



In the summer of 2004, Youth Professionals and Regional Extension Educators in Community Youth Development were asked to write case studies about community efforts to coordinate out-of-school time programs. They examined how the coordination occurred and how it impacted availability of programs for young people. They also captured the lessons from the coordination efforts that could help other Minnesota communities work together to increase programs and opportunities for youth. This is one in a series of ten reports.

About The Community

Hoffman is a small town in west central Minnesota. It is a bedroom community for Alexandria, approximately 20 miles to the east. Until 1953, one-room country schools were the norm in the countryside surrounding Hoffman. With the growth of the baby-boom generation and the closing of the country schools, community schools in Hoffman and surrounding towns flourished. However, with declining populations in the 1970s and school consolidations that followed, it became evident that some community schools would be lost as well. Schools are central to the life of small rural communities and such a closing is often seen as a step toward the demise of the town. The Hoffman school closed in 1995 following a series of consolidations that began in 1979. Hoffman K-6 students now go six miles to an elementary school in Kensington; those in grades 7-12 go seven miles to Barrett.

Many residents work outside of town, and many children, even very young ones, were home alone after school, on teacher workshop days, and in the summer.

What's Happening in Out-of-School Programming?

Hoffman took advantage of the school closing to "repurpose" the school facility

DATA FROM THE CENSUS

Hoffman: Home of Partners in Pride

Population: 672
 Youth ages 5-17: 108 (16%)
 Ages 65 and over: 208 (31%)
 Median household income: \$29,464

While Partners in Pride is a project of the city of Hoffman, the success of the after-school part of the project seems tied to the school district and county.

Grant County:

Population: 6,289
 Youth ages 5-17: 1,191 (19%)
 Ages 65 and over: 1,384 (22%)
 Median household income: \$33,775

The **school district** is made up of five communities:

Barrett	355
Elbow Lake	1,275
Hoffman	672
Kensington (Douglas Co.)	286
Wendell	177

School Enrollment:

Grades 7-12	449
Grades K-6	393
Total	842

Students K-6 are split between schools in Kensington and Elbow Lake. The middle school and high school in Barrett takes all students grades 7-12.

into an attractive and much needed service to the surrounding area. The Partners in

Pride project became an essential part of the Hoffman community because there is no library, YMCA, or other common hang-out places for the out-of-school hours.

The Partners in Pride project was carried out in four phases beginning in 1996. It included opening eight apartments in former classrooms, adding a small manufacturing firm to the old shop area, adding a senior center and, with help from the West Central Initiative Fund, renovating the gymnasium to accommodate a series of regular and special activities for the community, including an after-school program for grades K-12. The program is based on a large stage on one side of the gym. It contains tables and chairs, couches, a computer, a TV and VCR, and board games and puzzles. The gymnasium as well as the outdoor playground and athletic fields provide opportunities for exercise and large group activities.

This after-school program draws families to town from the surrounding area. It is open from 3:30-5:30 Monday through Friday during the school year. Last year, 127 individual youth used the program.

An average of approximately 50 youth attended each day, almost half of the total participation, with the following breakdown of participation throughout the school year:

Kinder.	4	7 th	16
1 st	6	8 th	10
2 nd	8	9 th	17
3 rd	6	10 th	15
4 th	8	11 th	6
5 th	15	12 th	6
6 th	10		

While there is apparent appeal for youth in grades 5-10, the K-6 participants were noted as being the most regular attenders. Youth in grades seven and up attended more sporadically, perhaps based on sports and other activity schedules. The cause for the sharp jump in participation at grade

five is unknown though it may have something to do with a broader range of sports activities available at the facility for kids that age—they are able to play basketball and volleyball.

The only other after-school program in the area is the School-Aged Childcare program in Elbow Lake. It covers after-school and summer for youth in grades K-6 with first through third graders being the primary users (12-13 kids per day). The youth director at a church in Hoffman does occasional youth activities and there is an active 4-H program with monthly meetings.

There are a few older teens who drive from Elbow Lake (14 miles) to participate, and several families from Kensington with jobs in Hoffman also use the service. Of parents using the service and driving to pick up their kids, most are within seven miles. Youth not involved in sports or employment tend to just hang out in town.

A coordinator is hired for three to four hours per day to conduct activities including homework help, basketball, volleyball, and other games and activities. The coordinator works closely with teachers so that students who need help with homework are able to get it. Several senior citizens act as homework helpers and also read to younger students once a week. A small mentoring program (six matches) is also associated with the after-school program. Several seniors are involved as mentors.

Community Education, based out of nearby Barrett, conducts a six-week summer sports and recreation program. Besides the after-school program and community education, the facility is used sporadically by other groups for activities and community events. The facility goes unused for a large share of the out-of-school hours including teacher workshop days, weekends, and much of the summer.

About The Coordination Effort

Mission/Goals:

The mission of the Partners in Pride after-school program is:

1. To provide a safe alternative to being home alone after school.
2. To become (financially) sustainable to guarantee the future of Hoffman Square [the repurposed high school].

Membership:

As is typical of small towns, once a direction is set, the entire community gets behind the effort. All key groups appear to be involved in Partners in Pride including Hoffman Economic Development Authority, Lions Club, Senior Citizens Club, churches, Early Childhood Family Education, Community Education, Hoops Boosters (basketball), and the University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Some members of the community initially felt that an after-school program would not be used or would be a poor use of the facility. The community now sees, however, the advantages of having youth involved in a structured environment.

Non-Participants:

The most notable non-participants are the youth themselves. Though the coordinator does discuss their interests with them, for the most part they have been recipients of the service and not participants in its development.

Partners in Pride After-School program is a project of the city of Hoffman. However it benefits and is used by families from several neighboring communities. No other communities are represented on the advisory board.

Structure:

The building is owned by the city and run by the Economic Development Authority (HEDA) with an advisory board of eight people representing the mentorship program, law enforcement, West Central Area Schools, senior citizens, and a HEDA board member along with the HEDA coordinator and the Hoffman Square coordinator.

Cost:

Partners in Pride is in its fourth year. In addition to local contributions, it has been funded all along by grants from the West Central Initiative Fund. They started with a grant of \$22,000 in 2001. This decreased to \$15,000 the following year and to \$10,000 in 2003 and in 2004. An application has been submitted for a fifth year of funding at the \$10,000 level. Grant funds have been for the total Partners in Pride project though the after-school program is the largest part of the effort.

No fees are charged to the families who take part in Partners in Pride. There is a feeling that if fees were charged that families would opt to keep kids at home rather than send them to the program.

Even though a stated goal of Hoffman Square is to become self-sustaining, the HEDA director is of the opinion that without outside help the program cannot stay open. And without additional financial assistance it cannot expand to cover additional hours.

The impetus for coordination:

In small rural communities, the school is often the central focus of community life. The presence of a school is a source of pride and a reminder that, in spite of declining rural infrastructure and population, things could be worse. The loss of a school is a blow, and in this case it mobilized the community to look for an alternative means of bringing the community together.

What else has happened in the community to impact availability?

- The most profound event affecting out-of-school time was the closing of the school, ending almost all sports, music, and other school-based activities.
- Many parents commute to surrounding communities for work—especially to Alexandria, 20 miles away.
- New low-cost housing has attracted more families to the area, some of whom want affordable after-school care options.
- The area transit program has not been able to provide service at times convenient to families during the out-of-school hours.

What could stimulate more local action?

- **Increased funding** is essential before the program can be expanded from an after-school program to an out-of-school program.
- **Transportation** needs to be addressed. Families living more than seven miles from the program have difficulty participating and the local transit program is difficult to use. It's a challenge that can be dealt with easily on school days when buses take youth directly from school to Hoffman Square. Picking them up or taking them home from Hoffman is a different story when participants are spread out over 170 square miles on non-school days.
- Public will precedes public action. **Education on the importance of out-of-school time programming** might help build public enthusiasm for similar projects making public action happen more readily.
- **Training for adults on how to work with youth and for youth on how to work with adults** could help ensure that the program stays in touch with youth interests and needs.

Implications for other communities:

An out-of-school program looks different in small towns with low populations weighted toward the high end of the age scale.

- **When you get lemons make lemonade.** Even negative events like school closings can be turned to good. Use those events to bring the community together to plan and coordinate. In Hoffman, coordination led to funding.
- **Involve youth from the start.** Consider training or other assistance to help adults learn to work with youth as resources. Consider what the youth of your community want and help them work to make it happen.
- **Be creative and flexible.** Who would have ever thought of putting apartments, manufacturing, an after-school program, and a senior center together under one roof?
- **Help people see beyond their own experiences.** The stereotype of two parents and their children working together on the farm or in a small business is an increasing rarity, but a strong one. When the after-school program was proposed in Hoffman, some felt that a parent should be home to greet their children as has been the expectation for previous generations.
- **Take advantage of opportunities to bring the community together.** The space use for both youth and senior citizens provides opportunities for multigenerational programming.
- **Use the opportunity to bring organizations together for the common good.** Scouts, 4-H, sports clubs, and other youth groups can all contribute resources. In Hoffman, the few youth programs in the area work together through Partners in Pride.

Compiled by: Eric Vogel, University of Minnesota Extension Service

Sources: Ruth Johnson, Director, Hoffman Economic Development Authority; U.S. Census Bureau