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A SURVEY OF WASHBURN COUNTY YOUNG PEOPLE

Amy A. Gessner

In the fall of 1936 a number of social-educational organizations of Washburn County decided to form a county-wide Community Council. The purpose of this Council was to secure united effort and more effective action on programs of activity or education which they were mutually interested in. Twenty-six organizations joined this Council and sent delegates to its meetings. Membership was open also to individuals in official positions who were interested.

The first task which these organizations wanted to unite on was assisting the young people of their communities in meeting their needs. The particular need of young people about which it seemed they could do the most was recreation and sociability.

However, before undertaking a program to meet this need, members of the Council felt that they should have more information about the present recreational interests of young people.

A committee from the membership of the Council was appointed to work out the questionnaire and supervise its collection. This committee consisted of Mrs. Roy Benson, Spooner, Neil Binkley, Spooner, Mrs. E. R. Herring, Shell Lake, Edward Crippen, Sarona and Mrs. Elsie Miller, Spooner. Representatives from the various neighborhoods and communities volunteered to visit the young people in their own districts and get the questionnaires filled in by them.

Three Hundred and Forty Questionnaires Completed

A total of 340 usable questionnaires were gathered by these volunteers. Much of the tabulating was also done by these workers, but the final tabulations and tables were done in the Department of Rural Sociology at the College of Agriculture. It should be pointed out that not more than two-thirds of these questionnaires had all the questions filled in. However, in each case where percentages are given, the total number of replies to a particular question is taken as 100% and the % is not figured on the total of 340 questionnaires. The question least completely answered of all was that on the present occupations of those who were working. The number of answers to the question "What occupation would you like to follow" was also comparatively low. However, the questions on present recreational activities and on what the young people would like to do if given the opportunity were answered on almost 100% of the questionnaires. Any questionnaires which appeared to have been filled in facetiously were, of course, discarded. In most cases the questionnaires were given out to be filled in and turned in later. In only two cases did the volunteers working on the survey act as interviewers and write in the answers on the questionnaires themselves. However, the questionnaires appear to be frankly and honestly filled in even though more than half are signed.

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More Boys Than Girls in Sample

Of the 340 questionnaires used, 181 or 53% were filled in by boys and 159 or 47% by girls. Just half of these boys were in school and 55% of the girls, or a total of 52.6% in school. The great majority, 70.5%, of these boys and girls were in the age group of 15 to 19 years. This was true for both boys and girls. Twenty-seven percent were in the 20 to 25 year group. Only five who answered the questionnaire were over 25. As might be expected there is a decided difference in age between the in-school and out-of-school group. Forty percent or 64 of the out-of-school group were between the ages of 15 and 19, whereas 98% or 170 of the in-school group were in that age classification. Another way to put this is to say that only 27% of the boys and girls between the ages of 15 to 19 inclusive were out-of-school. Of these 64 of this age group who were out of school, 27 were girls and 37 were boys.

More Town and Village Residents

Because questionnaires were gathered from Spooner and Shell Lake there is a preponderance of village residents, 57% compared with 43% farm boys and girls. Boys and girls from farms who were going to high school in town and lodging there through the week were counted as farm residents. This distribution remains about the same for the boys and girls but comparison between the in-school and out-of-school shows an increase in the percentage of farm residents in the out-of-school group. This is particularly true of the boys. When we talk about out-of-school boys we are talking about half town residents and half farm residents. However, where we are talking about the in-school boys, we are talking about three-fifths town dwellers and two-fifths farm residents.

Very Few Are Married

Since so large a percentage of the young people were in the lower age group it would follow that but a small percentage would be married. Only 4% of the boys and 6% of the girls are married. Summarizing our sample then we are reporting upon a group of boys and girls, a great majority of whom are between the ages of 15 and 19 years, a little more than half of them are in school, nearly three-fifths are town dwellers, almost all of them are single.

Although the survey was planned primarily to ascertain the recreational interests of the young people of the county, questions with regard to other needs were included with the thought that a program to meet some of the other needs of the young people might be undertaken later by the Council. Education, vocational choices, employment, and organizational participation were other needs on which questions were included.

Amount of Education

Because of the number now in school the educational records of a majority show some high school education, but only 18% have finished high school. Among the 156 now out of school who answered the question on education, only 6 had had less than 8th grade, but 44 had had no school contact beyond the 8th grade. Almost as many had started high school but had not finished. Twelve had had some college or normal school training.

Almost 70% of those who were now out of school had no plans for going on to school. Perhaps for the same reason which a majority of them gave for being out of school, that is, financial difficulties or because they were needed at home. These two causes accounted for 71% being out of school. Only 19% were out because they had no desire to go on. Other causes of less importance were poor health, getting a job and getting married.

Employment

Working for Compensation. As in other surveys it has been difficult to ascertain exactly what the employment situation is for these young people. For those who are still in school the matter of employment does not seem so urgent. However, we are interested in finding out what the situation of those who are now out of school is. One hundred and thirty-five out of the 161 who were out of school answered the question asked regarding compensation for work done, but only 108 gave any answer to the question asked about their occupation if working. Many who earned some compensation for work, however, probably felt that they could not be considered as having an occupation since they were working at home. Fifty-nine or 44% of the 135 out-of-school boys and girls who were receiving some compensation were receiving wages. We have no check on how much that was nor how much of the year they received it. Twenty-nine percent were earning spending money, and 24% felt they earned board and room. A very small number had a partnership on the farm or shared in the sale of crops and livestock.

A little more than half of the 179 boys and girls in school indicated that they were working for compensation of one kind or another. A majority, 52 or 54%, were working for spending money, twenty-nine or 30% earned wages, though it is not known whether this was during the school year or during vacation. Twenty-two percent were earning room and board; only five shared in the crops and livestock sales. As one would expect more boys than girls received compensation of one kind or another in both in-school and out-of-school groups. Only where the remuneration was room and board was there a nearly equal number of boys and girls.

Present Occupation Followed. Farm or common labor is the most important occupation for the 62 out-of-school boys who listed present occupations. Sixty-six percent of the answers in this group gave this occupation. Next in importance was retail trade including clerking, oil filling station attendant, tavern helper, etc. This occupied 15% of the boys who answered the question. Only 4 of the boys listed teaching as their occupation, the same number gave truck driving as their occupation.

Forty-six of the 71 out-of-school girls listed an occupation and housework and waitress jobs were the most important. Twenty-six or 57% of the girls gave this as their occupation. Next in importance for the girls is teaching. One-fourth of the girls answering the question reported teaching as their occupation. There were only five in clerical or stenographic positions and three in retail trade.

In cases where the in-school group considered themselves with an occupation other than that of study, they followed much the same trend as those out of school. Perhaps because those were occupations taken during vacation periods, farm and common labor, housework, and retail trade were important. However, NYA occupations were peculiar to the in-school group and 17 of the students included in this survey were earning something through work sponsored under this program.

Present Occupations Not Satisfactory. It can not be assumed that those who were out of school and had found work were located as to occupation for 71% of the boys who answered the question "Would you like to make your present occupation your life work?" answered negatively. The girls seem to be more satisfied with what they are now doing for only 52% of those answering the question answered negatively. On a question like this, of course, where there is a failure on the part of many returning questionnaires to answer it, a doubt arises as to whether or not there may be others who are satisfied who do not register opinion while those who feel most negative are heard from.

Occupation Desired

It was surprising to find so many who did not seem prepared to answer the question, "What occupation would you like to follow?" Only 262 replies were made on the 340 questionnaires. These 262 answers show a wide and scattered range of interests. The girls seemed to be a little readier on their response to this question as 83% of the girls' questionnaires carried answers to this question, while but 72% of the boys' questionnaires had answers to it. The choices were scattered among such a variety of occupations that it would be difficult to say any one was of greatest importance. However, farming was chosen by a larger number of boys than any other one occupation. It received 21% of the choices. Next in the number choosing it was engineering including electrical, civil, radio and Diesel engineering. Sixteen percent of those naming a vocation named engineering. Twelve percent chose conservation, forestry or game warden. Teaching had attractions for nine percent of the boys. Mechanics was a very close second to teaching. Unlike the boys in the counties previously surveyed, very few boys in Washburn County wanted to be truck drivers. In fact only two named this occupation.

In the girls' occupations, stenographic or clerical work was selected by 32 or almost one-fourth of the 132 girls who answered the question regarding vocational choice. Teaching was a very close second with 29 girls or 22% selecting it. The third occupation in the number selecting it was housework or home-making. This was named by 14% of the girls. In other counties the occupation of beauty operator has been more attractive than in Washburn. Only about 10% were interested here whereas 34% of the girls in Taylor County elected it. Nursing was also chosen by 10% of the girls.

So far as comparison in vocational choices between in-school and out-of-school groups are concerned, there is not a great deal of difference. It is odd that the girls in both groups seem to be more willing or ready to say what occupation they would like to follow. Answers to this question were given on 86% of the in-school girls' schedules, and 79% of the out-of-school girls' schedules, but only 70% of the in-school boys' schedules carried answers and 73% of the out-of-school boys'.

In comparing in-school and out-of-school choices it must be kept in mind that where a person gave their present occupation and said they would like to continue that occupation, it was counted as a choice. This is a factor to be considered when we note that 29% of the girls, out of school, chose housework, while only 4% of those in school named it. Likewise for farming 21% of the out-of-school boys chose it while only 10% of those in school were interested. In general it might be said that those now out of school name vocations which they can enter without much more additional training, while those in school select occupations calling for more years in school. This is particularly true of the girls.

Organization Interests

Two hundred and forty-five of these boys and girls indicated that they attended the meetings of some organized group. Of these more than 65% attended church meetings. There was also some attendance at meetings of young people's societies, but a rather surprising difference exists between the number having church contact through attending church meetings and those attending meetings of young people's societies, namely a difference of 58%.

The most important group next to the church was the 4-H Club to the meetings of which went 13% of the 245 answering this question. More of the in-school group attend 4-H Club meetings than the out-of-school group. The percentages being 16 and 9 respectively. More in-school girls give 4-H Club attendance than boys, but more out-of-school boys than girls give the 4-H Club.

The Farmers Union ranks third in the number of times mentioned. Eleven percent have this contact. About 4% attend P.T.A. meetings. About 4% meet with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. There was a wide scattering among a number of local, indigenous clubs, particularly for those in school as most of these were associated with school activities.

4-H Club Not Available to All. Three hundred and twenty-five answered the question "Have you ever belonged to a 4-H Club". Fifty-five percent of those who answered had had such experience. Eight percent more girls than boys had belonged, and 9% more in school than out of school.

There were 202 answers to the question, "Why don't you now belong to a 4-H Club". (It will be recalled that 32 indicated that they now went to meetings of the 4-H Club). The reason for not now belonging cited most frequently was "no club here". This was a more important reason for the girls than the boys and more important for the in-school than the out-of-school group. Thirty-eight percent of all who replied to the question gave this reason. Thirty-one percent gave "not interested" as the reason for not belonging. There was little variation between the classifications on this, except that about 10% more of the in-school than the out-of-school group gave this. This is partly explained when one recalls that a larger percent of the in-school group are town dwellers to whom 4-H Club work would naturally have less appeal.

For the out-of-school group the most important reason for not belonging to a 4-H Club is being too old. This was the reason for 37% of them but for only 1% of those in school. Fourteen percent more of the boys than of the girls felt they were too old.

"No time" was the reason given by 14 percent of all who answered and this reply came from considerably more in school than out of school. "Parents disapprove" was a reason given by a very few.

Interest in Additional Organization for Young People

Almost all who turned in questionnaires answered the question, "Would you like to belong to a young people's group", namely 318 out of 340. Ninety-five percent of these answers were in the affirmative. A slightly larger percentage of the girls wanted to belong to a group, and more of both boys and girls out of school were interested. Ninety-nine percent of the out-of-school girls wanted to belong to a group. The most negative answers were from the boys in school.

The questionnaire asked for information regarding the type of young people's group which they would like to join. The types listed for checking included "all boys", "all girls" and "mixed". All who answered affirmatively to the question "would you like to belong to a young people's group", checked the type they thought they would like. Eighty-seven percent preferred the mixed group. Sixteen percent of the boys preferred all boys' groups but only 9% of the girls preferred all girls' groups. There is very little difference in the preference between in-school and out-of-school boys, slightly more of the in-school than the out-of-school group preferring all boys' organizations. However, with the girls, 15% of the out-of-school group prefer all girls' organizations while only 4% of the in-school girls prefer that type.

Recreational Interests

Radio Listening Most Important Present Interest. A list of many leisure-time activities was written in on the questionnaires for checking. There was no one who did not now take part in at least one of these activities and most of them checked several. Ninety-five percent do some radio listening. Ninety-two percent go to movies. Seventy-five percent play cards. Sixty-eight percent go to public dances. About half of them go to private dances. For some of the activities, the figures for all the group taken together do not mean so much because some are more strictly boys' activities and some more girls' activities. For example about 55% of the whole sample hunt, but 88% of the boys hunt. This difference might be brought out by listing the first eight activities in their order of importance when judged by the number checking. For the sample as a whole the order is as follows: (1) radio auditing, (2) going to movies, (3) playing cards, (4) swimming, (5) fishing, (6) going to public dances, (7) hunting, (8) playing baseball. For the boys only the order is (1) radio auditing, (2) going to movies, (3) fishing, (4) hunting, (5) swimming, (6) playing cards, (7) playing baseball; for the girls it was (1) radio auditing, (2) going to movies, (3) needlework, (4) playing cards, (5) going to public dances, (6) swimming, (7) going to private dances, (8) singing.

Radio auditing and going to movies appeal equally to both boys and girls. Dancing interests a much larger percentage of girls. Playing cards is universal to both but done by quite a few more girls than boys. Swimming is attractive to a few more boys than girls. The sharp difference, of course, is in hunting and fishing for the boys and needlework for the girls.

Want More Recreational Activities. Though this seems like a considerable array of activities yet somewhat more than nine-tenths of the 317 who answered the question with regard to their desire to participate in more recreational activities indicated that they would like more. About the same percent answered in the affirmative for both boys and girls and for in-school and out-of-school people.

Two hundred and eighty-seven answered the question "What prevents you from taking part in more recreational activities at the present time." No opportunity was the reason checked by 71% of those who answered. It may be assumed perhaps that though a variety of activities was checked, these are participated in only irregularly. They are quite unorganized and depend entirely upon chance. This is substantiated by the expressed desire for an organized group. This very high percentage checking "no opportunity" as the reason for not taking part in

more recreational activities appears very significant in view of the program contemplated by the Washburn County Council. However, it has been pointed out by members of the survey committee that there is another aspect to this matter of "no opportunity" which does not occur to most people. Many of these schedules were filled out in the winter-time when roads were bad, and it would have been difficult to go any distance to participate in activities had they been available. Though the group activities with others of one's own age may be the most desired, some suggestions for recreation in the family perhaps should also be furnished by the Council.

"No time" is a factor in lack of recreational participation on the part of 30% of the young people. One might question here whether or not a carefully planned and attractive program of recreation might not result in some finding time for them. There is very little difference between the classifications on these reasons.

Additional Activities Desired

A number of activities were listed on the questionnaire and the boys and girls were asked to check those which they thought they would like to do. Three hundred and sixteen checked at least one suggested activity and many checked several activities. There were ten more girls than boys who filled in this question. The most popular activity as indicated by the number of boys and girls checking it, was an indoor sports program. More than half those replying checked this as desirable to them. Second in importance to the indoor sports program in the number showing interest was dramatic activity which was checked by 46% of those answering. Cooking lessons were requested by 40%, almost as many wanted to attend lessons in etiquette. Participation in singing groups was a close fifth. Only a few less wanted to study personality. Needlework and sewing were checked by 35%. The same number checked participation in instrumental music groups. About 30% wanted to study forestry. Almost as many wanted to study vocations. Farm mechanics, farm accounting and animal husbandry interested 19%, 10% and 14% respectively. The study of English, literature and current social and economic problems ranked as follows: 19%, 16% and 16% respectively. The young people were asked to make suggestions if they wished to be part of a group doing several of these things. However, there was such a variety of combinations that it was almost impossible to tabulate them. However, the combination of indoor sports, music and drama seemed to recur most frequently.

There is, of course, a substantial variation in expressed interests between the boys and girls and between those in school and those out of school. When we list the activities side by side in the order of their importance according to the number of people checking them, we get the following array:

<u>Girls</u>		<u>Boys</u>	
1. Needlework	72%	1. Indoor sports program	57%
2. Cooking study	71%	2. Study of forestry & conservation	55%
3. Etiquette study	61%	3. Instrumental group	37%
4. Drama group	60%	4. Farm mechanics	36%
5. Personality study	58%	5. Drama group	33%
6. Singing group	51%	6. Singing group	28%
7. Indoor sports	41%	7. Study of vocations	28%
8. Instrumental group	33%	8. Study of animal husbandry	26%
9. Study of vocations	31%	9. Study of personality	21%
10. English study	27%	10. Study of current problems	19%
11. Literature & book reviews	24%	11. Study of etiquette	18%
12. Study of current problems	13%	12. Farm accounting	15%

The difference between the in-school and out-of-school groups should if possible be taken into consideration in planning a program. There is a tendency on the part of both the boys and girls out of school to emphasize the vocational activities, while those in school emphasize play activities. For example 66% of the in-school boys call for a program of indoor sports while only 47% out of school call for it; 34% of the in-school boys want to be in drama groups while only 22% of the out-of-school boys want to. Twelve and a half percent more out-of-school boys want farm mechanics. For the girls the greatest difference between the in-school and the out-of-school groups is on drama about 24% more in-school girls want it. Twenty-two percent more in-school girls want to study etiquette.

About 20% more in-school girls want to study personality, but more out-of-school girls want to study literature and English. However, both groups are equally interested in studying cooking.

These differences would indicate that where a limited program only is possible in a community and it seems desirable to plan for this entire age group from 15 to 25 and for both in-school and out-of-school people, the activities to be provided should be chosen carefully. The things which interest almost the entire age group are, for the boys, the study of forestry and conservation, instrumental music groups. They agree pretty well on the study of farm accounting and animal husbandry. A drama group would meet the needs of a large number in both groups of boys. An indoor sports program would apparently satisfy considerably more in-school boys but it would still be patronized by 48% of the out-of-school group.

For the girls cooking classes would interest the largest number in both groups. Sewing and needlework would satisfy a large, almost equal, number in both groups. An equal number of girls in both groups want an indoor sports program. A good many more in-school girls want to study personality but such a program would also appeal to 46% of the other group, which would make it seem worthwhile. The same is true of the study of etiquette which would appeal to about 48% of the out-of-school group.

Because of a rather sparse population and long distances to be traveled in most of the neighborhoods and communities in which a program is contemplated, the number of young people is limited so that much distinction between sex and age groups will not be possible everywhere. In such cases the information at the beginning of this section where the various activities were listed in the order of their importance to the total group would be the most useful.

Distance Between Centers Must Be Limited

As a further aid to local committees in planning a young people's recreation program the boys and girls were asked to indicate how far they would be willing to travel to take part in these activities. Again it should be recalled that a majority of the questionnaires were filled out during the winter when road conditions were least favorable. A majority, 67%, indicated that they would be willing to travel a distance somewhere between one and five miles inclusive. About 25% would travel five to ten miles for these meetings. This would indicate that meetings or centers will have to be planned on a community or neighborhood basis.

Opinions Differ on Frequency of Meetings

About 300 of the boys and girls expressed an opinion when asked how often they would want to go to meetings of the groups they were interested in. There was considerable scattering of opinion but the once a week meeting received more notes than any other type with 42% of those voting checking it. About 24% checked twice a month, 17% wanted meetings only once a month, and 9% checked twice a week.

Meeting Places Named

The boys and girls were asked to name the places which they regarded as their centers, and were also asked to suggest buildings which they thought might be used for a young people's program. These centers and meeting places vary according to the area from which the questionnaires come. This information has been summarized for each area, however, and turned over to the members of the local committees since it is of purely local interest. Various town halls and school buildings were named as the most likely places for these meetings.

Conclusion

It should be pointed out perhaps that this survey differs from most of those on rural youth which have been done in other counties. The other surveys set out to ascertain the various needs of young people, whereas in the Washburn County study the need for recreation was assumed and effort was pointed to getting information which would be useful in planning the program. However, the ready response to the survey, the general interest indicated as well as the answers of the young people themselves make it apparent that the assumption that more recreation is needed is correct.

It is hoped that the information obtained in this survey will be most helpful to the Washburn County Community Council and its sub-committees in the local communities to the end that a program may be worked out which the Council will be proud to sponsor. A program will make a richer experience of life in the communities of Washburn County.