



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

Murray County is situated in the heart of southwestern Minnesota farmland. Nine separate communities are found within the borders of the county: Avoca, Chandler, Currie, Dovray, Fulda, Hadley, Iona, Lake Wilson and Slayton. Lake Shetek provides an additional community which is greatly enlarged during the summer months. Fulda and Murray County Central, located in Slayton, are the two school districts that serve the county. The Community Education Program is shared between the two school districts and is known as Murray County Community Education. Slayton serves as the county seat and is the hub for the county.

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

An exciting new Murray County Teen Center had a grand opening the summer of 2004. This new teen center is designed as a safe place for 7th-12th graders during the non-school hours. The center is typically open from 3:30–11:00 p.m. each day. It has been successful in attracting many of the older disengaged youth. A membership application and dues are required to be in the center. Youth can pay \$25 or complete five hours of community service to receive their annual membership. The center has an executive director, who works with the local community of Slayton to identify community service projects, build

DATA FROM THE CENSUS 2000 & CITY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Murray County population: 9,165
Population ages 19 and under: 20-28%
Population ages 65 and over: 20-26%
Slayton population: 2,072
Fulda population: 1,283

Fulda Schools:
PreK-12 579 students
PreK-6 273 students
7-12 306 students
[36% of Elementary and 27% of middle and high school students are receiving free or reduced price lunch]

Murray County Central School:
PreK-12 810 students
PreK-6 407 students
7-12 403 students
[32% elementary and 20% 7-12 are receiving free or reduced price lunch]

public will for the center, and provide supervision and programming to youth members. It is supported by Murray County, private and corporate donations, and the Lincoln, Lyon, Murray County Collaborative.

Both Murray County Central and Fulda school districts offer an array of youth development opportunities for their students. This includes sports and enrichment activities during and after

school. Because Murray County has rural communities, the schools are seen as central to the civic and community life of the county.

Murray County Community Education (MCC) offers a variety of youth related activities and programs during the school year and summer. During the summer the majority of opportunities are in sports or recreation camps. During the school year additional opportunities are offered to school aged youth. These are offered primarily through secondary organizations within the community; such as the Department of Natural Resources, drivers training, Prairie Ecology, Prairie Winds Zoo, and the University of Minnesota Extension Service. MCC also offers a number of sports activities, including volleyball and basketball, for elementary and junior high school students.

Roughly 615 youth participated in Community Education youth programs during the school year. Most out-of-school time opportunities for youth are located at the facilities of the Murray County Central school and city facilities in Slayton. Additional opportunities are located at the Fulda school and city facilities.

Church youth groups, 4-H (314 members), dance groups, saddle clubs, archery and karate clubs, boy scouts and girl scouts, and some community civic groups make up the additional opportunities for youth in out-of-school time.

About the Coordination Effort

Murray County out-of-school time coordination could best be described as informal. Community clubs such as Girl Scouts and others usually pass on information and carry out recruitment activities independently of MCC or other organizations. A particular youth serving organization normally visits the Murray County Schools and/or sends information home to the parents through the school.

Much of the out-of-school time coordination happens through word-of-mouth. Since Murray County's communities are rural and small, residents tend to be aware of what is happening and who is doing what.

The Murray County Community Education Office produces an activities guide a few times during the year. It provides information on adult educational offerings and activities as well as youth programming opportunities through community education. Included in the guide is a list of all the community organizations in Fulda and Slayton along with contact information. The coordination of out-of-school time opportunities through community education has become more centralized as Fulda and Murray County Central Community Education offices have recently merged.

There are several multi-county agencies serving the county, including Public Health, Family Services, and Corrections. The staff of these agencies often will be involved in the coordination effort for out-of-school time in several counties. The Lincoln, Lyon, and Murray County Families Project is a multi-county collaborative with multi-county agencies serving as members. This collaborative collects Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) dollars from three counties and distributes revenue through a grant process to projects within the three county area.

In addition, a Restorative Justice Committee (1999), Murray County Youth and Families Task Force, and the Child Abuse Prevention Council all coordinate educational activities for families in Murray County. The Restorative Justice Committee wrote the grant to the Lincoln, Lyon, and Murray County Families Project for the Teen Center. These groups or committees normally operate on a project by project basis. Because the Fulda School District has students attending their school who reside in Nobles County, the Nobles County Family Services Collaborative also has projects within Murray County.

The Impetus for Coordination:

Facing difficult budget cuts, Community Education was forced to combine in the two school districts. In small rural communities, the school is often a source of great pride. Both communities (Fulda and Slayton) are hoping to maintain their schools in the future. They also both realize the financial resources may continue to diminish, thus a greater need for collaboration may emerge.

What else has happened in the community to impact availability?

- Budget cuts within both schools and the county have made coordination and delivery of after-school programs difficult.
- Murray county population and community populations within the county have been on the decline. Creating community support and public will for youth opportunities can be difficult with a generally older population many of whom are living on fixed-incomes. A rise in property taxes normally is typically met with resistance.
- Older youth in the community often are working during out-of-school time.
- Distance between communities and programs has also been a barrier to participation in out-of-school time for programs.

What could stimulate more local action?

- Potential providers of out-of-school time opportunities have to **collectively frame the out-of-school time issue** for the purpose of building public will.
- **A standard set of basic youth development principles** needs to be adapted by the teen center, Community Education, and the various other youth development programs in the county. These standards would raise the level of quality of the programming and provide greater impact for youth and the communities.
- **Additional funding for out-of-school time programming** would allow the communities within Murray County to offer additional out-of-school time opportunities.

Implications for other communities:

- **Parents and youth are willing to make an investment** of time and resources into the out-of-school time opportunities that they value and consider to be of high quality.
- **A “youth voice” component has been instrumental** in the establishment of the new teen center in Slayton. Young people currently sit on a 12-person advisory board with 6 adult and 6 teens. Youth also have opportunities to give input into programming and structure of the teen center. They also serve in the capacity of center workers and helpers.
- **As a direct result of a Restorative Justice Proposal to the Families Project, a \$35,000 grant was received.** This money has been used to open the new Murray County Teen Center.
- **The informal nature of the coordination has made building public will more difficult.** The teen center is a good example, though, of how it can work. The public was invited to the open house and over 100 community members showed up and learned about what the Center has to offer young people. Many of the participants were surprised by what they saw and heard. Some community members made financial donations to the center.
- **Many of the older youth in rural communities are most interested in their academic achievement and employment.** They see these two factors as important foundations for a successful future. An out-of-school time opportunity that does not directly have an impact on either of these two factors will likely not receive much attention from the older youth population.

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Contributions by: Murray County Community Education District, Murray County Teen Center, and Murray County Extension Committee.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau