawn to different causes, come from different backgrounds, and serve in different roles. Classic volunteering literature connects volunteerism to human psychological needs for competence, related or connected to others, and having a sense of choice in how they spend their time (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

4-H volunteer roles vary depending on the job or organization; however, there are some basic principles that differentiate a volunteer from a paid employee. Stenzel and Feeney (1976) provide a comprehensive image of a volunteer:

The volunteer is not a career worker.... the volunteers do not receive salary, wages or honorarium for their services....the volunteer has a different kind of responsibility than a staff member where one is employed....the volunteer has a different kind of preparation for his or her volunteer service than for a career or trade in contrast to a paid employee who must meet specifically state qualifications in education and experience for this position....the volunteer has a different identification with the organization and community than the career worker who may be promoted into positions with other agencies or other localities in the interest of professional advancement. (pp. 3-4)

As volunteers are not the same as paid employees, they are often not covered in the same way with liability as paid employees and have strict perimeters that must be enforced depending on the organization. While the term volunteer can be a catch all phrase (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996), there are very specific guidelines which apply to volunteers.

Volunteers donate their time to causes they believe in. People decide to volunteer for a variety of reasons. Ellis (1996) states, “after painstaking statistical analysis, the researches end up proving...there are many motivations for volunteering” (p. 211). For example, reasons to volunteer can range from a desire to feel needed or valued to fulfilling a family tradition or a desire to give back after benefitting in some way from services offered by a volunteer organization. Volunteers are motivated by family obligation, to learn new skills, to make connections, or even out of guilt. Volunteers can be motivated because they have friends who volunteer, because an employer says it is important, or because of religious expectations. People

volunteer to teach skills they have learned, to be a positive influence for youth or others, or to feel a connection to another time in their life. According to Shantz, Banerjee, and Lamb (2019):

Altruism and giving back to the community may be primary motivators among youth (Lanero et al., 2017), research shows that their continuance to volunteer depends more on personal motivations, including activities that may lead them to new or better employment opportunities (e.g., Handy et al., 2010; Jardim & da Silva, 2018). (p. 202S)

The reasons people volunteer are as diverse as the people who volunteer.

Understanding the motivations of volunteers is more than compiling a list of reasons why people volunteer. Motivations can affect personal commitment and overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience. Motivations are deeply personal and differ for each person. Organizations do not simply want people who have a desire to volunteer, they also want people who are motivated to stay involved in volunteering. To help facilitate a positive experience for all parties, Finkelstein (2007) reported, “to best ensure active, satisfied volunteers, prospective volunteers’ motivations for helping should be determined early in the orientation and training process” (p. 10). Organizations want and need volunteers, but they also need the right fit for volunteers. When an organization takes the time to learn a volunteer’s motivation both how to recruit and how to utilize the volunteer is made apparent (Stukas, Hoye, Nicholson, Brown, & Aisbett, 2016). Understanding personal motivations and reasons for volunteering helps ensure the volunteer opportunity is a good match for the person and a good match for the organization.

**Recruitment and benefits.** For organizations that utilize volunteers, attention to the recruitment process and an ability to welcome and retain volunteers once they begin their work is critical. Volunteering starts with recruitment, and though there are a variety of ways to recruit, Musick and Wilson (2008) state, “even highly motivated people are unlikely to volunteer unless

they are asked, and people with little motivation to volunteer might agree to do so if they are constantly badgered by friends to give some of their time” (p. 55). Ellis (1996) writes about targeting volunteers and believes “the volunteer community has been singularly uncreative in finding places in which to encourage people to volunteer. Recruiters tend to go to the same sources over and over again, often in direct competition with lots of other organizations” (p. 45). For those who want to volunteer but may not know exactly how, there are websites such as VolunteerMatch.org that match people’s interests with organizations seeking volunteers. Through websites such as these, volunteers can find, be paired with, and volunteer for causes and projects that they believe in. These volunteer opportunities include face-to-face opportunities and the opportunity with some organizations to volunteer virtually (Volunteer Match, n.d.). DeWitt Watts and Edwards (1983) state: “personal contact--a direct request, organizational membership, or knowing a friend or family member who benefits from a particular service--is the primary way people become involved in voluntary activities (Allen, 1982)” (p. 10).

Bussell and Forbes (2002) argue that it is more important for organizations to “have an understanding of its target group” (p. 244). The target group is the ideal person or persons that an organization wants to recruit to be a volunteer. If an organization does not know who it wants to recruit, the likelihood of recruiting the right person who will serve long-term, decreases. To fully understand an organization’s target group, there has to be some intentional thought for the type of volunteer an organization wants and an understanding of who volunteers. While all organizations want super volunteers, the ones that high volumes of their time and talents, Einolf and Yung (2018) state that often times super volunteers do not “seek out a high-level volunteer commitment on their own, but the organization slowly encouraged them to commit more and more of their time” (p. 798).

Volunteering is big business with an incredible economic impact and savings. For the year 2018, the Corporation for National and Community Service (2018a) found that “77.34 million adults (30.3 percent) volunteered through an organization last year.” (para. 2). Altogether, “Americans volunteered nearly 6.9 billion hours, worth an estimated \$167 billion in economic value” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2018a, para.2). When comparing genders, the Corporation for National and Community Service (2018b) reports that in the year 2018, women volunteered “3.9 billion hours of service” (para. 2) as compared with men who volunteered “3.0 billion hours of service” (para. 2). When looking at generations that volunteer according to the Corporation for National and Community Service (2018b) “26.1% of Generation Y Americans volunteer”, (para. 3) while “30.7% of Baby Boomers volunteer” (para. 6).

Just as who volunteers varies, where people volunteer varies. Overall in 2018 according to the Corporation for National and Community Service (2018a), of those who volunteered:

Americans most frequently gave their time to religious groups (32 percent), a quarter volunteered most often with sports or arts groups (25.7 percent); with another nearly 20 percent supporting education or youth service groups. One in three volunteers raises funds for nonprofits (36 percent). Additional volunteer activities include: food donation and meal preparation (34.2 percent); transportation and labor support (23 percent); tutoring young people (23 percent); serving as a mentor (26.2 percent); and lending professional and management expertise (20.5 percent). (para. 7)

Volunteering is important, and it can be good for physical health in addition to the mental benefits of being connected with an organization and giving back. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (2007), there is a “strong relationship between volunteering

and health: those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression later in life than those who do not volunteer” (p. 1). It is also reported that “those who engage in volunteer activities are less likely to suffer from ill health later in life and may be introduced into a positive reinforcing cycle of good health and volunteering” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007, p. 7). There are other benefits to volunteering besides just health benefits. According to Sengal and Robinson (2019), “volunteering can help you make friends, learn new skills, advance your career, and even feel happier and healthier” (para. 1). Volunteering for an organization is not only good for the organization, it can also be good for the person volunteering. Intentional volunteer recruitment takes time, but time spent on the front end making sure the right people are recruited saves time later when the volunteer stays and helps recruit others to the organization.

**Development and training.** Once partnered with an organization, in most cases, volunteers have to go through some sort of screening, matching, and training process. According to Huang, Strawderman, Babski-Reeves, Ahmed, and Selehi (2014), “effective training programs are critical for successful employee performance. The same can be said for volunteer programs. Volunteers need to have the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill the mission of the organization” (p.1095). Volunteer training varies greatly from organization to organization. Training can range from no training to minimal screening and possibly an orientation to an in depth and extensive training complete with benchmarks and follow up processes. For example, to volunteer with the organization World Relief, in addition to filling out an application, references are checked, a background check is performed, and persons wanting to volunteer must attend an orientation process (World Relief Durham, n.d.). When a person volunteers with the American Red Cross, a 45-minute online orientation is provided in addition to local specific

information and training (American Red Cross, n.d.). UNICEF has a variety of volunteer opportunities and provides two online volunteer training webinars.

The Peace Corps is a well know federal agency. This organization trains volunteers to travel “abroad to tackle the most pressing needs of people around the world” (Peace Corps, n.d.-a, para. 1). After training, volunteers travel abroad to serve and then return home to use their skills in a multitude of areas. The Peace Corps program has a prescribed training program depending on the specific assignment given to a volunteer (Peace Corps, n.d.-b, para. 5). In addition, the Peace Corps spends time and resources on capacity building with their volunteers. This organization states that the role of a volunteer is to “join your community in its learning process, serving as a teacher and student, facilitator and participant. “As you assist others in building their capacity, you will strengthen your own abilities in ways you perhaps never imagined possible” (Peace Corps, 2011, p. 4). The organization has created an in-depth handbook and training focused on capacity building for its volunteers and for those the organization serves. Habitat for Humanity is an internationally known non-profit organization. For its volunteer training, it offers an e-learning training module where volunteers register for an account and are then provided resources on topics ranging from “construction basics to housing finance options to tips for effectively leading a Habitat for Humanity affiliate” (Habitat for Humanity, n.d., para. 1). In addition to an online training, specific Habitat for Humanity groups provide handbooks and policy manuals for their volunteers such as resources provided by the Kalamazoo Valley Habitat for Humanity. This division has a handbook for their volunteers covering organizational information and policies regarding conduct, safety, and contact information (Kalamazoo Valley Habitat for Humanity, 2012, p. i).



Another organization that is well known and depends on volunteers is Hospice.

Wittenberg-Lyles, Schneider, and Oliver (2010) examined Hospice volunteer training. Hospice volunteer training is multi-dimensional, includes curriculum, and prepares volunteers “for coping with patient care, ethical decision-making and clarify the volunteer’s role within the interdisciplinary team” (Wittenberg-Lyles, et al., 2010, p. 261). It is reported that an “estimated 400,000 active volunteers participate in the delivery of hospice each year, supplying more than 16 million hours of service” (Wittenberg-Lyles, et al., 2010, p. 261). Through the evaluation of a national training survey, Wittenberg-Lyles, et al. (2010) reported from the study that “the majority of volunteer coordinators reported a 12 month minimum commitment required for volunteering” (p. 263) and that the calculated amount to “conduct three volunteer training sessions per year was approximately \$14,303” (p. 264) with “an average training cost of \$763 per volunteer” (p. 264). From this study, Hospice has a detailed plan in place for training and equipping their volunteers for the role of serving as a hospice volunteer. They spend the time and the resources making sure that they know the volunteer who will join a patient’s team and that the volunteer knows the organization and fully understands his/her role within the process.

Volunteering is a unique concept and according to Hager and Brudney (2015), “the professional field of volunteer administration advocates a core set of best practices, such as interviewing volunteers, matching them to assignments, supervising volunteer activities, and recognizing their contributions to organizations” (p. 235). One model of volunteer management that can be applied across a variety of settings is the ISOTURE model. This model has seven steps, “Identification, Selection, Orientation, Training, Utilization, Recognition, and Evaluation” (Dodd & Boleman, n.d., p. 1). Though all steps are important, the orientation and training pieces are crucial to make sure the volunteer is prepared to work with and represent the organization.

As part of the orientation and training process, many organizations also include a background check as part of this process. Orientation and training processes range from an online application and 90-minute training for some organizations to a multi-level orientation and training program. Training volunteers is beneficial to both the volunteer and to the organization. Naylor (1967) states, “in addition to the values for the individual volunteer, from an overall administrative point of view, training is a very effective tool for focusing the efforts and coordinating various parts of the whole” (p. 123). Without proper training, volunteers should not be utilized. It is misguided for an organization to send out an untrained volunteer, and it is potentially unsafe for a volunteer to work for an organization without receiving proper training. Volunteer training should be “specific to the requirements of the volunteer position, geared to the skill level of the volunteer, ongoing, specific to the needs identified by both the volunteer and supervisor, [and] periodically evaluated to determine if it is on track” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005, p. 3-3). Quality training includes the long-term view and ongoing or continuing learning plans that benefit and support the volunteers as they progress through their roles. Viewed from this perspective, training should be more than a one-time experience; quality training involves a continuing and ongoing learning plan (Naylor, 1967).

Skoglund (2006) acknowledges that one predictor for volunteers to stay with an organization for a significant amount of time is “an effective orientation and training of a program’s volunteers” (p. 217). A quality training program should “increase volunteers’ confidence and their sense of personal achievement and serve as a meaningful form of recognition. Training must meet recognized needs, engage the intended audience, and lead to application” (“4-H Volunteer Leader,” n.d. p. 1). Howard and DiGennaro Reed (2015) question if this is a “contributing factor to high rates of volunteer turnover” (p. 297) and conclude “it is

vital to develop and evaluate training procedures that can teach volunteers to carry out their responsibilities correctly, can easily be implemented by volunteer managers, and are affordable for use in nonprofit organizations with limited training budgets” (p. 298).

A volunteer taxonomy, Volunteer Research, Knowledge, and Competency (VRKC) is an outline for volunteer development for 4-H professionals (Culp, McKee, & Nestor, n.d.). The taxonomy focuses on communication, organization, program management, educational design and delivery, positive youth development, and interpersonal characteristics as domain areas based on the thought that these are the “competencies that volunteers will need to effectively deliver 4-H Youth Development programs and activities” (Culp et al., n.d., p. 3.). Each domain is supported with tasks that once a volunteer understands and can implement, will lead to a stronger volunteer and overall enhanced volunteer led program (Culp et al., n.d.). In 2008, a National Framework for 4-H Volunteerism was created using VRKC as a resource. The purpose of this framework was to “communicate and guide decisions and actions related to volunteerism across the 4-H system” (Stone & Edwards, 2008, p. 2). The framework, which was designed for those who implement 4-H volunteer programs, addressed five elements, “creating safe environments...engaging volunteers...administering volunteer management...systems, benefits of volunteering...[and] strengthening partnerships” (Stone & Edwards, 2008, p. 4).

Factors such as time commitment, resources spent, and material covered, there are many ways volunteer organizations deliver volunteer training. Face-to-face is the traditional and still very common way to conduct trainings. Just as many people prefer face-to-face academic classes or meetings, face-to-face trainings still prove to be effective and used in many settings. Simeral (2001) shares some of the benefits of face-to-face interactions: “teaching diversity and tolerance...strengthens committees...encourages long-term relationships...[and] provides

opportunity for sociability/hospitality” (n.p.). Banna (2014) says of face-to-face training, “by retaining the physical face-to-face method of training, both companies and individual will be able to take more from the experience both in terms of social skills and interaction in addition to educational know-how” (para. 17).

Online training, or e-learning, is growing in use as technology becomes easier to access. Carter (2004) acknowledges the flexibility that “anytime anywhere” (p. 32) training provides. Often, online training is a “highly flexible model [allowing] users to tap into resources, including lectures, video clips of experts, simulation activities and tutorials, whenever they have the time” (Carter, 2004, p. 32). Walls (2000) argues that true online learning is as good if not better than face-to-face training.

The assumption has been that face-to-face training-- with a human being actually providing the training-- leads to greater interaction than computer-based training, and as a result, leads to greater success. But that assumption is not based on fact. True e-learning provides many, if not more, opportunities for interaction than instructor-led training.

(Walls, 2000, para. 5)

In 1999, Kiser highlighted the top 10 things a trainer or company needed to keep in mind when presenting online training. One of the points presented is applicable to all types of training: “don’t dump data online and call it training” (Kiser, 1999, p. 68). This point remains true today; it is easy for an organization to find data, dump it (online, in a handbook, etc.), and call it training. Organizations developing online training must think creatively and acknowledge that “the learner – not the trainer – is in control” of their learning experience (Kiser, 1999, p. 68). The downside to the highly flexible online training environment is “maintaining user motivation

and interest” (Carter, 2004, p. 32). Planning creatively and purposefully will help to maintain both the motivation and interest of the learner while providing a high-quality training experience.

Blended or hybrid training blends both elements of face-to-face training and online training to create a unique training experience. “Hybrid learning is a pedagogical approach that combines face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction” (O’Byrne & Pytash, 2015, p. 137). Mortera-Gutierrez (2006) explains the benefit of a blended learning environment: “the combination of face-to-face instruction and communication technology (e.g., computer communication, Internet, online instruction, delivery content software, etc.) in a blended learning situation create a myriad of educational possibilities that reflect its pedagogical richness” (p. 317). Though there are multiple models for this type of learning, each model contains an element of face-to-face interaction, instruction, and online experiences. One way to successfully utilize this type of environment is to share knowledge online and use the “face-to-face time for in depth discussions and content application” (Burns & Schroeder, 2014, n.p.). Blended forms of learning and training can “provide more responsive, flexible and innovative training” (Callan, Johnston, & Poulsen, 2015, p. 294).

If an organization has effectively trained a volunteer, then the volunteer is ready to begin the assignment and feels equipped and prepared to serve in his or her role. Depending on personal motivations, how a person wants to be recognized may vary. According to David McClelland’s Human Motivation Theory, “every person has one of three main driving motivators: the need for achievement, affiliation, or power” (McClelland’s Human, n.d., para. 13). When volunteer managers and organizations understand a person’s driving motivation, they can find ways to reward a person in a way that is meaningful to them. Volunteers, regardless of the organization, program, or cause they volunteer for, give of their time, their knowledge, and

offer their resources to help further an idea they believe in. Research shows that volunteers can be utilized in different ways in an organization, volunteer for a variety of reasons, and give back in a variety of ways. Research also shows that volunteer training is critical, not only for the happiness and fulfillment of the volunteer, but also for the wellbeing and productivity of the organization.

#### **4-H Volunteers**

In North Carolina 4-H, volunteers are key to success in all areas of 4-H Youth Development. Without the help of 16,798 youth and adult volunteers who gave of their time, knowledge, and resources in 2018, 4-H would not have the reach and impact that it does today (North Carolina 4-H, 2019). Volunteers are recruited and managed through county 4-H programs, and the county 4-H agent administers the county volunteer program. 4-H agents are expected to serve as a volunteer manager, making sure all their program volunteers are trained, have a positive experience, and have what they need to help 4-H youth.

4-H is only successful as a youth development program because of the work of volunteers. Without these volunteers, 4-H would not reach the number of youth it does each year. 4-H volunteers are the hands, feet, and often the first point of connection for 4-H programs. These volunteers are often a product of the program and believe in paying it forward for the current generation. Others volunteer because they believe in the mission of 4-H or they want to make a difference in a young person's life. 4-H volunteers range from a new volunteer who has served less than a month to volunteers who have served over 45 years. Volunteers carry on 4-H clubs that were led by their parents and grandparents, start new clubs, take youth to camp, volunteer at a summer fun activity, offer to serve as a judge at local or state events, and serve in many other capacities. Volunteers are recruited by word of mouth, specific asks, volunteer fairs,

flyers in the grocery store, or through their children. Volunteers seek out 4-H because they were a member, they want their child to be involved, or because they read about 4-H in a newspaper article. Volunteers come to 4-H for a variety of reasons and serve in multiple capacities.

4-H volunteers serve in roles ranging from club leaders, to camp volunteers, to teaching a summer fun workshop, to judging at a favorite foods event, volunteers serve in a variety of areas. Just as varied as the areas in which volunteers serve is the amount of time they volunteer. 4-H club leaders for example could be expected to spend at least five hours a month volunteering for a club that meets once a month. A volunteer who serves as a judge for an event might spend three hours a year in volunteer service. Volunteers might serve in a volunteer role on a one time or occasional basis while others might serve in volunteer roles continuously. Volunteer longevity and involvement can last for more than 50 years, which is an unusual commitment in the realm of volunteerism. When you combine the time volunteers give (both in hours and in years of service) and account for the number of volunteers who are legacy volunteers (meaning their parent, grandparent, and sometimes great grandparents volunteered), the total time a family unit volunteers for 4-H can be exceptionally large. 4-H volunteers give abundantly of their time and have a high level of commitment to both the role and to 4-H as an organization. 4-H volunteers have a variety of resources available to them to help in their work. They have their personal experiences and skill sets that can support their volunteer work.

Volunteers have access to 4-H curriculum on a variety of topic areas to support their programming with 4-H participants. There are contests and competitions that provide training and other relevant materials to support the work of a 4-H volunteer. If a 4-H volunteer needs resources, their 4-H agent will help them find these resources and tools to support them in their role. 4-H is dependent upon the work of its volunteers, and youth depend on 4-H volunteers to

guide them through varied and positive life experiences while participating in the 4-H program. Regardless of the years of service or role of service, 4-H volunteers are a crucial part of the overall 4-H program. Because of their selflessness, these volunteers create life changing experiences and opportunities for many youth.

### **Current Trends in 4-H Volunteer Training**

Nationally, there is no national uniform model or guideline for volunteer training; instead, there are many types of volunteer training that are offered. One example of state volunteer training offered nationally includes a hybrid model developed at the University of Illinois Extension 4-H. This model utilizes some courses online in partnership with other state 4-H Youth Development programs combined with courses offered through local extension offices (University of Illinois Extension, n.d., n.p.). Oregon State University 4-H has developed an online e-learning volunteer training program developed around four modules. The e-learning system notifies the local extension office when a volunteer has completed the training (Oregon State, n.d., n.p.). Clemson Cooperative Extension has a five-part volunteer training series that contains lessons that can be downloaded (Diem, 2005, n.p.). The Clemson model focuses on 4-H opportunities, understanding youth, program management, and club organization and enrichment (Diem, 2005, n.p.). Iowa 4-H offers a variety of county and regional trainings combined with e-learning courses for 4-H volunteers in their state (“Volunteer Training”, n.d.). Florida 4-H has five main sections in their volunteer training series with each section having several subsections. This is in addition to their orientation series (Florida 4-H, n.d.).

Currently in North Carolina 4-H, when a person expresses an interest to be a volunteer with a county program, they fill out a volunteer profile through 4H Online. 4H Online is a newly adapted participant and volunteer management system. As part of this profile, a volunteer



application is completed. This application grants permission for a background check to be run on the individual. All North Carolina 4-H volunteers participate in a standardized background check process that is the same for all counties. Background checks are run centrally through North Carolina State University. This is a recent change to the volunteer onboarding system. Previously, a variety of background check processes were utilized. Also within this online system, volunteers agree to a standards of behavior and attest to watching a Minors Regulation Training video. During this initial screening process, references are checked by county 4-H staff. Assuming the background check process is completed successfully and all standards have been met and completed, a volunteer role description is written, agreed to by both the volunteer and the county professional, and an orientation and training process begins. Though the structure varies from county to county, orientation should be face to face include an overview of the county program, resources which are available to volunteers, as well as introduce volunteers to county staff. Orientation is not designed to be a long process, but rather an introduction to the county 4-H program. Following orientation, North Carolina 4-H volunteers should participate in a training program.

In North Carolina 4-H, this phase of training for 4-H volunteers is very ad hoc and varies from county to county. Some counties conduct scheduled face to face trainings on regular basis, such as every month, quarterly, or on another predetermined schedule. Other counties do not hold regularly scheduled trainings but rather hold trainings as volunteers have questions or express a need. Some counties conduct trainings on a one on one basis while others conduct group trainings within the county and yet other counties conduct trainings in county clusters. Currently the majority of the volunteer trainings being conducted across the state are held face to face. Both the structure and the content for how trainings are conducted varies across the state.

All counties should address topics such as risk management and personal safety in the training process. Depending on the training format a county adapts, additional topics can range from general organization topics to content specific topics (such as completing projects or livestock judging). The calendar year also influences the training that is offered. In January all families are required to reenroll in the 4H Online program, thus fall training opportunities would center around the reenrollment process for this program. 4-H Agents mentor volunteers and give volunteers the opportunity to experience and learn experientially. A lot of the initial learning that is done by a 4-H volunteer is experienced through shadowing other volunteers as well as on-the-job volunteering experiences. This lack of consistency can create confusion and gaps within the organization. Without a standardized training model, counties are left to put together trainings they feel their volunteers need. This raises concerns for liability, quality, and risk management.

On a statewide level, in North Carolina, there is a 4-H Volunteer Leaders' Association. This association, which is guided by an elected officer team and advised by the state 4-H office, supports 4-H volunteer leaders by holding a statewide training weekend each year. The training is optional for volunteers to attend and provides a peer to peer learning format by which new and experienced 4-H volunteers have the chance to come to together, learn from and with each other, and participate in a variety of workshop opportunities. Peer learning encourages "members to both teach and learn from each other, exchanging ideas, knowledge and experiences" (Clark, Heller, Rafman, & Walker 1997, p. 751). Workshop topics range from general leadership or youth development areas (such as teambuilding or risk management) to project or topic specific (such as electricity or shooting sports). Volunteers self-select if they want to participate in the training and if they choose to attend the conference, they self-select which workshops they elect

to attend. Participation in this conference is optional and a very small percentage of the overall volunteer numbers in North Carolina 4-H attend this conference.

### Theoretical Framework for the Study: Kirkpatrick's Model

The Kirkpatrick model was designed as a training and evaluation model. In 1959, Donald Kirkpatrick published the first model. This study is using the most recent model, the New World Kirkpatrick Model (Figure 3), first developed in 2010. This model enhanced the previous model through more current terminology and explanation.

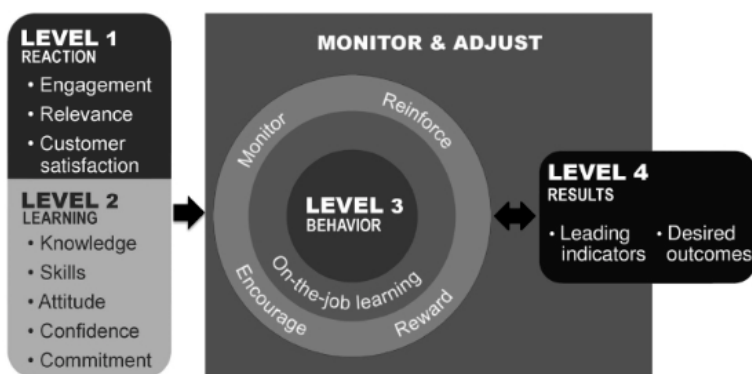


Figure 3: New World Kirkpatrick Model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016)

The Kirkpatrick model is purposeful in its design. The first level begins with the easiest to achieve concepts, while the fourth level can take the most time but can also yield the greatest reward. The first level, reaction, looks at “the degree to which participants find the training favorable, engaging and relevant to their jobs” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 17).

Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick (2016) state, “approximately 80 percent of live classroom programs and 58 percent of electronically delivered programs are evaluated at Level 1 in some fashion” (p. 17). This is the “low hanging fruit” and the one that is the easiest to evaluate against. Though important, more emphasis should be placed on gathering data at higher levels in the model to yield higher level feedback. Level two of the Kirkpatrick model, learning, addresses “the degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and

commitment based on their participation in the training” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 15). Some key phrases associated with each of the benchmarks include:

Knowledge: “I know it.”

Skill: “I can do it right now.”

Attitude: “I believe this will be worthwhile to do on the job.”

Confidence: “I think I can do it on the job.”

Commitment: “I will do it on the job.” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p.15)

Level three of the Kirkpatrick model, behavior, addresses “the degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 14). This level looks for specific behavior or actions that occur as a result of the training (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). “Alignment of what is learned during training with critical behaviors and the desired leading indicators is the key to creating training programs that deliver value to the organization” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 14). Level four address “the degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training and the support and accountability package” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 12 ). It is the final level in the Kirkpatrick model and the one that is the most difficult (and some might argue the most important) to achieve.

This model is often noted as one of the most influential frameworks for training and development programs. Reio, Rocco, Smith, and Chang (2017), describe Kirkpatrick’s model:

One of the most well-known and widely used evaluation models for training and development programs is the four-level evaluation model by Donald Kirkpatrick.

Introduced in 1959, it has stood the test of critical review, gaining support over time to be one of the most widely accepted and influential models (Phillips, 2003b).

Kirkpatrick formed a logical framework to examine results and impact from both individual and organizational performance perspectives (Setaro, 2001). (p. 35)

Donald Kirkpatrick (1996) states his model is widely used because:

It's simple and practical. Many trainers aren't much interested in a scholarly, complex approach. They want something they can understand and use. The model doesn't provide details on how to implement all four levels. Its chief purpose is to clarify the meaning of evaluation and offer guidelines on how to get started and proceed. (p. 55)

While it is often easier (and quicker and cheaper) to skip levels in the model, advancing through the model in the order of the levels is purposeful and will provide the greatest benefit (Kirkpatrick, D., 1996). The levels are designed to not only build on each other, but also to lead the participant through a series of activities and steps that helps them to think fully and wholly about the experience. When taken holistically, the model provides more comprehensive information. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) share three major reasons to evaluate the training program: "1. to improve the program 2. to maximize transfer of learning to behavior and subsequent organizational results 3. to demonstrate the value of training to the organization" (p. 5). Effective training, according to Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016), is defined as "well-received training that provides relevant knowledge and skills to the participants and the confidence to apply them on the job" (p. 5).

The model has proven to be a valuable tool in the area of training in general. Businesses have used the model as have non-profit, professional, and educational organizations. Health related programs are often a good fit for application of the Kirkpatrick Model. Campbell, Taylor, and Douglas (2017) used Kirkpatrick's model when evaluating the effectiveness of an online cancer education program and with the model were able to "analyse [sic] the studies and

categorise [sic] them according to the reported level of evaluation: views, knowledge, attitudes, organizational [sic] change and clinical outputs” (p. 355). The Allied Dental Education Association and the Academy for Academic Leadership developed a program evaluation to evaluate an online training program that had been in existence for seven years (Gadbury-Amyot et al., 2015). To measure the effectiveness of the program, researchers developed an online questionnaire using Kirkpatrick’s model to both design and evaluate the findings of their research.

Smidt, Balandin, Sigafos, and Reed (2009) used the Kirkpatrick model to evaluate the “effectiveness of a range of staff training programs for staff working with adults with intellectual disability” (p. 267). They also share:

The Kirkpatrick model provides one technique for appraisal of the evidence for any reported training program. Moreover, the model can be used to determine whether a favourable [sic] outcome is limited to self-reported staff attitudes and practices, or whether there are improvements to relevant knowledge acquisition and application and even positive impacts on operating costs. (Smidt et al., 2009, p. 272)

Jones, Fraser, and Randall (2018) evaluated home-based pediatric nursing services using the Kirkpatrick model. They concluded:

The Kirkpatrick Model may be used as an effective framework to evaluate a nursing training programme [sic]. However, it is highly recommended that the evaluation is designed using all levels of the model to be able to ascertain the success of the training and its impact on clinical practice. (Jones et al., 2018, p. 499)

In the field of education, Kirkpatrick’s model is used to evaluate teacher performance. Naugle, Naugle, and Naugle (2000) report:

Today schools are being asked more and more to justify that they are providing quality education to their students (Haertel, 1999). The schools in turn are asking that teachers be responsible for the quality of the training that they are providing their students (Haertel, 1999). This demand for quality is often without markers other than, perhaps, student performance on some identified standardized test (Haertel, 1999). (n.p.)

This study looked at evaluating teachers for their work against Kirkpatrick's four levels with the hope of establishing a process of accountability and evaluation. La Duke (2017) asserted, "The Kirkpatrick model is a simple and fairly accurate way to measure the effectiveness of adult learning events (i.e., training), and while other methods are introduced periodically, the Kirkpatrick model endures because of its simplicity" (p. 20).

This model, as widely used as it is and as simple and easily applicable as it is to a variety of programs, is not without criticism. Bates (2004) in *A Critical Analysis of Evaluation Practice: The Kirkpatrick Model and the Principle of Beneficence,* highlighted "some of the limitations of Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model and points to several risks for clients and stakeholders associated with the model and its assumptions" (p. 341). Bates (2004) does acknowledge the popularity of this model, referring to it as "by far the most popular approach to the evaluation of training in organizations today" (p. 341) and acknowledges the work Kirkpatrick's model has done for training and evaluation. Bates (2004) lists three main limitations from his point of view with the Kirkpatrick model. These include, "the incompleteness of the model, the assumption of causality, and the assumption of increasing importance of information as the levels of outcomes are ascended" (p. 342). Bates (2004) calls for evaluators and those who use this model to be aware of these concerns and to address them accordingly.

Reio, Rocco, Smith, and Chang (2017) state of Kirkpatrick's model, "from its beginning, it was easily understood and became one of the most influential evaluation models impacting the field of HRD" (p. 35), yet they also express critiques that have been presented with the model. With the high praise for Kirkpatrick's model, Reio, et al., (2017) conclude their research by stating:

While there has been high praise and acceptance of Kirkpatrick's model, research findings support the critical need for further studies of Kirkpatrick's model in its entirety (Alliger & Janak, 1989; Bassi, Benson & Cheney, 1996; Bomberger, 2003; Bromley & Kitson, 1994; Plant & Ryan, 1992; Sobelson & Young, 2013). (p. 49)

The Kirkpatrick Model is both easy to use as well as applicable in a variety of settings. The model has proven its usefulness in a variety of settings for many years. While there are some critiques of this model, overall the model is well received.

### **Summary**

4-H Youth Development has both a rich history and a bright future. The important work that volunteers do for the program cannot be overlooked or underscored. Volunteers are the hands and feet of this organization that provide the opportunities of 4-H throughout communities across the world. Capturing the experiences of 4-H volunteers is important both to the history of the organization and the future success of the organization. Understanding a 4-H volunteer's experience of training and support received will help scholars and practitioners develop curriculum and training programs that will effectively prepare volunteers to be successful in their role and gain skills that are transferable to other life experiences. This chapter has explored 4-H's history, unique features, and current status. This chapter addressed positive youth adult relationships and intergenerational learning. In addition, information has been presented about



who volunteers are, the breadth of available volunteer training, and what the literature says about volunteers. This chapter presented information specifically about 4-H volunteers and 4-H volunteer training including how volunteers learn through experiential and on-the-job training. Finally, the chapter ended with a discussion of Kirkpatrick's Model and its value as a conceptual framework for this research.

### **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative case study described and analyzed how the training and support 4-H volunteers receive influences their overall volunteer experience. A well-planned and well-executed training program equips volunteers with “new skills, increases in knowledge and preparation for the volunteer role” (Fox, Herbert, Martin, & Bairnsfather, 2009, para. 4); therefore, it is important to understand the training process as perceived by 4-H volunteers.

#### **Purpose and Research Question**

Training and support both play roles in the overall experience a volunteer has with an organization. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how the training and support 4-H volunteers receive influence their overall volunteer experience. The following research question guided the work of this research:

What are NC 4-H volunteer perceptions of training and support as they relate to their volunteer experience?

#### **Research Design**

**Statement of positionality.** I am a qualitative researcher and have found both a comradery and comfort in this role. I acknowledge that I owe a great deal of my career success to the work of 4-H volunteers. As an active 4-H participant, 4-H agent, and now state 4-H staff team member, my involvement with North Carolina 4-H volunteers has been ongoing and extremely rewarding. Whether that volunteer was a competition judge, a record book reviewer, or a silent or vocal encourager, much of what I have been able to accomplish in my life is because of 4-H volunteers who believed in me and provided an opportunity for me as a young person to grow and explore. Now, as a professional, one of my job responsibilities is to work with, give guidance to, and serve as an advisor for North Carolina 4-H volunteers.

This study sheds light on volunteer perceptions regarding the current organizational training and volunteer support system. As a researcher positioned in the organization and among the study participants, I ultimately believe that the study findings will benefit the organization at large and 4-H volunteers in particular. This research is a personal interest area as well as something that is crucial and timely from a professional perspective. My connection to the organization allowed me to know how the 4-H system works including how to navigate the system. Any group has specific contextual elements related only to that organization and having a connection to the organization allowed me to understand the complexity and nuances in the 4-H environment. This experiential knowledge helped me to understand how things really work within the organization and helped me to understand the nuances of both what was said and what was not verbally said. In addition, I had a working knowledge of what may or may not work in terms of the recommended implications of the study. The overall knowledge of the 4-H system has aided in understanding of terminology, basic processes, and procedures as well as helped me to make sense of information shared. My connection to the 4-H program had the opportunity to present an issue based upon my role within the organization; however, this was carefully accounted for and was managed with utmost care.

**Statement of subjectivity.** As a researcher, I am deeply connected to this research both personally and professionally. Personally, I am a product of the 4-H program, joining the program at a young age until I aged out. I have experienced first-hand the difference a 4-H volunteer can make in the life of a young person and I have a passion for the difference this program can make in the lives of young people. I have benefited from volunteers' thoughtful guidance and keen insight in youth development. Professionally, I understand the power of volunteers for the organization and also the importance of well-planned and solidly executed

training. I maintain that 4-H professionals across the state are generally effective at developing and delivering volunteer trainings, yet are frustrated when they try to determine the kinds of training volunteers need, the nuances and specifics of the training, how the training should be delivered, and in what sequence it should be presented. Though a variety of training programs are being used successfully in other organizations that utilize volunteers, I hear in my professional setting frustration in the lack of standardized programs to train 4-H volunteers.

I believe in the power of both 4-H and 4-H volunteers. 4-H is an important community youth education program, and 4-H volunteers are a critical piece of the 4-H program. My positionality and subjectivity added a layer of interpretation to every phase of this research. This opportunity carries many positives such as understanding the culture of the organization and experiencing first-hand the difference this program and 4-H volunteers can make in the life of a young person. Having this lens also meant that as the researcher, while I had first-hand knowledge, I had to take the information that was shared and not put my own filter or insert my own experience into the data. 4-H volunteers are exceptionally capable, intelligent, and add unique value to 4-H. By having 4-H volunteers work side by side with 4-H agents, youth who participate in the 4-H program become more confident in their learning, in their community, and in themselves. No organization is perfect, and though I observe opportunities for the 4-H program to grow, these opportunities do not overshadow the positive aspects of the program. As an organization, we should continue to provide high quality training experiences for our 4-H volunteers, and we should make these trainings both accessible and affordable. One way to do this is to make sure 4-H professionals have the resources they need to conduct volunteer trainings.

## Qualitative Design

Qualitative research has many definitions. According to Salkind (2010), qualitative research “is an umbrella term used to cover a wide variety of research methods and methodologies that provide holistic, in-depth accounts and attempt to reflect the complicated, contextual, interactive, and interpretive nature of our social world” (p. 1159). All parts of qualitative research are varied from the definition to methods and techniques for conducting research. Creswell (2013) discusses the ever-changing definition of qualitative research. Based on the works of others, he proposes the following definition for qualitative research:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individual or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (Creswell, 2013, p. 44)

Qualitative research is used to explore an issue, empower individuals, and develop theories (Creswell, 2013, pp. 47-48).

According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), there are three major methodological approaches to qualitative research: post-positivist, interpretive, and critical. Each of these approaches has its own key features. “Post-positivism asserts that social research can only approximate reality” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 156). “Interpretive approaches focus on

subjective experiences, small scale interactions, and understanding (seeking meaning)” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 15). “Critical approaches have a social justice orientation...[and] look at how power and hegemonic discourses shape experience and understanding” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 16). Multiple methodologies exist for conducting research. Some of these include ethnography, narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. (Creswell, 2013). Each methodology has defining characteristics which lend themselves to specific types of research.

### **Case Study**

Though there are many methods for conducting qualitative research, this research used the exploratory case study method. Eisenhardt (1989) explains case study as “a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (p. 534). Yin (1993) states “case studies are an appropriate research method when you are trying to attribute casual relationships—and not just wanting to explore or describe a situation” (p. 31). There has been ebb and flow related to the prevalence of case study research over time, yet it remains a widely used and effective method for qualitative research. “Researchers have attributed the early popularity of the case study to the same conditions they have used to explain its decline. Many argue that the case study developed as a method because there were no better methods available” (Stoecker, 1991, p. 89). Gerring (2007) asserts that “the case study method has a long and largely neglected history” (p. x). The case study according to Gerring (2007):

was the first method of social science. Depending upon one’s understanding of the method, it may extend back to the earliest historical accounts or to mythic accounts of past events. Certainly, it was the dominant method of most of the social science disciplines in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (p. x)

The next “clustering of references [can be found] in the 1920s and 1930s, when it is a near-automatic textbook topic” (Platt, 1992, p. 17). Though case study has ebbed and flowed in the literature as a topic of discussion, the meaning and definition has changed over time.

Yin (as cited in Eisenhardt, 1989) points out “case studies can involve either single or multiple cases, and numerous levels of analysis” (p. 534). According to Tellis (1997), “case studies can be single or multiple-case designs...” (p. 6). Gerring (2004) describes the term case study as a “definitional morass” (p. 342). Gerring (2004) elaborates:

To refer to a work as a case study might mean (a) that its method is qualitative, small-N (Yin 1994); (b) that the research is ethnographic, clinical, participant-observation, or otherwise “in the field” (Yin 1994); (c) that the research is characterized by process-tracing (George and Bennett 2004); (d) that the research investigates the properties of a single case (Campbell & Stanley 1963, 7; Eckstein [1975] 1992); or (e) that the research investigates a single phenomenon, instance, or example (the most common usage).

Evidently, researchers have many things in mind when they talk about case study research. (p. 342)

While acknowledging the intricacies and varied interpretations of case study, Gerring (2004) defines case study as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (p. 342). According to George (as cited in Bennett, 2007), a case is “an instance of a class of events of interest to the investigator” (pp. 20-21) and a case study is “a well-defined aspect of a historical happening that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical happening itself” (p. 21). It should be a researcher’s objective when conducting a qualitative case study to create and conduct exemplary research. To be exemplary, Yin (2003) says that case studies must be “significant, complete, consider alternative perspectives, display

sufficient evidence, [and] composed in an engaging manner” (pp. 161-165). When a case study encompasses these items, it will “be a lasting contribution to the research” (Yin, 2003, p. 160). Yin (1993) states, “the major rationale for using this method is when your investigation must cover both a particular phenomenon and the context within which the phenomenon is occurring” (p. 31).

In an exploratory case study, research questions do not have to be defined before collecting data; having a structure is still key to conducting a successful study (Berg, 2004). This type of study is useful when there is not a lot of previous information on the topic or as a pilot study (Berg, 2004). According to Streb (2010), exploratory case studies are useful:

in the study of social phenomena in their original context, especially when doing so by other means is difficult or impossible. This might be relevant for other kinds of case study research as well, but it is a predominant characteristic of the intuitive and flexible exploratory case study. (p. 374)

This research focused on 4-H volunteer training within the context of North Carolina 4-H. Specifically, an exploratory case study was a good fit for this research because of both the specific research environment and the lack of existing research on this specific topic (Streb 2010).

### **Research Process**

Creswell (2007) states, “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (p. 73). This case study took place among North Carolina 4-H volunteers. Their experiences, training, and perceptions were explored as they relate to their role as a North Carolina 4-H volunteer.



## **Data Collection**

**Site selection.** This study was open to all North Carolina 4-H volunteers who had between 3-10 years of volunteer experience. Volunteers who participated in this study represented 11 North Carolina counties. In the North Carolina Cooperative Extension system, the state is mapped out into five districts and taken together, form a statewide system. Each district is clustered regionally. Participants in this study were drawn from all 5 districts.

**Participant selection.** Participant selection was based on several criteria. The nature of 4-H is cyclical, and it was important to ensure that participants have enough experience to have a frame of reference but not so much that their experience and expertise overshadowed the training and support opportunities they have received. In addition, the study design included a minimum standard of volunteer training experience for participants to meaningfully share reflections on their volunteer training and experiences within 4-H. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, volunteers were adult volunteers ranging in age from 24 to 56 with volunteer experience between 3-10 years with North Carolina 4-H Programs. During their volunteer service, participants must have also participated in at least one 4-H volunteer training experience.

**Participant recruitment.** Participant volunteers were identified via purposeful convenience sampling. Purposeful convenience sampling is defined as one in which participants not only meet the study context but are also convenient to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). County 4-H agents were contacted through email and asked to share a recruitment letter with volunteers that matched the basic participant criteria. Volunteers who received the invitation flyer were encouraged to share the flyer with other volunteers they thought might meet the criteria. From that point, if a volunteer was interested, they reached out directly to me. At this phase, a follow-up email was sent to each participant. The email thanked participants for

their interest, re-iterated the details of the interview, established a date and location, and included a copy of the informed consent form.

All participants who expressed an interest in participating and met the study criteria were invited to participate in this study. This study was able to reach volunteers in all five of North Carolina Cooperative Extension districts as referenced in Table 1. These volunteers represented 11 counties.

Table 1:

*Participant location*

District	Number of volunteers
Northeast	3
Southeast	3
North Central	3
South Central	2
West	2

Thirteen volunteers were further interviewed with a second round of follow up questions for a total of 20 contact hours. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), “There is no one size fits all method to reach data saturation” (p. 1409), but aiming for between 20 and 30 contact hours should provide enough data to reach saturation and provide both rich and thick information. Fusch and Ness (2015) determine that it is important to have both rich and thick data and to think about “rich as quality and thick as quantity” (p. 1409).

### **Data Collection Strategies**

Data collection with qualitative research is an inclusive process. It involves “gaining permissions, conducting a good qualitative sampling strategy, developing means for recording

information both digitally and on paper, storing the data, and anticipating ethical issues that may arise” (Creswell, 2013, p. 145). The research design included primary data and was collected via face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are defined as a “qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions...In contrast to structured interviews...that use closed questions, there is no fixed range of responses to each question” (Ayres, 2008, p. 811). The interviews were conducted in a private setting to ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts, feedback, and stories. The interviews followed an interview protocol and were conversational in nature but also allowed for natural conversation. According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), “semi-structured interviews are flexible in that the interviewer can modify the order and details of how topics are covered” (p. 29). Furthermore, “because respondents are asked more or less the same questions, this makes possible comparisons across interviews” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 29). Interview recordings were transcribed using direct verbatim transcription. According to Schwandt (2007):

Transcription is the act of recording and preparing a record of a respondent’s own words, and it yields a written account – a text – of what a respondent or informant said in response to a fieldworker’s query or what respondents said to one another in conversation. (p. 296)

Transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy, and participants were encouraged to contact me as the researcher after the interview if they had additional thoughts to add that they thought would be beneficial.

**Interview protocol.** The interview protocol was divided into sections. The semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) was used to guide the conversation while still

allowing for flexibility and for additional information to be shared. Among other things, an interview protocol is “more than a list of interview questions; it also extends to the procedural level of interviewing and includes a script of what you will say before the interview, script for what you will say at the conclusion of the interview” (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 2).

The protocol was developed with general contextual and icebreaker questions, with questions aligned with the guiding framework (Kirkpatrick’s Model), and with open coding questions. The first section had questions that were demographic and contextual while also serving as an icebreaker to help the participant feel comfortable with me as a researcher and with the process. Questions then led into deeper contextual questions followed by questions aligned with the framework, focused upon information about volunteer training and support. Finally, the interview protocol finished with open ended questions, and offered an opportunity for participants to share and add anything that they thought was relevant or overlooked.

**Data handling.** The information gathered through this process was handled in keeping with research standards. All data collected was kept in a locked space within my home. In addition, the transcripts are maintained on a home computer with password protection along with a copy stored on an external hard drive in a location requiring a passcode to enter. To preserve anonymity, all participants were given a pseudonym; therefore, transcript participant names were not the actual participant names. A master list was stored in a locked file space with the list of names and pseudonyms. To ensure confidentiality, findings were presented in such a manner that participant data is not readily associated with a particular district, location, or situation.

**Data analysis phase.** Though the entire process of data analysis seems both complex and daunting, the process can be made more manageable by working with the data through the entire collection process. “Qualitative data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process that

begins as data are being collected rather than after data collection has ceased” (Engel & Schutt, 2005, p. 381). This research used Baptiste’s (2001) phases for data analysis. Baptiste (2001) believes all qualitative data analysis, “comprise four interrelated phases: defining the analysis, classifying data, making connections between data, and conveying the message(s)” (n.p.). Phase 1, defining the analysis phase researchers, “decide on the goals of the analysis; what counts as appropriate and sufficient information; and on how best to capture, record, interpret, and convey that information” (n.p.). During this process, “researchers must consider ontology (understanding what is real), epistemology (the nature and process of knowing), and axiology (the domain of values and ethics)” (Thompson, 2013, pp. 89-90). Phase 2, classifying data, data is grouped together in like categories. Tagging involves, “selecting from an amorphous body of material, bits and pieces that satisfy the researcher's curiosity, and help support the purpose of the study” (Baptiste, 2001, n.p.). Phase 3, making connections, is where concepts relate “to each other (or to existing theory) to build a cohesive whole” (Baptiste, 2001, n.p.). Baptiste was precise in using the terminology phases instead of stages for his work. Phases are “...iterative, interactive and non-linear” (Baptiste, 2001, n.p.), meaning that at any point any phase can and should be encouraged to be revisited.

**Coding strategies.** For this research, I did first level tagging and labeling analyzing one participant at a time through their entire transcript before moving to the next participant. I also developed participant profiles during this stage. Items that were of interest to further explore were noted in an excel spreadsheet. According to Baptiste (2001), qualitative data analysis is “meaningless without some form of tagging” (n.p.). Next I completed a first level pre-selected framework coding with the Kirkpatrick model. After the first level process, I conducted a second level coding with the Kirkpatrick model, using data analysis strategies described below

(Saldaña, 2009). Creswell's (2009) eight step guide for the coding process includes going through one document fully and after all topics have been determined and similar topics clustered together, taking the list and "go back to your data" (p. 186), followed by determining the best wording and "if necessary recode your data" (p. 186). The next step of coding – second cycle coding – has the purpose of developing "a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or concepts" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 149). Pattern coding served as a second cycle coding technique with the purpose of developing "major themes from the data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 152). Each transcript was coded using both descriptive coding and pattern coding. The transcripts were coded by looking for groupings. These coding strategies were used to both interpret and report information gathered. Participant profiles are presented in chapter four.

**Ethical issues.** According to Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000), "the research process creates tension between the aims of research to make generalizations for the good of others, and the rights of participants to maintain privacy" (p. 93). Strong ethical principles are a critical component for qualitative research. "Ethics pertains to doing good and avoiding harm. Harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles" (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000, p. 93). Confidentiality was of utmost importance in this study. As the researcher, I asked participants to share their experiences and their trust in the process. Confidentiality involves more than keeping data secure and not using names or other identifiers such as location. Kaiser (2009) describes this process:

Although meticulous data cleaning can remove personal identifiers such as names, the contextual identifiers in individuals' life stories will remain. This is particularly true for respondents who have faced unusual life events or who are unique in some way.... As such, researchers must also consider whether the specific quotations and examples they

present when disseminating research results could lead their respondents to be identified via deductive disclosure. If so, details in the data will need to be modified. (p. 1635)

Maintaining a strict ethical protocol while still gaining information to help the greater good were a priority of this study.

**Trustworthiness.** Trustworthiness of a study is more than just trusting the research process. According to Rolfe (2006), “a study is trustworthy if and only if the reader of the research report judges it to be so” (p. 305). Rolfe (2006) draws in the work of other researchers to determine that the idea of trustworthiness, “has been further divided into credibility, which corresponds roughly with the positivist concept of internal validity; dependability, which relates more to reliability; transferability, which is a form of external validity; and confirmability, which is largely an issue of presentation” (p. 305). Creswell (2013) addresses the concept of trustworthiness by using the term validation to “emphasize a process” (p. 250). “In qualitative research, trustworthiness has become an important concept because it allows researchers to describe the virtues of qualitative terms outside of the parameters that are typically applied in quantitative research” (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 896). In addition, “trustworthiness can be thought of as the ways in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are evident in their research” (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 896). Creating trustworthiness is a process. Creswell (2013) presents eight strategies that can be used to establish trustworthiness and suggests “qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study” (p. 253). Of Creswell’s (2013) suggested strategies and upon the recommendation to use at least two strategies, I used both clarifying researcher bias and rich, thick descriptions. Through clarifying researcher bias, I commented on “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations” (Creswell, 2013, p. 250) that could shape “the interpretation,

approach to the study” (p. 250). By providing rich, thick descriptions, I described in “detail the participants or setting” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252) in the study.

**Study limitations.** There were two limitations to this research study. The first was the issue of geographically diverse representation. The volunteers in this study represented all five Cooperative Extension districts. However, the study would have benefitted from a larger participant pool. While the overall numbers were not large, the participants were balanced in that they were drawn from both rural and urban areas, had a variety of experiences as 4-H volunteers, and varied in age, gender, and ethnicity. A larger participant pool would have allowed for more variation in the clubs represented, and deeper saturation in participant data.

A second limitation in the study was that in leaving a broad window of time to recollect training, the possibility for a recency effect occurred. A recency effect is “an order of presentation effect that occurs when more recent information is better remembered and receives greater weight in forming a judgment than does earlier-presented information” (“Recency effect”, n.d., para. 1). To overcome this, prompts were given during the interview and time allowed for volunteers to think through training experiences beyond their most recent experiences.

**Study strengths.** An important strength of the study is the mirror image of one of the limitations mentioned above. Though I am a novice researcher, I am a highly experienced 4-H'er. I have been active in the 4-H program for over 30 years and have ranged in roles from participant/learner, to volunteer, to donor, to county agent, and now to state staff. I have served as an advisor, mentor, trainer, program developer, and now researcher. My professional roles are rich and varied and allow me to understand the nuances of the 4-H world and to interpret the information shared by participants. The fact that I thoroughly understand the complex context



of 4-H offered me the ability to discern nuances in the data and to situate participant responses in the larger context.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This research study included interviews with 13 4-H volunteers who met the study criteria and addressed the following research question:

1. What are NC 4-H volunteer perceptions of training and support as they relate to their overall volunteer experience?

Each participant was asked to think about and reflect upon the training and support they received as a 4-H volunteer and any training and support they would have liked to have received. They were also asked to reflect upon their overall experience as a 4-H volunteer.

The data was analyzed through open coding and coded with a framework guided by the Kirkpatrick model. Data generated through open coding will be shared first, followed by data from framework coding. The themes of people, training, and future training are presented first followed by presentation of data findings organized parallel to Kirkpatrick's four levels of reaction, learning, behavior, and results.

### **Profiles**

As a part of the data analysis process, profiles were developed for each participant. These profiles reflect a diverse participant group of 4-H volunteers both in age range and volunteer location. The participant chart (Table 2) is sorted by age and offered as an introductory snapshot of the study participants.

Table 2

*Participant Chart*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of Years as a 4-H Volunteer</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Extension District</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Mary	24	5	White	West	Female
Elizabeth	27	7	White	West	Female
Tara	45	6	Black	North Central	Female
Wanda	47	4	White	North Central	Female
Shannon	56	10	White	North Central	Female
Meredith	43	9	White	South Central	Female
Randy	52	5	White	South Central	Male
Mitzi	43	9	White	Southeast	Female
Lily	49	9	White	Southeast	Female
June	49	9	White	Southeast	Female
Al	36	8	White	Northeast	Male
Sue	39	10	White	Northeast	Female
Kate	51	8	White	Northeast	Female

**Mary.** Mary is 24 years old and has been a 4-H volunteer for five years. Mary has volunteered in a variety of program areas but because of a busy academic schedule, she most often volunteers in one-time volunteer opportunities. She has volunteered both in her home county, on the district, and state levels, and most recently on the national level. Though she may go to school out of state, she still finds time to come back to volunteer in North Carolina. Like some other volunteers in this study, Mary is a product of the 4-H program. She was a 4-H participant for nine years and during that time, participated in a variety of program areas. Mary does not have children but “bleeds green” and cannot imagine not volunteering with 4-H. Mary shared:

...by the time I was ready to age out of the program, I was already looking for opportunities to volunteer because I didn't really want to leave, so I just, I started looking around for different things that I could participate in and looked a lot at the county level and district level to get involved with clubs and some of the teen programs like teen retreat and that sort of thing, and then also reached out to the state office, so, to find out what opportunities were available for some of the state-wide programs

Mary is very soft spoken. One of her memorable 4-H experiences involved being at a teen retreat as a youth and during the dance, being a little bit "freaked out." Because of her past experience as a youth, she now offers to teach line dancing workshops at teen retreats. Mary shared:

It was really cool seeing some of the kids who were first timers coming to this retreat; they felt comfortable going out and dancing because they knew some of the different [dances], they knew like what to do for some of them, they had a couple, it's like, I know how to dance to this song now. I think that was probably one of my most fun experiences that I've had so far.

Between all the responsibilities that Mary personally juggles, she has continued to find a way to volunteer with 4-H. The majority of Mary's trainings have been situational based. Since Mary is an episodic volunteer, she has had limited formal volunteer training. The majority of the training she has received has been directed specifically to each of the volunteer roles she was participating in. She credits much of her experiences as a 4-H participant to her successes now and cannot imagine not being a part of 4-H as a volunteer.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth is a 27-year-old female and has been a 4-H volunteer for 7 years. Elizabeth started volunteering after she aged out of the traditional 4-H program. She volunteered

in North Carolina until graduate school took her to another state. She continued to volunteer with both the 4-H program where she attended graduate school and came back to volunteer in the North Carolina 4-H program as time allowed. Now that graduate school is behind her, she volunteers with the North Carolina 4-H program. With her current lifestyle, she most often volunteers in an episodic capacity. Elizabeth shared many volunteering memories, which are funny and endearing. One story that she shared is a funny story of when a drone landed on top of a building while helping with an event. She did not want the coordinator to know, so she handled it and told the coordinator years later about the incident. Elizabeth also shared about helping with the 4-H record book process and the accomplished feeling that she achieved by helping to provide a positive (and consistent) experience for other 4-H participants. As a product of the program, it is very important to Elizabeth that others have a commitment to give back to the program after aging out.

Most of Elizabeth's trainings as a volunteer have also been event specific. She believes all volunteers need a general training that is both "standardized and accessible." Elizabeth explains,:

The first thing is we have to move them online and they have to be integrated digitally.

We've hit a point where we aren't gonna physically gonna have people right in front of us all the time to come to a training and I think it's a beneficial thing because if they're super busy and they still want to be a 4-H volunteer, then we're already important enough to them to carve out time.

Elizabeth transitioned from a 4-H participant to a 4-H volunteer and has now transitioned from a 4-H volunteer to a 4-H professional. She is the first to volunteer for a project and works hard to make sure the volunteers she now trains have a consistent and positive experience.

**Tara.** Tara is a 45-year-old female who has volunteered with 4-H for six years. Tara became a 4-H volunteer through her children. She was a volunteer in the public school system and a flyer was sent home from their county Cooperative Extension Office. Before becoming a 4-H volunteer, Tara became a Master Gardner, and through that experience learned about 4-H. Once her children were old enough to participate, she took the leap as a 4-H volunteer and formed a 4-H club. The club met at her home, which is on a farm, and focused on agriculture. Though the focus of the club has changed as her children and the youth in her club have become older, the club is still active, and it is all because a flyer from the Cooperative Extension Office was sent home at her child's school. Tara, who is kind and outgoing, loves to share wonderful 4-H volunteer experiences. She fondly remembers a time when she received a grant to support a school gardening project. She shared that the benches she purchased (as part of the grant) are still there today and give the children at the school (and the staff) a place to relax, eat lunch, and enjoy being outside.

Tara reflects on what she enjoys most about being a 4-H Volunteer: "I just like to have the kids learn. They open up to the world; they think about something new, things they'd never considered before." Her passion for working with and helping youth shines through when she talks about the young people she has met through her volunteer experience. Like many other volunteers, Tara talks about her 4-H agent as providing a tremendous amount of support. She is also encouraged by the support that 4-H participants give each other. Tara has participated in trainings on different 4-H materials and curriculum as well as "4-H stuff and policies", liability concerns as well as rules and regulations. Tara never participated in a formal structured training, but wishes she had that opportunity when she was a new volunteer. Tara shares that while 4-H participants compete against each other in competitions, "even during speeches, everybody's

supporting each other, cheering, even when you're judging, you're sitting there and you're...rooting that kid on. You want to see kids succeed. That's why I keep coming back every year, because of that."

**Wanda.** Wanda is a 47-year-old female who has volunteered with 4-H for four years. Before becoming a 4-H volunteer, Wanda worked in a youth and family serving organization. She understands child development and has a passion for helping children and families have a positive experience. Wanda previously lived in a large area where the perception was that 4-H was only for families who lived in rural areas. When she had the chance to move and live in a rural area, she did. She describes the process of moving to a more rural area, "oh wow, we have a little bit of land, I'm gonna have chickens, maybe I can call 4-H and see." She was so excited to be able to get her children involved in 4-H. The process to get them involved took some more time and eventually led to Wanda being a club leader for her children and other children. When asked if she would be willing to be a club leader, she responded, "well, alright, sign me up. I don't know anything about 4-H but if that's what it takes to get it to come to my town, I'll do it."

When it comes to memorable moments, the moments Wanda shared were as fun and adventurous as her personality. Regardless of the adventure that Wanda and her club members go on, she talks about how she learns the entire time through the work of the club members. She also shares, "I'm really working on the older children being role models to the younger and helping them." Wanda is grateful for all of the support but says that it can be almost overwhelming at times:

It's a little overwhelming for me as a parent because I'm getting inundated with emails and I don't know which ones I should read, which ones I shouldn't. I really want to do all

the things I get emailed about and forward it all on to the parents and do all the activities as a leader, I feel like that's my obligation... but on a personal level, I just can't.

Wanda wishes in her volunteer experience, she would have been able to have a mentor. Wanda would have found "another agent or someone I could just shadow for a few meetings" exceptionally beneficial. Wanda's county has scheduled trainings; however, because of her schedule, Wanda has only been able to attend one. At this particular training, filling out club paperwork and forms were reviewed. In addition, Wanda also attended a training on maintaining club record books. While Wanda understands that everyone's schedule is busy, she does think at least one training about policies on how to work with children to protect both the volunteer and the youth should be required and covered.

**Shannon.** Shannon is a 56-year-old female who has volunteered with 4-H for 10 years. She became involved as a 4-H volunteer by first being a 4-H mom. Shannon wanted a club for her children that did not require you to take lessons or board an animal at their facility to be a member. Therefore, Shannon started her own 4-H club where anyone could become a 4-H member. When describing her club, Shannon says "the kids are from all over with all different backgrounds and... the older ones really mentor to the littler ones and, knock on wood, it has really grown into a very successful, no drama... great group." It is obvious from the way Shannon talks about her 4-H club that she not only loves serving as a volunteer and the 4-H organization, but that she also loves her 4-H club members. Shannon takes great pride in giving her club members opportunities and being able to watch them succeed. Shannon has participated in trainings such as birth order training and how to teach young people according to what it is they need, subject matter specific training, training on parliamentary procedures, and training on



team building. Shannon feels especially with subject matter training, all training should come from the state level to ensure equal access and accessibility.

Shannon is a down-to-earth, funny, level-headed, volunteer who loves 4-H and the difference 4-H makes in the lives of young people. Shannon shared:

I have one child who is now 17, she joined when she was 9, would not look you in the face, would not talk, would not speak unless spoken to, and then sometimes she wouldn't speak back or would look down. The older kids were really great at the meetings asking questions to her such as, "What did you learn at the? What experience did you like when we were volunteering?" She did get into horse judging but was petrified of doing the oral reasons. She did the oral reasons and actually placed as a junior. Her mom started crying and said that 4-H had done what psychologists at UNC had not been able to do, getting this kid to talk. She is now one of my officers who, when young shy kids come in, she takes them under her wing and tells them how she used to not talk.

Through mentoring, Shannon was able to learn a lot about being a 4-H volunteer as well as opportunities available through 4-H. To pay it forward, Shannon offers to be a mentor to 4-H volunteers who are just starting in their role. Shannon can tell story after story of why she has volunteered with 4-H, and even with the challenges that arise and the hard work, she continues to volunteer and make a difference in the lives of so many youth.

**Meredith.** Meredith is a 43-year-old female who has been a 4-H volunteer for nine years. Meredith started out as a mom who was supporting her children in their interest areas. Soon she became interested in what her daughter was learning and became an active volunteer, helping with the 4-H club. She enjoys watching both older and younger 4-H participants learn from each other and watching different generations learn from each other through activities in

the club. She has a genuine interest in learning and a life-long curiosity for how processes work.

To Meredith, what she enjoys most about being a 4-H volunteer is:

working with youth in general. It gives me a really safe structured place. With 4-H, I go in, I know what it is, it's standardized system and I can pick up. The youth are familiar with the pledge and there's a set deal, we have business meeting and we have club activities and things and so I like the structure of it.

Meredith has a unique background compared to other volunteers in this research.

Meredith comes from a formal youth development background professionally and has both education and professional experience in successful youth development practices. Though she was not involved in the program as a youth, she is extremely familiar with youth development and the difference that positive youth development makes in a young person's life. She shares, "I didn't really understand what 4-H was, so even becoming involved with it... it was almost happenstance." Coming from a youth development background, Meredith came to the role of 4-H volunteer already with a set of skills that a lot of volunteers might not have. Meredith recalls one training she participated in was ages and stages where volunteers learned about the different stages of youth development as well as age appropriate activities to do with each age group. Meredith also recalls a training called volunteer 101 which "talked about 4-H, what it is, and structure of it a little bit and...how clubs can be run and who's in charge". Meredith is a proponent of a longitudinal standardized training where each session builds on the previous session. While this was not part of her 4-H training program, she has experienced this type of training structure within other volunteer organizations. Meredith is grateful for the support and the knowledge that she has encountered from 4-H professionals as she has navigated the role of being both a 4-H volunteer and a 4-H mom. She is also grateful to the mentors she has had in

her 4-H volunteer role. Meredith had other volunteers that she was able to emulate and ask questions of when she first started in her role as a 4-H volunteer. “It’s nice that it’s a professional organization that does youth development as opposed to... those who could be in those positions that maybe don’t have any concept of youth development or child development in general.”

**Randy.** Randy is a 52-year-old male who has volunteered with 4-H for five years. Randy was first introduced to 4-H through his son who was interested in a 4-H program that was being offered in his county. While it was his son who first drew him to 4-H, it was Randy’s interest in the subject matter that involved him as a volunteer in the 4-H program. His time as a volunteer has provided many memorable experiences from long days at the range to watching the youth he works with learn life skills regardless if they were the top scorer in a competition. One aspect Randy likes about 4-H is the Life Skills Wheel. Randy states, “4-H is geared around youth development, not necessarily a particular skill or discipline or activity, but how do you use that to develop life skills”. To Randy, 4-H and being a 4-H volunteer is about more than the competition or activity; it is about the bigger picture of what 4-H participants are learning.

Randy, a quiet yet sure spoken volunteer, has continued to seek out opportunities to receive new trainings and certifications to participate in 4-H more fully as an instructor. With his volunteer role, specific trainings are needed that are not needed in other volunteer capacities. Randy has participated in trainings related to ages and stages, the life skills wheel (a training designed to help incorporate 4-H life skills into all programs and workshop areas), and subject matter specific trainings. Ages and stages is a training where the different stages of youth development as well as age appropriate activities to do with each age group is taught. Randy sees the need for a structured and standardized training especially as it relates to subject matter

specific content. He sees this as important for both the safety of the youth and the volunteers as well as for the integrity of the program. Randy appreciates that within the 4-H program there is the flexibility to run a 4-H program in the way that works best for you, yet you still have the “guardrails” of the program structure to keep you centered. He appreciates the openness that is experienced among 4-H volunteers and staff. Randy shared that his club was considering a move to another county and said, “everybody’s open with that and just making sure the wheels are greased and everybody’s above board nobody’s blindsided.” The openness and willingness to help are just some of the aspects that Randy appreciates about being a 4-H volunteer and being involved with the 4-H program.

**Mitzi.** Mitzi is a 43-year-old female who has been a 4-H volunteer for nine years. Mitzi started out volunteering with 4-H as part of her work. She provided a service that her 4-H program needed, and that is how she became involved. As career paths changed, Mitzi continued to work with 4-H and transitioned into a volunteer role. Mitzi shares that as she transitioned into the volunteer role she, “fell in love. I love the curriculum we got to do, the interactions that we got to have with the kids... it was just a different perspective that I had not had the opportunity to work with.” Mitzi is outgoing, funny, and full of life. When Mitzi was asked about what she enjoys about being a 4-H volunteer, she shared, “I laugh because I enjoy everything. I mean, really and truly, as crazy as it sounds, I enjoy everything.”

Mitzi did not grow up in the 4-H program but is now both an engaged volunteer and 4-H mom. Both of her children are actively involved in the 4-H program. Through her role as a volunteer and a mom, she has had many memorable experiences. One memorable and touching story she shared was about a teen boy that she worked with and as part of the experience, the group created items for a local fair. The entry the teen boy submitted won a prize, and when

sharing the news with the boy's family, Mitzi shared how proud the family was of the teen boy and what a life changing experience that was for both her, the young man, and his family. When Mitzi shared the story, you could hear the pride she had for both her role as a volunteer and for the teen boy and his accomplishments.

Mitzi feels that a more structured training opportunity in the beginning would have helped answer some of her questions and helped her become comfortable in the role as a 4-H volunteer. Mitzi has participated in trainings that focus around paperwork and rules. Mitzi is quick to point out the support she receives as a 4-H volunteer from her county Extension staff and the critical role this support plays in both her volunteer experience as well as the experiences available to her club members. She is both thankful and grateful for the support she has received as a 4-H volunteer and is amazed at all the work 4-H professionals put into their jobs. "I can't commend 4-H agents enough because they have so much to balance and juggle."

**Lily.** Lily is a 49-year-old female who has volunteered with 4-H for nine years. Lily has a family history of volunteering with 4-H. Her mom was a 4-H club leader, yet when Lily's daughter was old enough to join 4-H, she shares "I didn't even look into 4-H, so I'm not sure why that didn't click." Through a series of events, her daughters were introduced to 4-H, and from there, she became a 4-H volunteer. Lily is very well spoken, detailed, and passionate about both the positive experiences her daughters had in 4-H and some of the discrepancies that she has noticed in the program. Lily has participated in trainings including portfolio training, subject matter specific training, and "a whole book of the basics" training. Lily commented that this training was "really helpful" and that she still has "the book and I can still refer to the book". With the trainings that she has received, Lily commented that when she was "...just a new parent

volunteer, not running a club, it would be helpful if someone explained all the opportunities”. This was an area for 4-H volunteer training to grow when working with new 4-H volunteers.

A positive memory Lily shares from being a 4-H volunteer is “just the fact that the girls have been able to participate in a variety of things from ...shows... to public speaking and presentations.” She has a negative memory about a time when her girls competed in a competition and they did not place. Even when this happened, Lily is quick to point out the experiences they learned from their participation. In addition to the positive memories from her girls in their participation in the program, Lily shares, “My favorite thing about 4-H is it gives our family a structure or a venue to kind of do all the right things.” The opportunities presented to young people is one of the positive qualities that 4-H has according to Lily.

A challenge from Lily’s perspective is that “the standards are not always same way; there are a lot of diverse personalities and even in 4-H, there’s politics.” She shared multiple examples of where the standards were not the same in shows and how the different personalities and the politics of those involved in the program did not always create the welcoming, positive atmosphere that she expected from the 4-H program. As Lily’s daughters are growing up, her oldest daughter asked her if she was going to continue to be a club volunteer after her own children had aged out. She responded:

My immediate response was, “no, I’m done.” And then I thought about it, and I thought, well, maybe I could do some of the things that I’ve learned really well from our kids.

Maybe I could share that support, with my 4-H agent. I would do it for her. I don’t intend to run a club when my girls are grown.

**June.** June is a 49-year-old female who has volunteered with 4-H for nine years. June loves 4-H, her 4-H county staff, and the experiences it has given and doors it has opened for her

daughter who will head to college soon. She started in 4-H when another homeschool mom invited her to join their club. Soon after joining this group, she became a club co-leader and soon became a club leader where she has stayed active and engaged in this role. June is quick to share stories that are memorable to her, such as the little girl who would not stand up and share for a club show-and-tell. This little girl later won a county level award and walked up in front of a large room to accept it. June stated, “What I really enjoy is just seeing the kids have fun and learn and grow.”

June has had a variety of trainings from formal trainings to trainings at conferences in a variety of subject areas. She can name specific trainings she attended and how she both learned and incorporated what she learned into her club meetings. June has participated in workshops that are interactive (such as teambuilding) that she is able to glean ideas from and take them directly back to her 4-H club and implement them. This opportunity to both learn personally and have information to take back to her club is something June finds very beneficial. June has participated in training such as 4H Online, subject matter specific training, teambuilding workshops, and workshops on how to update and complete paperwork. June missed the initial volunteer training because of her personal schedule; however, feels that a training structure should be in place that is accessible for all volunteers. June volunteers, however, for more than just club activities. She volunteers in a variety of other areas, including judging project record books, although according to June, “I don’t really like it. I hate judging kids’ work. And the reason I hate it is because I am like a stickler for the rules. So that’s why I don’t really care for that, but I do it because someone has to”. June shared:

I’m so happy for 4-H... especially for homeschoolers. My child has had experiences through 4-H that she would have missed out on being a homeschooler, like the

presentation program. You know, it's not that intimidating to give an oral presentation to your mom and dad. But through the presentation program, she gets to stand up and learn how to give, you know, a presentation in front of a group of people. So things like that have been very helpful to us.

**Al.** Al is a 36-year-old male and has been a 4-H volunteer for eight years. Al has volunteered in a variety of 4-H projects ranging from camp volunteer to favorite foods show judge. Al was active in 4-H as a youth, and his energetic and fun personality makes him a very relatable 4-H volunteer. He attributes much of his interest in volunteering to the experiences he had as a 4-H youth. Al does not have any children, yet because of his experience and his belief in the program, he felt the need to give back by being a volunteer in this youth serving organization.

Al enjoys telling stories (many of them funny) about his 4-H volunteer experiences. One of the most memorable experiences he had as a 4-H volunteer was judging a county dessert cooking contest. He quickly learned that he had to taste all 25 of the dessert dishes. He shared:

So we were on like number seven of 25 and I'm like, "I'm full." And he's (his counterpart judge) like, "suck it up, buttercup, because we've got to keep on going." But just the fact of watching those kids, you know, later watching as an agent, but the fact of watching those kids when you actually do taste their product and you see how good it is and their faces was worth it.

He also shared that after that experience he learned to take small bites after being sick for two days following this experience. Al learned skills as a volunteer through experience but also participated in trainings that addressed with ages and stages, risk management, nurturing young people, and 4-H volunteer 101. Al thinks that volunteer trainings should be held on a regular



basis with certain topics covered at each meeting. The schedule does not have to be every month, but should be frequent so volunteers in a county can come together and learn. Al recalled the experience of moving from a 4-H participant, to 4-H volunteer, to 4-H professional, noting that at each stage he learned something new. He shared that much of what he learned as a 4-H participant later impacted him as a 4-H volunteer. In turn, these volunteer experiences influenced how he led 4-H volunteers when he became a 4-H professional.

**Sue.** Sue is a 39-year-old 4-H volunteer who has volunteered with 4-H for 10 years. During her time as a 4-H volunteer, Sue has had a variety of experiences ranging from being a club mom to a club leader. Sue, who did not grow up in the 4-H program, is a mom to two young children who are involved in the 4-H program. She describes her introduction to becoming a volunteer as another volunteer saying, “this would be great for you” and I said ‘yes, ma’am’ and that’s kind of how it started.” This has transitioned into her now co-leading two 4-H clubs. Sue was asked to volunteer by someone she respected.

Sue is personable and knowledgeable. You can tell she is up for the task of learning something new and is not afraid to try new things if that is what her 4-H participants want to do. She is committed to impactful life experiences for the 4-H participants she works with regardless if they are in her club or if she crosses paths with them through other experiences. She describes her 4-H memories as mostly:

really sweet affirming stories, so... you know, young people that come together and... are truly interested in sort of whatever it is that we’re studying and show leadership by making the commitment to come and making the commitment to sort of bring everyone in so we have a whole.

She explains that her 4-H participants:

do... a really good job of just like bringing people in, so we have kids that are from one high school that are going to be valedictorians, homeschool kids, and we have Muslim kids, we've got kids of color, we've got white kids, and they do really a good job of just sort of making sure that it's collaborative and that everyone sort of feels like they have a place.

Sue's memories are memorable as are her training experiences. She highlights that many of her trainings have been real time training when it was needed. When Sue needed a question answered or more information about specific topic area or issue, Sue found that her county staff were willing and prompt to provide help. In return, if Sue heard of an activity happening in the community which she felt 4-H should have a role in or enhance the quality of the project, she made connections between community members and 4-H staff. Sue participated in formal trainings such as registration, club financials, as well as how to charter 4-H clubs.

**Kate.** Kate is a 51-year-old female who has volunteered with 4-H for eight years. Kate, like other volunteers, became involved with 4-H because of her children. and through a series of events, she too became a 4-H club leader. Kate is an extremely involved and dedicated 4-H volunteer and 4-H mom. She has children who have both aged out of the 4-H program and who are still actively involved in the 4-H program. As a volunteer, Kate has participated in trainings such as ambassador trainer training, subject matter specific training and paperwork, and club management. Having scheduled (but not overly scheduled) trainings that are inviting and worth the volunteer's time to attend is also something Kate feels would be beneficial. Kate also seeks out opportunities to be involved with 4-H as an adult outside of the club leader role. Although Kate was not in 4-H as a youth, she is an active member of the North Carolina 4-H Volunteer Leaders' Association. Kate shares memorable moments of being a 4-H volunteer working with

youth and equally memorable moments as an adult volunteer involved with the Volunteer Leaders' Association.

Kate, a funny and bubbly 4-H volunteer, enjoys “that you can work one-on-one with a kid, but it’s still in a group setting, but you can make an impact or difference in their lives.” She can name numerous support systems that have helped her be both a volunteer and a 4-H mom, but to her the first part is having family support. She shares:

First you have got to have family support. If you don’t have your [biological] family’s support, then you’re just going to be hitting a brick wall. It helps if your own personal kids are involved in the club that you’re leading, so then you’re going to be approaching that together as a family, so the family support has got to be there for your commitments.

4-H Volunteers serve as club leaders and teachers as they teach their club members different skills and present new opportunities to them. Kate shared that she has learned “to teach, you don’t have to be expert, you have to be willing to learn and willing to help others.” This is a skill she has tried to pass on not only to her 4-H club members, but to other 4-H volunteers, as well. Being a 4-H participant might not have been how Kate grew up, but it is how she has raised her family and been able to learn as an adult.

## **Findings**

This study focused on North Carolina 4-H Volunteers and sought to answer the question: What are NC 4-H volunteer perceptions of training and support as they relate to their overall volunteer experience? Through open coding, data analysis revealed several findings that have been organized into three sections: people, training, and future training.

**Open code 1: People.** It was clear through data analysis that you cannot be a 4-H volunteer without interacting with people, people of all ages and roles. People are at the core of

a 4-H volunteer experience. The findings from this study indicate that the centrality of connections and support with others in the 4-H community and is vital for understanding how and why people volunteer with 4-H and in turn the nature of their 4-H volunteer experiences and needs.

*Becoming a volunteer.* Though the role varied and was not always a straight pathway, each 4-H volunteer became a volunteer by traveling through their own unique path. For some, their personal experiences in 4-H and the people surrounding them led to their role as a volunteer. Al shared, “I was an active teen in my 4-H program through 4-H camping and the in-school program. So what really pushed me to be a volunteer with the program ...were the volunteers themselves that I had.” Mary shared a similar experience, “I was in 4-H for eight or nine years. By the time I was ready to age out of the program, I was already looking for opportunities to volunteer because I didn’t really want to leave.” Not all participants had a first-hand experience of the program. For others, children were the reason parents became a 4-H volunteer. Meredith shared that it was because of her daughter’s interest areas that she found out about 4-H as she was researching opportunities for her daughter to grow. Shannon shared about wanting to find a 4-H club for her daughter to get involved in and after a few failed attempts at making a connection, a 4-H agent called her back. After doing 4-H independently for about a year, “the agent encouraged me to start a 4-H club since I had three girls. I started a club and now ... we have developed into a very successful club competing at national levels in educational competitions.” Sometimes it was just showing up that got people involved in volunteering. Randy shared:

They were going to start a shooting sports program in my county, and they had an

information session and my son was interested, so I went, probably, went for the first year and then they needed more instructors. And so, I went to the instructor training. And then went to the next instructor training and went to the next instructor training and then, you know, finally it got to the point where, you know, it's like, "oh, it's the guy from Clover County!" because I was the only one that would go. So that's how I got involved.

The path to becoming a 4-H volunteer varied depending on the person and their life experiences, but the result was the same; whether out of tradition or just being the one to show up, they became a 4-H volunteer. Some participants in this study had an unexpected start, but often there was a gentle nudge or ask. Someone else noticed that many of the volunteers in this study had something to offer and invited them to be part of 4-H.

***Moments to remember.*** Working as a volunteer brings moments to remember, some that are enjoyable and some that are frustrating or challenging. Some of the memorable moments included experiences 4-H volunteers have had as a part of their roles. For instance, Wanda shared reflections about how she has been able to learn alongside her 4-H club members. Through the interest of her club members, she learned about geocaching including where and how to do it. *Learning* was a common word that those interviewed used to describe their volunteer experiences. Kate talked about 4-H helping you learn:

I really like the fact that you can work one-on-one with a kid but it's still in a group setting, but you can make an impact or difference in their lives, like you can help them get better [at] livestock judging or you can help them learn. Like one time I taught leather stamping and it's really easy to do, but they get excited and it gives them a sense of

accomplishment, so you're building them up and you're creating good memories for them too and building their confidence in themselves.

Tara reiterated the enjoyable feeling of watching youth learn, "I just like to have the kids learn and they open up to the world; they think about something new, things they'd never considered before." Sometimes volunteers almost learned about something until the group redirected as in an example Sue shared:

We were doing some planning and one of the 4-H'ers was like, "I really want to dissect a deer. I think we could figure it out..." fortunately, his fellow 4-H'ers were like, "maybe we could think about that but do something else."

Achievement was a proud moment for 4-H volunteers. Shannon shared how watching some of her 4-H participants (or her kids as she called them) move on to national levels in competition and how that brought her happiness. Kate shared about the important role volunteers can play when it comes to reaching out and offering support.

I love it when the little kids come and it's their very first contest and they have this look of, "what am I doing here" and you're able just to reach out to them and tell there's just a sense of relief. They see that somebody's here to help me, guide me, and kind of tell me what's going on and what I need to do. I guess that's true for all 4-H kids whether, you know, that's what our role is as volunteer leaders, we're guiding them and helping them when they don't know, you know? You hear about your four clovers, your head, your heart, your hands, and your health, they may have questions about some of those and they may not know and so our role is to guide them.

There are other enjoyable moments that 4-H volunteers reflected on through their stories. Meredith shared that one of the aspects she most enjoys about being a 4-H volunteer is both working with youth and within the structure of 4-H:

I don't know how to say it exactly. I just love working with youth in general. It gives me a really safe, structured place. With 4-H, I go in, I know what it is, it's standardized system and I can... pick up, it's got, you know, the youth are familiar with the pledge and there's a set deal, we have business meeting and we have club activities and things and so I like the structure of it. That's one of the best things that I like about it.

Lily also found value in the structure:

My favorite thing about 4-H is it gives our family a structure or a venue to kind of do all the right things, like I'd like to think that we would do everything anyway. We would do community service, we would do citizenship, we would keep track of their horse shows, we would do all that, but I have a really difficult time keeping up with things, like everything from family photo albums to paperwork, I just can't juggle all of it, so 4-H, I'm hyper-vigilant about making sure we have lots of community service activities and enough citizenship opportunities so that they are exposed to the world and the record books.

Not all moments to remember are favorable or enjoyable moments; some also present frustrations and challenges. Some frustrations aired themselves as timing due to personal schedules. Wanda shared:

It is hard for me to find people willing to commit. I have a lot of parents wanting to help, but the challenge, I think, trying to do it on my own; if something comes up in my own

personal life, I have to cancel the whole activity. And I don't like doing that. I really want people to come on that date.

Sue shared:

For my other club, that struggle is real where, you know, I'm not always getting online, you know, the registrations, I'm not always really good about making sure all of that comes together, so that part is a little bit more of a challenge.

Shannon expressed a challenge in how politics affected her volunteer experience stating, "I think district politics within the [specific] program has definitely negatively affected my experience. These experiences have involved funding, resources, rules, ideas, etc., and have caused myself and many others to back away from volunteering at a [certain] levels". Shannon continued to share, noting that she felt as though there were resources she did not have access to because these "resources they're kind of saved for favorite people... that part was frustrating."

June also shared a frustration related to politics related to the club. June shared:

Politics plays a huge role in my volunteer experience. There are politics involved with choosing activities that appeal to the club membership and getting the members to show up for and be involved in the activities in which they have no personal interest. There are also politics involved in making sure everyone feels they are an equally valuable member of the group as everyone else. The main need for politics, though, is with the parents... making sure they feel no children are being favored more than others and that everyone has equal opportunities. I want to maintain a welcoming environment for all, so I keep election politics out of the club environment, although I do encourage our members to participate in citizenship activities and attend events like Citizenship Focus and the NCACC Youth Voice.



Other frustrations and challenges revealed themselves as a lack of resources. Mitzi shared:

I would say the biggest struggle that we have is not having the resources to be able to provide. Not every family can afford \$420 for a week of summer camp. That's the biggest frustration is, you know, the lack of resources and wanting them to be able to have those experiences but not having the necessary funds.

Related to resources, Randy shared:

We also do wildlife shooting and that seems a little bit more organized. I realize that 4-H is a volunteer organization, and we don't have as much money as they do... when you think about it, you're scoring at each event, right, and then that goes into the build in, they're tabulating everything up and all this other stuff, but they're scoring targets actually at the range where there's archery or black powder or rifle or shotgun, and then they're trying to get all that up. If money was no object, ...if we had like a tablet, you score the target, boom, you punch it in there, and it's all just all there, right? You get rid of all that hand off type stuff.

June too talked about resources but from a different perspective, sharing:

Challenges, finding interesting activities for all ages that will engage all ages at one time because our club has cloverbuds. And even younger siblings will come into our meetings, all the way up to 18-year-olds, and so sometimes it's a challenge to figure out what the kids can do... although, I've been surprised. Everything we've come up with, most of the time, everyone's engaged. They participate at their ability...And get different things out of it.

Other volunteers expressed challenges with the program itself whether related to evolution, to standardization, a lack of experience, or something else.

Al, who was a 4-H participant and then a 4-H volunteer, talked about the lack of evolution with the program. “The most frustrating part as a volunteer was the fact that the program wasn’t evolving at that time.” Programs that are steeped in tradition have a habit of becoming sedentary or stagnant, which is a frustration Al expressed. Kate expressed a similar frustration related to program evolution:

Most of our volunteer leaders coming up are a different generation than what [we are]; we have a lot of older volunteers that are from the former generation, you know, versus a new upcoming generation. And those two generations have a different way of doing things, different way of approaching things, and different motivations. And I... so there’s different motivating factors, probably for different age levels of volunteers, and if you don’t figure out what it is that motivates volunteers to do something, it’s very frustrating, you know? If you can’t figure out their language or what really is important to them to get this done as a volunteer leader and then the second thing is, so motivating leaders to do what they should do, and then the second thing is the level of standard that we should have for volunteer leaders. I expect, you know, if you’re a district officer that, you know, you need to attend the meetings and you need to be prepared for the meetings and you need to help the team, the officer team, so, you know, we should have a standard for our volunteer, and the standard should be met, and so I see those as the two challenges as a volunteer leader, holding leaders accountable to a standard... and that’s a fine balance because you don’t want to discourage them and have them quit being leaders. So motivating leaders I found and getting people willing to commit to be a leader and then maintaining the standard, that’s where my frustrations and challenges [come from].

Lily, a 4-H volunteer and a 4-H mom, expressed concerns related to standardization and consistency:

What I struggle with 4-H that I think is just natural is because... there are a lot of volunteers... a lot of times, the standards aren't across the board, and so I've watched year after year. I understand that there's, you know, everybody has different ideas of things, I just wish things were more consistent because for kids, the feedback is critical, I think.

Meredith had the concern as it related to the overall system of 4-H:

At the beginning, coming in as a 4-H volunteer was frustrating to me because I am not a 4-H'er, personally. I did not grow up as a 4-H'er, so I didn't understand the system at all. My county helped me. But I personally didn't understand it. I didn't really understand what 4-H was so even becoming involved with it, it was almost happenstance. Figuring out how to plug in and things took a little while.

Memorable moments and impressions are ones that stay with a 4-H volunteer, whether positive or negative.

***Support received.*** The moments or journey to becoming a 4-H volunteer would not be possible without a strong support system. Each volunteer's support system looked different, and how they defined support varied among each volunteer. What was consistent was that support was a necessary and an important part of the volunteer role. The types of support received varied across the participants. People are a critical component to the support system as Meredith shared:

Having a mentoring system is an awesome thing, because that's basically what I had. I had other volunteers around me who knew what they were doing, had done it before.

They were like, “look, you just do this and this and this and this,” and then... But they were, you know, I had a relationship with them and they were my buddies so to speak. So that really helped as much as anything.

Lily again spoke of the importance of support:

Our extension agent...is phenomenal. She is not a horse person, but she is... I can't say enough good things about her. I don't know how she does what she does but she is spot on about making sure we have what we need, we understand what we need, that kind of thing. She's super supportive.

Mitzi reiterated the importance of people and staff being supportive of ideas:

We have an awesome 4-H agent... the staff here, we are like family, so, you know, if I'm struggling with something, [4-H Agent] is gonna be like, “what can I do,” or our livestock agent, she's gonna be, “what can I help you do?” you know? “Do you need help carrying that? What's going on?” you know? Our director is just phenomenal, there's no other word, she is phenomenal. She supports us in every which way, I can go to her with the most craziest ideas and schemes and she's like, “go for it.”

Tara again reinforced the 4-H staff and the important role they play to support a 4-H volunteer:

The extension agent, because, you know, she gives out these calendars of events, she tells you what's going on, she sends out the emails are key, everything under those groups and everything telling us when things are like... like now, we got to re-register for the 4-H online thing, they have everything is online now, so she's reminding us to do that. We have achievement night coming up in February so she's telling us to get ready for that, so... you know, that's the support we need, because we don't want to miss out on anything, the kids... we're getting ready for speeches this year coming up in the

spring/summer, so... and then what I do is call her and she'll be like, well, you know, she's very flexible, she'll be like, "well, you can come today or tomorrow," or she'll make an appointment with you and, you know, she'll work around your schedule and everything, so... that's good to have an extension agent, she'll go over and beyond her schedule and stay longer or something like that, you know, and I know she's got things to do at home too, but she'll stay or she'll meet up with you on a Saturday morning, you know, and everything and so... and she really loves the kids too, she knows every 4-H'er, even the new ones, she'll try to learn, you know, try to have a relationship with and... so that's important, I think.

Sometimes as Wanda shared, too much support can also be overwhelming:

Since our current agent came in place, it's been almost overwhelming for me... the offers of support and willing to come to meetings and help. It's a little overwhelming for me as a parent because I'm getting inundated with emails and I don't know which ones I should read, which ones I shouldn't. I really want to do all the things I get emailed about and forward it all on to the parents and do all the activities as a leader, I feel like that's my obligation... but on a personal level, I just can't. And I feel guilty. That's probably my hardest part, just feeling guilty that I'm not able to always pass the email on because I haven't had a chance to even read it, you know what I mean? but the actual support is overwhelming, I think, from the current agent. He's great.

When support and training come together, it creates a positive scenario as Sue described:

The one thing that I really appreciate of how [4-H] County does it is... they're willing to meet you where you're at, and so... [Our Agent] has done a really good job of kind of individualizing training or personalizing training, so for our... club that's led by [one

group of volunteers], she just had all of us together and kind of walked through all of the different pieces, like as a cohort rather than part of this larger thing, and so on the one hand, you know, that was great because that group was specifically targeted, only really interested in this, probably less interested in sort of the bigger 4-H world... and then we've had, you know, other places where they... you know, [4-H agent] and her staff has just really kind of supported you as you've needed it...

June sees support as something that is provided in terms of people but also materials and space:

Oh, I'm sure I've received all sorts of support. Um... what have I received, well, the, for example, the national youth science day kits. After national youth science days happens... the 4-H office makes those kits available to our club if we want to use them. And [the] county has a livestock arena... And the livestock agent allows our club to meet there free of charge any time that we need to as long as it is available. But that, receiving the ability to use the livestock arena has probably been the biggest amount of support. It takes a lot of pressure off when you know you have a place that you can meet.

It takes people to make a volunteer experience, but it also takes training. Training was another theme from the open coding of the interviews: 'training received', 'training needed', and 'training applied'.

**Open code 2: Training.** Training equips and prepares volunteers, lessens liability on the host organization, and helps to ensure a positive experience for everyone who is involved. The open coding data surrounding training is organized into sub-categories of 'training received', 'training needed', and 'training applied'. The findings from this study indicate a wide range of training which volunteers received, what training volunteers perceive as needed as well as how

the training is applied. This training related directly to the volunteer experience and helps to portray a complete picture of the 4-H volunteer

***Training received.*** Studying 4-H volunteer training is an under researched area within 4-H; therefore, the feedback volunteers in this study provided is both unique and important in relation to what they found helpful, yet still need. The information gathered on volunteer training was varied but overall positive. Training experiences for volunteers varied from consistent scheduled trainings to training when something was needed or requested.

Furthermore, how the training was delivered varied. Al shared:

Most of our trainings that I had early on as a volunteer were sitting with them. Um... this is what I have to say to you, listen to what I have to say, if you have question, ask 'em, but we did not do a lot of simulations, we didn't do a lot of scenarios. As a 4-H volunteer specifically, we did not do a lot of interaction. So... I think too, we were still a part of that generation that... could handle that.

Sue shared how training delivery has changed throughout the course of her time as a volunteer:

There was a time where she [4-H agent] was doing... like consistent quarterly training and maybe not getting, I think the engagement she might have been looking for and shifted to like to some online, she's done a couple, I think Zoom webinars.

Lily had a different experience in receiving training but one that worked for her:

I think mostly the training just has been... when I needed something, I don't know that there's been any formal training, but [my agent] is always available and now [our program assistant] if we need to do something.

Mary had a similar experience to Lily in receiving training:

Most of my volunteer training has been... most of it's been kind of a situational basis, so for example, if I'm volunteering with a camp, we'll have some sort of orientation for, you know, what is involved being a camp counselor, what is involved being a chaperone or that sort of thing... same thing for any, yeah, any camps or any workshops or anything like that that I've gone to. Most of that has been situational depending what the event was, they would have some designated orientation or training set aside. I can't think of any other, like any formal volunteer training I've had... like I've attended volunteer leaders conference, but it was usually to teach a workshop or something like that, so I don't think I really participated in many of those workshops. I think most of the things that I draw on are a lot of the things I picked up when I was in 4-H.

Tara had different experiences compared with Mary and Lily. Tara was able to participate in a half-day scheduled training and described the experience:

In the beginning when she was like, "okay, we're gonna start a 4-H club," well, I'm on board with this, I said, me and my husband, I said, "[Husband], are you ready? We're gonna train together," so I think it was on a Saturday like at 9 am in the morning to like 12 or something, like a half day and she [4-H Agent] sat there, and there were some other people in the room too, and we sat there in the room and she went through the whole, she had like a thick booklet full of nothing but 4-H stuff, policies and we had to sign our life away like I was buying a house. And... then also, she said, you need to do the background checks and stuff like that and so, you know, that's when I knew it was serious.



Just as training experiences vary, so does the types of training received. Training is both variable as well as situational. The list below shows the types of training 4-H volunteers recall receiving:

- “We did a lot of... ages and stages of kids, we did quite a few of... working with exceptional children.” (Al)
- “risk management... we did a lot of risk management actually.” (Al)
- “how to deal with kids and how to, you know, the nurturing parts to working with those kids.” (Al)
- “4-H volunteer 101 And I think that’s about it. Other than like on the job training. It (4-H 101) talked about 4-H, what it is, and structure of it a little bit and... how clubs can be run and who’s in charge.” (Al)
- “So the ages and stages, the life wheel, liability, and that sort of stuff has all been covered in a section in the formal discipline training.” (Meredith)
- “Registration, financials...the big notebook - definitely those are the two big pieces like chartering your club... registering your families.” (Sue)
- “I did go to the horse leaders... they used to have a horse leaders, like... volunteers leaders conference, they had a horse leaders conference in Greensboro. And that was good because they do learn about the specific horse bowl, hippology, public speaking.” (Shannon)
- “The parliamentary procedures I really liked. Also, I like the team building. I really, really like the team building.” (Shannon)
- “Two years ago, it was a series of...Five workshops and I went, just happened to go to the first one because I was like, huh, I’ve been a volunteer now at that time, I was a

volunteer for six years and I'm like, "I've never heard of ambassador, what's this?" So I didn't realize what it was all about and so I went to first one, I realized, oh, I can be an ambassador trainer if I go to the rest of these workshops and then I could take it back to my county kids or if other counties wanted to get me to come, so I did ...[and] I was able to go through those five classes and be trained". (Kate)

- "So far, we've had one, I think we're supposed to do like, three a year. Or four in a year. And I've done one. Um, and we've also done one on... record books, because I don't know anything about record books. We did a training for kids, but I went as a parent and a leader." (Wanda)
- "I'll say my county very much prepared me, but I was not getting, I was never given a formal orientation. I was never given anything formal, really, it was more like they were very welcoming and very, and as things came up, they taught, but it was not formal, "hey, we have new volunteers, let's," I mean, we kind of did because you went through a background check and here's your paperwork that you need to do." (Kate)
- "I think the biggest thing for training honestly is [4-H agent]. If I don't understand something or need to do something, I call [4-H agent] and she tells me how to do it or she sends me to the right place." (Lily)

***Training needed.*** The 4-H volunteers in this study also had general thoughts when it comes to training 4-H volunteers which are important to capture as it also reflects on their overall volunteer experience. Some of the thoughts on training included:

- "I think training (and experience) gives you confidence to handle issues, and gives you information whether it's rule book or expectations for 4-H. Training also lets you network with other leaders who may have had similar issues." (Shannon)

- “Um, the training I went to, I left really motivated. I was very excited when I left the training, I was like, “alright, we’re gonna do this,” and then I lost the momentum, obviously. Like, when I got back to reality, I realized that I didn’t have the time... but I really felt excited about it. I felt like, “wow, this can go anywhere, I could really make this a really amazing program,” or I can just continue doing what I’m doing, just barely getting through, you know, meeting, but it did make me more excited about planning a year.” (Wanda)
- “I would like more of the interactive activities that are... that are ongoing. I enjoy those, because I do... you know, I run out of ideas and I could... I like to do them and then take them back to the club. It makes it easier for me.” (June)

Participants in the study had ideas based upon their experiences about which training would be good for other or all 4-H volunteers. According to the participants in this research, some of the trainings all volunteers need are bigger picture trainings.

Meredith shared:

Understanding, especially for people like me who did know what 4-H was, knowing what 4-H is and what the expectations, very clear expectations for volunteers and what level you’re volunteering at... who is there to help you. Who are your supports, who can you call, like, immediately in the county, I know that is [4-H Staff] for me. And if I can’t get [4-H Staff] and I can find [County Extension director], I know it’s [him].

In addition, Meredith explained, “making sure that if there’s any paperwork or things like that that we’re responsible for that that’s clear and that we know what to do and what to document, how to document.”

Wanda included working with parents as training she thinks is needed by all volunteers:

I guess just really the flow of a meeting and like how often we should meet. I think there's so much... broadness to this group program, like 4-H is so open to different things. Like we were doing weekly meetings at one point and then I'm now down to once a month. [I] think just knowing how the flow of [a] meeting is supposed to look based on the age level and how long is a good last, how long a meeting should last and... I haven't had to deal with difficult parents. I mean, I imagine that comes up. It would be good information to learn too is what to do when a parent is belligerent. Or not happy or leaving their kid unsupervised or things like that, I mean, I haven't had those problems so I've been really lucky but... and I don't know if I would be a good person to deal with that because honestly I'm kind of cut and dry, you know, if it's not appropriate, you need to leave and come back another time, but they may say like, that's not okay, you can't do that. But I don't know, but... I think that's worth having as a part of training too is parents and whether they're appropriate and what to do if they're not appropriate, things like that and what to keep an eye out for and... but we've been just very fortunate, we've not had any problems with parents in our group.

June learned about all opportunities available to 4-H participants through her experience as a volunteer and wants others to know about everything that 4-H members can get involved with:

I think it's important for 4-H volunteers to know everything that the kids can do outside of their own club. That's something I did sort of have to figure out. Because I missed this initial training. So, and we were a brand-new club. Um, so it takes a while to get to learn, you know, about the achievement night and project record books and... the presentation program. And then of course all of the district and state activities that the kids can participate in.

Not all training is aimed at aspects that would directly help youth. Sometimes as Mitzi shared, training is needed to help volunteers be better volunteers as well:

I think the top one is youth development because, you know, when I came in as a volunteer, I knew something about youth development, but not a whole lot... I think having that knowledge base as to how kids think or don't think... And how they react or don't react is important. Um... self-regulation... Was another one that initially I struggled with, and I'm not talking about self-regulation with kids, I'm talking about self-regulation with others, um, you know, because again, if you are coming in as a volunteer and you're working with a group of youth who... for a lack of a better term are... geared wide open all the time...classroom management or just, you know, just management in general and how to deal with behaviors. Um, and so, you know, and being self-regulatory so that they, you know, they don't, don't let 'em see you sweat.

Randy reminded volunteers to have a relationship with their 4-H agent:

Your agent is your friend because they could be a big help... and, you know, if they don't engage you, you should engage them, right? Um... and from my experience... and from what I know, most of the agents want to... engage with their instructors... They may not know what you're doing, but still, they can help you from the 4-H perspective, so I would say, you know... forge that relationship with your agent.

Other big picture trainings that were suggested included:

- “I mentioned that parliamentary procedure's not something easy that comes for me and as I've sat through other business meetings... a lot of people struggle with it. They really do.” (Kate)

- “Fundamentals of 4-H should be one of those checkboxes that a new volunteer should go through” (Kate)

Other trainings were suggested that focused on technology. Al shared:

I think working with technology is important and a lot of people, you know, 4-H is very traditional and we don't do a whole lot of technology stuff, and you're right, we do have traditions but we also have to meet kids where they're at and they're very technologically savvy. So being able to provide some things like that.

Meredith focused on the fact that as a volunteer sometimes experiences can be unpredictable:

Physical safety as much as anything and also just liability to make sure that they aren't ever put in a position or other staff or volunteers are ever put in a position where they could be questioned as to whether anything inappropriate was said, done... whether the child did it or a staff member did it or some random person came up and did it...making sure that the youth are safe and that there are guidelines in place for when... you know, if you have to leave a group and go take somebody somewhere or if you have to, I mean, there are a lot of different little things that come up.

Wanda, from her social work background, understood the importance of safety for both the 4-H volunteer and the 4-H participant:

I do think one training should be mandatory... it's more about... never being alone with children, the basic, I mean, from a social worker perspective, a lot of the different programs like Boy Scouts, things like that, for their leadership programs, for their leaders, they have to have them make sure that they follow certain policies about never being alone with a child for instance, you can't hug them, you kind of do a side hug, just little things like that. I'm a Darkness to Light facilitator and...they do have grants that

people have obtained and it is a good program. I mean, it talks about... preventing child abuse as opposed to dealing with the aftermath, which what I've always had to deal with, so anything preventative to me is a good thing. So something on that direction I guess...but a training that talks to the leaders about certain policies that they have to follow, that wasn't something that I've seen, it might be in a policy handbook, but I do think that that specific training on what to do in certain situations, you're gonna be working with children all the time and I think anything that comes up, you should know how to handle it. Usually it has a two person kind of always, like never driving with a child alone or giving them a ride home without another adult in the car, that kind of stuff, and I just think it's a good policy to have. Whether it's a one hour blurb on what to do if a child discloses something, like, who do you call? Do you call your 4-H agent, state agent... and hopefully those things don't happen but I think if they do for one time, you need to be prepared.

June also saw the importance of knowing how to appropriately work with youth:

I don't know if there are 4-H rules regarding how you're supposed to interact with the children, other than, and I mean, of course, you know, you have got your basic, you have to be nice, things like that with kids. But that just hit me, I've never really received any training on interacting with the kids, if there are rules or guidelines...

After training is received, the hope is that training is then applied to their work as a 4-H volunteer.

***Training applied.*** Training application varied from incorporating and applying concepts to application of specific subject matter learned. Meredith was able to use the concept of experiential learning to shape how she worked with 4-H youth:

I think the concept of experiential learning, that letting them do stuff and sometimes make mistakes and not... not doing it for them, letting them be... wrong. Letting them fail so they can succeed so they can see the process, so the idea of... of learning by doing really probably shaped a lot of things for me that I'm unaware of.

Specific subject or topic specific training was also useful. The business meeting model was beneficial to some volunteers such as Meredith:

The business meeting model... Was really beneficial to me because I had never thought to teach my children that. And so... We all learn that together. It's not like I'd never been in a meeting before, but the fact that children can do that and children can learn that definitely informed me as I became an educator in a classroom and then later as a volunteer in other areas, but just the... and I guess that's not really content.

Training that can be applied in their 4-H clubs, such as 4-H record books, was also something that 4-H volunteers like Wanda discussed:

I actually went to the state fair this year and I'm starting to really pay attention to what they're doing at the state fair and so I can apply it next year, but I'm narrowing down right now on record books, I really want to master this little bit of what they're supposed to do, and I'm experimenting unfortunately with my own children first, and selfish as that is, I think I do have to do a trial so I don't, what mistakes I've made... but I'm really motivating, some of the kids really don't want to do them and I'm like, "oh, c'mon, just do one-on-one with me," and... and I have the parents drop them off here at the library and you just sit and go over it and create it. Like, I don't care which child honestly it is, it's easier with my own because I'm home... But if, I'm trying to, I think they're like, "oh no, here she comes again, she wants me to do it with my ballet," but they're like,



“well, she’s very busy with ballet, she’s very busy,” I’m like, “let’s do a ballet record book.”

June shared “I like going out and doing activities that I can then come back and incorporate into the meetings, because after doing this for so long, sometimes you run out of new ideas.”

For some volunteers it was the subject matter specific information that was easily applied with the 4-H youth. Randy shared:

I would actually say part of the discipline stuff, right? Um, especially... in regards to... trap shooting, ‘cause I didn’t grow up doing that... But then especially with shotgun... and the trap shooting is then not only taking that to our, it’s really important to get... a kid started right, right? And let them see success early, right? Um, and so having kind of those foundation principles... help a lot, right, if you don’t have a background in that area, right? Because you’re learning along with the kids, so... you know, and to be able to tell a kid, “okay, here, you need to, you know, focus on, let’s work on just one thing...” And then, so... kind of building small success and putting that in practice.

Not all training sticks, despite best efforts as Sue describes:

Oh, and one other thing that just professionally I don’t really get despite my best efforts and from a volunteer, I don’t really see much about...project record books and so I felt like I want to be committed to this traditional 4-H project but... I don’t know, the... it has always felt, and I’ve tossed it out to my, especially my middle and high schoolers before... and there doesn’t seem, for my group, to be a lot of relevancy or connection to it and so the idea is great, right? You’re taking in and accounting of all of these different experiences you’ve had, just the mechanism to deliver that information has just never really stuck with my group and so I wonder if it’s my lack of understanding or if, you

know, that's a project that could be reframed or we could reframe it somehow, so... anyways. That would be one particular thing that I'm like, I've been to a couple of those trainings and I'm just like, hasn't really stuck with me, so...

Training application may vary, but volunteers use their training and put it into practice to work with their 4-H participants. They take the experiences that they gain as volunteers and give youth opportunities to participate in something new. Some ideas may work; others might not, but they apply in some way the training receive. As 4-H moves into the future, training 4-H volunteers will have to be refined.

**Open code 3: Future training.** 4-H volunteers shared their thoughts on how to develop training and how to improve the 4-H volunteer experience. These findings address ways 4-H volunteers can benefit from training and support thus improving their overall volunteer experience.

*Training design.* Volunteers in this study shared feedback on how a volunteer training should be designed. Thoughts on this question ranged in responses from “more so of a check in of... you know, are we getting the things that you need, am I providing you the things that you want” as suggested by Al to cross county or regional training as suggested by Meredith. When asked about training design, Meredith replied:

Well, I think it would be in person. And it would be with other volunteers, maybe from other counties... Because the interaction between volunteers, different types of clubs, not all the quilting clubs together, not all just [one] county volunteers, if it were a... a larger group where you were talking about how you can... what the requirements are, what you're expected to do, what the safety boundaries are, all the things that you would need for all of the clubs. I think it would help... give people a more universal idea of 4-H

volunteerism and it can also help you step out beyond, I mean, I can quilt. I don't mind volunteering there, I was part of a homeschool group leadership team and I homeschooled so that made sense to me there, but I never want to go to the shooting sports group. Even if they didn't need me to do the shooting, I still wouldn't want to run the club because I wouldn't feel equipped to do it, but if it were standardized to the point where we expect every volunteer to be able to do and the list of expectations, it might let me step out a little bit, and I also might get ideas... From other volunteers in the meeting, because sometimes you have people who have already begun to volunteer and people who have never been there before or people who are 4-H'ers who need to do this but haven't volunteered before. You have a big, I think you could find, a big mix, a cross section, in such a group and I think that the conversation and the networking and fellowshiping that could happen in that kind of group could encourage everybody. And also give you a support group.

Meredith continued:

If you did them regionally, maybe you could do it... a couple of evenings in a row or something like that, give it two or three days or even a weekend so people could get to know each other truly...sessions just to bring people back and kind of follow them along... the word's not coming to me right now, longitudinal? So in an longitudinal manner, that way, you know, you can see, this person had a great idea but it fell apart by our second meeting, let's not do it, let's do this instead and I mean, from... just having them come together one time would help. Having them come together twice and kind of checking in would be great, but seeing them maybe at the beginning, at the end of their first season or something along those lines where you could kind of gather them to make

almost a cohort out of volunteers would be nice, but then we're talking about people who are often volunteering their entire time and all the resources come from them, and so you'd have to balance what's... doable and feasible to ask of your volunteers at the same time. So maybe the first one could be in person and then the second or third ones could be Zoom meetings or something along those lines.

Randy was also in support of weekend away training. He shared:

The weekend away... works, right? Because you are isolated... and it's, you're immersed, right, in that, I mean, it's kind of like drinking from a fire hose, right? In some ways, it is, right? Um, but I think that's good and I think the practicum at the end is good, right? And then... like for shooting sports, right, again, you've got multiple disciplines, and so if you go back and you're getting training in multiple disciplines, it's a lot of the same people there, right? And so you form a lot of relationships, you know, I got this kid that, here's what they're, you know, they're facing this issue or, you know, "here's where you can get ammo cheap," or here's, you know, all that sort of... information, or here's a grant you can apply for, so I think... for shooting sports, I think that's good.

Some people felt that training should be delivered through a manual or portfolio while others favored face-to-face or online/video; still others preferred a blended approach. Kate thought something like a portfolio would have been helpful for her and to other volunteers:

I think they should be handed a portfolio folder and there should be steps of, you open this portfolio folder and on the left side should be step, step, step, with check boxes, hey, we're gonna teach you this, and then when you learn it, it gets checked off and maybe... I guess for new volunteers, "hey, one-on-one, here's your folder, this is yours, we're

organized, we're gonna go through it step by step, here it is, we're gonna teach you, and, you know, you're gonna get a background check and we want to make sure that, you know, here's your paperwork," but more like... how can we support you, what do you want to be trained in? What are your gifts? What are your strengths? Remember, teach to your weaknesses, you're only gonna get your weaknesses better if you teach 'em. So what are your weaknesses so we can help build you and stuff like that and so I don't know, maybe something more formal, hey, you know, and maybe don't wait for volunteers to ask. Maybe have your 4-H agent say, "hey, you know, I'd like to sit down, let's just go over one-on-one, what are some things you would like to learn," 'cause if people wait to be asked, I mean, it's not gonna happen and say it in a positive way, not like, "alright, this is your six month evaluation and," you know, say like your boss is gonna say, "well, here's, you're not doing good in this but you're doing good in this," more like, how can we help you? And here's our checklist, we're gonna work through this portfolio, like, for instance, somebody, I didn't grow up in 4-H personally, so somebody who knows nothing about 4-H, they should get something like maybe they could ask me to come in and say, "hey, could you share the fundamentals of 4-H with this new volunteer?"

Kate felt that having a portfolio of everything they needed to know would be helpful. In the portfolio would be a checklist of the things that volunteers needed to do or turn in so that volunteers could keep track of where they were in the process. The checklist could include deadlines, trainings (mandatory and optional), resources, and anything else that might be helpful and serve as a support for volunteers. Wanda echoed Kate's thoughts, "Definitely a manual. Like, one manual. Like everything you need to know".

Some of the volunteers saw a place for online training for 4-H volunteer training. Randy shared:

The place I would say there are things that we could add or that would be beneficial is more like online training. So... you know, and video on demand and that sort of stuff. Because a lot of the other organizations have that type... I think the ages and stages, right... and making, you know, and different aspects of using the life skills wheel, right, and ideas on how to incorporate that, right? Um, because you can only get so much of that in... a weekend. I think online... kind of review or training modules would be good and then also... whether it's web resources or online videos or anything like that, I'm not sure, but, you know, how to... be a more effective 4-H leader and, you know, and what are... the paperwork requirements and how to navigate those and, you know, maybe some tools to kind of make that a little bit easier to keep up with, right?

Sue felt that online training would have a place in the training of 4-H volunteers and described it as:

Like a traditional delivery of information where they sort of read it, you see the words, but they have a couple of like graphics or pictures or something that explains the concept and then you're also required to test out, so you have to, you know, basically listen to the information enough to be able to answer questions and get a certificate, so it might be lab safety, it might be hazardous waste material disposal, it might be safety electrical training, whatever the really boring topic is, they've got a module for it, and that's really nice, 'cause you can do it at your own pace.

Wanda, Sue, June, and Mitzi felt that a blended approach might be one way to structure 4-H volunteer training. Wanda shared:

Some programs online... for people like me that are a little older. A book. At least gives me the lingo what to look up if I had to go online and wanted to learn more, I just know where to go when I hit this phase or something to that effect

Sue echoed the importance of a variety of training types:

There really ought to be like some high quality engaging... online presence for training. some of the club nitty-gritty stuff that's, you know, that's sort of one piece and maybe that will always be an in-person thing but I do think that, you know, I would love to see a couple of two to three, like, if I'm, you know, as a club leader interested in doing something with... you know, let's say health and nutrition or whatever, you know they've started to do some of these, like, really quick videos so I think it would be kind of neat to have... you know, some of that sort of stuff so you can... almost have a portal if you will of like, okay, I'd like to do embryology but I'm not sure how to do it, you know, let me watch a quick video about it, or hey, I would love to do plant propagation, I think that's a great, you know, 4-H gardening activity, let's see a quick video. Something like that...

June understood that an ideal training system depends on the person:

That would depend probably, be different from person to person. when I first started... probably what would have been ideal to me would have been an online pre-recorded, you know, like... That I could go on my own time... And read things and see slides and things like that online that were in one place. Um, just because at that time, [my daughter] was like seven and I didn't have time then in my schedule to, I had no one to leave her with... So I couldn't have come to an in person training without having to bring her. And keep her entertained while I was being trained. At this point... I have more

time on my hands and I might enjoy an in person training where I could, you know, ask questions as I have them, but back then, I would have loved to have, you know, all the information in a nice concise place online, but with graphics and visually appealing... I could have watched some videos... Or seen some... like PowerPoint type presentations online and I would have, that would have been good for me then.

While Mitzi's preferred style was face-to-face for training, she realized that not everyone is the same:

I'm a face to face person, don't get me wrong, so I love face to face trainings. But unfortunately, that's not doable for everybody. Um, and so, you know, if I could have my perfect 4-H volunteer training world...would love to see at least twice a year face to face trainings on different, like, hot topics. Whatever those hot topics may be, you know, if it's doing a seminar on, you know, youth on the autism spectrum or if it's doing a seminar on behavioral management skills, if it's doing a seminar on how do you handle youth who have service or assistance dogs?

In addition to scheduled training, both Lily and Mitzi shared ideas of a type of purposeful check in or webinar. Lily shared:

So how are they getting their information? I don't know, so I don't know that you can require club leaders to do training modules or go to so many things or whatever, but... I don't know, maybe once a quarter, send out like highlights of, "okay, hey, make sure you, you know, this is this policy, this is this," and just clickable links, quick information, you know, five minutes if you read these three things and sign off that you read them or something.

Mitzi shared:



A majority of people have internet access, whether it's through a laptop, most people are gonna have it off this little device right here which is a cell phone. And maybe doing a monthly webinar. Again, on something different. Um, or just, you know, being an effective volunteer and what does that effective volunteer look like?

Mentorship was suggested by Wanda, pulling from her experiences as a new 4-H volunteer and what would have been helpful to her:

Mentorship would be another part of the training, whether it's like a group of young new workers meeting with older workers and sharing ideas and have kind of like a, I don't know... maybe idea burst or something. That would be another helpful one is just a meeting about just ideas. Of groups and what they've done in the past and what they want to try to do in the future

Mary understood that training can be generic for all 4-H volunteers but can also be situational:

I'm still thinking more in terms of like the situational type training. If there were some way to make sure that that was... so if we were looking at something, like some sort of training system that would apply at any of those situations, I could see something like... essentially, having, okay, well, what's coming to mind is like a volunteer training toolkit, so for example, if you were training volunteers to work at a summer camp, you have some sort of toolkit that asks specific questions about the training environment, so maybe has some of those questions, like what do your volunteers need to know, what resources do they need to have, what kind of things, if any, do they need to have practice or experience doing before the event itself, what do they need to prepare ahead of time,

what deadlines are there... having some sort of toolkit that assists the people training them.

*Improving volunteer experience.* To recruit the best volunteers and keep the great volunteers 4-H currently has, it is imperative to analyze the volunteer experience. Ideas for improving the 4-H volunteer experience range from a one stop shop where volunteers can find information to providing consistent feedback to then providing opportunities that help volunteers grow in their capacity.

Relationships are an important part of the volunteer experience. Positive relationships can have a beneficial effect for the volunteer. Meredith explained one such idea of a relationship:

Having volunteer mentors at the county level may not be a bad idea. Um, because then, even if you couldn't do a one to one, you could do maybe a one to three or one to four and just, or maybe every time you have new volunteers come in who start at the same time, have a mentor follow that crop of people.

Wanda had a different spin on the idea of learning from others:

Another agent or someone I could just shadow for a few meetings and see what, I don't even know what they're supposed to do for the pledge. Like, is there a little hand movement? And I had to really tap on someone else who had a 4-H kid when they were little. I think I would have really liked if someone was doing it for a long time.

Randy learned that positive relationships, including those with your 4-H agent, are important:

That your agent is your friend because they could be a big help... and, you know, if they don't engage you, you should engage them, right? Um... and from my experience... and from what I know, most of the agents want to... engage with their instructors... They

may not know what you're doing, but still, they can help you from the 4-H perspective, so I would say, you know... forge that relationship with your agent.

Mitzi shared that a formal training in the beginning would have improved her 4-H volunteer experience:

I honestly wish I had gone through a formal training. I didn't realize there was formal training until [current 4-H agent] came on board. Um, and I heard her talking... you know, about there's workshops that volunteers can go to, you know, and things like that, I was like, "man... I wish I had known that," but I think at that point in time, I was so focused on... my Tuesday nights, and like I said, my kids weren't old enough yet to really get into the 4-H experience... I see that more now with them being involved in 4-H, and like I said, you know, and being here, because [current 4-H agent] has even told me, she was like, "if you want to go to a training," she said, "we will make it happen..." but unfortunately, it's never worked where I could go.

Sometimes it is resources that can improve a 4-H volunteer's experience. Meredith shared:

Having a website with the information on it for volunteers would be really nice. I'm not sure if that exists or not. Yes, all in one place, or a manual, one or the other or both... standardized forms, that kind of stuff, all the things that one would need so that one wouldn't have to bother [4-H agent]. Really and truly, to try to just... making sure they understand if and where the funding is, if and how to do... what's it called? Fundraising. Making sure all of the financial parts are well explained because a lot of times with volunteering it gets very complicated when you have your volunteers do any of that. But mostly just resources so that if I don't remember something that I've been taught, I can

go find it. Online or a manual. Or a combination of both, it could be that there's a printable PDF that's a short version of [the manual] that directs you to the online service for something more lengthy so that you're minimizing your physical cost, but you're still providing those people who want that with something in hand.

Wanda also liked the idea of manuals:

I think I'm really old fashioned so one big manual would be great. Like, one book that covers everything would be easier than a whole bunch of websites. I'm still behind on a lot of the technology right now, so a lot of times it's a website here and you can go to this link and you can go to this link and... and I'm not gonna go looking for those links. It'd be a whole lot easier if I just had a book. Sorry, it's a little old fashioned.

In addition, Wanda said that improving her volunteer experience would include helping her to be a more efficient club leader. One thing Wanda needed was:

Help with finding places to meet - there should be a plethora of programs, or locations that we can meet at that are county programs, like, or county locations. Um, I can't get any locations to have my group meet other than at church maybe that's willing to offer space... the 4-H extension office is closed on Fridays, so Monday through Friday, it's closed at 5, so someone would have to come in and open the doors, let us in the building and it's not really conducive for our meetings for one hour, that morning to have a state official come in probably and open it, but there's a lot of other places that are open like the library here, I think we can only reserve one a month I think...Um, one room a month for... I think it's a month, or two a month I think it is, but if we meet weekly, I don't want to have to try and get that room and then not, the reservation be full by the time I try to get it and they're really booked out. Um, but there's a senior center, they told me that

they charge because they have to do clean up or whatever it is at the senior center, which is a county building, I thought. And then there's, I'm trying to think of other buildings there are. It's just limited location space.

Sometimes though the resources needed are support for all club members to have opportunity.

Wanda shared:

I wouldn't say financial necessarily which is shocking. So we don't handle money in our group at all, we try to avoid that at all costs because I don't want to be responsible, but... but maybe some scholarship for each group on the side for those kids who can't afford, I do feel bad when we want to do something a little bit bigger. Um, we want to go to a museum down in Raleigh and see a 3D show and I know that there's a couple of parents that that's gonna be a real burden for them and I would love to know that I can just say, hey, that's covered. So it would be nice to maybe have like, a little slush fund that's not under my care, like maybe [4-H agent] has it and I can call him and say, "hey, there's an event coming up," you know, even if it's only twice a year, that would be another good support system.

Another opportunity to improve the 4-H volunteer experience is to improve or update communication. Randy shared:

I don't know, like maybe... message board or email us or... Facebook but, you know, a lot of our people are older and will not do that, right, will not use social media but, you know, some... a forum where we can share with the learned experience of others across the state, because whether or not, I mean, you know, if you're in Jackson County or if you're in, you know, or... Brunswick County, Pender County, or Wake County, or Lee

County, there's certain principles that are gonna be the same, right? Just some sort of a brain dump kind of place.

Wanda saw the importance of communication. "Even just a way that we can all connect, either a phone call or, you know... I don't know, Skype or something like that." Sometimes feedback improves the 4-H volunteer experience. Wanda shared her need for feedback so that she can keep moving the group forward:

And sometimes I feel like I wish I had feedback though because I have parents that come and bring their kids and I don't try and take it personally because I think if you can, you let it get to you but there are parents who have come that never came back and I think, "well, is there something they didn't like or is there something that they," you know, but then I think, well, they're looking for what's the best fit for their child too so if they came and they didn't see enough animals in our program, then they gonna go find something, I would do the same thing, so I don't really try to take it personally but I think sometimes it would help to know, what exactly, what parents are in my group because sometimes they'll come and I don't know if they're still coming and they might have joined another group and I have no idea... that's kind of a missing piece of information that I need, because if their child joined another 4-H group and I still have them on my roster.

Sue shared that having easy-to-go to activities would help support her as a 4-H volunteer:

So having some sort of... infrastructure, whether it was like from the state 4-H office to the volunteers...like...a monthly newsletter that had like one cool activity you could do, and so then eventually you have this library of sort of these one-off grab and go's that might be from a curriculum like, "hey, here's this one activity, check out this curriculum more."

There are a plethora of opportunities in the North Carolina 4-H program, but sometimes knowing about those opportunities can be a challenge. June shared:

One thing that would be helpful is when you are getting your training or maybe throughout the training, to learn what other resources are available outside of 4-H but in the extension office. For example if there, the family and consumer science person... Would they be willing and able to... do, you know, present something to the club, or if you brought the club to her or him, you know, would they be able to teach the kids about something? Um, or suggest a topic and provide visual aids or whatever. I think it would be neat, you know, if the livestock agent had maybe a list of some people who might be willing to host a meeting to teach, we're not an animal club, we're just a general club... But we do like to take trips to farms to learn about, you know, goats, and sheep, and horses and things like that, so it would nice to have... a list or some sort of, and I don't even know if they have resources. Through the years I found that some... like, some of the people will be able to meet with the club. But it would be nice to have that.

Improving the 4-H volunteer experience and creating an effective training design is not always about financial resources. More often, it is about creating trainings that work for volunteers and giving them tools and resources to make their job as a 4-H volunteer easier. It is about talking and listening and then putting what you learn into action. Open codes were developed before the data was coded using Kirkpatrick's four levels: reaction, learning, behavior, and results. As discussed in Chapter Three, Kirkpatrick's framework worked to a point. Then I adapted the framework to work for my study. The explanation below is based on the revised framework and the coding from the revised framework.

## Framework Coding

**Reaction.** The Reaction level of the Kirkpatrick model is defined as, “the degree to which participants find the training favorable, engaging, and relevant to their jobs” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 17). When analyzing data from the participants, this study defined the Reaction level as: the degree to which study participants found training, support, and the overall volunteer experience favorable, engaging, or relevant to their role as a volunteer. The feedback shared addressed the training, learning, and general support for doing volunteer work.

Sue found the collaborative nature and inclusiveness of her club as a learning and support opportunity for her volunteer role:

Most of my stories are really sweet affirming stories, so... you know, young people that come together and... are truly interested in sort of whatever it is that we're studying and show leadership by making the commitment to come, making the commitment to sort of bring everyone in so we have a whole... especially with our...older kids club, so they do... a really good job of just like bringing people in, so we have kids that are...that are gonna be valedictorians ...we have Muslim kids, we've got kids of color, we've got, you know, white kids and so they do really a good job of just sort of like...Making sure that it's collaborative and that... you know, everyone sort of feels like they have a place and that is always sort of... an affirming, and that's the thing that keeps me going too, 'cause you know you've got a lot going on, and there've moments where my co-leader and I have thought about stepping away but it's always the kids that, you know, keep you in it affirmation of sort of the kindness and good that, you know, young people show, so I love that part.



Multiple volunteers reacted to the favorable support they received from their 4-H agents. This support helped them to learn and feel supported in their volunteer role. Lily shared:

Our extension agent...is phenomenal. She is not a horse person, but she is... I can't say enough good things about her. I don't know how she does what she does but she is spot on about making sure we have what we need, we understand what we need, that kind of thing. She's super supportive.

Mitzi shared, "I can't commend 4-H agents enough because they have so much to balance and juggle". Tara talked about her 4-H agent as providing a tremendous amount of support and customized training which allowed her to feel successful in her role as a volunteer:

She gives out these calendars of events, she tells you what's going on, she sends out the emails are key, everything under those groups and everything telling us when things are like... like now, we got to re-register for the 4-H online thing, they have everything is online now, so she's reminding us to do that. We have achievement night coming up in February so she's telling us to get ready for that, so... you know, that's the support we need, because we don't want to miss out on anything, the kids... we're getting ready for speeches this year coming up in the spring/summer, so... and then what I do is call her and she'll be like, well, you know, she's very flexible, she'll be like, "well, you can come today or tomorrow," or she'll make an appointment with you and, you know, she'll work around your schedule and everything, so... that's good to have an extension agent, she'll go over and beyond her schedule and stay longer or something like that, you know, and I know she's got things to do at home too, but she'll stay or she'll meet up with you on a Saturday morning, you know, and everything and so... and she really loves the kids too,

she knows every 4-H'er, even the new ones, she'll try to learn, you know, try to have a relationship with and... so that's important, I think.

There were also unfavorable reactions or opportunities for growth that were identified throughout this process which would improve training, learning, support, and the overall volunteer experience. Mitzi shared:

I honestly wish I had gone through a formal training. I didn't realize there was formal training until [our Agent] came on board. Um, and I heard her talking... you know, about there's workshops that volunteers can go to, you know, and things like that, I was like, "man... I wish I had known that," but I think at that point in time, I was so focused on... my Tuesday nights, and like I said, my kids weren't old enough yet to really get into the 4-H experience... I see that more now with them being involved in 4-H, and like I said, you know, and being here, because [our Agent] has even told me, she was like, "if you want to go to a training," she said, "we will make it happen..." but unfortunately, it's never worked where I could go.

June shared that having a list of resources provided through training would be both relevant and appreciated:

One thing that would be helpful is when you are getting your training or maybe throughout the training, to learn what other resources are available outside of 4-H but in the extension office. For example if there, the family and consumer science person... Would they be willing and able to... do, you know, present something to the club, or if you brought the club to her or him, you know, would they be able to teach the kids about something? Um, or suggest a topic and provide visual aids or whatever. I think it would be neat, you know, if the livestock agent had maybe a list of some people

who might be willing to host a meeting to teach, we're not an animal club, we're just a general club... But we do like to take trips to farms to learn about, you know, goats and sheep and horses and things like that. So it would nice to have... a list or some sort of, and I don't even know if they have resources. Through the years I found that some... like, some of the people will be able to meet with the club. But it would be nice to have that.

Sometimes volunteers just needed help to find other volunteers that could support their learning and on the job training. Wanda shared:

I guess help with recruiting other leaders. I don't know how much recruitment is going on behind the scenes. I don't know, I haven't asked [our 4-H Agent] about it, but I feel like it's left to me to find them. In some ways, that's good because I want a good match.

Most of the comments shared by participants were coded at the Reaction level. This is not surprising as this level is the lowest level of Kirkpatrick's model. The definition for this study was intentionally designed to have a place to capture comments that did not necessarily fit at the higher levels. The study definition, "the degree to which study participants found training, support, and the overall volunteer experience favorable, engaging, or relevant to their role as a volunteer" was able to capture volunteers' perceptions related to training, support, and overall volunteer experiences.

**Learning.** The Learning level of the Kirkpatrick model is defined as, "the degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training" (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 15). The data from this study defined the learning level as: the degree to which study

participants acquired knowledge, skills, or confidence through the training, support, and overall volunteer experience(s).

Volunteers reflected more on the experiential learning they experienced with their 4-H participants than the formal learning they experienced as an adult volunteer. While formal training programs were a way that volunteers learned, volunteers also learned by experience and that helped to shape how they approached their role as a volunteer. Wanda shared an experience she was working on with her 4-H club and how she was learning through the experience:

We've done... the GPS thing, it's called geocaching. I think it's called geocaching. We use the GPS on our phone and we go looking and what was exciting about it is... I didn't know a lot about it, but I went out and we would find, we had this GPS that takes us to a certain location and there's a capsule that is in the middle of nowhere and you open it up and there's like a thousand signatures inside of people that have already found this capsule based on the GPS and then they sign it and you can take, some of them have prizes in them you can take out and you can put something back, it can be like an acorn, and you get take a prize out and then you get to replace it with a gift to the next person who finds it. And there's multiple ones you can choose from inside and one was a toilet, it's really funny...there's actually one in the outhouse toilet that was there originally, historically, I mean, it's not used anymore obviously, but it's like a... so to reach down in this historic toilet and find this capsule that was there for several years now is one of the more popular sites, so... and there's a graveyard and you learn history as you're doing it as well because you have to stop at these sites and also you just, it kind of makes you feel good to know someone was there already.

Through this process, Wanda was able to acquire knowledge and confidence in a new activity and able to share this opportunity with her club members. Sometimes learning takes place through negotiation as Sue shared:

We were doing some planning and one of the 4-H'ers was like, "I really want to dissect a deer. I think we could figure it out..." fortunately, his fellow 4-H'ers were like, "maybe we could think about that but do something else."

Volunteers did share opportunities for expanded learning or refreshers on topics they may have already learned. Randy shared:

I like that we are covered, you know, insurance-wise, we're covered under the... university, right? And... and there's ways that, you know, if we have a landowner that's willing to give us a place to shoot, right, there are ways that we can get them covered, either through the local county office or, you know, there's ways to make sure they're protected and we're protected, right? Um, so I like having all those options available... and then, and back to kind of the youth development... the ages and stages presentation, right? You know what I'm talking about. If you study psychology, then you kinda know about all that sort of stuff, but that's been a long time ago. I think having those types of refreshers... at the training courses is good.

Learning also took place through the support of other volunteers. These opportunities increased volunteer knowledge, skills, and confidence. Shannon shared, "a lot of the more experienced coaches reached out and helped me as I try to do." Kate shared:

I have been developed as a leader through interactions from maybe being a district officer, maybe in conversations I've had with my 4-H agent, ... at the March training

seminars, so... that to me, that means a lot that it also develops me as a leader and personally.

Specific trainings also provided an opportunity for learning. Volunteers mentioned specifically several trainings they had attended and found beneficial in their learning including ages and stages (Al), working with exceptional children (Al), risk management (Al), 4-H volunteer 101 (Meredith), ages and stages, the life wheel and liability (Randy), registration and financials (Sue), livestock judging (Kate), and 4-H Online (June). There were also trainings that volunteers thought were needed that would aide in both their learning and their overall effectiveness as 4-H volunteers. These included, “more of the interactive activities that are... that are ongoing. I enjoy those, because...I run out of ideas and I could... take them back to the club. It makes it easier for me” (June). Meredith shared:

Understanding, especially for people like me who did know what 4-H was, knowing what 4-H is and what the expectations, very clear expectations for volunteers and what level you're volunteering at... who is there to help you. Who are your supports, who can you call, like, immediately in the county.

Also shared as needed topics were, risk management (Al), working with technology (Al), building rapport with staff (Al), youth safety protocols (Meredith), physical safety and liability (Meredith), different types of learning disabilities and how to work with all youth (Wanda), the flow of a 4-H meeting (Wanda), and parliamentary procedures (Kate).

Volunteers had much to share that was coded at the Learning level. The study definition, “the degree to which study participants acquired knowledge, skills, or confidence through the training, support, and overall volunteer experience(s)” was able to capture volunteer perceptions

related to learning experiences and learning experiences that are needed or would be valuable for the role of a 4-H volunteer.

**Behavior.** The behavior level of the Kirkpatrick model is defined as, “the degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 14). The data from this study defined the behavior level as the degree to which study participants were able to apply knowledge or skills learned through training and support in their work as a 4-H volunteer. Kate shared an activity she participated in that she was able to apply in her role as a 4-H volunteer:

I remember playing with pipe cleaners. And I think at one of them, we had, it was interesting and maybe I remember this because now I have a son who’s been diagnosed with ADHD, on the table, we had on our table fidget toys or something in the center and... and sometimes, and now as a parent of a kid like that, I realize that sometimes, we just need our hands, we can focus better when our hands or our fingers are busy and now I know that, you know, that doesn’t necessarily mean somebody’s not paying attention, actually it may mean that they’re better focused that way.

Through an experience Kate learned at a volunteer training, her behavior changed and she was able to use what was learned in another environment. Al shared about how training he learned as a 4-H camp staff member translated to his work throughout his 4-H volunteer career:

I think the importance, and this goes along with training and it goes along with interacting with youth all on its own. I was a 4-H camp staff member for six years and we were always trained on how to interact with kids, not be alone with kids, and things like that. The biggest thing that really focused that for me as a volunteer was that it only takes one person to discredit your reputation and so it doesn’t matter if it’s true, false,

whatever, you get that one person that doesn't have a good day or something to that affect and your reputation's shot. So... I utilize that as a volunteer the most of, you know, never being alone with a child or alone with other people that, in that capacity... making sure that my t's are crossed and my i's are dotted when I'm putting together something for a program or for somebody, and I think that carried over the most into career and college for me too.

Meredith shared about how mentoring helped her in her role as a 4-H volunteer and filled both an immediate and an ongoing need:

Having a mentoring system is an awesome thing, because that's basically what I had. I had other volunteers around me who knew what they were doing, had done it before. They were like, "look, you just do this and this and this and this," and then... But they were, you know, I had a relationship with them and they were my buddies so to speak. So that really helped as much as anything.

Through this experience, Meredith was able to apply the learning gained in her volunteer role.

This study defines the behavior level as the degree to which study participants were able to apply knowledge or skills learned through training and support in their work as a 4-H volunteer.

Behavior is the third highest level in the Kirkpatrick model; therefore, it is not surprising that it is harder to show results at this level. Behavior changes take time, and translating the training you have received to a behavior change is a not an easy or quick process.

## **Results**

The results level of the Kirkpatrick model is defined as, "the degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training and the support and accountability package"

(Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 12). The data from this study defined the results level as



the degree to which study participants were able to exhibit results either in themselves or in the youth they work with as a result of training or support they received. This is the level that takes the longest to achieve as it is the highest level in the Kirkpatrick model. Through the course of the interviews, few clear result level comments were shared. This does not mean that results were not necessarily achieved but it may mean they were expressed in a way that aligned with one of the other categories more appropriately.

In this study, participants shared their experiences as North Carolina 4-H volunteers. This chapter portrays the findings from those interviews. The “people” section showed that people become a 4-H volunteer through multiple avenues and along the way collect both positive and frustrating moments to remember. The “training” section showed that not only is there no one way to become a 4-H volunteer, there is also no one standardized training mechanism by which all volunteers are trained. This section also showed that 4-H volunteers apply the training they learn in a variety of ways and that based on their experience as a volunteer, have some real ideas for trainings that all 4-H volunteers should receive. The section on “future training” highlighted a variety of ways that future volunteer training can be delivered and ways to improve the overall 4-H volunteer experience. While there is no one size fits all approach to volunteer trainings, there are ways to look at preferences and design a training that is beneficial for all volunteers. Kirkpatrick’s model worked reasonably well as a guiding framework for the participant interviews and aligned with the research purpose. It offered a way to view and interpret the participant feedback. Further, it allowed the research to be categorized, analyzed, and to make meaning of what was shared in relation to the larger research question.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This case study focused on North Carolina 4-H volunteers who had between 3-10 years of volunteer experience. Interviews from 13 participants from 11 different counties revealed volunteer perceptions of training and support as they relate to overall volunteer experience. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as they connect to the literature. In addition, this chapter discusses the implications this study has on research and practice and concludes with a discussion on the limitations of the study and areas that should be explored with future research.

### Research Question

**What are NC 4-H volunteer perceptions of training and support as they relate to their overall volunteer experience?**

North Carolina 4-H volunteers perceive training and support and its' influence on their volunteer experience in a variety of ways. Kirkpatrick's model provided a framework through which to interpret and make meaning of the information that was shared by North Carolina 4-H volunteers through interviews (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Through this study findings it is suggested that formal educational programs – at least as it stands now – are not necessarily the primary mechanism of learning for volunteers. Study findings indicated volunteers are learning how to be a volunteer and also find support through a combination of formal training, mentorship, and experience. Table 3 below shows Kirkpatrick's model along with the adapted model. The adapted model was used to code the data gathered through this research. Through this process it was determined that no data was gathered that could be substantively categorized at the results level. Results is the level which takes the longest to achieve as it is the highest level in the Kirkpatrick model. This does not mean that results were not necessarily achieved by

training but could suggest that the data was expressed in a way that best fit in one of the other categories more clearly and appropriately.

Table 3:

*Study Model* (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016)

Learning Level	Traditional Definition	Study Definition
Reaction	The degree to which participants find the training favorable, engaging and relevant to their jobs.	The degree to which study participants found training, support, and the overall volunteer experience favorable, engaging, or relevant to their role as a volunteer.
Learning	The degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training.	The degree to which study participants acquired knowledge, skills, or confidence through the training, support, and overall volunteer experience(s).
Behavior	The degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job.	The degree to which study participants were able to apply knowledge or skills learned through training and support in their work as a 4-H volunteer.
Results	The degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training and the support and accountability package.	The degree to which study participants were able to exhibit results either in themselves or in the youth they work with as a result of training or support they received.

## Discussion of Findings

**Reaction.** In this study, interviews were coded at the reaction level based on the degree to which study participants found training, support, and the overall volunteer experience favorable, engaging, or relevant to their role as a volunteer. Several areas for reaction level stand out in the findings that relate back to the literature.

***Collaborative efforts, inclusiveness, and structure.*** Volunteers in this study commented on both the collaborative nature and inclusiveness of their volunteer experience. This ranged from interactions with other volunteers and staff members to work among the youth participants. Ellis (2005) states, “successful collaboration requires all participants to carry their share of the work load and resource contribution, while trying to maintain their own distinct identities...” (para. 1). For volunteers in this study this meant that they collaborated not only with other volunteers (perhaps in the club, in the county, or across the state), but also that they had a collaborative ongoing partnership with their local county Extension staff. They did this while preserving the uniqueness, individuality, and autonomy of their own 4-H volunteer role. This requires an ability to balance and recognize boundaries.

Volunteers found opportunities for collaborative training either especially helpful or, in the alternative, it was suggested as something they would like to have but perhaps had not experienced yet. When group trainings were held, volunteers felt value in peer learning and being able to learn from other volunteers – whether about a particular area of instruction or just being able to talk with volunteers who were going through similar experiences. According to Topping (2009), “peer learning has a long history. It is possibly as old as any form of collaborative or community action and probably has always taken place...” (p. 53). Peer learning helps volunteers to talk candidly about their experiences and help one another.

Participants felt on-line learning was appropriate for certain topics and situations. However, trainings offered via webinar or online modules convey the information and may involve structured interaction, but they do not offer the opportunity for meaningful collaboration among peer-to-peer volunteers.

Volunteers also shared how they learned from their 4-H youth club members. The Youth-Adult Partnership model, which is a core principal in 4-H, is “characterized by mutuality in learning, with both parties sharing their expertise, experience, and perspective” (Zeldin & Leidheiser, 2014, p.1). When volunteers and youth can learn from and with each other, the overall experience for both is usually more favorable. Intergenerational learning, defined as “an interactive process that takes place between different generations resulting in the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and values” (Ropes, 2013, p. 714) is of tremendous value to both parties participating in the learning process. The findings in this study are consistent with the literature related to intergenerational learning.

Volunteers valued that the 4-H program was welcoming and that all areas of the 4-H program were open. Whether you came from a family generation of 4-H members or if you were just hearing about it for the first time, you were included and welcomed. If you had always participated in 4-H work in the area of science and wanted to start learning about livestock, you were welcomed or if you had been a volunteer for 15 years and now wanted to get involved in the 4-H Volunteer Leaders’ Association, you were encouraged to participate. Because you had always done one thing and now wanted to venture into a new area was not a problem and was encouraged. The fact that 4-H program was inclusive to both volunteers and youth who wanted to try something new was something that 4-H volunteers appreciated.

The organizational structure creates a support system for 4-H volunteers. The organizational system provides a guide for how 4-H volunteers perform their roles, especially with club functions. Resources such as “So You Want to Start a 4-H Club” (Young, n.d.) can provide county specific information for 4-H volunteers while national resources such as “4-H 101: The Basics of Starting a 4-H Club” (4-H Military Partnerships, n.d.) show the national structure of the 4-H club program. The overall structures are in place creating a guide for 4-H volunteers; however, there is still room for autonomy and individualization.

*Need for formal training / resources.* Volunteers in this study expressed appreciation for existing training, but also communicated a need for a more formal training program and access to resources which would make their role as a 4-H volunteer easier. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2005):

To have highly effective volunteers, your organization needs an orientation and training program. Initial orientation and training prepare volunteers to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. Your policies and procedures form the basis of the orientation, and your position descriptions form the basis of the training. (p. 3-1)

In addition, Smith, Dasher, and Klingborg (2005) state that effective training for volunteers can improve their “skills and abilities, thus enhancing the programs they lead (Hoover & Connor, 2001). Furthermore, training increases the potential for sustaining programs over time (Snider, 1985) and improves the rate of volunteer retention (Van Winkle, Busler, Bowman, & Manoogian, 2002)” (para. 5). Volunteers commented that training opportunities varied a great deal depending upon the county staff that were in place. The volunteers noted that after a change in staff, they were made aware of additional training opportunities that would have especially been helpful at the start of their volunteering journey. Volunteers did appreciate the individual

and one on one training, but often commented on the need for or the “I wish I had” opportunities for formal collaborative training with other 4-H volunteers and across a wider region or area. This finding is consistent with the literature. According to Imel (1991) as cited in Brookfield (1986) “one of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of adult education is the fact that it should be collaborative or participatory in nature” (p. 2). Just as collaboration is an important focus in formal adult education, it should also be an important focus in non-formal adult education, such as volunteer training.

Volunteers in this study also commented on the critical need for training related to liability including how to work with minors. In a time of increased caution and worry, knowing how to appropriately work with young people is important for the organization, the agents, the volunteers as well as youth and their families. Participants shared that specific training was needed which addressed topics such as what to do and what not to do when working with a young person, proper relationship boundaries, and youth safety. Having this information and an opportunity for understanding and discussion of the organizational expectations would make volunteers more comfortable and confident in their role. It was relevant to their volunteer role positive experience. According to Hoover and Connor (2001):

Training for volunteer leaders will allow them to increase their skills and thus offer more potent training to the volunteers (Rauner, 1980). It is important that volunteers receive effective training because poor training can harm the organization by decreased productivity in volunteers, a possible loss of volunteers, and by decreasing the image of the organization (Naylor, 1973). (para. 4)

The need for resources focused upon 4-H volunteer roles was also shared. The resources requested were not always financial, they included resources in content knowledge areas,

resources explaining what and where community resources were available, and resources in providing networking or connections for club work. Providing access to resources helps give volunteers a sense of control. According to McCurley and Lynch (2005):

When we talk about giving volunteers a sense of control, we are talking about giving them the authority to think, the authority to plan and evaluate their work, the authority to decide what to do. The volunteer has a degree of autonomy in determining what they do and how they go about doing it. (n.p.)

Of the 13 volunteers interviewed, 10 reported the need for a standardized or structured volunteer formal training in key areas and increased supplemental training based upon niche topics such as subject matter, advanced leadership, etc. As an organization, 4-H needs to listen to the suggestion for a formal training program.

**Learning.** In this study, interviews were coded at the learning level based on the degree to which study participants acquired knowledge, skills, or confidence through the training, support, and overall volunteer experience(s).

*Alongside youth – youth adult partnerships.* While the reaction level evaluates how study participants found information favorable, engaging, or relevant, this level addresses the knowledge that was gained. Whether through training or experiences, 4-H volunteers discussed many times the experience of and the skills gained by learning alongside youth. Their intergenerational learning meant learning together through training experiences; together on activities of their club; and they learned together in setting goals and planning. According to Gamliel and Gabay (2014):

Intergenerational education programs that encourage joint activities between children and seniors have become the focus of a growing body of studies. Such programs extend,



enrich, and reconstruct social networks and affect individual behaviors and attitudes that influence community participation (Bostrom, 2002; Kerka, 2003) mitigate stereotypes; improve mutual understanding and trust; promote social inclusion and assimilation of values (Granville & Ellis, 1999; Kaplan, 2001); and cultivate constructive feelings of acceptance and respect (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008). (p. 597)

The literature is clear on the value of Youth Adult Partnerships. “Youth-adult partnerships arise from the conviction that young people have a right to participate in developing the programs that will serve them and a right to have a voice in shaping the policies that will affect them” (Norman, 2001, para. 1). What is surprising to some adult volunteers is the benefit they receive from the partnership experience. According to Chong (2006), adults who participate in a Youth Adult Partnership gain:

- first-hand information about the needs, concerns, and issues that pertain to youths
- the satisfaction of seeing youths willingly accept the services and messages of the relationship
- open and honest interactions and feedback about existing programs or services relating to youth
- access to new collaborators with fresh and innovative ideas, creativity, energy, and enthusiasm
- new perspectives on decision-making and community problem-solving, as responsibilities are shared with the partnering young person
- opportunities to foster active community members for the future. (p. 1)

Adults who participated in this study commented that learning alongside youth was fun. They were able to have experiences that they would not necessarily have made time to explore

otherwise. Learning with the youth was a highlight of many of the 4-H volunteers' role. In a study by Pstross et al. (2017), young people and adults who worked together and interacted through social exchange were "equally enriched" (p. 164). Knowing the value of intergenerational learning and youth adult partnerships, combined with the value 4-H volunteers place on this, as an organization, 4-H needs to encourage more youth/adult partnerships. Though youth/adult partnerships and intergenerational learning are both important parts of the 4-H program, more focus should be placed on intentionally creating opportunities for these partnerships to develop and thrive.

*With other 4-H volunteers.* Having opportunities to learn from peer 4-H volunteers and knowing 4-H volunteers who could be contacted for support were themes that came up repeatedly through the interview process. Volunteers shared that they enjoyed the networking being a 4-H volunteer provided them, and also depended upon the networking to perform in their roles. Volunteers mentioned the Volunteers Leaders' Association and Volunteer Leaders' Conference as both a source of networking, affirmation, and training. The number one reason to join an association according to Health Careers (2019) is, "associations provide unparalleled networking opportunities, allowing individuals to connect with their peers, mentors, and other industry leaders" (n.p.). Volunteers see the importance of finding opportunities to network, both for themselves personally and for their role as well as their continued learning. Gurden (2014) states, "teams that forge close relationships work in synergy to deliver the best quality care and support each other" (p. 63). By participating in opportunities to work with other volunteers, teams are formed that serve as a network for information as well as for support and encouragement. In addition, by working with others, volunteers are able to learn new skills, new ideas, and new ways of doing things. In addition, volunteers are able to share skills and

knowledge they have with others thus increasing the knowledge base and access to opportunities for the 4-H volunteer community. Creating a culture of collaboration is beneficial for both the volunteer and the organization. Jensen and McKeage (2015) state, “increased volunteer satisfaction that can result when a collaborative organizational culture is enhanced with attention to clear structures, policies, and procedures” (p. 174).

Training is one way to facilitate peer to peer learning and group collaboration. There are instances where training needs to be conducted locally, but there are also opportunities for training to be organized around the same topic (robotics for example) or general training to be provided across county lines. Volunteers in this study discussed having cross county or regional trainings in order to learn from others as well as to meet new volunteers. Knowing this, the 4-H organization needs to provide opportunities for 4-H volunteers to work together in peer groups. Volunteer peer groups could serve on planning teams together, participate in trainings together, or serve in a number of other peer team capacities. Teamwork and the opportunity to learn from and learn with other volunteers needs to be both purposefully included and facilitated.

**Behavior.** In this study, interviews were coded at the behavior level based on the degree to which study participants were able to apply knowledge or skills learned through training and support in their work as a 4-H volunteer.

***Lifelong change.*** Volunteers shared through the training and support they received in their role as a 4-H Volunteer, they were able to make changes which have affected change in their lives, as well as how they volunteer. The skills gained range from activities that help them be better meeting facilitators to things they learned that shaped how they work with young people. Behavior and attitudinal changes were shared as a result of receiving training and support as a 4-H volunteer. Through training, volunteers learned skills such as having

manipulatives on the table to help keep hands busy or about teambuilding activities to help with group activities or club transition times that were easy to apply to the volunteer role. Volunteers also learned through workshops and conferences information that they were able to turn into a club program or a club project. Through the support of other volunteers, club volunteers assumed new tasks ranging from serving as club leader to forming a competition judging team. According to Sparrow (2018), “volunteering is a great way to learn new skills and try new things in a relatively risk-free environment” (para. 5). Volunteering gives people the chance to learn skills that will serve them in other areas of their life should their role as a volunteer end. The new skills gained will benefit the volunteer in their current role, but can also benefit the volunteer in other roles they serve including professional roles. The skills gained can also help a volunteer who might be looking for employment or a change in careers. Volunteers in this study noted that while what they learned through their volunteer experience was primarily used in their role as a 4-H volunteer, they saw how it connected to other areas of their lives and in some cases had used the skills learned through 4-H outside of 4-H. In 4-H, the primary focus is teaching young people life skills to lead them into adulthood; however, the heart of 4-H, is to equip both youth and adults with positive life skills. Knowing this information, 4-H should seek opportunities to provide volunteers with skills which help them in their volunteer role, but also by providing them with skills that are transferrable into other areas. Identifying the needed skills can be done by talking with and listening to volunteers.

***Mentorship.*** Mentorship can take on many different forms. In this study, 4-H volunteers talked about either mentors they had or mentors they wish they had and the benefit of mentor / mentee relationships. Mentors helped to answer questions, provide encouragement, make connections, and help others find resources. Often times these relationships were informal and

volunteers had more than one mentor. Mentor relationships are often thought of as an adult and youth relationship but having adult mentors is an important part of the volunteer process.

According to Culp, Tichenor, Doyle, Stewart, and Hunter (2010):

Mentor is defined as ‘a higher ranking, influential senior member with advanced experience and knowledge of the organization, who is committed to providing upward mobility and support to a protégé’s professional career’ (Collins, 1983; Kram, 1985; Mincemoyer & Thomson, 1998; Roche, 1979). Mentoring has been defined most often by focusing on behaviors mentors perform. These behaviors include teaching, guiding, advising, counseling, sponsoring role modeling, validating, motivating, protecting, and communicating (Zimmer & Smith, 1992).

Literature is positive about the role of professional mentors. Petrus (2017), states:

Mentorship can be a significant part of your overall career success, both early on in your career and even late in your professional life. A strong and trusted mentor is someone who can provide you a solid baseline of career support, someone who will keep you grounded, and someone who will help you remain self-aware throughout your entire career journey. (n.p.)

While volunteering is not a professional career, adults having mentors is both beneficial and encouraged. Mentors help people grow, act as a resource, and provide trusted feedback

**Summary.** Three of the four levels in Kirkpatrick were addressed through this study. Volunteers overwhelmingly reported the value they find in the collaboration, inclusiveness, and the structure of the 4-H program. These things allow for a guide and format, but also for the flexibility and autonomy to learn experientially and fit the needs of both the volunteers and youth. Volunteers did however report that there is a need and a value in having both formal

training and formal resources. While it is valued to be able to customize and seek out information when needed, sometimes having a set of predetermined classes and guides would also be helpful. Volunteers also enjoy learning alongside and with youth. The volunteers in this study, whether they identified the learning as Youth Adult Partnerships or not, saw the importance (and the enjoyment) of learning alongside youth. They expressed they learned things they would not have otherwise explored had it not been for the young people they work with expressing an interest. The volunteers also enjoyed working with other 4-H volunteers. Whether this was a co-club leader or at a tournament or through the 4-H Volunteer Leaders' Association, having an opportunity to work with other 4-H volunteers was both beneficial and enjoyable. In addition, volunteers in this study share that the skills they learned through their role as a 4-H volunteer have been skills they will carry with them through their life. Perhaps 4-H can be about creating life skills in young people and in the volunteers that work with the youth. Also valued was mentorship, both in serving as a mentor and of having a mentor. Whether this process was formal or informal, those volunteers who had this role in their lives found it both beneficial and rewarding.

## **Implications**

### **Implications for research.**

*Kirkpatrick model.* Overall the Kirkpatrick model was helpful in guiding this research. The model was found to be easy to use, apply, and understand which is consistent with the reviews of the model in the literature. The model was easy to adapt to fit the needs of this particular study yet had enough structure to guide how to interpret the data from this research. The flexibility of this model allowed me as the researcher, room to maneuver and thoroughly make sense of the data. The model has been tested through various settings ranging from

training to healthcare, so it was not surprising that it was a good model to use when looking at something as specific as volunteer training that produced such a range of thoughts and feedback. I would recommend this model for someone researching volunteer training. The broadness of the Kirkpatrick definitions can be intimidating to a novice researcher, but the flexibility allows the model to work and for thorough investigation and analysis. There is a lot written in the literature about both the Kirkpatrick model (1959) and how to use this model, which makes it a tested, simple, and effective model for a novice researcher to understand and apply.

Kirkpatrick's levels of reaction, learning, and behavior were addressed through this study. Feedback that was given through interviews did not appear to be able to be coded at the results level. The study design perhaps contributed to the scarcity of information from this level of the framework. The results level addresses impacts and while there is no doubt that 4-H volunteers make an impact on the lives of youth and arguably the experiences volunteers have in this role are impactful, often times in 4-H the impacts that are received take years to be identified. The interview protocol questions did not lead participants to report at this level. Volunteers with 4-H are humble and without coaching, most likely would not share information that related to impacts. For this reason, it was not surprising that this level was not apparent in coding. Using observations or data collected through visual analysis could get to the results level of the model and allow for more robust research. Focus groups would also add depth to the research.

*Specific context.* This research study was both specific in context and small in participant numbers which could have affected the overall data received. While all five Cooperative Extension districts were represented, the overall participant numbers were low. This research study should be repeated with a larger participant pool; however a larger

participant pool without contextual grounding and understanding of the organization is insufficient. A more in depth investigation in order to pick up the threads and impacts of this study and build upon the research of this study is needed, while keeping in mind the context of the 4-H organization. Future studies which draw upon a larger participant pool could provide more insight into volunteers perceptions of training and support. In addition, this study focused specifically on 4-H volunteers. 4-H agents were not interviewed as part of this study. Having their perspective as a volunteer manager, could also provide valuable insight for this research. This study was an exploratory case study. Next steps should move from an exploratory case study to an explanatory case study identifying if participants are sharing the same information and answering the how and why.

***Study focus.*** This study focused on asking volunteers to recall training and support. The topic of training format was addressed, but was not the primary focus for this study. Understanding more about training format would add another dimension to this research. This study interviewed volunteers individually. A suggestion for future research would be to use focus groups. If these had been a part of this research, volunteers might have heard ideas that would have helped them to recall more specific interactions and trainings that would have been valuable to the overall findings.

***Implications for practice.*** This section addresses four implications for practice:, standardized training, advanced level training, resources, and agent training.

***Standardized training.*** Standardized training in corporate entities or large organizations is very common. In the context of North Carolina 4-H; however, this is an area that has not yet been developed, but based on the results of this study, the findings suggest that a statewide standardized volunteer training process is needed. This training should still allow county levels



to contextualize information or supports that are specific to their county or program. 4-H needs a cohesive and comprehensive approach while being conscientious about not overloading volunteers or agents. The training developed would need to be created specifically for the North Carolina 4-H program. Trainings on liability, basic youth leadership principles, ethical dilemmas, policies and procedures, and other relevant information as deemed by the state program can be developed and shared statewide. Training that is specific to local county programs such as club information, calendars, and local resources would need to be developed locally and specific to that program. Sample templates and ideas of what to include locally could be shared in order to help the agent have resources when developing this material. While volunteers valued the autonomy of seeking out the training that was needed and expressed appreciation for agents and other volunteers providing training as it was needed, they also expressed a need for a standardized training process. Through this research, volunteers shared ideas about the training they think would be beneficial. These topics were appropriate for the context, including risk management, 4-H opportunities, youth leadership, ethics, how to work with diverse audiences, ages and stages, and policies and procedures. The training structure should be developed in a way that allows for both face to face and online opportunities. If completing a training online is not an option for the volunteer, alternative ways to train need to be provided. When holding the face to face trainings, a location should also be selected that is comfortable for participation. Notification for the trainings needs to also be publicized well in advance and supplemental resources need to be provided. If possible a yearly calendar of the training dates should be developed and shared. Moreover, trainings need to take into account what the volunteers in this study shared about working in peer groups and opportunities for peer learning and teamwork needs to be thoughtfully implemented into the training design. Learning

from each other is a valuable way to learn, experience, and make meaning. A training which is thoughtful and purposeful in its design from the beginning, will provide the most benefit to the volunteer and in turn to the organization.

An example of an evolved model of volunteer training is presented by Deslandes and Rogers (2008) who wrote about a volunteer training process for Volunteer South Africa. In their research, they shared that the training is broken down into 12 training modules that last three hours each. Included in the training process is a workbook, certificate, and a recognition component (Deslandes & Rogers, 2008). Deslandes and Rogers (2008) present an easy to use format that has proven to be effective and could be replicated within North Carolina 4-H.

Another component of the training is that it needs to offer ways for volunteers to reflect upon and draw more learning from their experiences. In addition, this training needs to provide a way for volunteers to ‘unlearn’ or avoid learning things that are not appropriate. This means agents and those that support volunteers have to understand this more explicitly and devise strategies that integrate learning via these three mechanisms. Volunteers in this study commented on how they learned through experience. Understanding this and capitalizing on this concept is important when designing a volunteer training. Purposeful guided reflection allows volunteers to be more in touch with what they’ve learned and experienced as well as how they have grown or would like to grow through reflection. While important for all volunteers, this is a potential area for volunteer training that would be useful especially for long-time volunteers. According to Rogers (2001), “ultimately, the intent of reflection is to integrate the understanding gained into one’s experience in order to enable better choices or actions in the future as well to enhance one’s overall effectiveness” (p. 41).

Furthermore, the design of this training should be purposeful and take into account what was learned in this study regarding the influence of experience, mentorship, and informal support. This study highlighted that volunteers learn experientially, through peers, and through technical training. Ideally, a volunteer training program would need to find a way to address all of these components. Standardized training ensures each 4-H volunteer is learning the same basic set of information and getting the same set of resources regardless of where they are or in what capacity they volunteer. Depending on the role or capacity in which they volunteer, additional training might be needed but at the beginning level, everyone would receive the same information in the same format. Volunteers shared that sometimes they didn't know there was an opportunity for volunteer training and had they known this; it would have really helped them in their early years as a volunteer. A standardized 4-H volunteer training process would not only benefit the 4-H volunteer, but also the 4-H agent as well. 4-H agents work exceptionally hard and having a standardized volunteer training program created for them to implement with the volunteers in their county I think would not only be helpful, but also appreciated. Deslandes and Rogers (2008) developed a three part training framework which would be a possible framework to adapt for 4-H volunteer training. In this model, there is an entry level, a developmental level, and leadership (or masters) level. Each level has different focus areas and when placed together create an entire framework with the goal of providing "opportunities for volunteers and volunteer managers" (Deslandes & Rogers, 2008, p. 361). This model, if adapted for 4-H would provide opportunities for both 4-H volunteers as well as 4-H agents. Suggestions for workshop topics for a standardized training based on the feedback of the study participants include:

- 4-H opportunities and the life skills wheel,
- Ages and stages,

- Conducting club meetings (optional if not a club volunteer),
- Registration procedures (including 4H Online) and club financials (optional if not a club volunteer),
- Risk management,
- Safety – youth, physical and liability, and
- Volunteer expectations.

Volunteers in this study did not specify how each training should be delivered, but based on feedback given regarding delivery preferences, the delivery structure for the trainings should be a combination of face to face group settings and online options when appropriate.

*Advanced level training.* In addition, there needs to be an advanced level volunteer training program so volunteers can continue to learn and grow in their skill sets. Workshop topics for experienced volunteers could include topics such as public speaking or planning a successful group outing. Experienced volunteers could help teach some of these topic areas to new volunteers to add to peer to peer learning as well as give the experienced volunteers recognition for the work they have done in the organization. Suggestions for workshop topics for an advanced level training based on the feedback of the study participants include:

- Building rapport and relationships,
- Interactive activities for club meetings,
- Resources to strengthen programs,
- Technology – opportunities and how to use it, and
- Working with differently abled youth.

Furthermore, there should be specialized trainings offered, some of which might be mandatory depending on the subject area. A volunteer working with the 4-H shooting sports

program is going to need specialized training in this topic area before becoming a volunteer just as a volunteer working with the 4-H horse program will need some specialized training in order to understand the rules and nuances of the horse program.

**Resources.** In addition, resources need to be created, updated, and available to supplement volunteer training. These resources do not need to take the place of training but serve as a supplement to the training. The resources need to be housed in a place that is always available to 4-H volunteers and provide them with an extra set of learning materials to guide them, enable the volunteers to feel supported, and help them in their volunteer role. The types of supplements will depend on the training, but any materials or handouts given at training need to be available. This might be in the form of a guide or manual but must be kept up to date, available, and easily accessible. The supplemental materials need to be continually updated in order to provide relevant information at all times.

**Agent training.** Finally, if a holistic training program for volunteers is going to be created, it is critical agents are trained in the program. Making sure agents have the materials they need to effectively recruit, train, and retain volunteers is crucial for volunteer and program growth. A train the trainer model is the way to help standardize the process and empower the instructors.

With the value 4-H volunteers in this study placed on both serving as and having a mentor, 4-H should investigate establishing a 4-H volunteer mentor structure. The peer to peer interaction could support the overall volunteer experience. This could be an optional program for volunteers to participate in if they self-selected. It would be a beneficial way to recognize experienced volunteers and useful to new volunteers who would welcome the guidance. The

mentors could be within the same county or outside of the county depending on what was more appropriate for the needs of the volunteers.

Any volunteer training program that is going to be developed, needs to have buy in from both volunteers and agents. These are two groups that need to be involved in the discussion, the development, and the implementation of the program. Both volunteers and agents know from different perspectives what is needed and what is valued in a training. These are audiences that need to be asked to share their thoughts and opinions and their ideas need to be taken into account when developing a comprehensive, standardized training. If these thoughts are taken into account and if the process is purposeful and intentional and if there is buy in from all stakeholders, a standardized training process will be both beneficial and successful.

## **Future Research**

There is still much to be learned from 4-H volunteers to improve their overall volunteer experience. Ideas for future research include:

- Focus on the 4-H system and how 4-H can build capacity to deliver training that is both centralized and decentralized and that supports 4-H training in youth development, youth leadership, risk management, and ethics.
- A system wide focus of 4-H and Cooperative Extension and what is feasible if volunteer training was able to be upgraded.
- This study identified the reward of experiential and peer learning, but more research should be done to investigate this relationship more fully.
- In addition, how experiential learning, peer learning, and formal training come together in a 4-H context is another area for future research. Volunteers in this

study shared aspects of all three of these areas, but how they all come together would be an opportunity to further enhance the volunteer program.

- Larger and more diverse participant pools and data collection broadened to include observations or modes of learning. Larger, more comprehensive volunteer studies will add depth to this line of research. Repeating this study with more participants with more volunteer areas represented would be of benefit. This study could also be replicated with a larger and more complex participant pool to see how the results compared and contrasted.
- This study advocates for a centralized training model with an opportunity for local input and information. Future research could explore formats and how to balance centralized and decentralized approaches to training.
- Finally, this study did not gather data on the fourth dimension of the Kirkpatrick model. Further studies are needed to address this level purposefully in Kirkpatrick's model.

Whatever the topic and however it looks, it is important to continue to listen to and learn from 4-H volunteers.

### **Closing Remarks**

The participants in this study are not only an asset to North Carolina 4-H; they are a valued and integral part of the program. Volunteers are a main reason North Carolina 4-H is a successful youth development program. There are simple things that can be done immediately to enhance the overall volunteer experience as it relates to training and support; however, long term a standardized volunteer training program should be considered. This research shows that 4-H volunteers bring a lot to and gain a lot from the North Carolina 4-H program. In North Carolina,

4-H volunteers work tirelessly to help develop young people and give them positive life experiences. Volunteers deserve continued support, standardized high quality training, and resources to make their overall volunteer experience positive.



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**APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol - Volunteer

Participants First Name:

Age:

Gender:

Race:

Ethnicity:

Number of Years as a NC 4-H Volunteer:

Please share the story of how you became a 4-H volunteer?

Tell me about some of your most memorable moments as a 4-H volunteer?

What do you enjoy about being a 4-H volunteer?

What do you find frustrating or challenging?

Please tell me about what types of volunteer training you have had?

Please share a volunteer training experience that stands out for you.

Please share a negative volunteer training experience.

Share with me some examples of the types of support (other than training, for example advice, information) that you have received as a 4-H volunteer.

What types of training or support experiences did you wish you had, but weren't offered?

What would you change about any of your training experiences if you could?

Explain why you felt as though you received support in the examples you shared.

What topics are important for you to know more about as a 4-H volunteer?

Can you describe something that you learned in training that you then applied in your volunteer work? Tell me about it. What did you like? What did you not like?

Can you think of a part of the training that you thought would be really useful, but when you tried to use it, it just didn't work?

Tell me about training or support that would have really helped you if you had received it. Why would it have been helpful?

Compare for me this training experience with other training experiences that you have had – 4-H or not 4-H related.

How was this support (or lack of support) you received similar to or different from other support you receive in other volunteer situations?

What was the implication for not having access to this training?

What would an ideal 4-H volunteer support system look like to you?

Is there a better solution to how 4-H trainings are currently conducted?

How do you think that the training and support you have received as a 4-H volunteer has affected your overall volunteer experience?

If you had all resources available, how would you create a training experience to make it valuable to 4-H volunteers?

When creating a 4-H volunteer training program, what are the most important factors to consider?

From your perspective, how would you recommend creating a training for 4-H volunteers?