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Picture This: 4-H Press Corps Builds Life Skills

Abstract

A picture is worth a thousand words! Extension professionals are often looking for the picture that best captures an event and tells its story. Look beneath the surface, though, and a picture is worth much more. Developing a 4-H press corps results in a collection of useful photos but has the added benefit of providing 4-H members with an opportunity to explore an interest, develop workforce skills, and provide a service to the community. Additionally, development of a 4-H press corps has the potential to involve more members in telling the 4-H story. Moreover, the 4-H press corps concept can be adapted to each program's unique needs.

Keywords: [4-H](#), [workforce development](#), [workforce skills](#), [photography](#), [life skills](#)

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Introduction

Extension professionals are often looking for the picture that is worth a thousand words—the one that best captures an event and tells its story. Yet time constraints typically dictate that Extension professionals focus on events' programmatic aspects rather than document the events visually. Development of a 4-H press corps can help address this problem. A 4-H press corps capitalizes on an interest—photography—and turns that interest into a vehicle for members to serve in leadership roles and develop life skills. 4-H members want to be involved with activities that allow them to explore new areas of interest, actively contribute, have a sense of ownership, and feel like their ideas and skills are valued (Chaskin & Baker, 2006). Additionally, 4-H should be a venue in which young people can investigate interests they are unable to explore in school (Lewis, 2008). Several authors have called for expanding opportunities for 4-H members to serve in leadership roles and finding innovative ways to challenge them (Albright & Ferrari, 2010; Bennett, 2009; Lewis, 2008; Radhakrishna & Sinasky, 2005). Development of a 4-H press corps answers this call, placing members in an interesting and challenging role as they capture the stories of numerous stakeholders and events.

Program Description

The 4-H press corps in Brown County, Ohio, was created in 2006. The objectives of the press corps are

- to provide youths with an opportunity to explore photography and build skills they need for the workforce and

- to compile a large collection of photos of 4-H and junior fair events to use to promote programs.

The press corps program in Brown County was originated for fair week but has since been expanded to include all 4-H events. Participants are recruited from those youths enrolled in a 4-H Photography project, but membership is open to any 4-H'er aged 8 to 18. Typically, more than 30 members participate annually. Approximately half of the participants return for a second year, and some have participated for as many as 6 years.

The 4-H press corps has two different structures, one for fair week and one for all other 4-H events (Table 1).

Table 1.
4-H Press Corps Structure

Key element	Fair week structure	Year-round structure
Supervisory role	Volunteer	Extension educator
Photographers	Official junior fair photographers	Photographers for 4-H activities occurring throughout the year, such as Cloverbud Day Camp, project judging, officer training, and award banquets
Before-event activities	The volunteer reviews the junior fair schedule and recruits press corps members as photographers for each event. Each photographer meets with the volunteer prior to the start of an event to check out one of the program's six cameras, review how to work the camera, and receive event-specific instructions.	The educator recruits press corps members to take photos, checks cameras out to photographers, and provides necessary instructions.
During-event activities	Press corps members take photos of class winners and candid shots of shows and all major events. Members are allowed in the show ring and photo areas and have reserved press seating at events.	Press corps members take photos of all activities related to the event, including candid shots, photos of award winners, and related group photos.
After-event activities	Each photographer returns the checked-out camera to the volunteer at the conclusion of the event. The volunteer organizes the photos and prepares the	Each photographer returns the checked-out camera to the educator at the conclusion of the event. The educator organizes photos by event, and they are used by the

	equipment for the next press corps member to use. After the fair, the volunteer returns all photos and materials to the Extension office.	Extension office for promotional materials. Older teens involved in events assist in organizing photos and request photos to use as needed. Examples of uses include promotional displays and award applications.
Photo availability	All photos that have no photo release restrictions are made available to community members, parents, and exhibitors. Individuals can request electronic copies of photos.	All photos that have no photo release restrictions are made available to community members, parents, and exhibitors. Individuals can request electronic copies of photos.

Equipment is stored and maintained at the Extension office. A 2014 Ohio 4-H Foundation grant funded the purchase of new cameras, memory cards, batteries, and an external hard drive.

4-H press corps photos are the property of Ohio State University Extension and are available for promotional use and press releases. Photo credit is given to the 4-H press corps and the individual member who captured a photo when possible. Having over 3,000 pictures from various events throughout a year means that there is no shortage of photos to use in press releases, social media posts, and displays to promote 4-H programs and upcoming events. Press corps photos also are made available to community members when possible. This provides opportunities for family members to obtain photos they may not otherwise have access to and allows businesses that sponsored trophies to obtain photos of award winners.

Value Added: Building Workforce Skills

In addition to providing members with opportunities to learn content-specific skills, value can be added in 4-H by applying a workforce preparation layer to existing programming (Cochran, Catchpole, Arnett, & Ferrari, 2010). Through such efforts, the 4-H program successfully develops workforce skills (Bennett, 2009; Cochran & Ferrari, 2009; Cochran & Lekies, 2008; Digby & Ferrari, 2007), and implementation of a 4-H press corps is another means for doing so. Brown County's 4-H press corps participants learn not only photography but also life and workforce skills by acting as photographers at real-life events. Workforce skills can be grouped into six categories: thinking skills, communication, teamwork and leadership, lifelong learning and self-direction, technology, and professionalism and ethics (Cochran & Lekies, 2008). All these skills have been incorporated into the design of the Brown County 4-H press corps program (Table 2).

Table 2.
Workforce Skills Incorporated into the 4-H Press Corps Program

Skill category	Example(s)
Thinking skills	Determining how to approach photographing various events Deciding how to capture best angles

Communication	Speaking with the volunteer coordinator, communicating availability Introducing oneself to adults in charge and discussing what is expected Providing photo setup instructions to class winners and other individuals and groups
Teamwork and leadership	Working with others in situations in which two people are assigned to an event Providing photo setup instructions to class winners and other individuals and groups
Lifelong learning and self-direction	Deciding what pictures to take Determining appropriate shots and locations to shoot from during an event
Technology adoption and application	Learning to use a digital camera
Professionalism and ethics	Wearing appropriate attire (4-H press corps t-shirt) at events Arriving on time, remaining through the duration of an event, and returning the camera according to established protocol Acting respectfully toward adults and photography subjects

Program Evaluation

A brief survey was sent to past participants for the purpose of assessing the program, specifically for determining what motivated youths to join, why they returned, skills they developed, and any transference of learning to other areas of their lives. Participants reported that they were most likely to participate because they had been asked by the volunteer in charge. One youth commented that she participated because of her interest in photography: "I really love taking and looking at pictures. I like getting to see everyone happy and smiling. I also get really excited to look at the pictures from the event." Another participant said it was interesting to see a show from the perspective of photographing it and to get up close to an animal species she had never been around before. Participants reported being excited to see their photos appear in press releases, on Facebook, and in newsletters, and to return each year.

Anecdotal feedback from community members about the program also has been positive. A professional photographer hired for a fair show noted how respectful the 4-H press corps members were and how they "stuck with it." Specifically, this photographer was impressed by the way the youths stayed through an entire show, worked to get all the photos, and were respectful when adults stepped in front of them to take their own photos. A local newspaper photographer was impressed with the growth of the program and the dedication of the youths. This photographer has taken time to work with the youths at the fair, helping them understand what needs to be captured and discussing with them different angles and why various shots are important.

Conclusion

The 4-H press corps is a positive aspect of the Brown County 4-H program. Begun to meet a practical

programmatic need, the 4-H press corps program has grown to have benefits well beyond producing a collection of photos. The photos taken by the press corps have strengthened the Brown County Extension office's ability to share the impact of the 4-H program through photo documentation and by crediting members for their contributions. Families have been able to access photos they otherwise would not have been able to obtain, and older press corps members have photos they can use to strengthen various applications. The program has the potential to be replicated in other locations, and for purposes beyond those associated with 4-H, as it is relatively simple in nature and can be modified to fit a community's needs, all while building life and workforce skills in youth participants.

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