

2021

## Extension Youth Development Professionals' Experiences Implementing Inclusive Youth Development Programming

Crystal Renee Perry  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Crystal Renee Perry

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Extension Youth Development Professionals' Experiences Implementing Inclusive Youth

Development Programming

by

Crystal Renee Perry

MPA, Columbus State University, 2008

BS, Georgia Southwestern State University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

Walden University

February 2021

## Abstract

Youth with disabilities benefit from being included in extracurricular activities. However, often youth with a disability do not participate in extracurricular activities. The purpose of this basic, qualitative study was to explore the experiences of Extension Youth Development Professionals (YDPs) as they serve youth with disabilities in their 4-H programs. The research question for this study focused on the perceptions and experiences of the YDPs implementing inclusive, positive youth development programs. Conceptually, the transfer of learning theories provided the framework for this study. Data for this study were collected through the instrument of interviews, consisting of questions focusing on training, experiences, and program implementation. Eight participants who had experience implementing 4-H youth development programs, were assigned to work and had received training to serve youth with disabilities were interviewed. The collected data were transcribed from Zoom audio recordings, and codes were identified from the collected data. Six themes emerged from the interviews: (a) making and providing accommodations, (b) engaging in an intricate planning process, (c) learning in the process, (d) limited on-the-job training, (e) providing access for all, and (f) reputation for having an impact regardless of limitations. Findings from the study confirmed that Extension YDPs are often not provided the adequate amount of training to serve youth with disabilities. This study's results contribute to the body of knowledge for Extension professionals to influence YDPs strategies to design and implement inclusive, positive youth development programs.

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## Dedication

I dedicate the accomplishment of this academic journey to my parents, George and Helen Perry. Thank you for your love, prayers, and support. Your encouraging words and consistent support for me to achieve more means so much to me. It is because of you that I started and completed this intense academic journey. I am grateful for the watchmen and women God has assigned to me. In loving memory of the late Pastor Helen T. Mercer, I also dedicate the accomplishment of this degree. It was the push of Pastor Mercer for me to walk confidently in my purpose, and for this, I am grateful and honored to have had the opportunity to serve under her leadership.

## Acknowledgments

I acknowledge my parents and church family who have supported me in this process and the study. I am forever grateful for my parents, George and Helen Perry. Further, I want to acknowledge my church family, Christians On A Mission Deliverance Center Inc. Thank you for your prayers, support, and encouragement as I juggled many roles.

I would like to acknowledge and give thanks to Dr. Jeffrey Harlow for the words of encouragement and support. I acknowledge and thank the rest of the committee team, Dr. Randy Heinrich and Dr. Sarah Matthey, for your efforts and support. To my doctoral program cohort, Lillian Williams, thank you for your encouragement and motivation to keep going. Finally, many thanks to the participants that participated in the study and enabled this research.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

There are numerous benefits for youth, with and without disabilities, participating in extracurricular programs (Elliot, 2016; Willis et al., 2016). The benefits of extracurricular programs are associated with positive outcomes physically, psychologically, and socially (Willis et al., 2016). However, youth with disabilities often do not participate in extracurricular activity opportunities outside of school (Willis et al., 2016). In 2016, approximately 32% of youth with a disability did not participate in an afterschool activity (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). Youth living with a disability may feel more isolated than others without a disability due to limited resources and/or access to other extracurricular groups or organizations (Willis et al., 2016).

When youth with disabilities have fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, their parents often face barriers to be involved in the activity compared to parents of other youth (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015). Parents who have children with disabilities have more barriers to parental participation roles in the activity than parents of children who are in the general education category (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015). These parents tend not to be involved with their children in extracurricular activities unless a teacher extends an invitation for a school event (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015). Children with disabilities are typically under an educator's guide for extended periods of a school day. Therefore, the afterschool activities for these students become the responsibility of the parent. However, most parents assume the role of a caretaker

rather than provide an extracurricular activity for their child with a disability after a school day (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015).

There is a need for additional youth development resources for youth with disabilities (Angima et al., 2016). According to the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH, 2018), approximately 24% of Georgia's youth from the ages of 3 to 17 years have a disability categorized as mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral. Across the United States, the demographic and behavioral needs are changing for youth with disabilities, and because of the changing demographics, youth development programs must diversify their services and activities and make the appropriate accommodations for the youth (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). Accessible programs that offer opportunities for youth with disabilities to participate, provide significant value to their lives (Willis et al., 2016). The programs that focus on providing a sense of belonging and acceptance allow youth with disabilities to be engaged, creating enjoyable experiences as they participate (Willis et al., 2016).

The National 4-H Learning Priorities Steering Committee emphasized that youth development professionals should understand that there is a lack of opportunities and limited resources for positive youth development opportunities for diverse populations (LaVergne, 2013). The youth development professionals working with diverse populations of youth (in private nonprofit programs) are often faced with challenges of being unprepared and the uncertainty of opportunities to support youth properly (Biederman & Mills, 2014). The professional should know the disability of the youth before working with them. A best practice for youth professionals is to pair the youth

with the disability with an adult or a responsible peer and provide positive feedback to youth regarding the task and/or behavior immediately and as often (Biederman & Mills, 2014).

These training techniques are not widespread or used consistently across the spectrum for youth with mental or physical disabilities (Biederman & Mills, 2014). The 4-H program offers training tips for the adults working with youth with disabilities, but the organization recognizes many opportunities to implement trainings and model techniques available beyond their minimal offerings (Biederman & Mills, 2014). The tips and techniques that 4-H offers are not a requirement, and the professionals may or may not have training or techniques to work with children with behavior or emotional disabilities (Biederman & Mills, 2014). The 4-H program administrators recommend that youth development professionals learn to treat all youth as people first and not treat youth as their disabilities dictate (Biederman & Mills, 2014).

Training to work with this specific population increases the need to create an atmosphere of inclusion and belonging for the participants (Biederman & Mills, 2014). Scholars have revealed barriers to inclusive 4-H programming that include appropriate resources, and the youth development professionals' lack of knowledge and training to properly serve youth with disabilities (Angima et al., 2016; LaVergne, 2013; Mouton & Bruce, 2013; Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). As populations increasingly become more diverse, the need for resources and programming to accommodate individuals with disabilities continues to grow (Angima et al., 2016). There is evidence of substantial variations of Cooperative Extension youth development professionals training for

inclusiveness; however, researchers recommend improvement in professional development training opportunities for all adults working with youth with disabilities (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019).

### **Background of the Study**

Youth development professionals play an integral part in land grant universities, distributing research-based information to the general public (Angima et al., 2016). This group of Extension professionals plays a role in the lives of youth as the agent of change so they can further develop and enhance the skills and lives of youth served through programming (Moncloa et al., 2019). This group of professionals creates supportive relationships and environments to increase positive outcomes for youth (Moncloa et al., 2019). As the demographics of youth served in positive youth development programs have changed, 4-H programs have identified the need to diversify programmatic strategies to accommodate this change (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). The 4-H Youth Development Program creates supportive environments so that participants will realize their fullest potential (Goble & Eyre, 2008).

It is vital that land grant universities make efforts to improve access for “all” (Angima et al., 2016). Improving access for all and serving individuals who have a variety of disabilities adds value to the nation-wide work of Extension (Angima et al., 2016). Therefore, understanding the perceptions of Extension professionals, specifically, the youth development professionals, and their ability to implement and facilitate programming to serve individuals with and without disabilities, is critical. Scholars have documented the barriers of Extension professionals serving the needs of all clients for a

variety of reasons when they are developing more inclusive programming (Angima et al., 2016; LaVergne 2015; McKee & Bruce, 2019). To combat the barriers, administrators have realized that the professionals will need to have an openness and willingness to expand their knowledge and skills to what is forthcoming and foresee with a new thought process to enhance the individual's competency to work with youth with a disability (Argabright et al., 2019).

Many professionals in Extension programs understand the importance of diversity and being inclusive with their 4-H youth development programs (Summer et al., 2018). Incorporating inclusive programming is critical when accomplishing the Extension Program's mission, which is to provide access for all as youth development professionals (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). Youth development professionals work to develop strategies to include youth with disabilities in programming (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). Therefore, training is paramount to the development of 4-H programming that will effectively meet the standards of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Mouton & Bruce, 2013). Researchers have shown the importance of educating leaders about various disabilities and appropriate strategies for handling situations associated with disabilities (Mouton & Bruce, 2013). The 4-H Extension professionals provide programs to all people, so they must understand the effects of the 4-H program on youth with disabilities, whether the disability is mental, physical, emotional, or behavioral (LaVergne, 2015). The Extension professional needs to be competent in developing strategies for successful inclusive programming (LaVergne, 2015).



### **Statement of the Problem**

Programs such as 4-H are not necessarily bound by the IDEA of 2004; however, the principles behind the act are practiced throughout the organization (Sumner et al., 2018). With the appropriate training and education of diversity and inclusion, along with best practices, agencies and staff can render services that embrace the value of inclusion and create effective programs for youth (Yakhnich et al., 2018). However, one of the most significant challenges of informal education programs is the lack of training for youth development professionals to ensure inclusion within their programs (Mouton & Bruce, 2013). Professional training is essential to work with diverse and vulnerable populations (Lavergne, 2015). However, what remains less clear is how 4-H youth development professionals are using the few trainings they have received to design and implement inclusive programming (Mouton & Bruce, 2013). Since the passing of the American Disabilities Act in 1990, a limited number of articles have been published focusing on the inclusion of youth with disabilities in 4-H programs (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). Hence, there is an increased need for more attention to prepare youth development professionals to work with diverse audiences in services offered by Extension professionals (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic, qualitative design is to explore the experiences of Extension youth development professionals (YDPs) as they work with youth with disabilities. These professionals understand that their training to design and implement programs for youth with disabilities must have a foundation of positivity. Consequently, I

examined the overall experiences of the trained YDPS as they design and implement programs to work with youth living with disabilities that are mental, physical, emotional, and/or behavioral. I explored the nature of the implemented strategies of the Extension YDPS and their experiences as they applied strategies to work with disabled youth. I analyzed the overall perceptions of trained YDPS to determine if the implemented strategies enhanced inclusive and diverse programming for youth with disabilities. My goal was to determine factors that contribute to the successful experience of YDPS implementing programs that support the inclusion of youth with a disability participating in a positive youth development program.

### **Research Question**

This study has one research question: What are the experiences of 4-H Extension YDPS who have been trained to design and implement youth development programs that include disabilities of mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral youth?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The primary theory that I used to guide this study was Mezirow's (1991, 1995, 1996) transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1991, 1995) explained how an adult learns to comprehend their individual experiences and how the dynamics involved in their experiences influence that experience. Transformative learning theory is a process that affects change (Mezirow, 1997). The theory process is a frame of reference for the participant in learning of their experiences, expectations, perceptions, and feelings (Mezirow, 1997). Transformation occurs through critical reflection and the change of habits with the mind or perception (Mezirow, 1997).

Transformational theories, including the transfer of learning and the model of transfer of learning, have been associated with the successful implementation of inclusive academic programs in a variety of ways, including creating cultures of positivity, increasing the effectiveness of the instructor, and focusing on the success of the student (Murphy, 2018). Because professional development is an area for improvement, program leaders should identify the appropriate training opportunities that incorporate principles of effective inclusion (Murphy, 2018). Leaders have the power to transform and influence youth as they are one of the most significant influencers of the success or failure of the program (Murphy, 2018).

According to the developers of the model of transfer of learning, the transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts the performance in another context or with other related materials (Green, 2015; Salomon & Perkins, 1988). Therefore, implemented and developed concepts of the YDPS should transfer to the youth with disabilities so that learning takes place with this group of youth. In addition, YDPS comprehend that there are similarities between the kinds of cognitive processes during learning, and cognitive processes during testing, which has been shown to influence the possibility of learning being transferred (Day & Goldstone, 2012). This theory can be used to understand how YDPS implemented their interpretations from the training they received, how they applied their knowledge to provide accommodations and services to youth with disabilities, and how it all contributes to the success of their program. YDPS's ability to transfer learned material can potentially transform their youth programs (Murphy, 2018).

### **Nature of the Study**

I employed a basic, generic qualitative design and used the interviews of YDPS to assess their various experiences of working with youth with disabilities. As a qualitative researcher, I investigated the opinions and experiences and focused on the interpretation (Percy et al., 2015) of their expressed experiences. Other, more focused qualitative approaches include case study, grounded theory, and phenomenology. I did not select any of these other approaches (Percy et al., 2015) to investigate the study's participants' experiences, emotions, and reflective thoughts. I selected the generic, qualitative approach as most suitable for this study as the generic, qualitative approach. Using this approach will help me discover participants' attitudes and reflections of their perceived experiences (Percy et al., 2015) of other things. By using a basic, qualitative design, the study's participant's perspective is discovered, and the researcher identifies recurring patterns or themes from interviews (Percy et al., 2015).

The targeted Extension professionals were YDPS responsible for designing and implementing 4-H youth development programs that have enrolled youth with disabilities. I focused on the experiences of the YDPS who designed and implemented strategies for youth with disabilities participating in traditional 4-H programming. I selected the basic, qualitative design for this study to understand the study's participants' perspectives.

This study included eight YDPS participants. Through the generic study design, I documented the perceptions and experiences of the YDPS who had received some form of training to serve youth with disabilities. I used the generic study design to analyze the

participants' described experiences in applying their training to their program delivery method. I analyzed the data simultaneously with the collection, and the results were a narrative text describing the experiences of the YDPS throughout the study.

I arranged the analyzed data based upon frequent recorded patterns and themes mentioned in the YDPS interviews from their implemented programs that included youth with disabilities. I used the arrangement and clustering of data (Skelly et al., 2014) to identify and summarize themes. Cluster analysis is a useful tool for determining if participants can be grouped by traits (Skelly et al., 2014). The text data included transcripts from interviews, which I analyzed for emerging themes. I used the themes that I gathered to describe meaning in the experiences of the YDPS, and how these ideas relate to other issues (e.g., programming).

I examined the participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategic choices. Examples included their perceptions and descriptions of experiences with the training they received, program design, marketing, and program planning. I interviewed eight Extension Youth Development Professionals (YDPS) who had completed training(s) to work with youth with disabilities for the study. Data included the interview responses and descriptions of programs that were implemented by the YDPS after training. In my interviews, I focused on the descriptions of YDPS perceptions and experiences of their program design and the implementation process.

### **Definitions**

*4-H Positive Youth Development:* The context and development of a set of essential elements (belonging, generosity, independence, and mastery) that helps the

youth see themselves as unique, resilient, and life-long learners of the educational opportunities provided from research and best practices (National 4-H Council, 2017).

*Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*: Enacted in 1992 to provide enforceable standards to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities (Silvers & Francis, 2015). Cooperative Extension views the Americans Disabilities Act as an essential part of educating the public as ADA helps them to be productive in accomplishing the mission and goal of Extension.

*Inclusion*: In an educational setting, this term is often referred to as educating the youth with and without disabilities in a normative setting on a part or full-time basis (Yakhnich et al., 2018). Students with disabilities attend school as if they did not have a disability; however, the students receive special education services and support while attending school (Yakhnich et al., 2018).

*Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*: The primary federal statute that supports, with grant funds, special education, and intervention services for children with disabilities. This act includes a series of conditions to provide educational and procedural guarantees for children with disabilities and their families (Dragoo, 2017). There are four parts to IDEA, which include Part A, for general provisions that include the purposes of the act and definitions (Dragoo, 2017). Part B focuses on provisions regarding the education of youth and state programs for youth with disabilities (Dragoo, 2017). Part C authorizes grants for programs of infants and toddlers with disabilities, and Part D contains the requirements for national activities to improve the education of children with disabilities (Dragoo, 2017).

### **Assumptions**

I assumed that the participants of this study share typical job responsibilities in an Extension 4-H program. I also assumed that the participants have youth with disabilities participating in their program(s). 4-H programming provided by the participants of this study was not limited to in-school or after-school activities. Participants in this study had individual experiences that were unique to the program offered in their assigned location. Although the YDPS individual experiences are unique, the participants could potentially experience similar planning strategies to implement inclusive programs. Participants of the study shared their experiences of creating inclusive environments while working with a diverse youth audience that included youth with disabilities. I assumed that the participants of the study understood the questions asked during the interview and gave honest replies. The assumptions were necessary for the study as the participants' preparation and background training to work with youth with disabilities confirmed the purpose for this study.

### **Limitations**

There were limits to this study due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. I conducted the study's participant selection process and interviews in nontraditional settings due to shelter-in-place ordinances by the government. These restrictions prevented authentic face-to-face interviews with the YDPs. In an effort to counter the effects of an inauthentic interview experience, I requested interviews to be in the YDPS's office and conducted through the use of an online application (i.e., Zoom). I assured participants of the confidentiality of their responses, even with using an online format. I

explained my formal role in positive youth development and my motivation to study the experiences of other YDPS.

I am currently a YDPS working with 4-H youth. My current role with the program and experience serving youth through inclusive programming had the potential to create biases toward the study's results. However, to prevent bias, I conducted interviews focusing on the experiences of YDPS implementing 4-H programs in their assigned location. Other potential limitations with the study design included determining the study's participants' competency level (Day & Goldstone, 2012) from their received training. There was no guarantee that all study participants had received the same type and level of training to work with youth with disabilities. The limitations mentioned, specifically regarding the transferability of learning for the YDPS, were weaknesses of the conceptual framework beyond my control.

### **Scope and Delimitation**

The scope of this study involved YDPS who implemented and facilitated 4-H programs to youth with and without disabilities simultaneously. Selected YDPS for this study had a diverse combination of educational and training backgrounds. Some YDPS had some form of educational background and experience working in a school and/or classroom setting. Others had experience working with youth in various settings with advanced education in an unrelated field to their scope of work. I conducted the primary research for this study with selected 4-H programs in the state of Georgia. Participants included current Extension 4-H agents and/or adult program leaders from various counties who have youth with disabilities enrolled in their 4-H programs.



Other theoretical frameworks that I considered but did not select for this study included language ideologies and a social constructivist theory. I considered language ideologies (Bagg-Gupta et al., 2015) for this study to focus on the underlying language ideologies in which technologies and other institutional practices dis/empower individuals with disabilities in specific settings. Language ideologies emerge from social practices versus examining language itself (Bagg-Gupta et al., 2015). This framework emphasizes the need and relevance to study social practice training of programs in which youth with disabilities participate, the method of program delivery, and the impact of mainstream youth development programs.

I considered the social constructivist theory approach (Mallory, 1994) for the framework for this study, as youth development has focused on designing programs and practices for children who need immediate attention. Rather than emphasizing individual differences and discrete behaviors, this approach fully conceptualizes the role of the sociocultural context as an integral contributor to the development of youth with disabilities (Mallory, 1994). Further, other research and application of the social constructivist theory require an understanding of the processes by which youth skills and conceptual knowledge are enhanced through their social interactions (Mallory, 1994). This theory approach provides (a) knowledge distribution in various ways, (b) all involved with opportunities to solve problems (c) a broader platform to apply innovative strategies of teaching versus traditional approaches (Mallory, 1994).

I used Mezirow's transformative learning theory as the primary theory in this study. I used the transformative learning theory to explore the experiences of YDPS

working with youth with disabilities, which limited the collection of data of other barriers YDPS may experience related to their job scope. The majority of YDPS receive education training regarding diversity through their previous career experiences or academic work (LaVergne, 2015). Not all Extension YDPS have are trained; therefore, the Cooperative Extension service has begun to make efforts to provide training to YDPS and address the increase of diverse populations of youth served in 4-H programs (LaVergne, 2015). This study not only adds to the body of knowledge for YDPS but has the potential to transfer into training assessment, curriculum, and evaluation for YDPS with similar roles as the YDPS described in this study. I excluded Cooperative Extension Agents, whose primary program area is not 4-H youth development, from participating in this study.

### **Positive Social Change**

The implications for positive social change from this study included an increased positive perception of Extension YDPS experiences implementing 4-H programs inclusive of all youth and providing positive experiences for youth with disabilities. Most research reports successful 4-H programs; however, it is often unclear of the representation of a diverse population of youth participating in a mainstream 4-H program (LaVergne, 2015). As YDPS are responsible for participant recruitment and retention, the YDPS must examine and emphasize their intentionality of diversifying the 4-H program (LaVergne, 2015). The commitment of YDPS to become competent in working with various audiences is the first step to building equitable programs, leading to successfully inclusive programs (LaVergne, 2015). This competency prepares YDPS to

address the youth's needs and potentially significantly influence the development of youth with disabilities (Argabright et al., 2019; Fe Moncloa et al., 2019; Kelly, 2017). Therefore, understanding the experiences of YDPS may give other professionals working with diverse audience insight to implement inclusive programming. This study's results contribute to the body of knowledge for Extension professionals to influence YDPS strategies to design and implement inclusive, positive youth development programs.

### **Significance**

The Extension YDPS drives youth development programs in 4-H, and the success of the program is dependent on the strategies used to create a safe and learning environment (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2017). Extension employees value diversity; therefore, this study may be used to understand the efforts of Extension programs, specifically the 4-H program, to improve access for all who participate (Angima et al., 2016). Although attempts are made to improve access for all, previous studies reveal that Extension professionals have known and identified barriers to provide access for all (Angima et al., 2016). Nevertheless there are successful inclusive programs, and the success of these programs is traced in part to the professionals' ability to design and implement inclusive programs to diverse groups in learning, working, and engaging environments (Murphy, 2018). Youth with disabilities are empowered by the opportunities to be involved in youth development programs through new friendships, and life skills gained (Sumner et al., 2018). These opportunities for youth with disabilities are just as important to the youth development program and can be embraced by participants with and without disabilities (Sumner et al., 2018).

Specifically, this study focused on the experiences of YDPS who were trained to design and implement youth development programs with youth with disabilities. The YDPS perceives the training as essential to providing the appropriate accommodations and, ultimately, inclusion for youth. This study filled a present gap in the literature relating to inclusive environments provided for YDPS who implement strategies for youth with disabilities (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2017). I added an additional awareness of how the experiences of trained YDPS directly or indirectly influence the strategies of designing and implementing programs within inclusive youth development programs to the body of knowledge

### **Summary and Transition**

The first chapter summarized the background of the problem and provided an overview of the methodology, conceptual framework, and limitations for the study. In Cooperative Extension, educators and practitioners have the *Journal of Extension* to encourage professional development and advance the practice and theory of Extension. Based on an examination of YDPS and their programs' inclusion practices, further research is warranted to determine (a) the impact of training offered to youth development professionals and volunteers and (b) the implementation strategies that foster inclusive environments for youth with disabilities. Chapter 2 is an exploration of the literature that supports the purpose and significance of this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of YDPS and explain the experiences of YDPS, who implemented development programming for youth with different abilities. This chapter contains a discussion of the literature on youth development strategies to improve inclusion programming and the effects of professional training and skills related to the implementation of inclusive programming for a diverse audience of youth, focusing on youth with disabilities. Key search terms used in the literature review, the conceptual foundation, and additional sections that justify the chosen methodology and rationale for the selected literature are sections included in chapter 2.

The chapter serves as a review of collected literature related to YDPS serving youth with disabilities in traditional 4-H programs. The issues that I explored in this study include attitudes and perceptions regarding inclusion and the experiences of professionals who seek to implement inclusion strategies in their programming. After reviewing the relevant literature explored for this study, the reader will have an enhanced understanding of the experiences of 4-H YDPS, providing inclusive programming to youth with disabilities.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Keywords for the literature search included the following: *cooperative extension, youth development, IDEA, ADA, 4-H youth, diversity, inclusion, youth with disabilities, inclusive education, essential elements of youth development, perceptions of*

*professionals towards inclusive programs, 4-H programs, transfer of learning, nonprofit youth organizations, and training youth development professionals.* In searching the literature, I accessed the ProQuest, EBSCOhost, SAGE Journals Online, Questia, and ERIC Institute of Education Sciences databases. Additionally, I used information gathered from journal articles and websites identified through Google Scholar and Walden University's online library. The principal focus of the search was on identifying relevant peer-reviewed journal articles. Review of the reference lists in sources that I retrieved led to identifying additional resources on similar topics. I accessed approximately 110 sources, using over 90 of these for the literature review.

There is little current literature with an emphasis on YDPS training to serve youth with disabilities. Authors for the *Journal of Extension* have advocated for a focus on YDPS preparation and acceptance to serve a diverse population (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). In the past 27 years, there has been an increasing trend in published articles, specifically with the *Journal of Extension*, associated with the practices and studies of inclusive 4-H programs with participating youth with disabilities (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). The increasing trend indicates the need for additional attention to inclusion in Extension 4-H programs (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019).

Chapter 2 begins with a review of the purpose, conceptual framework, and methodological considerations of the study. In the literature review portion of the chapter, I addressed attitudes, influences, and the impact of inclusive programming provided by Extension YDPS. The chapter concludes with an overview of the literature review and an introduction to chapter 3.

## **Conceptual Framework**

I used the transfer of learning theory as the framework for this study. In this study, I examined multiple transformational theories that have been connected to inclusive educational programs, as well as link the transfer of learning and transformative learning theories. In this section, I focus on how the theories apply to implementing an inclusive educational program.

### **Transformative Learning**

Mezirow's transformative learning theory emerged in the field of adult learning in 1978 (Mezirow, 1978; Illeris, 2018). Since the introduction of this theory, there has been a shift in the literature of education towards the idea of transformative learning (Harris, 2008). Mezirow (1978) proposed that as individuals shift in their thoughts to be better, they build a better society (Christie et al., 2015). Transformative learning adds value to other styles of learning by provoking individuals to re-evaluate the validity of their learning often and apply what they have learned in various settings (Mezirow, 1991; Christie et al., 2015).

Transformative learning is a process in which individuals develop meaning from their experiences in childhood and various social situations (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). Mezirow (1997) referred to this mental and social process of learning as involving the way in which individuals understand their experiences. Specifically, this is a process in which individuals transform their habits, thought processes, and perspectives (Illeris, 2018). The process involves individuals understanding the state of reality, how things work, and how to do something measured as a form of learning (Moyer & Sinclair,

2016). Communication with others through language, expression, feelings, and intentions contributes to communicative learning (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016).

Transformative learning encompasses both communicative and instrumental learning (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). This theory addresses what individuals learn and how their learning may or may not lead to improved actions or thoughts (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). Further, the theory can be used to consider what kind of learning may encourage changes in individuals and society (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). According to Mezirow (1997), in order to achieve transformative learning, learners must become aware of their assumptions, experience effectiveness in the discourse, and engage in critical reflection. For learners, this requires sifting through relevant and irrelevant information to arrange what they need, in order of importance, to learn (Wells & Le, 2017). Teachers are encouraged to transfer the beliefs and character of students by modeling transformative learning across disciplines (Harris et al., 2008).

The goal of transformative learning is to assist others by challenging their reactions to initial assumptions (Christie et al., 2015). The aim of fostering this style of learning is to lead individuals to change their actions and assumptions (Christie et al., 2015). Although this theory is frequently used in the field of adult education for sustainability and as a resource for management, the theory continues to evolve (Harris et al., 2008). In recent years, the theory shifted in education from learning for knowledge to learning for transformation (Harris et al., 2008).

In the context of the study, transformative learning is a process whereby YDPS, as leaders, can understand their experiences by linking what they know to how they



know. Transformative learning is achieved through a *bridging-of-ideas* sequence rather than a *hugging* sequence (Harris et al., 2008). A bridging sequence begins with analyzing and thinking, whereas a hugging sequence begins with seeing and feeling before a change occurs (Harris et al., 2008, p. 320). This form of learning has been argued to move beyond knowledge and focuses on connecting theory to implementation (Harris et al., 2008). Platforms for learning may include, but are not be limited to, organizations and environment assessment programs (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). Further, this theory incorporates an understanding of the processes by which skills and conceptual knowledge enhance through the interactions of Extension YDPS and participants (Njiro, 2014). When professionals are being trained, they must be stimulated to learn so that the transfer of learning can occur (Njiro, 2014).

### **Transfer of Learning**

The term learning transfer refers to a process whereby learning that occurs in one context enhances the performance of an individual in another (Christie et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2008). Such transfer is often influenced by several factors, such as the task, the learning style of the individual, the organization, and the social environment (Harris et al., 2008). For learning transfer to take place, the learner needs to experience opportunities to practice the given task and to understand the meaning of the task (Harris et al., 2008). Through such experiences, the learner should be able to link the information learned in one setting to identify pertinent concepts to apply in various ways (Wells & Le, 2017). In this process, the learner can comprehend the root of the presented issue and efficiently transfer the knowledge gained (Well & Le, 2017).

It is imperative not to assume that because learning has occurred, learning application has happened (Njiro, 2014). Perkins and Salomon (1992) confirmed that individuals often do not understand how to apply what they have learned in other settings. According to Njiro (2014), most adults experience learning passively, as their other responsibilities and tasks may easily interfere with the process of learning. Njiro described adult learners as insecure in their decisions due to complicated lives in which ongoing learning is required rather than optional. Further, Njiro noted that there is not one adult learning theory that applies to all individuals. Some learning theories focus on gaining knowledge, whereas others focus on individuals' transformation through the learning process (Njiro, 2014). Transformative learning theory indicates that if individuals are encouraged to gain knowledge to analyze and change their assumptions critically, they can develop the ability to act as directed and in the best interests of society (Christie et al., 2015).

Anderson et al. (2017) described the impact of the transformation of chaperone training to enhance the experiences of youth participating in a leadership program. Anderson indicated that providing comprehensive training made a significant difference in chaperones' success, directly influencing the participating youth's potential. Program leaders realized that investing more in chaperones and preparing them with quality training benefited the chaperones and enhanced program participants' experience (Anderson et al., 2017). The most common training theme associated with chaperones' success was supporting youth through emotional struggles, hardship, and homesickness

(Anderson et al., 2017). Transformative learning theory is used to guide this study, influencing data collection through the selected qualitative research strategies.

### **Inclusion and the State of Education**

An inclusive educational environment is beneficial for all youth (Murphy, 2018). One of the most important values and objectives in the field of education is inclusion (Felder, 2018). There are many known benefits of inclusive education for students with and without disabilities (Murphy, 2018). Such benefits include, but are not limited to, social/emotional growth, positive self-image, stronger relationships, increased acceptance of diversity, and improved academic outcomes for students both with and without disabilities (Murphy, 2018). Therefore, adult education leaders must understand special education and the philosophy of inclusion (Murphy, 2018).

In the mid-1980s, the model of general versus special education (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018) moved toward a unified, inclusive system. This shift toward inclusion resulted from research that suggested that children with disabilities do not require different teaching methods than their peers (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Inclusive education involves the following principles: (a) equal access to an inclusive educational environment; (b) all youth, regardless of their differences, learning together in a group; (c) accommodating individual differences appropriately with curriculum and instructional methods; and (d) providing support as needed with the educational system (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) stated that inclusion is a continuous process in which all individuals within an organization have a presence, participate, and achieve.

According to Yaknich et al. (2019), inclusion occurs when students with disabilities are educated in the standard-setting used for other youth of the same age and supported in a traditional classroom. Moreover, in inclusive education, educators are also supported with access to appropriate tools for instruction (Yaknich et al., 2019). The idea that all children have the right to participate in education is an idea that integrated into the policies of the general education system (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

The formal education system leaders first acknowledged the significance of and need for inclusion within the education system. Youth with disabilities were offered inadequate services and often excluded from educational achievements (Scott, 2017). The IDEA of 1975 led the move toward inclusion in the education field (Yaknich et al., 2019). Although the IDEA led the move towards inclusion, there was and still is an on-going journey towards inclusion that began with the United National Human Rights Statement in 1948 (Azorin & Ainscow, 2020). The United Nations Human Rights Statement included attention to students with special needs and the transformation of educational systems (Azorin & Ainscow, 2020). Supporters of the movement toward inclusion understood that excluding youth is a significant risk factor that renders youth vulnerable and destabilizes their potential for development (Yaknich et al., 2018).

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 ensured that children with disabilities receive an appropriate education and related services designed to prepare them for their future, with supporting improvement resources and programs. IDEA's reauthorization intention was to provide the least restrictive learning environment (LRE) for all students and provide meaningful outcomes (Scott, 2017). Therefore, LREs are environments in

which youth with disabilities are educated in a regular classroom as much as appropriate (Franciso et al., 2020). Unmet learning needs and accommodations in a regular classroom environment would be the most restrictive for youth in a special education class(Francisco et al., 2020). Youth with disabilities are defaulted to receive education in general education, and it is through assessment that youth with disabilities learn in another setting (Fransciso et al., 2020). IDEA and LRE mandate that youth with disabilities are moved to another class if they have a severe disability, and their needs in the general education classroom environment are not met (Scott, 2017).

Youth enjoy numerous benefits from participating in afterschool programs and other youth development programs to prepare for productive futures; however, IDEA (2004) is written as a requirement for public schools to serve youth with disabilities' educational needs. Although schools are required to “enable students to make academic and functional progress in light of their circumstances” through individualized programs, under IDEA, students with disabilities have the opportunity to receive appropriate educational services and may not be excluded (Yell pet al., 2017, p. 2). LRE is used as a guiding principle of IDEA to indicate that students with disabilities are provided the appropriate education as their peers (Scott, 2017).

Through IDEA, states were with assistance to ensure that students receive free appropriate public education (FAPE) and appropriate services (Yell et al., 2017). IDEA and FAPE also require that educators address core academic content, but this focus should not neglect the instructional needs that students may attain through extracurricular activities such as 4-H (IDEA, 2004; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018, Yell et al., 2017).

Involvement in extracurricular activities plays a role in students' development and is important for students with disabilities (Kleinert et al., 2007). For many years, politicians, researchers, and practitioners have endeavored to develop inclusive schools, cultures, and practices; however, there is a lack of diverse topics to develop new forms of interventions (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). New forms of interventions should address activities in the classroom and other areas in or related to school (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

### **Entities of Special Education and Inclusion in Education**

Often special education and inclusion are perceived differently; however, they have been woven together through their history and as they evolved over the years (Francisco et al., 2020). The support for special education declined during the 1930s, which resulted in a “watered-down curriculum” and the formation of special interest groups movements during the 1950s (Francisco et al., 2020, p. 3). However, *Brown vs. The Board of Education* historical cases in 1954 and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s ushered the shift towards mainstreaming classrooms to support individuals with disabilities (Winzer, 1993; Yell, 1998; Yell, 2015). The principle of normalization in 1969 influenced society's views to bridge the gap and enable individuals with disabilities opportunities to participate in society (Nirje, 1985). Inclusion advocates well received the creation of the No Child Left Behind Act; however, this act appeared to have widened the gap between normal students and students with disabilities by forcing unrealistic standards on students with disabilities (Francisco et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Hursh, 2007; Wasta, 2006).

Special education is not just for individuals with disabilities but also for diverse individuals and those at risk (Francisco et al., 2020). There is a benefit for youth with disabilities to access the general education curriculum and classes (Francisco et al., 2020). Normalization ideologies and the humanistic approach dominated the education scene during the 1970s through the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) case as children with mental disabilities were educated and provided free public education in programs similar to regular students (Francisco et al., 2020). This normalization ideology marks another layer in the intersectionality in education and inclusion and led to a shift in contemporary special education and inclusion (Francisco et al., 2020).

Typically special education students are not generally instructed by untrained teachers but by well-trained teachers (Francisco et al., 2020). When the IDEA improved through its reauthorization in 2004, amendments required teachers to obtain special education teaching certification in addition to their license (Francisco et al., 2020). More students were placed in general education classrooms due to only a little over 82% of special education teachers had certification in content areas, whereas general education teachers were certified in specific content areas (Francisco et al., 2020; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Another contradiction to the latest IDEA version is that most general education teachers are not fully knowledgeable of special education or inclusion provisions (Francisco et al., 2020). Many teachers identified as not being properly educated to serve youth with disabilities (Sloik, 2018). Support services, trained

educators, and curriculum modifications are all variables that contribute to the successful integration of youth with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Francisco et al., 2020).

### **Factors Related to the Lack of Appropriate Trainings**

Although there is research on how inclusive education practices prevent the exclusion of youth with disabilities, a common barrier has been the lack of professional training and/or appropriate implementation strategies to ensure inclusion occurs for youth with disabilities (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). According to Sloik (2018), insufficient training for the teacher and the field of education impedes authentic inclusion. The most common misconception for inclusion is that inclusion place youth with disabilities with youth that do not have a disability (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). This misconception is now interpreted as inclusion, meaning to include all children regardless of disability (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

There is an urgency for trained youth development professionals in the nonprofit sector to implement and facilitate programming for youth with and without disabilities. Additional training is essential for educators is essential (Sloik, 2018). This urgency is based on national projected statistics, which states that by the year 2044, ethnic minority individuals will comprise most of the total population in the United States (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The U. S. population will increase from 319 million to 417 million (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The U.S. Census Bureau (2014) states that changes are expected in the age structure, shifts in racial composition, and shifts in populations' ethnic composition with the overall total population, including the native and foreign-born populations. These projected population statistics show that professionals who work with



youth, with and without disabilities, must be trained and prepared for population group shifts.

Public sector youth development or education programs are operating from the guidance of IDEA to provide inclusive education, but private-sector programs, under the Americans Disabilities Act (ADA), are mandated to take measures to accommodate persons with disabilities (Cole, 2017). The IDEA is a law with four distinct parts to improve the education of children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). Under Part A's general provision, Congress found that improving education for children with disabilities is an essential element to support equality opportunities (IDEA, 2004). The IDEA stated that children with disabilities have access to the appropriate education and emphasized related services designed to prepare them for their future by supporting the improvement of resources and activities provided.

The principles set forth by the IDEA are adaptable and are encouraged to be used by the private sector, and specifically any private sector and nonprofit organizations (IDEA, 2004). Through implemented changes, Extension Programs have begun to provide training for employees to design and implement inclusive strategies in their programming (LaVergne, 2015; Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). Land Grant Universities to improve access for all; therefore, extension values diversity and serving individuals with a disability (Angima et al., 2016). Formal education considers inclusion as a key element in education (Mouton & Bruce, 2013). Inclusion is also key in nonformal education settings, such as community, afterschool, and 4-H programs (Mouton & Bruce, 2013).

Just 14 years after IDEA (2004), school leaders reported the lack of knowledge and skills available to effectively oversee quality inclusive special education programs under their supervision (Murphy, 2018). The lack of knowledge and skills to oversee inclusive programs represents one issue for addressing so that youth with special needs/disabilities have access to an education curriculum that aligns appropriately with standards of education (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Therefore, for the educator to implement the curriculum, professional development is among the essential elements that require immediate attention (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). However, another concern for educators is the lack of resources necessary to serve youth with disabilities (Scott, 2017). The educational leader cannot expect to perform their roles if training, clarity of roles, and the understanding of inclusive education programs lacks (Murphy, 2018). In-servicing or professional development is necessary for educators when they are unprepared to serve students with disabilities (Sloik, 2018).

As school leaders need adequate training to perform effectively, there is an additional need to train other adult leaders serving youth with disabilities (Murphy, 2018). The training of the YDPs to work with youth with disabilities is key to the success and effectiveness of the program (Murphy, 2018). With Extension YDPs entering the career field with diverse degree backgrounds, Extension administrators were challenged to develop comprehensive training programs (Argabright et al., 2019). Over the years, much work has been put into providing and assessing the competencies of Extension YDPS that are essential for their roles (Argabright et al., 2019).

The training of YDPs may assist with the individuals' perception of inclusiveness and its importance in the success of programming (Murphy, 2018). The school leader's perceptions of inclusion directly affect others, including other teachers, students, and the parents' attitude towards inclusion (Murphy, 2018). It is essential that the example of IDEA (2004) for the public sector and the application of its principles in private, nonprofit programs ensures the inclusion of youth with disabilities in their educational programs.

Training programs developed for educational professionals to work with youth with disabilities creates an atmosphere of inclusion and belonging for the youth (Biederman & Mills, 2014). The professionals and volunteers who work with this population at a personal level are also the ones who may identify barriers to diversity inclusion within a program (LaVergne, 2013). School leaders, who support educators effectiveness in educating students with disabilities in inclusive settings, have been linked to successful inclusive education programs (Murphy, 2018). Inclusive classrooms are a team effort that also includes teachers, students, parents, and other community professionals (Sloik, 2018). Such programs create positive cultures, are likely to increase educators' efficacy, and increase student achievement (Murphy, 2018).

Youth and adults engage in 4-H programming are diverse in many ways (Moncloa et al., 2019). However, such diversity potentially presents challenges and opportunities, specifically working with youth living with a disability (Argabright et al., 2019). Biederman (2014) discusses how a little training goes further than expected while working with youth with a mental and/or physical disability. Training goes beyond the

expectation of creating an atmosphere where youth feel valued and supported (Biederman, 2014).

YDPs understands the significance of training and the need for further education that focuses on diversity and inclusion in the 4-H program (Sumner et al., 2018). Programs offered to than one group with a different background have the ability to alter the overall more experience of the program (Sumner et al., 2018). Therefore, YDPs must effectively develop 4-H programs focused on diversity and inclusion as the programs emphasize diversity and inclusion in its positive youth development efforts (Sumner et al., 2018). The 4-H program creates a diverse community intending to develop the skills and attitudes of youth participants.

The purpose of positive youth development programs (i.e., 4-H) is to emphasize all youths' potential and cultivate their strengths and skills to thrive in life (Sumner et al., 2018). A core value of the 4-H Youth Development Program is to create environments that are supportive of all youth regardless of the disability (National 4-H Council, n.d.). It is emphasized through the 4-H program the program staff is to provide opportunities to youth from all backgrounds and abilities (Mouton & Bruce, 2013). Their efforts to adequately train staff to meet the needs of youth with disabilities are essential (Mouton & Bruce, 2013). It is recognized, all over the world through the 4-H program, that diversity and inclusion are part of the essential elements of positive youth development (Sumner et al., 2018).

The national statistics have projected that by the year 2044, the makeup of minority individuals will consist of much of the U.S. population (Colby & Ortman,

2015). Therefore, Extension YDPs are encouraged to develop programs and have them implemented before the year 2044, so adjustments can be made to improve and enhance youth programs with disabilities. Not only does the 4-H program have an opportunity to take the lead in training youth with inclusive programs for other minority groups (e.g., youth with disabilities), but the programs offered must be developed to train other youth leaders responsible for youth development (LaVergne, 2013; Lavergne, 2015). Providing content-related adaptations reinforces the program's intention to develop youth participants' skills and attributes into contributing members of society and ultimately enhance the program's youth development facilitation (Sumner et al., 2018).

### **Perceptions and Attitudes of Extension YDPs**

Over the years, there has been an increasing focus on providing adequate inclusive services for disabled youth across the nation (Murphy, 2018). According to Kelly (2017), changing the perceptions, practices, and institutions to incorporate individuals with disabilities into programs creates a starting point of a future marked by diversity, complexity, and fluidity. Kelly (2017) further suggested that the starting point goes beyond accommodating to envisioning a different world entirely. Therefore, the future would relieve those disabled from the restraint of continuous self-advocating to be included (Kelly, 2017). Although the vast majority of Extension and 4-H professionals viewed disability inclusion positively, these views were not held universally (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). According to Taylor-Winney et al. (2019), barriers to inclusion within the 4-H program included the lack of information for the education providers and lack of training provided on inclusion strategies to work with disabled youth. However,

overall, Extension professionals believed that youth with disabilities could be productive members of their communities (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). These professionals believed that 4-H would benefit youth with disabilities as the program could help them improve in areas like their academics (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019).

Lyons et al. (2016) noticed themes of inclusive instructional practices, processes for transformation, and other challenges related to implementing an inclusive approach. A large of literature outlines inclusive teaching methods and guidelines for teachers (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2017). Therefore, literature is readily available to teach and support children within general education classrooms and schools (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2017, p. 806).

According to Yaknich et al. (2019), inclusion is among the guiding policies for traditional educational systems and, more recently, for nontraditional education settings considered. Because of the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), many organizations and schools to evaluate and report that their knowledge and ability to implement effective inclusive programming is lacking (Abernathy, 2012; Ball & Green, 2014; Praisner, 2003; Williams, 2015). For example, programs such as 4-H that are not necessarily bound by IDEA (2004) nevertheless embraced and attempted to practice inclusive strategies in their organization (Sumner et al., 2018). Murphy (2018) argues that one of the most significant indicators of successful inclusive education programs is directly related to the leader's (positive) attitude towards inclusion. Therefore, how the leader perceives inclusion directly affects the perception of the student, parents, and other educators (Murphy,

2013). This perception could potentially impact the culture of the organization (Murphy, 2018).

Rajovic and Jovanoic (2013) found that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education often reflected the lack of time, skills, and training. With few training programs available to school leaders and even less offered to Extension professionals, additional attention may need to be focused on providing educational leaders (out-side the classroom) with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to enhance inclusive programming (Murphy, 2018). Many Extension programs have sought methods to provide additional programming to a diverse audience, including an even greater need to provide programmatic efforts to accommodate youth with disabilities (LaVergne, 2015).

Extension administrators have noticed that a majority of the YDPs may have received (some form of) diversity/multicultural training to ensure they are appropriately trained to promote and implement inclusive programming (LaVergne, 2015). However, only approximately 18% received training after finishing secondary school (LaVergne, 2015).

Researchers have discovered that Extension YDPs found working with disabled youth challenging yet recorded positive perceptions and believed that youth being served benefited from inclusive activities (LaVergne, 2015). However, more specifically to the 4-H program, YDPs are uncertain that the programs create an appropriate environment conducive to including youth with disabilities (LaVergne, 2015). Several factors may influence the feelings of isolation from youth with disabilities (Willis et al., 2016). Eliminating feelings of isolation, an environment or setting must be created that engages the youth's desire to be engaged in the community and leisure activities, which are

imperative when experiencing isolation (Willis et al., 2016). Willis et al. (2016) described the attributes of an appropriate setting as one that can create experiences necessary for positive development. Willis'et al. (2016) idea extends further to acknowledge that the role of supportive (adult) relationships and settings can increase the positive outcome of youth development.

Also, the YDPs reported the need for training of various disabilities and methods to ensure an inclusive environment (LaVergne, 2015). The “lack or deficiency” in training and education to provide quality inclusive programs is a weakness of staff practices to appropriately accommodate youth with a disability (Mouton & Bruce, 2013, para. 18). Yaknich et al. (2018) suggest how this lack of specification negatively impacts the YDPs’ competence to positively develop the skills of youth participating in the program.

Although a vast majority of YDPs have a positive attitude toward inclusion, youth with a disability are less likely provided adequate accommodations while participating in an activity (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). A substantial variation in the study charged this assessment to the scarcity of inclusion trainings provided to staff (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). The training needs of the YDPS, to serve youth with disabilities, were proportionate to the availability of resources (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). As many programs campaign for resources, the YDPS workforce must also be prepared to operate in an environment to achieve the greatest impact in youth served (Argabright et al., 2019). The professional development process of the YDPS is critical for a more significant impact of the youth being served through the program. (Argabright et al.,



2019; Anderson et al., 2017). The ability for the YDPS to interact effectively with all youth, regardless of their ability and background, is identified by the National 4-H Headquarters as a core competency (Moncloa et al., 2019).

In an effort to increase the YDPS's ability to effectively work with a diverse group of students, understanding training and strategies for successful inclusion programs is imperative (LaVergne, 2015). As more programs are provided by YDPS to a diverse population of youth, there is a growing need for hands-on training workshops that are effective in assisting the YDPS to become more sensitive to the practical learning needs of youth with disabilities (LaVergne 2015). Moncloa (2019) suggests that embracing diverse and inclusive programming begins with building competence for this component as it is essential to support the development of youth and the organizational change towards inclusion. As competency increase among the professionals providing services to youth, through appropriate training, it results in effective services for youth and success for the program (Yaknich et al., 2018). Elements of the program's success include having a well-prepared workforce of educators and open to inclusive programs to understand that these are being developed for youth with disabilities (LaVergne, 2013).

### **Influence of Extension YDPS**

A significant effect of the Extension Professional revolves around their understanding that their competency should align with and in use to reflect Extension's future ability as a professional (Argabright et al., 2019). Extension Professionals understand that when participation barriers diminish from programs, access to new learning is enabled, a consensus in the community is developed, and a positive

environment can be created (McKee & Bruce, 2019). Other studies have described that creating diversity among 4-H participants enhances the program's ability to facilitate the skills and attitudes youth need to succeed (Ingram, 1999; LaVergne, 2013; Sumner et al., 2018). Therefore, developing inclusive educational environments are prioritized (McKee & Bruce, 2019). Historically, prioritizing this type of environment has not always occurred, causing Extension Programs to fall short when providing educational programs to individuals with disabilities (McKee & Bruce, 2019).

With increased professional development opportunities, and it being an area to improve, the program leaders and/or administrators must select professional development trainings that incorporate principles of effective inclusion (Murphy, 2018). However, it is the leaders' positive perceptions toward inclusion that aids in fostering a positive change (Murphy, 2018). The school leaders (and adult leaders) of a program are the influencers; therefore, they have the power to truly transform students of all ability levels (Murphy, 2018). According to Murphy (2018), leaders are one of the largest influencers of how successful or unsuccessful inclusive programs will be. The impact of the program is based upon the leaders' willingness to continue to build their transformational leadership skills to meet the needs of youth (Murphy, 2018).

### **Effects of Inclusive Programming**

There is a substantial amount of literature regarding inclusive tools and guides as effective for classroom educators (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Similar studies carry common themes of effectiveness that include, but are not limited to, a clearly defined vision, collaboration among colleagues and administrators, and quality training

opportunities (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). The effects of inclusive education encompass the physical, social, and psychological (specifically for community organizations) breadth of educational programming. (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Many elements contribute to meaningful experiences at the physical, social, and emotional levels for youth, both with and without disabilities. (Willis et al., 2016). The (meaningful) participation in out-of-school activities is one of the most significant elements associated with the experiences for an inclusive program (Willis et al., 2016). Therefore, what the individual defines as meaningful is at the discretion of the individual and the method in which participation occurred (Willis et al., 2016). The literature acknowledges the role of supportive adult leaders using inclusive methods to build rapport and create environments to promote successful experiences of inclusion (Willis et al., 2016).

Although the idea of a united inclusive education system took off in the mid-1980s (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018), all programs (specifically some 4-H programs) were not a part of this blended educational system. Mouton & Bruce (2013) describes the movement toward inclusive 4-H programs and the need for practices to train staff expeditiously to serve youth with special needs. The authors indicated that the 4-H program ranked lower in its response to diversity and ability to provide programming based on participants' developmental needs, versus other youth development programs serving youth with disabilities. Lower responses were rooted in several factors, with the lack of providing staff quality training and education being a common hindrance to a successful inclusive camping program (Mouton & Bruce, 2013). Several years after the educational system implemented a unified inclusive system study indicated that youth

with disabilities who were included in educational instruction fared as well or even better than their peers (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). The effects of inclusive programming are beneficial, as inclusive programs create meaningful experiences, promote critical social skills, enhance the 4-H program, and benefit the entire community (LaVergne, 2013; Sumner et al., 2018; Willis et al., 2016).

Positive youth development programs, like 4-H, are essential to the well-being of youth because their core values provide opportunities for youth development (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). The 4-H program's most prominent skill is to engage with diverse individuals and build rapport with the individual within their community (Moncloa et al., 2019). Extension Professionals and 4-H program leaders reported that the inclusion of youth with disabilities in programs is beneficial, in many forms, to youth with and without a disability (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). The program's perspective is to support and accentuate youth's abilities and skills for them to flourish and be productive in their communities lifelong and not temporary (Sumner et al., 2018).

4-H program leaders understand that by creating a diverse audience of participants, the program enhances its ability to cultivate the attitudes and skills among youth involved in the activities (Sumner et al., 2018). The program's goal is to facilitate the essential element of diversity and inclusion for youth and adults through an inclusive program (Sumner et al., 2018). Adult leaders identified an important element of 4-H programming that included diversity and inclusion (Sumner et al., 2018). These elements helped the youth develop and keep an openness to inclusion throughout the program (Sumner et al., 2018).

### **Methodological Considerations**

This dissertation employed a basic, generic qualitative design using Extension professionals' interviews to assess the various experiences working with youth with disabilities. The targeted Extension professionals are designated employees who are responsible for the design and implementation of a youth development program, which includes youth with a disability. The qualitative study focuses on Extension educators' experiences who design and implement strategies for special needs youth participating in traditional 4-H programming. Conducting a qualitative study supports that the results expand on the knowledge base of the phenomenon and provide a foundation for evidence-based practice (Holt et al., 2017). Therefore, the results are not subjected to narrative review as the results are combined, integrated, and synthesized (Holt et al., 2017).

Kelly's (2017) study used three main methods, which included key informant interviews. The qualitative research approach was useful for in-depth data collection as the participants were selected if there were an established relationship and a diverse audience (Kelly, 2017). Information collected, which included, but were not limited to, the geographical scope, mission, mandate, and key activities, generated general descriptions (Kelly, 2017). In an Oregon State University (OSU) study (Angima et al., 2016), employees were surveyed through an online tool to address language, vision, and hearing challenges. Although the survey tool contained 42 questions, seven questions guided the research needs assessment (Angima et al., 2016). The purpose of the study conducted with OSU Extension faculty and staff was to understand clients' prevalence of

challenges with language, vision, or hearing (Angima et al., 2016). However, this generic qualitative study design documents the experiences of Extension YDPs and their applied training methods to implement inclusive youth development programs.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review connected the findings from previous studies, the transformation of inclusion in education settings, traditional and nontraditional, the impact on youth served, and the success of the program. Extension programs have started making additional efforts to ensure staff are trained to work with diverse populations and implement effective programming. In more recent years, literature regarding the need for training has been increased significantly; however, there is limited knowledge outlining implementation practices and the correlation to the success of the 4-H program and/or youth.

In Chapter 3, I explore the methodology, data collection, and analysis. The method of inquiry is a basic qualitative design. The selected methodology allowed for exploring Extension YDPs knowledge and skills they used to implement inclusive 4-H youth development programs.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

Youth with mental, physical, emotional, or behavioral disabilities benefit from being included in extracurricular activities that adhere to the IDEA guidelines (2004). The professionals who work with youth with disabilities benefit from training as they offer programs and implement extracurricular programs to accommodate the youth. I used the qualitative design to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of 4-H Extension YDPs who have been trained to design and implement youth development programs that include youth with mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral disabilities? By using this method, I captured information from the YDPs' using interviews to establish what was lacking or linking in the study.

In this basic, qualitative study, I interviewed and documented the perceptions and experiences of the 4-H Extension YDPs in Georgia who have received some form of training and offer 4-H programs to youth with disabilities and their described experiences applying their training to the method of program delivery. The data were analyzed simultaneously with the collection, and the results was placed in a narrative text describing the experiences of the YDPs. I examined the experiences, perceptions, and strategies mentioned by the study's participants. Examples included their perceptions and descriptions of experiences with program designing, marketing, and planning. Extension educators, specifically eight Georgia 4-H County Extension YDPs interviewed for the study. Data collected from the selected participants included interview responses and actual program choices that were implemented after the Extension YDPs completed

training to work with youth with disabilities. The Interview questions focused on the Extension YDPs descriptions of their perceptions and experiences of the program design and implementation process.

This chapter includes an introduction and justification of the selected methodology. Data interpretation, background information for developing the research question, sample participants, sampling frame, geographic location, instrumentation, interview questions data sources, data collection, dependability, credibility, transferability, trustworthiness, data analysis plan, and methodology conclusion were also included in this chapter.

### **Methodology**

I used a basic qualitative design to analyze the perceptions and experiences of YDPs implementing an inclusive 4-H program for youth with and without a disability. I examined the YDPs experiences applying learned skills from training focused on working with youth with disabilities. I examined their overall experiences working with youth with disabilities in a 4-H youth development program.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I selected the generic, qualitative approach as most suitable for this study. According to Percy (et al., 2015), the generic, qualitative seeks to discover reports of the participants' attitudes and reflections of their perceived experiences of other things externally. Through a basic, qualitative design, the researcher discovers the study's participants' perspective and identifies recurring patterns or themes from an interview



(Percy et al., 2015). The selected basic, generic qualitative study is a common form of qualitative research for the field of education (Caelli et al., 2003).

This study does not fit the selection of other qualitative methodologies. Methodologies not suitable for this study included phenomenology, case studies, and participatory methodologies. Phenomenology studies purpose is to explore a phenomenon, and data are collected through interviews (Alase, 2017). The study aims not to find a theory (Alase, 2017). Furthermore, a case study is not applicable to this study. Through this study, I explored multiple experiences, searching for common themes among the experiences versus the analysis of a single experience. It was desired that this study creates a change in (positive) experiences for YDPs implementing inclusive programs, the ultimate goal of the study is to share the experiences with the body of knowledge. This study does not evaluate the change in YDPs experiences due to the selected research process, as described by Caelli (et al., 2003). A qualitative study with homogenous samples produces greater generalizability in comparison to other studies (Holt et al., 2016). As a generic qualitative study expands the knowledge base, and provides evidence-based practice, data can be combined, integrated, and synthesized (Holt et al., 2016).

By using a basic qualitative design. I discovered participants' perspectives and understandings as their underlying goals (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The generic qualitative studies exhibit some form of qualitative study characteristics; however, this design emphasizes several approaches or has no claim to one approach (Caelli et al., 2003). Specifically, through this study, there is a focus on understanding multiple

transformative theories and their relation to YDPs experiences implementing inclusive programs. For this study, the human problem was ascribed as the deficiency of training provided for Extension YDPs. The YDPs worked to develop youth with and without disabilities in inclusive programs.

According to Caelli (et al., 2003), the basic, qualitative design focus is to understand the experiences, specifically for this study, the experiences of YDPs implementing inclusive youth development programming. Therefore, I selected the basic, qualitative design to answer the research question and explore the experiences of YDPs. Through this study, I sought to understand the expressed opinions of the Extension YDPs working in the 4-H program with youth who have disabilities that may have mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. This research study developed into a completed narrative text format.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this study, I focused on eight Georgia counties in the South that have established 4-H programs. South Georgia was the selected area, as rural areas offer fewer extracurricular resources and activities for youth with or without disabilities. My role as the researcher included interviewing eight Extension YDPs to collect, analyze, and interpret the study's data. I analyzed the findings by writing a description of the questions and interviews in an informative manner after summarization occurred. The shared experiences collected from interviewed participants were used to analyze and determine shared themes among the YDPs.

Participants were contacted for this study based on recommendations from the District Extension office. The selected eight participants' previous training experience with youth came from working as educators in school systems or some other youth training experience in other programs or jobs at other locations. As the facilitator for the study, I did not have a personal relationship with the participants or serve in a supervisory or management role for the participants. However, some of the selected participants served in the same job capacity with a similar job description as I did, but the participants were employed at a different geographic location.

The study was conducted within research guidelines set by Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the agency. Scope and data gathering are two facets of the credibility component that helped me stay focused and minimize biases. For consistency, each participant was asked the same question, and validity was promoted as each participant had the opportunity to review their transcript of the interview. Biases were managed by asking participants the same-order quality questions to each participant without creating question-order bias.

The participants for this study were 4-H Extension YDPs located in an area of South Georgia. The selected YDPs worked in a county Extension office. The Extension YDPs are usually the only or primary professional responsible for the 4-H youth program in their assigned county. YDPs start the 4-H calendar year following the county's local public school's schedule (i.e., August – July) to sync with the students served through the 4-H program. The Extension YDPs have college degrees and have been in other professional jobs prior roles with the 4-H program. Some YDPs may have training

experience from local churches or school sites. The Extension YDPs have established a relationship with the students they are training and working within the 4-H program.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau of 2018, Georgia's overall population consists of approximately 59% White, 30% Black, and 11% Hispanic and Asian American (U. S. Census, 2018). These statistics are approximately the same per county in the state of Georgia and differ in smaller percentages by race in counties in the south of Georgia. The statistics are meaningful for this study because when counties have smaller populations, typically fewer opportunities are available for youth with or without disabilities. Therefore, the 4-H program is vital for the counties with smaller populations and fewer opportunities for positive youth development.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

For this study, eight participants were used due to a limited number of extracurricular opportunities made available to youth in this geographical area of Georgia. The eight participants were located at different geographical locations, each of which is physically 100 miles or less from the others. Time was a factor of consideration when arrangements were made for each participant. This time consideration provided for setting appointments was based on participants' schedules and the Extension office days of operation. Interviews were completed within 30–45 minutes. Consideration of time was also given in the possibility that a participant had to be replaced while the study is being conducted, and the process would have to start over with a new participant. In the event of a new participant introduced to this study, notations in the study would indicate

the change and new participant. Each participant had a designated site location, and the participant received a follow-up time for their scheduled interview.

### **Instrumentation**

Interviews were the tool of instrumentation used for the purpose of this study. Interviews were conducted to establish rapport, identify and confirm qualifications, answer the questions, establish an individual schedule based on each participant's time, secure and cement the participation with the YDPs, and review privacy concerns. I produced a strategic set of questions to ask each participant, and the questions are listed in a later section of this study. The selected questions were influenced by literature sources and other pilot studies to extract information from the participants who share their experiences serving youth living with a disability in their 4-H youth development programs.

The eight participants' interviews adhered to the basic qualitative design of credibility and data gathering, as mentioned by Roller & Lavrakas(2015). Interviews for a qualitative design study must produce significant knowledge on a firm ethical basis, and the knowledge must be useful (Olson, 2016). The researcher should also be able to initiate and conclude an interview, ask relevant questions during the interview, know how to transcribe and analyze, and know how to code the interview with details for later use (Olson, 2016).

Before an interview process can be used as an instrument in a basic qualitative design study, it is recommended that the researcher understands their own standpoint regarding the topic (Olson, 2016). The researcher's standpoint is interpreted as being

neither right nor wrong (Olson, 2016). However, the standpoint must be established and acknowledged because this influences every aspect of the study, from the development of the topic to the end of the study (Olson, 2016).

Some of the questions considered prior to developing questions for the study included: (a) how will this study contribute to the body of knowledge for the field of Extension YDPs? (b) why is this study important? (c) what are my experiences in relation to the proposed research topic? (Olson, 2016). The previous questions were considered and potentially helped to understand further the nature (Olson, 2016) of the research question and the importance of the study. Taking the time to reflect and consider the assumptions is significant because both influence the research question, which is the foundation for the study (Olson, 2016).

The emic perspective is the basis for developing the tool of instrument for this study. Several of the questions formed for the interview derived from my previous experiences as a YDPs serving youth with disabilities. In this study, I used the emic perspective because it allows questions to be asked during the interviews. The emic perspective means the interviewer can learn as much as possible about an experience directly from the person who had the experience (Olson, 2017).

By interviewing the Extension YDPs for this study, I gathered knowledge from participants who can adequately describe their experiences and perceptions, develop programs for inclusion, and work with youth with disabilities of mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral issues. There are two perspectives or angles to use when interviewing participants for a study. The two perspectives are emic, the insider

perspective, or etic, which is the outside perspective (Olson, 2016). The emic angle is more suitable for interviews than the etic angle, which is more suitable for quantitative studies in which the researcher uses data and validated instruments (Olson, 2017).

Although several questions were developed with consideration from my previous experiences, the questions were crafted in a format to collect data that contributes to the body of knowledge and provide insight to other YDPs implementing inclusive youth development programming. To ensure that the instrument tool questions were clear, thought-provoking, and would provide valuable feedback for other YDPs, I selected up to two reviewers for the instrument tool. Before implementing the tool of instrument for this study, two non-study participants were presented the opportunity to serve as a review panel of the interview questions prior to implementing the tool of instrument for the study. This panel served as YDPS experts in the field of positive youth development, and they had experience implementing inclusive programming. Recruiting a panel to review the tool of instrument for the study increased validity for the instrument.

### **Procedures of Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted through interviews. I collected the data by facilitating each interview with the participants. First, I identified eight participants who responded to the study's invitation. The selected participants were contacted and scheduled a time to interview for the study. Multiple interviews were completed each week based on the participants' availability, and all data collection was completed within 30 days. Each interview was audio recorded through Zoom and saved to a removable disk. Interviews were recorded to transcribe the interview and write summaries at the

conclusion of each session. Participants were reminded that the interview would be recorded and reminded of the purpose of recording the interview. Follow-up interviews did not occur but would have been available if an interview was terminated early. Participants had the opportunity to request a follow-up interview within 7 days if they desired to provide additional data for the study. If eight participants within South Georgia could not be recruited for the study, plans including going beyond South Georgia boundaries to recruit additional study participants. If additional participants had to be recruited, a document for the change of record would have been included in the study.

The interviewing of participants continued until saturation was reached.

Saturation is a criterion tool in research to determine if the collected data supports the study, and saturation is an indicator to discontinue data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2018). When no additional data developed during collection to form a category or new code for the study, this implied that the category is saturated and saturation has occurred (Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation is reached through interviews when there is enough information to replicate the study, the ability to obtain no additional new information has been attained, and when further coding for the data is no longer practical (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data saturation through the interviewing method varies from study to study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Research suggests asking the study participants the same questions to achieve data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This study includes interviews for data collection; therefore, saturation was evident when the same comment repeatedly occurred (Saunders et al., 2018). Balancing data collection through interviews must be



measured against the concept of rich and thick (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Whereas the concept of rich equated to quality, and the concept of thick equated to quantity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In planning, if I could not reach saturation in the study with the initial selected eight participants, additional interested participants would be contacted to participate in the study. If deemed necessary, I would consider expanding recruiting methods to other YDPs in the state of Georgia. Reaching data saturation is about the depth of the data, not necessarily about the numbers (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data collection through the instrument of interviewing is suggested to have questions structured to facilitate asking multiple participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In this study, eight participants answered structured questions designed as open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to talk freely about their experiences and perceptions or lack of experiences working with programs for developing youths with and without disabilities. Data saturation is not necessarily a negative aspect of a study, nor does saturation have a negative impact on the validity of the data through interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). However, failing to reach saturation within the study impacts the study's validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The collected data were analyzed at the conclusion of each interview session. At the conclusion of each interview, the data from the open-ended questions were summarized and documented for: (a) time, (b) session length, (c) experience of the participant in the 4-H program, (d) and knowledge the participant had from the training prior to working with the youth with and youth without disabilities. Participants had the

opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of their interview if they missed mentioning any other information. If a theme was developed at the conclusion of each data collection session, then the theme was noted for the study and included in the results.

Interview questions were coded and kept confidential. Each participant was assured, prior to the session, interviews are kept anonymous for the participant's privacy and protection. During the interview, each participant was assured that their responses would be kept in strict confidence. These assurances were discussed prior to securing the participants so that the participants would feel comfortable with the interview process. Participant names (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, etc.) was used to replace the actual name of participating YDPs. Data collected was saved to a removable device and stored in a locked cabinet in my home.

When analyzing the data collected from the interviews, summaries were developed and converted into themes. Saldana's (2015) method for coding qualitative research was used to analyze the collected data for the study. One significant theme focused on the training, or the lack of training each Extension YDP has received and when. The length of time between their training and how much training they have received. In some cases, a theme focused on what training is required to serve youth with or youth without disabilities. Analyzing the training theme for the Extension YDPs is critical and will have an impact on the comparison summarization. Each participants' interview was measured for an identified theme and summarized for the outcome of this study. A final narrative text was compiled from all forms of data collection.

In the process of analyzing the collected data from interviews to determine themes of the study, codifying and categorizing was used to determine themes for the qualitative study. Saldana (2015) defined codifying as the process of arranging things in a systematic order to categorize. This is a process that allowed for the information to be grouped and relinked to merge meaning and explanation (Saldana, 2015). The qualitative design structure requires reflection and attention to the language and interpret meaning from the human experience; therefore, recoding can occur (Saldana, 2015). As coding continues, more data may be collected with each review. Saldana (2015) suggested that codes and categories should become more refined. Another aspect of using the basic qualitative design is understanding how the data is interpreted. I selected the qualitative method to use as (a) a tool to interpret the data as purposeful samplings, (b) a collection of open-ended data, (c) an analysis of text images such as pictures, representation of information in figures and tables, and personal interpretation of the findings, which are all informed qualitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, I used open-ended data through questioning techniques and interviews. I analyzed the findings by writing a description of the questions and interviews in an informative manner after summarization has occurred.

Eight participants were contacted for this study based on recommendations from the District Extension office. Recommendations came from the extension coordinators and program development coordinator for the Extension 4-H program familiar with the Extension YDPs. The recruitment flyer for the study was shared with the district YDPs. Interested YDPs called as instructed on the flyer to participated in the study. During the

initial call from the interested participants, I discussed the purpose of the study, the criteria for participating, logistics at their site to conduct the interview, and ethical concerns. Also, I determined their eligibility to participate in the study (i.e., interview). Once eight participants were identified, they were contacted to review the study's details, secured their commitment to participate in the study, and scheduled a day and time to interview the selected participant. Assurances were discussed regarding ethical concerns, anonymity, and privacy of statements.

Since this study focused on a select group of 4-H YDPs interviewed based on their knowledge of the 4-H program and serving youth with and without disabilities, the human element will be significant. The select group of participants, eight YDPs, worked with the 4-H program for a minimum of two years. The two-year requirement is necessary so that the YDPs will have some knowledge of the 4-H program, know the program's history, and have experience working with youth with and without disabilities. Also, within the two-year requirement, the participants would have acquired information about possible changes in the program, improvements, or what is needed to succeed as a 4-H extension professional.

### **Sample Participants**

Prior to interviewing the selected participants, Extension YDPs received an invitation to participate in the qualitative study. Invitations were extended to 4-H YDPs serving counties in rural South Georgia. Invitations were sent through an email. Interested participants were invited to respond to the study's invitation through a phone call to express their interest and commitment to participate in the study. The eligibility of

the participants was determined during the initial interest phone call. Eight eligible interested participants were selected to participate in the study. This selection process was used specifically for purposeful sampling, as the participants are knowledgeable and experienced with the interest of this study (Palinkas et al., 2015). For the interest of this study, the aim (of the study) is to identify shared experiential accounts among the selected participants.

### **Geographic Location**

The study was conducted within Georgia 4-H programs located in South Georgia. More specifically, the study was conducted with YDPs from the 4-H Southwest District of Georgia. Southwest District Georgia 4-H is made up of 41 counties of the 159 counties in Georgia. Interview locations were held via a web conferencing format (e.g., Zoom).

### **Interview Questions to be Asked**

The following is a list of questions that were used with each selected participant for this study. The questions were developed not to identify the participant but be able to extract the information needed to conduct this study. The developed list of questions focuses on training, experiences, and program implementation practices. Selected questions are influenced by literature sources and other pilot studies to extract information from participants who shared their experiences serving youth living with a disability.

1. Describe your role as a youth development professional with the Georgia 4-H program.

2. What has been your experience working with youth who have a physical, mental, or social disability?
3. Describe your training experience to work with youth who have a disability and those without a disability in settings and/or programs individually and simultaneously.
4. How have you incorporated the (working with youth) trainings into your 4-H youth development programs?
5. How do you ensure that youth with disabilities are offered the same experiences as other participating youth?
6. Describe your experiences working with youth with disabilities in your traditional 4-H youth development programs.
7. Describe your experiences facilitating a nontraditional 4-H program that involved youth with a disability if any?
8. How have you been able to evaluate programs that included youth with disabilities? If so, describe that experience.
9. What has been the impact of your implemented programs that included youth with disabilities?
10. What learned experiences do you use while planning inclusive youth development programs?
11. What learned (inclusive) experiences do you use while implementing youth development programs?

12. Are there specific training needs you have to provide effective programs to youth with disabilities?

In summary, the interview protocol (i.e., questions to be asked) was used as the instrument to collect data. In addition to the customized questions to ask the participants, participants were asked for permission to contact them for a review of the transcripts, which provided accuracy and improved the validity of the study. The information was recorded and summarized to make sure all data collected were for the purpose of the study.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The human element is significant due to the documentation of the experiences and perceptions of the YDPS. Therefore, the basic qualitative design questions must include elements that are considered critical when interviewing (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The critical components are fundamental when designing a qualitative framework, and they include credibility, analyzability, transparency, and usefulness (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Other essential components included are transferability and conformability. These components help identify the study's strengths and limitations (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015) and guide the researcher during the basic qualitative process (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

The credibility component, or what is known as the trustworthiness of the component, focuses on the outcome of the data (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Credibility refers to the idea that the information is believable and inevitable for the research's quality findings (Connelly, 2016). This component also minimizes the researcher's bias

while providing reasonably known results to be an accurate account of reality within specific parameters (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Two facets of this component help the researcher stay focused on credibility: scope and data gathering (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The scope is the coverage of the target population, which for this study is the Extension YDPs, and data gathering, which is the question and answer validity, along with the interviewer and the observer reliability (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). For this study, to ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study was conducted within research guidelines set forth by Walden University and the participating agency. Participants were involved in providing feedback and reviewing their collected data to ensure accuracy and strengthen the study's validity. Each participant was asked the same question, and validity was promoted by having each participant review their interview transcripts. By having each participant review their transcript, credibility was established as the participants had the opportunity to determine the authenticity of their responses and the transcript.

### **Transferability**

Transferability occurs when the results of the study are useful to others and in similar situations (Connelly, 2016). The study's detailed processes to include the formation of interview questions, method of interview, data collection, and data analysis allow other researchers to replicate and examine this study process. I tried to ensure transferability as I carefully detailed the study processes, considered implications, and suggested recommendations, from the research, for future youth development inclusivity studies. Therefore, this study's content may be used in other districts and states by



individuals exploring the experiences of Extension YDPs implementing inclusive, positive youth development programs.

### **Dependability and Conformability**

Dependability is achieved when the research process is structured in such a manner that it is replicable (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). When a variety of data collection methods are applied, the methods ensure that the topic's interpretation and summary align and connect (Yin, 2014). In an effort to confirm dependability and conformability, I made notes of the interview recordings and transcribed data. Also, participants were allowed the opportunity to review the transcripts from their recorded interviews for accuracy and make modifications if needed. In an effort to prevent bias and ensure confirmability, I checked my notes to verify that the recorded and transcribed data were free of errors (Connelly, 2016).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before conducting the study, the partner agency was contacted for permission to conduct the study. The agency's IRB was notified, and appropriate permissions were requested to recruit participants and conduct the study during the participants' work hours. Once approvals were obtained from the agency and Walden's IRB, recruiting study participants began with the approved IRB documents (i.e., recruitment flyers and consent forms). Assurances of confidentiality and ethical concerns related to data collection and analysis were discussed prior to securing and interviewing the participants. Participants were required to return the consent form via email by the specified deadline. Only one participant was interviewed at a scheduled time during a private and secure

audio session. The session's online link required a unique password to enter the recorded audio interview session. Therefore, no one else had access to watch or hear the participant during their interview.

Selected participants participated in the study at will and had the opportunity to terminate their participation in the study at any time. If a participant failed to complete the study, any recorded information and agreement forms would be securely stored and filed for the required time length specified by Walden's IRB. If a participant withdrew from the study, the withdrawn participant would have been informed of the procedure. Also, the withdrawn participant would have been notified in writing that their responses would not be included in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and did not have any bearing on the participants' employment with the participating agency. There was a low and minimal potential relationship risk. However, I knew the participants of this study because the same participating agency employs me as the participants. Although I was the participants' coworker with similar assigned duties, the participants and I were assigned to different geographic areas within the state of Georgia and the organization. I did not have any authority or supervisory responsibilities over the study's participants.

At the conclusion of each interview, participants had the opportunity to provide feedback and to review their collected data to ensure accuracy. All interview data collected were kept private and confidential. All data collected were saved to a removable device and stored in a locked cabinet in my home. The study's final results were shared with the participants in the format of a scholarly academic poster or an article through the

participants' email addresses. All participants' identities and identifiable factors remained anonymous during and through the conclusion of the study. The names and other identifiable factors were removed from all parts of the study. The study results were made available to the participants by providing a link, and the agency's contact person has access to view the completed and approved research study.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 3 reviewed the key points from Chapters 1 and 2 with an emphasis on the federal law, IDEA (2004), that guides this study. The introduction revealed that inclusion is part of the guide for developing future leadership programs when working with youth with and without disabilities. Emphasis was provided in the introduction regarding the experiences and perceptions of the 4-H participants who must deliver the programs. Chapter 3 also examined that the Extension YDPs were responsible for their youth development programs and activities; however, the YDPs may have had little to no specialized professional development training.

The methodology of the study was identified as a basic qualitative design, with four components, which are the foundation for this design, to include credibility, analyzability, transparency, and usefulness (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The research question was restated from the previous chapter, and the question included the four categories of disabilities for youth as being mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral. The sample participants were identified as the 4-H Extension YDPs, located in South Georgia. The instrumentation was identified as interviews, along with supporting literature for this study.

The data sources were identified as the participants and the interviews. The data collection logistics were explained to include where the data will be collected, who will collect the data, how often the data will be collected, the length of the collection, how the data will be recorded and what will happen if a participant cannot participate. In addition, the explanations of ethical concerns were discussed for the participants to feel comfortable participating in this study. Finally, the plan for analyzing the data, once it is collected, was explained to summarize this study, and a narrative text for review was written.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

Through this qualitative study, I aimed to explore the experiences of Extension YDPs working with youth living with a disability. The research question addressed the experiences of extension YDPs designing and implementing programs that include youth with disabilities. The goal was to explore the strategies currently implemented by the Extension YDPs and increase understanding of their perceived experiences from their work with youth with disabilities. Through this study, I determined factors that contribute to the professionals' and program's success of implemented inclusive programs.

Chapter 4 includes the interview responses and overarching results from the extension YDPs participating in this study. This chapter also includes the demographics of the participants, interview protocol, data collection process, and analysis. Following the details of this qualitative study, the study's analyzed findings were revealed. The credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study are discussed in this chapter.

### **Setting**

Participants were recruited from extension YDPs using purposeful sampling. The recruitment involved sharing electronic flyers with the district extension coordinator and program development coordinator, who shared it with Extension YDPs who were knowledgeable of the 4-H program. Interested participants were instructed to contact me by phone to express their interest and determine if they met the requirement to participate in the study.

As initially proposed, eight participants were selected to participate in the study. The selected participants expressed interest and commitment in the study by responding to me with their agreement to the consent form via e-mail. All eight selected participants met the screening criteria to participate in this qualitative study, which was being assigned Extension YDPs in rural areas of the state. The participants replied with their selected time and day for their virtual interview. The recorded interviews took place virtually using Zoom. Prior to each interview, the participants were reminded of the consent form's details to participate in this study.

### **Demographics**

The sample size for this qualitative study included eight YDPs participants. Compared to quantitative research, typically qualitative research has smaller sample sizes (Moser & Korsjens, 2018). The small number of selected participants were due to a limited number of extracurricular opportunities offered to youth in the designated geographic area. My reason for using a smaller sample size was not to evaluate the program or the Extension YDPs working with youth with disabilities but to share the experiences of the YDPs to enhance the inclusivity practices of the profession.

One requirement to participate in the study was that the participants must have had at least two years of experience implementing 4-H youth development programs. The participants were assigned as a YDPs for the 4-H program (e.g., county extension agent, extension educator, or program assistant). Participants must have had an assigned work location in southwest Georgia. The participants must have also received some form of training to work with youth with a disability.

Of the eight participants, seven were county extension 4-H agents, and one was assigned a 4-H program assistant role. All participants were assigned in their roles within the southwest district of Georgia to work with the 4-H Positive Youth Development Program. Participant 1 (P1) defined her role as “split;” P1 worked as a 4-H agent and family and consumer sciences (FACS) agent for Extension. 60% of P1’s duty was 4-H related, and the remaining 40% percent as a FACS Agent. Participant four (P4) served the 4-H program in a rural area as a full-time 4-H program assistant. The other six participants were full-time county Extension 4-H agents assigned to work in rural counties in Southwest Georgia.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected from eight participants. Due to COVID-19, all interviews were completed through Zoom audio and video recording software. The eight interviews were completed within three weeks. Scheduled interviews allowed for approximately 45 minutes each; however, all the interviews were completed in less than 35 minutes. Participants of the study completed their virtual interviews in their workplace setting. There were no variations in the data collection process from the plan presented in Chapter 3.

Participants were informed in writing and again verbally that the interviews would be recorded and kept confidential. Before the start of each recorded interview, I also informed participants that all identifiable factors mentioned during the recording would be removed to maintain their confidentiality as they participated in the study. Details that would identify participants, such as their name or their work assigned area,

was not be shared. Participants were also reminded of the purpose of the study. They were advised that if they no longer felt comfortable participating in the study, the interview and the recording would be stopped.

Each interview started with a brief message of appreciation for the participants' time and willingness to participate in the study. Participants were reminded of the minimal risk to their safety and well-being as they participated in the study, the procedures of the study, and the number of questions to be asked. Questions asked during the interview were asked based on a responsive interview process recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2011). In the responsive interview process, the participants had the opportunity to speak freely and clarify their thoughts. All participants were interviewed once and were asked the same 12 questions.

Each interview ended with a verbal expression of gratitude for their participation in the study. Participants were also reminded of their incentive gift that would be mailed within 24 hours of the completed interview. As an incentive and gift of appreciation for participating in the study, participants received a \$20 Visa gift card. Gift cards were mailed to the participants' office mailing address in an undisclosed handwritten thank you greeting card. Further, after each interview, the participants had the opportunity to add any other comments or thoughts related to the study. The additional comments could be anything that the participant thought would contribute back to the profession of YDPs and the body of knowledge for Extension YDPs.



## **Data Analysis**

When analyzing the data collected from the interviews, summaries were developed and converted into themes. Data collected from the eight interviews were transcribed immediately following each interview. The transcription was completed using an advanced speech to text recognition software, Temi. Each interview transcription was reviewed for clarity and accuracy before the analysis of the collected interview responses began. Saldana's (2015) method for coding qualitative research was used to analyze the study's collected data. The transcription for each interview was then analyzed for categories to code the data based on the research question.

ATLAS.ti is a tool used to manage text in documents for qualitative analysis, systematically coding through an automated search in a document or multiple documents. The ATLAS.ti can extract meaning from the presented research. Using the ATLAS.ti software, I explored the experiences shared during the interviews to extract YDPs experiences' meaning to merge and arrange codes into categories. This process is known as pattern coding, as the codes are grouped into similar categories (Saldana, 2016). Specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the collected data included: (a) making and providing accommodations, (b) an intricate planning process, (c) YDPs learning in the process, (d) limited on-the-job training, (e) providing access for all, and (f) impactful programming regardless of program's limitations.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In Chapter 3, I addressed how to confirm the study's reliability and validity through selected coding and analysis protocols. As I conducted the study, there were

several processes implemented to establish trustworthiness. The study's credibility was confirmed by minimizing my bias as I focused on the data gathering process. The recording of each interview also enhanced the credibility of the study by permitting the transcription of the recording for participants to review, which allowed participants to determine the authenticity of their responses. All the participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy (see Roller & Lavarkas, 2015).

The collection of participants' narratives is Saldana's (2015) coding scheme I used to evaluate for the analysis process, which is referred to as a quantitative transformation and analysis for qualitative studies. By collecting the participants' narratives, transferability occurred because a connection between the data collected and their expressed experiences contributed additional insights to the study (see Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The outcome and insights of this study will be transferable into other contexts of the profession of YDPs as the study outcomes are shared in scholarship engagement settings (e.g., professional conferences, academic papers, journals, etc.) for other professionals to compare and learn from the participants' experiences.

When others (i.e., professionals) can generalize the knowledge from a study's outcomes and replicate the process, dependability is achieved (Roller & Lavarkas, 2015). Although it is desired that this study creates a change in positive experiences for YDPs implementing inclusive programs, the ultimate goal of the study is to share the experiences with the body of knowledge. A qualitative study with homogenous samples produces greater generalizability in comparison to other studies (Holt et al., 2016). Data collection methods and the application process ensures that the study topic interpretation

and summary align and connect (Yin, 2014). This process is confirmed as other readers are able to follow the processes and procedures for the conduction of the study. Records and reports from the study that include the flyer for participant recruitment, the letter of agreement, consent form, and interview questions are items that readers and users may replicate. The ability to replicate (i.e., apply or transfer) the design features from the study to other context is evidence of confirmability (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

## **Results**

Through this qualitative study, I aimed to explore YDPs experiences implementing inclusive 4-H programs and enhance the body of knowledge for Extension YDPs. Six themes emerged from the interviews: (a) making and providing accommodations, (b) engaging in an intricate planning process, (c) learning in the process, (d) limited on-the-job training, (e) providing access for all, and (f) reputation for having an impact regardless of (program's/professional's) limitations. The themes are based on the description of the experiences expressed by the participants of the study.

### **Theme 1: Making and Providing Accommodations**

Each participant was asked how they ensure youth with disabilities have the same experiences as their peers that do not have a disability. Asking this question helped me to explore their strategies and their perceptions toward implementing an inclusive program. All eight participants expressed how programs and activities are modified and amended to accommodate the youth with a disability appropriately. However, P2 stated, “you’ve got to plan for accommodations... that’s the biggest thing I’ve learned is to plan, think through that... being creative and being flexible.”

Several participants shared their various perceptions on working with differently-abled youth participating in programs whom they had to accommodate. P7 did not refer to the adaptations as accommodations but as an “alternative option” provided for the program’s participants: “It’s not a revision, it’s an alternative option.” Participant 8 (P8) said, “No matter what the disability the kid has, I’ve always felt it was up to me or our staff or office to make adjustments for that child.” According to P3, “they may have a limitation..., but I adapted. They can adapt very quickly. If they are given the opportunity to be themselves among the other kids, it means a lot to them.” P5 stated that youth with a disability are worked with “one-on-one.” For youth with behavior and learning disabilities, P2 shared the importance of making minor adjustments while also “holding youth to the same high standards (of other participating youth) is one way of ensuring that the program is the same.” P4 further emphasized the importance of “remaining flexible” for youth with emotional and social disabilities: “So if it doesn’t work, we change it up, like we do something different. So, they are successful and have a good time. Options are added for some children that want to branch off and do something else.”

Participants shared experiences in which accommodations were made to ensure that youth with disabilities were given the same opportunity to participate in the 4-H activity. P6 made sure “they’re [youth with disabilities] getting the same experience as everybody else.” According to Participant 3 (P3), “they may have a limitation..., but I adapted. They can adapt very quickly. If they are given the opportunity to be themselves among the other kids, it means a lot to them.” Participant 1 (P1) shared experiences of

making adaptations for a youth in a wheelchair who participated in a 4-H forestry judging competition: “We adapted, we just put some tape on the wheel, and the child was able to go through and count how many turns of the wheel instead of walking, and it worked great.” Participant 6 (P6) shared that in 18 years of experience as a YDPs, every youth with a disability was “able to be accommodated.” Additionally, P6 made sure “they’re (youth with disabilities) getting the same experience as everybody else.”

### **Theme 2: Intricate Planning Process**

Although the YDPs repeatedly reported their efforts to accommodate youth to participate and have the same experiences, several revealed that each accommodation is a “case by case situation.” P1 said, “It’s not easy. It takes being physically and mentally challenged, but it can be done. I’ve learned to keep it simple... don’t let their disability overrule their person.” Adding to this, P6 said, “we just got to figure out how to do it... it may take a little bit more time and maybe having conversations with the youth... and make it a safe environment for everybody.”

In the process of figuring it out, several participants shared their experiences seeking assistance from the parents of the youth to ensure that the youth with the disability had the best experience, though some used their own experience. P3 shared, “I will have to say that I get pointers from the parents as well. The likes and dislikes, like of what youth is capable of doing.” Other participants relied on their own previous experiences. P8 said, “I go back to how things happened in the past.” According to P4, developed and ongoing programs are based on previous programs that worked successfully.

Participants also explored being mindful in the planning process to ensure that all 4-H program participants are treated fairly and have an equal chance, so participants are, according to P1 “given the possibility to be successful and to learn something that the average person doesn’t know, that gives them confidence.” P7 stated,

When I plan my events, I know that it really benefits the child with a disability to be a part of it. They will really be appreciative of just being thought of, or even considered to be a part of something.

Although some participants relied on parents’ tips as programs and activities are planned, some other participants of the study relied on their own previous experiences. P8 stated, “I go back to how things happened in the past,”. P4 shared that developed and on-going programs are based on previous programs that worked successfully. P8 further stated that program surprises are not desired, so being prepared is essential: “Now we make sure that we get our kids and families to RSVP for everything because it will give us an opportunity to prepare for a child.” Participants planned not only for program instruction but also for managing distractions, specifically for youth with behavior disabilities. P5 shared that distractions are blocked while teaching, so “I’m teaching the one that are there and wants to be there.” P1 reiterated that youth with emotional behavior disabilities need a lot of affirmation.

All participants shared methods in which they prepared for youth by having program participants register to planning how to improvise when a youth have challenges to achieve success, to ensuring appropriate staff members are strategically placed to assist differently-abled youth when needed. However, only P2 shared experiences in which

strategies and techniques learned from a completed college special education course was implemented as part of the planning process inclusive programs. In the planning process, P2 emphasized the need to “plan it all out,” specifically for accommodations: “The biggest thing that I’ve learned is to plan and think through that. You have to be creative... flexible, but definitely prepared.”

### **Theme 3: Learning in the Process**

The 4-H program has a slogan of “learn by doing”; however, participants shared that they also learn in the process while working with youth with a disability. P3 described it as being “trial and error”: “You may see somethings work and some things do not.” However, the participants shared a work ethic of determination to ensure that youth with disabilities have a successful 4-H experience despite their level of education, training, or experience. Though the education requirements for a YDPs is dependent on their assigned role, 4-H Agents are required to have a master’s level degree with some experience in education or a related field; however, assigned program assistants are not required to have an advanced degree, but may have experience working with youth. Only one participant had an advanced degree to work with youth with learning disabilities and behavioral and emotional disorders along with hands-on experience. Each participant had some form of experience working with youth living with a disability.

As part of learning in the process, participants reported that many of the students with disabilities participate in the 4-H program during in-class instruction. However, each Participant shared experiences of working youth living with a disability in their traditional and non-traditional 4-H programs outside the classroom. Regardless of

whether the youth with a disability were in a classroom setting or an out-of-school program, participants reported that it is imperative to remain flexible. P1 shared that “it (inclusive programming) can be done. You can include every child in some way.” However, according to P3, “you may have to come up with other ideas and plans that would reach that kid in a different way”. Participants shared experiences working with specific disabilities that required the YDPs to incorporate unique strategies of flexibility and creativity. P5 shared that “sometimes you have to go in a different direction for youth with disabilities so they can participate successfully. This gives everybody an opportunity.” P4 shared experiences gardening with youth who have a disability and the physical challenges the program is working to eliminate:

When we bend over out there, that’s hard. But if it’s a kid (with a disability) that wants to, we’re trying to talk with the schools about that ... raising it up where it’s like, they can just reach in – elderly or disabled, or can’t bend over. I guess you just learn by doing.

The participants also revealed that they often take a close look at the lives of youth living with a disability as they build rapport with the youth and their families, which is part of the learning process. P7 referred to the families of youth with disabilities being key. Additionally, parents and family members may become supporters of the other 4-H programs. P6 shared an experience of a family member attending summer camp with a 4-H youth that had a physical disability: “The sister was a big help to each everybody; everybody was learning at the same time.” P4 realized that if parents or other family



members are not involved many times, the youth's immediate needs with a disability would be missed initially:

If that mother had not told me what he had, I would have picked up on it, but it would have taken a long time, and he might have missed out on some things. But I did research, and I knew what he had to do by reading.

P8 shared that while working with youth with social, emotional, and behavioral disabilities, more games are often incorporated into the process to tone kids down. However, P2 emphasized the importance of not announcing a youth's need for an accommodation: "Let them blend in because they want that normal childhood experience. They want to be normal kids... to feel included." An experience shared by P7 revealed that not all disabilities are easily identifiable; therefore, it's important for YDPs to be careful about what is said: "You wouldn't want to make the mistake of saying something, even though it wasn't your intent to harm someone. I made this mistake. Thank God this child still worked with me", said P7.

#### **Theme 4: Limited On-the-Job Training**

Only two participants of the study, P1 and P6, had formal (specialized) training and/or certifications to work with youth with disabilities. However, all participants reported they had little to no training while working with Extension. P1 had a master's degree in special education and experience teaching at a psychoeducational center. P1 was also intentional to keep up teaching certifications by taking additional classes. However, P1 shared a request for the state's 4-H program to provide additional training on its curriculum to be more sensitive to accommodations for youth with disabilities. P3

had some training through a previous work employer. P6 and P8 shared their experience attending an introductory orientation training, Ages and Stages, offered to Extension 4-H agents. “But even that didn’t really focus on kids with physical, mental, or social disabilities, or illnesses”, said P6. Three YDPs, P1, P2, and P7, referenced an Extension Conference in which participants attended a special needs workshop.

Professionally, I have received no training. I think that a lot of our training with my position or with my organization is one-sided... Ages and Stages talk about one type of youth; it doesn’t factor in youth that have a disability, no matter what type it is. I feel like a lot of programming we get training on; there are no modifications added to assist youth with kids who have some sort of disability. So, professionally I have received no training in working with kids that have a disability. (P8)

As a result of the limited amount of Extension training, participants of the study have completed their own research to work with youth with disabilities. Specifically, P4 shared an experience in which the mother had informed her of the (unrecognizable) condition before the event:

I would have picked up on it, but it would have taken a long time, and he might have missed out on some things. But I did research, I knew what he had to do with reading and what she told me... It was just thrown on us, and we basically just had to go with it.

P2 sought additional professional development to work with vulnerable populations through a mental health first aid training. According to P2, this specific

training, “definitely helped with identifying mental health issues.” However, P2 is interested in trainings that are more specific (i.e., physical disabilities):

What are some techniques that you can do for physical disabilities and then another one for mental disabilities, like specific strategies that we can use. I think very specific trainings with specific strategies would definitely be very effective.

P3 was adamant that there is a need for continuous YDPs training to work with youth with disabilities:

You never can get complacent because each kid is different. Each generation have their own identity and their own style, but challenges come with them. I would invest in additional training to better my program and for the benefit of the students. P7 desired a workshop or training that provides “real life scenarios.” Show us what do we need to do when this happens for kids with autism, with ADHD and any type of physical or mental disability... potential things that you need to be doing that’s approved. (P7).

However, P5 was the only participant that did not have a specific need for training: “I just try to promote a positive learning type of climate, embrace the students’ diversity and encourage their interactions.”

### **Theme 5: Providing Access for All**

Extension YDPs mission is to provide programming and access for all; therefore, “we advertise or invite kids to all of the same programs”, said one participant of the study. “We don’t turn any child away. But, if we know that the child has a disability, it is our responsibility to make modifications or adaptations to make sure that they can enjoy

the said activity”, said P8. P1 shared, “we don’t hesitate to offer to take anyone with us that wants to go.” P4 shared, “I just try to work with them and try to get it, if it’s something they need.”

According to P6, it’s the responsibility of the YDPs to “make sure that all these kids have those opportunities, and if they are differently-abled we just got to figure out how to do it”. Several participants of the study collaborated with other neighboring agencies or organizations to create and ensure a successful experience for the program’s participants. The intention of the collaboration is to offer different experiences and provide access to youth who would otherwise not participate in the program.

Participants shared their own experiences of just being different. P7 stated, I know what it feels like to not be included and to feel like I am outside of the circle. Even as adults, we want that belonging, which is a part of the four essential elements of 4-H. I’m mindful and intentional in keeping that in mind. I have to make sure that everybody gets a fair and equal chance.

The other participants of the study’s perceptions often reflected similar thoughts. Participants did not find identifying specific experiences implementing inclusive traditional or non-traditional programs challenging. P5 referred to the question as “strange because I don’t mind working with them. They get the same opportunity as the ones that do not have a disability.”

However, study participants repeatedly shared how imperative it is to be sensitive to youth with a disability and their desire to be “normal kids”. P2 shared, “just try to get them to blend in as much as they can to feel normal, to feel included. P3 practices pairing

the youth with a disability with another youth as a partner for the planned activity. This practice is used to reinforce the sense of belonging, which is an essential element of positive youth development. P8 specifically shared an experience of delivering a cooking program to youth ages 17-18 with a 5th and 6th-grade learning level:

They heard about our cooking classes we did for kids... so I had to change my mindset or adapt,... but as far as delivering the program, we're going to deliver this program. Like we were working with fifth graders. So, it was different for us, but I don't know if we had to change programming much.

#### **Theme 6: Impact Regardless of Limitations**

Although the evaluation methods for each participant of the study varied, their interview responses shared experiences of a noticeable impact on the youth with disabilities and their families, despite the program's or the YDP's limitation. As the study participants repeatedly shared their positive perceptions to work with this youth population, not one participant shared an experience when they could not adequately accommodate a youth. "I haven't really had any youth that we haven't been able to deal with or be able to accommodate or be able to make sure that they're getting the same experience as everybody does," shared P6.

What impact looks like for youth with disabilities and how the impact is determined in 4-H youth development programs, varied among the Participants. "Impact is not necessarily always an impact as a personal... we've had students able to attend camp that would not have normally been able to do things and go through the state," shared P1. P8 shared an impact of implementing inclusive programs and working with

youth with disabilities, which was replicated by another organization. P7 shared that the families of the youth with disabilities have shared the impact of their inclusive program:

The mama said this (4-H program) is all she can do and all she has and all she talks about.... Because she's limited with her range of movement and her immune system, our (4-H) competitions, especially now with it being virtual, are her extracurricular activities that are outside her traditional schoolwork. So, she thinks it's fun. She thinks it's her own thing. And that parent is really appreciative of it.

It was clear from all eight interviews that the YDPs had seen great success through their inclusive 4-H programs. Each Participant ensured that youth with disabilities are presented the same opportunity to participate in the program's evaluation process. P3 shared seeing "more (program) success than failure." However, none of the participants had a specific method or tool to evaluate youth with a disability.

Several participants of the study did not know what evaluation, designed specifically for youth with disabilities, may look like. P2 shared, "I really haven't had that opportunity yet." P7 shared, "I never really thought about looking at the data, like how a child with a disability answered it versus my other youth that didn't have the disability." "I guess it was really just by word of mouth from teachers and administrators wanting us to come back to continue doing some of the things that we did, especially for those that were self-contained", shared P6. However, P3 measures the impact of the program based on the parents. P3 shared an example of how one parent "was very skeptical about whether or not we could attend to their kid or make an impact, but after

they saw how the child comes back and talks about the program at home with them.” P5 shared an experience of impact determined from the participant’s parents:

We had a kid that his parents were basically thought twice about him even going to a day event, and they certainly didn’t want him to attend any overnight events. But his first event with us was like, I think it was a day camp. And when he went back home, they just saw how excited he was, and he didn’t even have an episode. And then after that trip, he was able to do overnight, and he stayed at camp. So, just to see that excitement in that child, we could tell him it was impact in how the mother and the father were excited about it and how they thanked us, and they appreciated us for even involving him into 4-H.

P4 shared experiences of impact when youth with disabilities continue to participate in other 4-H programs. The mother of a child with autism shared with P4:

he would not do anything at school, but he would do 4-H, and he’s gone to H20 Day Camp, summer camp, which I was very proud of him... and he actually wanted to do mini booths and the Albany fair last year and photography, and he won some money with is photography. And she said he does it all on his own. And he was so proud of that, but she said, he’s just comfortable with the (other) kids.

Participants that shared experiences of impact evaluation stated that accommodations are made for youth with disabilities to participate in the overall program’s evaluation. Accommodations included assistance from program staff to complete surveys at the end of a program to additional time offered to complete the

evaluation. “We had one instance where a teacher had to read the survey to the student”, shared P4. Other methods of evaluation of impact included use a suggestion box to evaluate programs for an afterschool program. According to P5, “just going off the different suggestions that the kids put in the box allows me to evaluate impact.” The state’s 4-H program does not have a standard evaluation tool to evaluate programs that included youth with disabilities. P6 stated that the new mental health awareness program for special education classes developed during COVID-19 would be implemented.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the results of the study to the research question. Eight participants of the study shared their experiences implementing inclusive programs and working with youth with disabilities. Study participants also shared the impact of their implemented programs and need for training to work with this vulnerable youth population.

Interviews were scheduled and conducted to collect the data for this study. The response from the interviews was analyzed to code and categorize to discover specific themes for the study. The six themes that emerged from this study included: making and providing accommodations, an intricate planning process, YDPs learning in the process, limited on-the-job training, providing access for all, and impact regardless of limitations. In Chapter 5, I will further explore the six themes that emerged from the collected data. Additionally, I will address the limitations and implications of the study and suggest recommendations for future studies.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Through this qualitative study, I explored 4-H Extension YDPs experiences as they serve youth with disabilities and youth without disabilities simultaneously through inclusive youth development programming. I recruited currently employed Extension YDPs, who had at least 2 years of experience implementing inclusive programs. The recruited participants had also received some form of training to work with youth living with a disability. Through this study, I identified factors that contributed to the successful YDPs experience implementing programs that support inclusivity in their positive youth development programs. This goal of the study was achieved as I examined the trained YDPs' implemented programs' shared experiences and explored the strategies applied in their programs.

Due to COVID-19, virtual interviews were conducted remotely with eight Extension YDPs. An interview guide of 12 open-ended questions was used for the YDPs to share their experiences of implementing 4-H programs that included youth with disabilities. The virtual interviews were recorded, and the responses from each interview were transcribed. Each participant had the opportunity to review copies of their transcription for accuracy and lucidity. Participants of the study made no suggestions of correction to the transcripts. This chapter includes the interpretation of the findings from the study, the connection to the conceptual framework, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and implications for social change.

Through the interviews, participants shared their experiences working with youth with disabilities. This study's findings reflect the information collected during the interview and from literature related to the research topic. Below is the analysis from the conducted study research question.

### **Research Question**

This study had only one research question in which six themes emerged and connected with the literature. Through the research question, I asked about the experiences of trained 4-H Extension YDPs who design and implement youth development programs for youth with disabilities. Themes that addressed the research question related to making program modifications and intentional program planning; however, most participants had minimal opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge to work with this vulnerable population. Despite the lack of professional development opportunities to work with this vulnerable population, all the study participants shared experiences of their implemented 4-H youth development programs that resulted in impact for their programs and 4-H youth. Six themes emerged from interview data: (a) making and providing accommodations, (b) engaging in an intricate planning process, (c) learning in the process, (d) limited on-the-job training, (e) providing access for all, and (f) reputation for having an impact regardless of (program's/professional's) limitations. The themes are based on the description of the experiences expressed by the participants of the study.

Frequently, participants described experiences of learning-on-the job to ensure that their 4-H programs were inclusive and exude an environment that youth felt a

connection to others and the club. The essential elements of positive youth development programming define this sense of connection as belonging (National 4-H Council, 2017). This connection is essential to the overall 4-H experience as it gives participating youth the opportunity to join in a physically and emotionally safe environment. Additionally, youth have the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with other youth and adults (National 4-H Council, 2017).

Participants of the study repeatedly shared experiences of accommodating youth with disabilities by making program modifications, including adapting planning and facilitation strategies to successfully reach youth with disabilities. Several participants emphasized the importance of intentional program planning to serve this population of youth appropriately. Participants shared thoughts that this planning style is challenging at times due to the program's limitations. Therefore, participants frequently developed new programs, improvised and revised current programs and curriculums to create youth development experiences for youth and youth without disabilities simultaneously.

Participants subconsciously recognized their influential powers to transform students of all ability levels as they implemented inclusive 4-H youth development programs. Although the majority of the study participants lacked the continuation of formal training to work with youth with disabilities, the participants were able to transform their programs and activities so that youth with disabilities could experience the benefits of positive youth development programming. Additionally, the participants recognized the need and importance for continued education (i.e., training) to serve this population of youth. Participants identified the learning curve, working with differently-

abled youth, that they must quickly overcome for their 4-H programs' continued success. Therefore, the participants often initiated their professional development growth, researched specific disabilities to have a greater understanding of the youth's abilities, and sought strategic methods and tools to use within their local 4-H programs.

Because the YDPs are influencers of their program, according to Murphy (2018), they recognized their influential powers and transformed the student's ability levels. This is one of the most significant indicators of successful inclusive programs. The impact made within the program and the participants of the program are based on the leaders' willingness to continue to build their transformational leadership skills to meet the needs of youth (Murphy, 2018). The leader's willingness begins with changing YDPs perception of inclusion (see Kelly, 2017). A vast majority of Extension professionals viewed disability inclusion positively and believed that youth with disabilities benefited from inclusive activities and could be productive members of their communities (LaVergne, 2015; Taylor-Winney et al., 2019).

Although studies recorded the positive perceptions of Extension YDPs, some studies found that some YDPs were challenged to serve youth with disabilities (LaVergne, 2015). The challenges faced by YDPs centered around their ability to create an appropriate environment conducive for the youth with disabilities to be successful (LaVergne, 2015). YDPs reported the need for training methods to serve youth with various disabilities to ensure an inclusive environment. Taylor-Winney et al. (2019) attributed the scarcity of training provided to staff to the YDPs ability to be less likely to accommodate youth with disabilities participating in the program adequately. Therefore,

the professional development competence to serve youth with disabilities is essential for a more significant impact on youth and inclusivity within the organization (Agrabright et al., 2019; Anderson et al., 2017; Moncloa, 2019). As the competency level to serve youth with disabilities of the YDPs increase, it results in effective services for youth and program success (Yaknich et al., 2018).

### **Interpretation of Findings**

As inclusive education systems have implemented principles of equal access for all, appropriately accommodating individual differences and providing support, so has the 4-H youth development program. Murphy (2018) identified the many benefits of inclusive education for students with and without disabilities and also shared that the education leaders must also understand special education and the philosophy of inclusion. Although there are many known benefits to youth with disabilities participating in inclusive settings and extracurricular programs like 4-H, educators face common barriers when working with this population of youth. Common barriers include the lack of professional training and the appropriate strategies of implementation to ensure program inclusivity (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

Extension programs have started to design and implement inclusive strategies that follow the principles set forth by IDEA to serve populations with disabilities; however, there is still an immediate need for frequent training, and more inclusive strategies to implement youth development programs continue to diversity and shift. The immediate need for training is for 4-H YDPs and school leaders who have reported the lack of knowledge and skills to effectively supervise inclusive special education programs

(Murphy, 2018). The findings from this study confirmed common barriers other educators face when serving youth with disabilities. Each participant shared their accounts of knowledge barriers and how they, without reservation, overcame barriers to ensure inclusivity within their programs. As individual Extension youth development program staff sought methods to provide additional programming to a diverse audience, the programs have an even greater need to provide efforts to accommodate youth with disabilities (LaVergne, 2015).

The implementation of the YDPs inclusive programs confirmed the benefit of youth with disabilities having access to education curriculum and extracurricular resources; however, according to Sloik (2018) just as many teachers identified that they are not properly educated to serve youth with disabilities, the YDPs participants of this study also identified this concern. This study also confirmed how educators continuously pursued to develop inclusive cultures inside and outside the classroom. Participants of the study serve as an extension to classroom educators to educate youth and provide enrichment and educational opportunities. Specifically, P2 sought additional professional development to work with vulnerable populations through a mental health first aid training.

Each YDPS participant shared experiences of their innovative techniques to implement inclusive activities so that youth's abilities are accentuated. Other studies have described that creating diversity among 4-H participants enhances the program's ability to facilitate the skills and attitudes youth need to succeed (Ingram, 1999; LaVergne, 2013; Sumner et al., 2018). The participants of this study identified that having diversity

and inclusion in their programs are essential to the program's success. Participants subconsciously recognized their influential powers to transform students of all ability levels as they implemented inclusive 4-H youth development programs. Participants shared experiences of promoting positive and safe learning environments, embracing youth's diversity and methods to encourage their participation and interactions with others.

### **Connections to Conceptual Framework**

I derived the conceptual framework for this study from Mezirow's transformative learning theory. The concept of Mezirow's transformative learning theory is how learners comprehend their learning experiences to influence that experience. According to Mezirow (1997), transformation occurs through critical reflection and the change of habits with the mind or perception. Over the years, transformational theories have been associated with implementing academic program inclusivity (Murphy 2018). Additionally, the transformational theories have contributed to creating cultures of positivity in an academic program and increasing effectiveness for the facilitator and the student learner (Murphy 2018). Hence, this is the reason I selected this conceptual framework for the study.

By conducting this study, it did not determine the YDPs competency level from their training; however, this study identifies strategies and concepts YDPs used to implement inclusive 4-H programming. By using Mezirow's theory, I gained further understanding of the YDPS interpretations of the training received, how they applied their knowledge, and how their interpretations contributed to their programs' success.

Through the qualitative study design, I was allowed to investigate the YDPs experiences through reflective thoughts shared during the study Participants' interviews. By using the qualitative design, I discovered participant's perspectives and identified transformative patterns from the collected data.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were limitations of the study that were expected and occurred. There were several initial limitations and other limitations that arose from the execution of the study. An online recording software was used to conduct the interview due to COVID-19 shelter-in-place ordinances and social distancing requirements.. The participants' interviews occurred during their work hours in their assigned work location to maintain an authentic interview experience for participants. Although the participants were assured of the confidentiality by participating in the study, I could not control the participant's environment where the recording took place.

Other limitations included the design of the study. Participants were required to have some form of training to work with youth with disabilities; however, their competency level from their received training could not be determined. Determining the study's participants' competency levels from their received training was a limitation of the study design. Additionally, all participants did not receive the same amount or level of training to facilitate and implement programs that included youth with disabilities. There was no guarantee that all study participants had received the same type and level of training to work with youth with disabilities. The limitations mentioned, specifically



regarding the transferability of learning for the YDPs, were weaknesses of the conceptual framework beyond my control.

### **Recommendations for YDPs**

The research study conducted is my account of the experiences shared by Extension YDPs implementing inclusive, positive youth development 4-H programs. Additional research should explore and examine the impact of training and lack thereof for Extension YDPs and the elements of impactful inclusive 4-H youth development programming.

#### **Recommendation One: Frequent Opportunities for Training**

One recommendation from the finds is to consider offering frequent training (i.e., to serve youth with disabilities) for Extension YDPs as a future research study. Often, YDPs are not required to have prior training before working with vulnerable populations. However, YDPs works with diverse populations and vulnerable groups to include youth with disabilities. There is an urgency for YDPs to be trained and prepared for population group shifts expected by the year 2055 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). This study revealed that it is not common for YDPS to participate in frequent training to serve youth with disabilities. The work-related training mentioned during the interviews of this study were not a requirement for all YDPs within the organization. The introductory orientation training, Ages and Stages training, was offered to Extension 4-H agents; however, P6 shared“ even that didn’t really focus on kids with physical, mental, or social disabilities, or illnesses,” said P6. P8 stated that I feel like a lot of programming

we get training on; there are no modifications added to assist youth with kids who have some sort of disability. So, professionally I have received no training in working with kids that have a disability.

Mouton and Bruce (2013) referred to this lack of training as a weakness of staff practices to appropriately accommodate youth with a disability.

According to Biederman and Mills (2014), training programs developed for educational professionals to work with youth with disabilities aids the professional to create inclusion and belonging for the youth. This atmosphere of belonging created by the professional is an essential element for positive youth development. The essential elements (i.e., belonging, generosity, mastery, and independence) are the pillars of the 4-H program (National 4-H Council, n.d.). Therefore, it is highly recommended that 4-H programs begin to implement training and develop a regimen to ensure YDPs are up-to-date with the knowledge and skills to effectively serve differently-abled youth. Moncloa (2019) suggested that building the competency of the professional is essential to support inclusion. The preparation of the YDPs through professional development training significantly impacts youth with disabilities participating in the program (Anderson et al., 2017; Argabright et al., 2019). Yaknich (et al. (2018) described the results of the professional's increased competency to be effective services delivered to the youth and success for the program.

### **Recommendation Two: A Comprehensive Accommodation Plan**

The study participants all made intentional efforts to accommodate youth with disabilities that desired to participate in 4-H programming; however, the participants did

not have a standardized plan of action to accommodate differently-abled youth. The (state's) program's current plan was to handle each youth in a "case by case" situation, according to Participant 6. The case by case process to accommodate youth with disabilities is too vague for one of the largest youth development organization. Although each differently-abled participating youth is unique, it is ideal to have a comprehensive plan to accommodate youth with disabilities.

Several study participants mentioned the need for specific, concise, and consistent plans of action to accommodate youth with disabilities that can be implemented in programs across the state. P7 desired to see the things YDPs should do within their program. "Show us what do we need to do when this happens for kids with autism, with ADHD and any type of physical or mental disability," said P7. Participants suggested that Extension provides accommodation ideas in published curriculums and tips to meet youth's needs with a specific disability (i.e., ADHD). P2 was interested in training that are more specific (i.e., physical disabilities).

What are some techniques that you can do for physical disabilities and then another one for mental disabilities, like specific strategies that we can use. I think very specific trainings with specific strategies would definitely be very effective," said P2. P7 desired a workshop or training that provides "real life scenarios": "Show us what do we need to do when this happens for kids with autism, with ADHD and any type of physical or mental disability... potential things that you need to be doing that's approved".

The National 4-H Headquarters has identified the ability of the YDPs to interact effectively with all youth, regardless of their ability and background, as a core

competency (Moncloa et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding strategies and incorporating trainings for successful inclusion programs is imperative (LaVergne, 2015). Extension administrators noticed a majority of YDPs receive some form of diversity training prior to their job assignment; however, only 18% receive training to promote and implement inclusive programming (LaVergne, 2015). A previous study's assessment reported that YDPs are less likely to provide adequate accommodations due to the scarcity of Extension inclusion trainings (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). The training needs of the YDPs in the study were proportionate to the availability of resources (Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). Elements of the program's success include having a well-prepared workforce of educators that understand inclusive programs and program development for youth with disabilities (see LaVergne, 2013). This study's YDPs participants seemed aware of this element as they sought professional development opportunities and strategies to serve youth with disabilities within their programs.

### **Recommendation Three: Share Tools of the Trade**

The Journal of Extension has advocated for a focus on YDPs preparation and acceptance to serve a diverse population (Taylor-Winne et al., 2019). Although there has been an increasing trend in published articles related to YDPs serving youth with disabilities in the past 27 years, more attention is needed on the strategies used by YDPs to implement inclusive programs. Each participant of the study shared their experiences and the impact of successful inclusive programs. Several participants shared experiences in which they implemented unique strategies to serve youth with disabilities effectively.

However, only one participant shared experiences of searching for other tools and strategies applied by other professionals in the field of youth development.

P2 sought additional professional development to work with vulnerable populations through a mental health first aid training. With a small amount of literature emphasizing YDPs working with differently-abled youth, from this study, it is evident that YDPs have resorted to implementing tools and programs they have learned along the way as they work with youth living with a disability. P4 shared an experience in which the mother had informed her of the (unrecognizable) condition before the event:

I would have picked up on it, but it would have taken a long time, and he might have missed out on some things. But I did research; I knew what he had to do with reading and what she told me... It was just thrown on use, and we basically just had to go with it.

P3 was adamant that there is a need for continuous YDPs training to work with youth with disabilities. P3 was adamant that there is a need for continuous YDPs training to work with youth with disabilities.

Although this study may help fill the present gap related to the inclusive environments provided for YDPs implementing programs for youth with disabilities, the more information shared among YDPs through scholarship engagement will provide additional awareness of the need to train YDPs and the impact of inclusive, positive youth development programming. The results from this study that included themes of making and providing accommodations and limited on-the-job training further indicated

the need for more attention towards the preparation and implementation of inclusivity in 4-H programs.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

#### **Recommendation One: Training competency level of YDPs**

This study design had limitations that included determining the competency level of the YDPs. Although this study required the YDPs to have received training, the study's scope did not evaluate the knowledge gained from their previous training experiences. Also, all the study participants did not receive the same amount or level of training to facilitate and implement programs that included youth with disabilities. However, a future study to focus on competency level after YDPs training and specific training models for implementing inclusive programs should be considered. The results of this study revealed a common need for additional training expressed from the YDPs. The participants of the study indicated a need for additional training. Specifically, P7 requested for specific training that would provide real-life scenarios and approved strategies to be implemented. Evaluating the specialized training provided to YDPs will further aid the profession of Extension YDPs implementing inclusive programs.

#### **Recommendation Two: Evaluate Impact of Inclusive Programming**

Although the study's results did not determine the YDPs competency level from their training, this study identified the strategies and concepts YDPs used to implement inclusive 4-H programming. Each participant of this study shared experiences of success and the impact of their implemented inclusive programs. The participants shared how they learned as they implemented programs to accommodate youth so that all youth could

have a positive experience in the program. However, the participants did not have a unified method to evaluate the success of their implemented programs. Several participants associated their inclusive programs' success and impact to one or more unique experience serving youth with a disability through their 4-H programs. Others stated their lack of comfort to evaluate the program; they had future plans to implement some form of evaluation for their inclusive programs. Evaluating their inclusive program will help the YDPs determine the actual impact and success of their overall 4-H program.

### **Implications**

For many years, educators have faced barriers related to the lack of professional training to properly implement inclusive programs (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). School leaders reported a lack of knowledge and skills to implement special education programs just after 14 years of IDEA existence. YDPs have met an even more significant challenge to serve youth with disabilities as professional development training (i.e., to serve youth with disabilities) is not mandated by Extension, but Murphy (2018) emphasized that training YDPs is key to the success of inclusive programs. With a small amount of literature emphasizing the need for training and few trainings offered to YDPs, this study's findings confirm the urgency to properly train YDPs to serve youth with disabilities and contribute to the body of knowledge for Extension YDPs. The study's findings revealed that Extension YDPs are still facing a lack of professional training barrier; yet, the efforts of YDPs continue to fulfill the mission of Extension and ensure that all individuals have access to the 4-H youth development program. It is the

responsibility of the YDPs to “make sure that all these kids have those opportunities, and if they are differently-abled, we just got to figure out how to do it,” shared P6.

This study has the potential to impact the body of knowledge by providing awareness of how the experiences of trained Extension YDPs directly or indirectly influence the strategies of designing and implementing programs in an inclusive youth development program. The experiences and information shared from this study provide an opportunity to enhance the knowledge and skills of 4-H YDPs. Although several implemented strategies by the study participants are not comprehensive for the profession, several strategies currently implemented to ensure inclusivity within 4-H programs can be replicated by other YDPs. Understanding the experiences of YDPs can give other professionals working with diverse and vulnerable populations insight on how to implement inclusive 4-H programs.

### **Conclusion**

The study's premise was built on the significance of inclusivity in 4-H youth development programs and the need for contributions to the body of knowledge for Extension YDPs as they design and implement programs for youth with disabilities. This final chapter provided insight into the themes found within the study and implications for positive social change to occur. This study's contribution to the body of knowledge helps fill the gap related to the strategies used to ensure inclusive environments within a 4-H youth development program. Additionally, the study provides an understanding of the experiences of YDPs implementing inclusive programs. The analysis of the eight interviews held with 4-H YDPs revealed that the YDPs was determined to ensure the



success of their programs and participants by implementing inclusive programs despite professional and program development limitations. Using a qualitative study design to interview participants helped to understand the experiences of the Extension YDPs and specific strategies implemented to replicate impactful youth development programming.

IDEA ensures that youth with disabilities are offered related services as other youth to prepare them for the future. Over the years, many have endeavored to develop inclusion in schools and other inclusivity practices; however, the inclusive tools and interventive forms of development lacked (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). The lack of interventions includes the education professional's knowledge and competency (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). According to Murphy (2018), the adult leader for the youth cannot perform their role when there is a lack of training, and there is no understanding of inclusive education programs. Program leaders are aware that the investment of preparing adult leaders through training benefits not only the adult leaders professionally but also the youth participants (Anderson et al., 2017). Therefore, Extension YDPs must be trained to serve differently-abled youth properly. Being trained to work with this population of youth is key to the continued success and effectiveness of the youth development program.

Also, to continue educating and enhancing the skills of Extension YDPs through training, the YDPs need access to a comprehensive plan to accommodate youth with disabilities appropriately. Developing a comprehensive plan can enhance the inclusivity perception of the YDPs and its impact on the program's success (Murphy, 2018). This potential can transform the YDPs from sporadic accommodation planning to a concise,

comprehensive program inclusion strategy. Implementing a concise, comprehensive accommodation strategy reinforces the program's intention to develop the skills and attributes of youth and the YDPs professionally (Sumner et al., 2018). This process of implementing a plan goes beyond accommodating but envisioning youth development as diverse, complex, and a fluid effort.

This study's findings confirmed that Extension YDPs are not trained frequently to serve youth with disabilities. Although there is a training urgency for YDPs to implement and facilitate programming designed for youth with and without disabilities simultaneously, the rate at which YDPs are trained and receive continuing education is slow. Despite the lack of training and tools, YDPs ensures that the mission of Land Grant Universities, to provide access for all, is met. YDPs are encouraged to quickly develop diverse programs as the total population is projected to see structural changes and shifts in compositions in the coming year. However, the demand to quickly share YDPs tools of their trade is not evident for program enhancement, curriculum development, and program evaluation.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

## Interview study seeks 4-H Youth Development Professionals providing inclusive programming

There is a new study called “, *A Qualitative Study of Extension Youth Development Professionals’ Experiences Implementing Inclusive Youth Development Programming*” that could help 4-H professionals like 4-H Agents and 4-H program assistants better understand and implement inclusive programs. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences implementing 4-H programs to youth with disabilities.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Crystal Perry, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during August 2020.

### **About the study:**

- One 30-45 minute zoom interview that will be audio recorded
- You would receive a \$20 Visa gift card as a thank you
- To protect your privacy, the published study would use fake names

### **Volunteers must meet these requirements:**

- 18 years old or older
- 2 or more years of experience as a 4-H Youth Development Professional
- Received (any form or amount) training to work with youth with disabilities

**To confidentially volunteer,  
contact the researcher:  
Crystal Perry  
2XX-XXX-XXXX**