

LIFE SKILLS ASSESSMENT FOR CARUTHERSVILLE HOUSING AUTHORITY AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

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DR. ELIZABETH DUNN
PROJECT EVALUATOR
MISSOURI CYFAR

I. BACKGROUND

This after-school program is a resource for residents of the Caruthersville Housing Authority (CHA). It is open Monday through Friday and provides after-school care for children ranging from pre-school through high school. The program provides a safe haven and adult supervision during after-school hours. In addition, children are encouraged to complete their homework and have opportunities to practice basic computer skills. Program activities emphasize reading and communication skills, team building, and self esteem.

In January 2002, a questionnaire was used to assess participants' life skills in seven categories:

- academics and learning,
- communication,
- decision making,
- goal setting and goal achievement,
- problem solving,
- self esteem, and
- social competencies.

There were four questions in each of these life skills categories. The questions included in each category are listed in the attachment. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale. Depending on the wording of the question, the responses may range from "never" to "always" or from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" as follows:

1	2	3	4	5
never	not often	sometimes	usually	always
strongly disagree	disagree	not sure	agree	strongly agree

The questions for the survey were adapted from three existing evaluation tools: 1) the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, 2) the Four-Fold Youth Development Model, and 3) evaluation materials for Utah State University Extension's Youth and Families with Promise Program. The life skills survey was pilot tested several times, in order to clarify and simplify the language used in the questions. The survey is written at about a fourth grade reading level, as measured by the Flesch-Kincaid scale.

II. ASSESSMENT RESULTS

There were 24 children and youth who participated in the January 2003 assessment at the CHA after-school program. As indicated in table 1, the participants were evenly distributed between males and females. Their average age was 11 years old and their average grade in school was fifth grade. All but two of the respondents were black, while the remaining two listed themselves as Native American. Most of the children had been in the program more than three months and attended every day or most days.

Table 1. January 2003 Participant Characteristics and Attendance Data (n=24)

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Summary</i>
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	13	54%	Even gender distribution
Female	11	46%	
<i>Age</i>			
Child (6-12 years old)	18	75%	Average age is 10.8 years
Youth (13-17 years old)	6	25%	
<i>Time in Program</i>			
Month or Less	4	17%	Most have attended more than 3 months
1-3 Months	6	25%	
More than 3 Months	14	58%	
<i>Frequency of Attendance</i>			
Few Days	3	13%	Most attend the program frequently
Some Days	2	8%	
Most Days	11	46%	
Every Day	8	33%	

The maximum possible score for the life skills assessment is 140 points, since there are 28 questions and each question can receive between one and five points. Total scores and scores in each category are shown in table 2. The table lists the average (or mean) score, as well as the median score, lowest score, and highest score. The median score is the score that is in the middle: half of the scores are below it and half are above it.

As can be seen in table 2, the average total score was 75 percent. The median total score of 79 percent indicates that half of the children and youth received a score above 79 percent and half received a score below 79 percent. There was quite a bit of variation in the scores: the lowest total score was 51 percent and the highest score was 92 percent.

Table 2. Average Total Scores and Scores by Category, in percent (n=24)

Life Skills Category	Average Score	Median Score	Lowest Score	Highest Score
Academics/learning	80	85	35	95
Goal setting	76	75	45	100
Decision making	76	78	40	100
Problem solving	71	70	25	100
Communication	72	73	25	100
Social competencies	73	75	40	100
Self esteem	78	80	50	95
Total Score	75	79	51	92

The scores in each of the life skills categories provide some information about how respondents rate themselves in specific skills areas:

- Highest scores were in academics/learning, followed closely by self esteem
- Lowest scores were in problem solving, communication, and social competencies
- These rankings are similar for both average scores and median scores

III. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The assessment results indicate that many of the children and youth attending the Caruthersville Housing Authority after-school program have the motivation and attitudes that they need to succeed academically. The after-school program helps to build those skills by providing children with a welcoming after-school environment and encouraging them to complete their homework. In addition, the program participants have relatively high self esteem, which is fostered at the after-school program.

On the other hand, the program participants rank lowest in problem solving, communication, and social competencies. The CHA after-school program could help participants to improve their skills in these areas by implementing appropriate activities and curricula. Most of the children and youth who attend the program do so on a frequent basis, attending every day or most days. This provides a real opportunity to help them improve the life skills they need to succeed in life.

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ATTACHMENT: LIFE SKILLS CATEGORIES AND QUESTIONS

Academics and learning

I read when I have free time.
I finish my school homework on time.
I like to learn new things at school.
I think that doing well in school is important.

Goal setting and goal achievement

I reach goals I have set for myself.
I plan ahead for things that need to be done.
I keep trying when things become difficult.
I set challenging goals for myself.

Decision making

Before I make a decision, I think about how it will affect me.
I say “no” to my friends if they want me to do something that is wrong.
Before I make a decision, I think about how it will affect other people.
I do things that are considered safe.

Problem solving

I think about different ways I can solve a problem before I decide.
I try to get the facts before I solve a problem.
When I have a problem, I try to figure out just what the problem is.
I try to think about what will happen if I solve a problem in different ways.

Communication

I look people in the eye when I talk with them.
I find it easy to get my point across.
I think about what I’m going to say before I speak.
I try to understand what the other person is saying before I answer them.

Social competencies

I can talk to my friends about personal things.
I try to solve problems without fighting.
I am good at cooperating with a team.
I think I am good at making and keeping friends.

Self-Esteem

I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
I feel that I am at least as good as most other people my age.
I have a good attitude about myself.
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.