



In the summer of 2004, Youth Professionals and Regional Extension Educators in Community Youth Development were asked to prepare case studies regarding 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

The city of Lyle is located in southeastern Minnesota, on the Iowa border. It is a small rural community with a population of around 570. The city of Austin is located 12 miles north of Lyle and is the regional center for Lyle and other smaller communities in the area. Many residents of Lyle are employed in Austin and most shop, do business, and access services in Austin on a regular basis. Lyle has two churches and only about 14 businesses in town. The largest employer is the Lyle Public School. The school is situated next to a large city park that is also used as the school playground. The district serves 301 youth from preschool through grade 12, many from rural families living in the country on large working farms or small hobby farms.

Lyle hosts two large annual community events that attract people from the whole region. These are the 4th of July Celebration and the Lyle Area Cancer Telethon Auction. Youth and adults are both involved in these two events.

DATA FROM THE CENSUS

Population: 566
Population under 18 years: 170 (30%)
Population 65 years and over: 16%
Square miles of town: 0.8

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

Most of the out-of-school time programming in Lyle is school based. It is primarily school sports, Future Farmers of America, Future Leaders of America, speech, and after-school band and choir activities. Community Education sponsors open gym on Saturdays and Sundays in January, February, and March, serving 40 youth.

Community Education also hosts a summer recreation program that serves 20-25 young people and features tee-ball, baseball, softball, and swimming.

There are two 4-H Clubs, a Girl Scout troop, and a Boy Scout troop that collectively serve 70 youth. The two churches have some programming for youth, primarily religious instruction. The city library offers a program after school every day. It reaches about 50 kids in grades 1-6. On Fridays during the summer months the library has an 11-week reading program for 20 youth ages 3-13.

Some youth and families drive to Austin to participate in out-of-school time activities such as dance and YMCA programs. The Austin YMCA charges only a \$1 membership fee for all Mower County youth thanks to a grant from the Hormel Foundation.

The American Legion hosts an annual Halloween Party and the Lyle Commercial Club hosts an Easter Egg Hunt with many prizes for kids in the Lyle area.

About The Coordination Effort

Mission/Goals:

The people coordinating the various and individual out-of-school time opportunities for youth in Lyle do so because they want to offer things for kids to do that have structure and positive goals, and that involve youth in the community.

Leadership:

The Lyle Community Education Board makes the recommendations for the open gym and the summer recreation program and hires staff for each. The other programs are run by their independent organizations and volunteers.

Membership:

At the present time there is no one coordinating body of which to be a member.

Structure:

Coordination of out-of-school time opportunities across programs is very informal. The Community Education Board plans their specific activities based on the input of their adult board members. Youth organizations plan programs focusing on the wants and needs of the youth involved in the particular organizations. Youth workers and volunteers in this small town talk with each other about their upcoming events and activities.

“Hosted” community events are organized by adult groups such as the Lyle Commercial Club, the American Legion Post, the Lyle City Council, and the Lyle Area Cancer Auction coordinators. Each of these groups involves youth in assisting with the events and activities. Youth sell

tickets, decorate, work in the food stands, and are in charge of set-up and clean up. Older youth lead some of the activities for the younger children.

Cost:

The only cost that is directly related to youth programming is the Community Education Youth Program budget, which is approximately \$9,000. This is mostly for staff and transportation for that program.

The impetus for coordination:

The impetus for the various youth programs and coordination efforts is that the community leaders in Lyle genuinely care about the youth living there. It is a small community that is brought together by its largest establishment, the school, and therefore by the needs of youth.

What else has happened in the community to impact availability?

A present issue in the community that will impact availability of out-of-school time opportunities in the future is the school bond issue. A portion of the school was built in 1906 and needs to be replaced, and a 1957 addition needs to be remodeled. There have been two bond issues in the last two years and both were very close, 25-80 votes apart. They have another bond issue slated for September 14, 2004. If the bond does not pass and the school consolidates with other districts, it will have a huge impact on the community and what opportunities it will provide for youth. It has already brought some division between city residents and rural residents.

What could stimulate more local action?

- **Money:** If the American Legion Post, the Commercial Club, the city council, the library, and the Lyle School Community Education Board could meet and pool funds, they could forge a much more coordinated effort to provide opportunities for all youth in the community. Funds could also be

used to educate youth and their families about all of the available opportunities.

- **Leadership:** Some individual or group in the community needs to make this issue of out-of-school time, programs, and coordination a priority and gather all the players (including youth) to discuss how to work together. At this point the community has provided opportunities, but has not thought strategically about them. They need to assess the needs of youth in their community and make a plan from that information. This could lead to the writing of grants to help fund programs and community training of staff and volunteers. It would also increase communication among the various programs in the community and between youth and community leaders. What better way to create public will? This process would actually mirror the tactics used in the community when they have come together to plan the very successful Cancer Auction and 4th of July celebration.
- **Community pride:** Lyle is small, but when its citizens are impacted by certain events, they come together to create a collective public will. This has been proven with the Lyle Area Cancer Auction event. Cancer was affecting many people in the Lyle area and they came together to raise more money than many of the larger communities in southeastern Minnesota. Last year they raised over \$125,000 for the American Cancer Foundation. It is a very intentional effort that requires much planning and cooperative work from the whole community, both youth and adults, throughout the whole year. This effort is truly a community builder and Lyle takes pride in their success as a community in getting the job done!

Implications for other communities:

- **Small communities have strength in the relationships that are built amongst the citizens in supporting each other.** They care about their youth and it shows through the events the businesses in town sponsor for youth. Youth are both recipients of and contributing members to the community at these functions. What communities like Lyle need to do is use the same strategies in coordinating positive out-of-school opportunities for youth that they use in coordinating large community events. They need to pool their resources to respond to the needs that surface. Because they are small, it is not a huge task to form this type of collaborative and it will benefit all the individual entities as well as the citizens as a whole.
- **Informal coordination works in this community.** Because of the public will, the strength provided by the school, the number of activities available to youth, and the size of the community, the coordination effort is meeting needs. Change in the community will surface the need for change in how the community addresses out-of-school time and coordination.

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Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; I.S.D. #497