Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Philosophy

Situation
A significant proportion of American children are at substantial risk for negative outcomes: infant mortality, undernourishment, abuse, neglect, poor health, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, crime, violence, and academic underachievement, due to family, community, social, political, and economic conditions which they have not created. In 2006, 17 percent of all children ages 0-17 lived in poverty (*Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, 2008, ChildStats.gov, Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.) Poverty exacerbates most other risk factors and is the central reason many children and families do not thrive. These children and youth who face the risk of not acquiring the basic skills they need to become responsible family members, participants in the work force or contributing citizens, are the focus of the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program.

Background
Land Grant Universities (LGU's) were established by legislation in 1862, 1890, and 1994 to provide at least one public education institution in every state. Extension Services in all of those institutions were created and charged with bringing the university research and education resources to citizens in the states – usually disseminated via County Extension offices serving all 3150 counties across the country. All of the university Extension Services are linked with the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in the US Department of Agriculture, and together make up the Cooperative Extension System (CES). NIFA provides financial support and program leadership to Extension programs including 4-H Youth Development, Family & Consumer Sciences (FCS), Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Community Development in all states and territories. The CYFAR program was established by Congress in 1990 with a first year appropriation of $10 million to focus LGU Cooperative Extension System programs on at risk children and youth and their families. The CYFAR mission is to marshal resources of the Land-Grant and Cooperative Extension Systems so that, in collaboration with other organizations, they can develop and deliver educational programs that equip youth who are at risk for not meeting basic human needs with the skills they need to lead positive, productive, contributing lives. The CYFAR Program is based on research on effective programs for at-risk youth and families and on the human ecological principle of working across the lifespan in the context of the family and community. To assure that critical needs of children and families are met, CYFAR supports comprehensive, intensive, community-based programs developed with active citizen participation in all phases. CYFAR promotes positive youth and family development by supporting healthy environments and providing opportunities for learning and leadership by youth and adults in their communities.

CYFAR brings the youth development programs of 4-H and the family development programs of FCS to children, youth, and families living in high risk environments. CYFAR programs are holistic, working in the context of families and communities and through collaborations of youth, family, and community development professionals and volunteers within and outside the Cooperative Extension System.

Focus on Needs
Some youth programs focus on individual learners developing competencies. Other youth programs focus on risks and risk factors and work to reduce problems. CYFAR uses the 4-H Youth Development approach which focuses on needs of young people – considering the whole young person, not just a single characteristic or problem. Research has shown that young people need positive relationships with caring adults, inclusive and safe environments, to be engaged in their own learning, to have opportunities for mastery, self-determination, and to see themselves as active participants in the future and to value and practice service for others. 4-H employs a youth development approach and categorizes needs of youth into the following four Essential Elements of 4-H.

To experience BELONGING
Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others. Current research emphasizes the importance of youth having opportunities for long-term consistent relationships with adults other than their parents. 4-H gives the young people the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group, trying new things, making mistakes, and taking risks under the supervision of caring adults. CYFAR programs treat all members of the community with respect and dignity, providing a welcoming atmosphere for all children, youth, and parents. CYFAR programs recognize and celebrate cultural and social influences on child and youth development.

To experience INDEPENDENCE
Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. By exercising independence through 4-H leadership opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility, learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers. Youth and adult CYFAR program participants play key roles in identifying issues and needs and in program implementation.

To experience MASTERY
To develop self-confidence, youth need to believe they are capable and they must experience success in solving problems and meeting challenges. Youth must have access to quality research-based content and have opportunity to learn by doing. By exploring 4-H projects and activities, youth master skills to make positive career and life

choices. 4-H offers youth the breadth and depth of topics that allow them to pursue their own interests within a safe environment for making mistakes and getting feedback.

To experience GENEROSITY

Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. Community service projects allow 4-H youth to see that their effort to help others is important and valuable – that their lives have meaning and purpose. By participating in community service and citizenship activities, youth and adults connect to their communities and learn to give back to others – they learn that they are part of a global community, which requires awareness and compassion for others.

CYFAR Focuses on Positive Outcomes

While children and youth living in low income families and high risk environments face many challenges, CYFAR programs utilize youth development strategies to focus on positive outcomes for young people, rather than only on preventing negative outcomes. The CYFAR program vision is for communities where children and youth lead positive, secure, and happy young lives while developing competencies necessary for fulfilling, contributing adult lives.

CYFAR programs expect positive outcomes for all age categories:

▪ Early Childhood: Children will have their basic physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs met. Babies will be born healthy.

▪ School Age (K-8): School age youth will demonstrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior necessary for fulfilling contributing lives.

▪ Teens: Teens will demonstrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior necessary for fulfilling, contributing lives.

▪ Parents/Families: Parents will take primary responsibility for meeting their children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs and provide moral guidance and direction. Families will promote positive, productive, and contributing lives for all family members.

Healthy Environments and Opportunities for Learning and Leadership

Research and practical experience gained through hundreds of community-based CYFAR projects since 1990, indicate that programs which are most effective in addressing needs of at-risk children, youth, and families, possess common attributes. These include working in community settings, engaging citizens in the targeted populations in program implementation and leadership, creating supportive and respectful environments, and providing opportunities for learning and building

competencies essential for academic and career success. CYFAR emphasizes helping community-based programs create healthy and inviting environments so that children and youth can take advantage of educational opportunities with the guidance of caring, competent professionals. Guiding Principles for Early Childhood, School Age, Teen, Parent/Family CYFAR Program outcomes are available on the [CYFAR Web site](#).

Integrated Program Components – Community, Technology, and Sustainability
CYFAR programs integrate three essential program components in all community-based projects. The Community Component captures the "ecological" approach of CYFAR projects connecting the projects to existing networks as well as insuring that the family and community remain strong contexts for program participants. The Technology Component recognizes the importance of the teaching and utilization of technology, including technology in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. The Sustainability Component needs to be part of initial program design. Planning for how the project will evolve, change and ultimately become institutionalized both in the community and with the CES is essential early in the life of the CYFAR project.

Community
Effective programs operate in the communities where the identified at-risk citizens live– in housing projects, in community centers, on Indian Reservations, in migrant camps, and in rural, suburban, and urban areas. They welcome children, youth, and family members to actively engage in the programs, employ local citizens as staff and volunteers, and address the needs of the people in the community. They pull together resources of a variety of local agencies. Effective community programs utilize contributions and commitments of multiple organizations based on the belief that no single agency can solve problems alone and that multi-agency "ownership" and collaboration is essential to program effectiveness and long term program sustainability. CYFAR programs are most effective in achieving long-term outcomes when they involve change in the larger ecological context of the program audience. For example, pairs of mentors and youth engaged in a mentoring project are grouped to do an ongoing community service project aimed at increasing community connections, or a parent education program is governed by a community collaboration seeking to lower child abuse rates. The community context should be integrated coherently into the overall program to insure achievement of positive outcomes for young children, school age children, teens, or parents and families.

Technology
Information and communication technologies (ICT) are permeating American society and lives. Americans communicate via email, use the Web to find health and gardening information, and bank and shop online. Schools require term papers that are word-processed, illustrated with graphics and tables and include URLs of references in their footnotes. Online directories and maps help locate people and businesses. Entry level Rev. 10/08; Updated 01/15 5

jobs now require technology skills as inventories of goods and services are maintained with technology. Technology literacy is essential for performing basic activities of education, jobs, and personal lives. Integrating technology and the development of technology skills into programs which serve at risk youth and families is especially important, as typically they have less access to technology and fewer opportunities to learn. CYFAR programs develop explicit technology plans to ensure that information and communication technology is appropriately integrated throughout the program design. Programs should have adequate information and communication technology infrastructure (hardware, software, network connectivity/mini-labs, and technology expertise) to support program administration, professional staff development, educational programming with clients, online collaboration, and electronic publishing of lessons learned and results. The technology plan needs to put technology tools in the hands of program participants to help them reach the goals of CYFAR.

Sustainability
Planning for sustaining community programs is an obligation of CYFAR program professionals. Sustainability is the capacity of programs to continue to respond to the identified community needs. A sustained program maintains a focus consistent with its original goals and objectives, including the individuals, families, and communities it was originally intended to serve. Some programs contract in scope while others expand and others maintain the original program activities. Some programs align with other organizations and institutions while others maintain their independence. The key element of sustainability is retaining the goal of supporting at-risk youth and family programs by providing continued benefits, regardless of the particular activities that are delivered. To most effectively sustain programs for children, youth, and families, an intentional effort must be made early in the program planning process. CYFAR plans include those factors that research has demonstrated to be important for program sustainability --Leadership Competence, Effective Collaboration, Understanding Community, Demonstrating Program Results, Strategic Funding, Staff Involvement and Integration, and Program Responsiveness.

Extension Resources
Extension has the capacity to provide a broad spectrum of educational programs for children, youth, and families. 4-H is the youth program with direct access to technological advances in agriculture and life sciences, home economics, human development, and related areas, which result from Land Grant University Research. The foundation of 4-H Youth Development is the practical application of the Land Grant university knowledge by youth in their communities. 4-H offers opportunities for youth to participate in science, engineering, and technology; healthy living, and citizenship education. Family & Consumer Sciences offer parent and family education, child care training, family financial education, and nutrition education. Extension professionals are well connected and have the capacity to bring a wide variety of university and community resources together to address needs of low income, at risk youth and Rev. 10/08; Updated 01/15 6

families. School age and teen programs are directed to youth and encourage parent and family involvement. Family programs work directly with families and impact children and youth through their parents. The particular program strategy employed in a community will be determined by the needs identified and prioritized by the people in the community. Effective CYFAR projects utilize the expertise and resources of the total Land-Grant University System, the National Children, Youth, and Family Education and Research Network (CYFERnet), as well as existing programs and resources offered by other agencies and organizations in their states.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture provides CYFAR grant funding to Land Grant University Extension Services to expand statewide Extension capacity for supporting and sustaining programming for at risk youth and families. The University CYFAR projects call for collaboration across academic disciplines, program areas, and geographic lines as well as a holistic approach which views the child in the context of the family and community. They support community educational programs for at-risk children, youth, and families which are based on locally identified needs, soundly grounded in research, provide healthy environments and opportunities for learning and leadership and which ultimately lead to positive outcomes. CYFAR programs, people, and objectives become integrated into the mission, vision, and goals of the Cooperative Extension System