



# ADVENTURE CENTRAL

## MIAMI VALLEY EXTENSION EDUCATION AND RESEARCH AREA

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### PREPARING YOUTH FOR SUCCESS

- **Out-of-School Time Programming**—Adventure Central is a trusted, community-based, positive youth development partnership serving at-risk children and their parents in the West Dayton community since 2000. This nationally recognized program has been at the forefront of positive youth development—providing children and families opportunities to change their lives through building positive well-being, higher academic performance and less involvement in risky behaviors. Using nature and science, our high-quality and diverse staff nurtures participants in life-changing activities that strengthen values, build lasting life skills and empower youth to explore life's possibilities.
- Adventure Central engaged over 222 urban Dayton youth ages 5 to 18 and over 90 parents/guardians in programming totaling nearly 61,000 contact hours. This positive youth development initiative was made possible through funding and support from Five Rivers MetroParks, OSU Extension, Ohio 4-H, the Ohio 4-H Foundation, the University of Dayton and other grants and contracts. Delivery models include after school, day camp, overnight camp, teen and activity night programs with a specific focus on ongoing contact with youth.
- **Teen Programs**—Teens at Adventure Central had new and challenging opportunities in 2013 thanks to special funding from the Ohio 4-H Foundation. From trips to Washington, D.C. to attend Inauguration Day, to cultural outings in and around Dayton, to attending the Ohio Teen and Hip Hop Literacy Conferences, Adventure Central teens gained new insights and experiences to prepare them for success.

- One significant teen-led effort was 4-H Camp Counselor Training. Twenty-five teens demonstrated outstanding leadership in planning and leading the Adventure Central overnight, residential camp. Through participation in multiple training and planning sessions, the teens planned a highly effective camp. Teens demonstrated skills such as teamwork, communication, self-direction and critical thinking—vital skills for today's workforce—all while being great role models for the youth in the program.

### ADVANCING EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME OPPORTUNITIES

- **Workforce Preparation**—Youth participating in Adventure Central programs are developing 21st century workforce preparation and interpersonal skills that better prepare them to be productive members of society and positively impact the community in which they live. While all Adventure Central programs reinforce these valuable skills, the Job Experience and Training (JET) program, a nationally recognized 4-H Program of Distinction, is the cornerstone of this effort. Twenty teens participated in training and job experiences through the JET program and held volunteer or paid positions in a wide variety of park-related summer jobs at one of seven Five Rivers MetroParks facilities. Through this program, teens reported an increase in the development of vital skills such as organization, problem solving, collaboration and overall leadership.
- **Volunteerism/Service Learning**—Nearly 130 volunteers contributed over 15,000 hours to the program at Adventure Central, with a value of over \$332,100 using 2012



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Independent Sector figures. The impact of volunteers is most evident in their service as positive role models and caring adults to all youth in the program. In addition to support from Adventure Central parents, partnerships with the University of Dayton Semester of Service Program, the University of Dayton Fitz Center for Leadership and Community, OSU Extension Master Gardeners and the Sisters of Notre Dame Mission Volunteer Program provided the service of AmeriCorps positions that enriched the lives of youth in the program.

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

- **Parent and Family Engagement Programs**—Involving families has been associated with high-quality programs, children’s academic achievement, and healthy development. Adventure Central offered family programs in an effort to close the gap between home, school and after school, and increase sustainable family engagement. Ten programs were held throughout the year with 714 participants attending. Parents indicated their primary motivation for participating in these programs was to support and to be a good role model for their youth, meeting a key goal of the program and filling a vital role in the lives of those youth.
- **Parent Progress Report**—A common concern for youth service providers is effectively engaging adequate parental support. Providers recognize that involving families in their children’s learning is critical to academic achievement and overall healthy development—but that communicating and connecting with parents can be challenging. Since introducing a Parent Progress Report tool in 2011, Adventure Central has observed increases in parent volunteerism, greater participation at events, improved communication and increases in overall support of the program. The tool has been shared with numerous partners, program providers and a national conference audience with the intent of replicating a similar effort.

## ENHANCING AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- **Connecting People with Nature**—Adventure Central has always placed a high priority on getting youth outdoors and active. Through unstructured time outdoors daily and additional structured group learning adventures in the 60-acre Wesleyan MetroPark, participants and their families have new experiences in nature, which make them socially and emotionally happier, physically healthier and more open to new possibilities. Many of the urban families participating in Adventure Central have limited opportunities to connect with our natural world. Youth at Adventure Central spend at

least one hour a day outdoors and consistently report that doing so is one of their favorite things about the program.

- A continued relationship with the OSU Extension Master Gardener program in the delivery of a garden club for youth at Adventure Central occurred in 2013. Youth demonstrated increased ownership of the garden as well as greater self-direction due to their involvement with the garden club.
- **Conservation Camp**—Adventure Central staff and JET teens embarked on a one-night, two day camping trip better known as “AC Conservation Camp.” This service-learning and staff development opportunity proved to be a memorable experience that pushed comfort zones and provided many first-time experiences (first time camping, making s’mores, kayaking, etc.). Participants learned new outdoor skills, improved their knowledge of conservation, deepened their connection with nature and had fun! The impact of Conservation Camp was evident in an observed increase in comfort and frequency of program staff leading outdoor and conservation-related activities as part of the summer day camp program, in particular hiking and exploring in the creek.