

## **The Impact of Boys & Girls Club/Keystone Club Participation on Alumni**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the impact of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGC), and its Keystone Club (KC) component, on the leadership and citizenship development of its alumni. 14 alumni were interviewed using a structured interview technique. The constant comparative method was utilized to identify leadership traits and skills that alumni perceived they had developed as members of either organization. It was found that alumni from both organizations felt that they had developed the ability to lead groups, and developed the traits of integrity, honesty and patience. In addition, their participation in BGC/KC gave them the confidence to pursue leadership roles outside of BGC/KC. These traits and skills also carried over into their adult lives.

### **Introduction**

In 1906, three women in Boston, Massachusetts opened their doors to the boys in their neighborhood. The women prepared snacks and activities for the boys to participate in to keep them off the streets, out of trouble, and in a safe place. This was the beginning of the first Boys Club of America. Over the next 100 years, the Club and its successful programs would spread to more than 3,900 locations across the world benefiting boys and girls ages six to 18 (Boys & Girls Clubs of

America, 2005). Boys & Girls Clubs of America produces quality educational programs for children and youth. Boys & Girls Clubs offer diversified programs in five core program areas: character and leadership development, education and career exploration, health and life skills, the arts, and sports, fitness, and recreation. (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 2005)

The Boys & Girls Clubs not only offer programs for young children, but also a variety of teen programs, including the Keystone Club. The Keystone Club is a voluntary program that builds character in teens by challenging youth to “develop many virtues and characteristics of positive, ethical leaders” (TeenSupreme Keystone Manual, 2005, p. 4). The purpose of the Keystone Club is to “create and maintain high standards of character and citizenship, health and education in order for teens to grow to become responsible, productive adults” (p. 4). Teens learn leadership and communication skills along with time management, event planning, and the importance of helping others in their community.

Keystone Clubs offer teens the ability to lead an important initiative in their community, one that helps not only their peers and their community, but also themselves. Keystone Clubs implement activities in the following six core areas:

- **Service to Club and Community:** Service opportunities allow Keystone Club members to learn the responsibilities of being an active citizen in the community. It also allows them to experience the satisfaction of helping those in their community. Service projects might include holiday celebrations, food bank drives, club carnivals, neighborhood clean ups, or events for the elderly (TeenSupreme Keystone Manual, 2005). Developing service programs also helps teens develop leadership skills.
- **Character and Leadership Development:** Members of the Keystone Club learn to be ethical leaders and to have good character by engaging in projects and activities that benefit their community. Character and leadership skills developed through the Keystone Club could include trustworthiness, patience, organizational skills, reliability, sense of humor, listening skills, and communication skills. (TeenSupreme Keystone Manual, 2005)
- **Education and Career Exploration:** Opportunities are given to Keystone Club members to explore potential educational and career paths for their future. Activities include career and college fairs, résumé building, and goal setting. Activities involving education and career exploration include college tours, 4-H, Job Shadow Day, SAT preparation classes, and presentation by career professionals. (TeenSupreme Keystone Manual, 2005)
- **Free Enterprise:** Keystone Club members learn how to develop and implement fundraisers, money management, and record keeping and how to sell effectively.

- **Unity:** Keystone Club members acquire the “human relation skills needed to understand, if not appreciate, individuals different from ourselves in a non-judgmental manner” (TeenSupreme Keystone Manual, 2005, p. 29).
- **Social Recreation:** “A teaching tool that fosters positive group dynamics and social interaction” (TeenSupreme Keystone Manual, 2005, p. 30). Social recreation includes sports activities, social activities, and field trips.

This study examined the impact on club alumni in the core areas of the BGC and Keystone Club programs dealing with character and leadership development and service to club and community.

The Keystone Club program involves high school aged students. It has been a part of the Boys & Girls Clubs programming for more than 40 years. All BGC members participate in the Youth Development Outcome Measurement Tool Kit, which allows staff to know whether programs are successfully influencing the youth of their club (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 2007). However, no study has been conducted with local alumni of the Boys & Girls Clubs regarding the influence the Keystone Club program has had on their lives. The Keystone Club program is a nationally recognized program with thousands of participants involved each year. It is crucial that the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, club professionals, donors, and current club members know the long-term benefits of both Boys & Girls Club and Keystone Club participation. Club professionals will be able to use the information to garner new funding from foundations and donors, as well as change programming to accommodate local club and member needs.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and compare the experiences of selected alumni who only participated in the Boys & Girls Club with those alumni who also participated in the Keystone Club program to determine the influence each program had on their character and leadership development. Specifically, the study will take a close look at the development of the alumni’s leadership skills, character, and participation in community affairs.

### **Objectives**

1. Determine current demographics of alumni of the Bryan and College Station Boys & Girls Boys & Girls Clubs and Keystone Club programs.
2. Determine the benefits gained through two of the six core areas of the BGC and Keystone Club programs:
  - Determine the influence of the Keystone Club program on alumni’s service to club and community.
  - Determine the influence of the Keystone Club program on alumni’s character and leadership development.

- Compare and contrast the impact of BGC programs on Club alumni and Keystone Club alumni.

### **Theoretical Base for Study**

The Boys & Girls Club (BGC) and Keystone Club (KC) focuses on character building, civic responsibilities, unity, free enterprise, social recreation, and education and career exploration. As a theoretical base for this study, the researcher looked at the 40 Developmental Assets Model developed by the Search Institute (Search Institute, 2004). The model incorporates assets comparable to the core areas of the Keystone Club and Boys & Girls Clubs.

The assets model is comprised of 40 assets that are considered necessary for youth to move along a successful path to adulthood. The model is split evenly into two primary sections, 20 external assets and 20 internal assets (Search Institute, 2004). The Search Institute has provided evidence of a relationship between the number of assets a young person has and the positive attitudes and behaviors. “For example, 49% of young people who indicate they have 0 to 10 of the 40 assets are likely to engage in problem alcohol use as opposed to only 3% of young people with 31 to 40 assets. Conversely, 47% of young people with 31 to 40 assets succeed in school while only 8% of those with 0 to 10 assets do so” (Witt & Caldwell, 2005, p. 9). The more assets a youth has the more successful they are likely to be in life. Likewise, the fewer assets a person has, the more likely they are to be involved in violence, crime, and sexual activity.

The 40 Developmental Assets consists of 20 external assets in four categories: support, empowerment, boundaries, and expectations, and constructive use of time. Likewise, the internal assets are split into four categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

Scales, Benson, and Leffert (2000) studied seven thriving indicators based on the 40 developmental assets model. The seven indicators are school success, leadership, helping others, maintenance of physical health, delay of gratification, valuing diversity, and overcoming adversity. Related to the developmental assets, they reported that “leadership opportunities are associated with positive mental health, and helping others may contribute to self-esteem” (p. 28). Of the seven thriving indicators, five of the indicators are core areas for the Keystone Club. These core areas served as the theoretical basis of this study.

## Review of Literature

### Character and Leadership Development

The results of various studies indicate that youth can learn leadership and other life skills via participation in youth serving organizations. Multiple studies have shown that youth who participate in youth organizations develop leadership skills to a greater degree than youth who do not participate in these activities (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Rutherford, Townsend, Briers, Cummins, & Conrad, 2002; Boyd, 2001; Toupencc & Townsend, 2000).

Bruce (2003) studied 4-H state council members and the skills acquired through the 4-H program. In her study, Bruce interviewed 14 former state 4-H council members and one former council advisor. From this study, she found that the council members did learn leadership skills through their membership in 4-H and continued to gain knowledge of leadership during their council years. Bruce also concluded that the council members did continue their participation and service with 4-H after their council years concluded.

Radhakrishna (2005) reported in his study, *Influence of 4-H Programs on Former 4-H Members' Career and Life Experiences*, that alumni "felt that their 4-H experiences greatly contributed to developing group interaction skills, leadership skills, and decision making skills" (p. 82). The alumni also indicated that 4-H participation influenced their completion of high school, career, higher education, community involvement, and leadership responsibilities. Alumni "strongly agreed that knowledge and skills gained in 4-H continued to benefit them in their adult lives" (p. 85).

Toupencc and Townsend (2000) found that residential camping experiences increased teens' self-perceptions of their leadership skills. This occurred even though leadership development was an unintentional goal of this camping program. The authors noted that with intentionality, the potential to improve teens' leadership skills is tremendous.

Jones (2009) reported that youth involved in a leadership development program that included community service had more positive perceptions towards their roles as decision-makers in their communities. They also developed more positive relationships with adults. Youth programs such as 4-H and FFA have demonstrated this; however, no evaluations have been published to determine if this is the case with the Boys & Girls Clubs.

While other youth-serving organizations appear to be effective in developing leadership skills in their members, it is unclear if the Boys & Girls Clubs/Keystone Club have the same effect. The purpose of this study is to assess if the

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Boys & Girls Clubs, including the Keystone Club component, are effective in developing leadership skills and character traits among its members.

## **Methodology**

For this study, the researcher used the naturalistic inquiry approach to gathering information regarding the experiences and benefits by alumni's participation in the Keystone Club program. "Naturalistic research seeks to maximize the range of specific information that can be obtained from and about the content" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 33).

## **Sample**

In order to retrieve the specific information regarding the Keystone Club, the researcher used purposive sampling to obtain subjects for the study. "Purposive and directive sampling through human instrumentation increases the range of data exposed and maximizes the researchers' ability to identify emerging themes that take adequate account of contextual conditions and cultural norms" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 82). The alumni also constituted a sample of convenience. Convenience sampling is used when the researcher needs to "save money, time, or effort" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 102). In this study, the researcher asked BGC staff from Bryan and College Station, Texas to identify alumni for whom they still had contact information and would be likely to participate in the research. This was convenient as the researchers were able to save both time and effort in locating alumni and most of the alumni still lived locally. A total of 40 BGC and Keystone Club alumni were collected to be contacted for the study.

## **Data Collection**

The researcher used structured interviews to collect data on the alumni's experiences and benefits gained through the regular Boys & Girls Club program as well as the Keystone Club program. All alumni were contacted initially by email or by telephone depending on the contact information provided by the BGC staff member. Alumni were asked to participate in the research study and to schedule an interview to be conducted either in person or by telephone. Participation in the interview was voluntary. Each alumnus was informed of their rights as human subjects in the research and was asked to sign a consent form acknowledging their voluntary participation and approval to use a recording device. A total of seven KC alumni and seven BGC alumni were interviewed. The researchers discontinued interviewing at 14 subjects because the alumni were providing the same data and new information was not forthcoming. It is recognized that the findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond the specific and Keystone Clubs participating in the study.

The researcher coded all interviews to establish confidentiality. In this study the researcher coded male participants as (M) and female participants as (F). In addition, interviews were coded to identify those alumni who participated in the Keystone Club program: Yes Keystone (YK) or No Keystone (NK).

Interview questions were designed to elicit responses about the two core areas of the BGC and Keystone Club programs dealing with service to community and character and leadership development. The questions were designed by the researcher and reviewed by a panel of experts in youth development for content and face validity.

### **Data Analysis**

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) describe qualitative data analysis as an ongoing process, one that starts the minute you start your collection methods. During the data analysis, the researcher continues to refine the themes of the interviews in order to reach the research goals. Continually refining and analyzing the information allows the researcher to make improvements and validate the study along the way. The data analysis method used by the researcher was adopted from Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method for naturalistic inquiry.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the constant comparative method helps the researcher derive a theory from the data collected. Lincoln and Guba describe four techniques in analyzing the data: The first is to compare incidents applicable to each category. Through the sorting of data by index cards or even computers, the researcher's incidents emerges into categories of similar data. For each new set of incidents in a report, the researcher compares the data to the previous incident and its category. If the incident matches the category, it is marked as the same category, if it does not the incident is assigned a new category. This process is continued until all incidents are placed into categories.

Second, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that the researcher needs to integrate categories and their properties. The researcher does this by comparing properties or rules by which incidents fit into the categories instead of comparing incidents. "The comparison shifts from a more or less intuitive 'look-alikeness' or 'feel-alikeness' judgment to a judgment of whether a new incident exhibits the category properties that have been tentatively identified" (p. 342).

Thirdly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that researchers need to delimit the theory. At this point in the analysis, the researcher makes fewer changes to the categories and properties of the incidents. Through this process, the original set of categories is reduced in size because of the integration of the data and the categories are well saturated because they are well-defined.

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The final step in the process is writing the theory, taking what the researcher has categorized and putting the theories discovered on paper. To further describe in detail the constant comparative analysis, the researchers followed the following outline:

- Utilization of Data – Researcher transcribed the recorded interviews and began coding the transcripts to identify themes in the participants’ responses. Themes were then printed on index cards. All index cards were coded to correspond with the interview code for audit purposes. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)
- Categorization of Units – The researcher sorted the data and put the cards into categories or common themes. Through this sorting method, main themes emerged from the information collected. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)
- Merging Categories – During this stage, themes became more prominent and similar themes were collapsed. There is less movement of units of information between themes. (Erlandson et al., 1993)
- Defining the Construction – The researcher reduced the remaining categories into main themes that became the final construct of the study. Some categories were completely discarded or distributed into the remaining categories during this phase. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness**

It is crucial for the researchers to establish trustworthiness in order to conduct a credible, sound study. Valid inquiry must “demonstrate its truth value, provide the basis for applying it, and allow for external judgments to be made about the consistency of its procedures and the neutrality of its findings or decisions” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 29). In this study, the researcher established trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility, as described by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) is “related to the degree of confidence in the ‘truth’ that the findings of a particular inquiry have for the subjects with which – and the context within which – the inquiry was carried out” (p. 29). There are seven methods to establish credibility in a naturalistic study: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, referential adequacy, peer debriefing, member checking, and reflexive journaling. In this study the researcher used peer debriefing, member checking, and reflexive journaling to establish credibility.

Member checking lends to credibility because it allows subjects the opportunity to review what was transcribed from the interview, make necessary changes, and approve their thoughts and comments. After the researcher transcribed the



interview, she emailed the subjects their interview and asked for corrections and approvals regarding their interview (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Peer debriefing lends to credibility by allowing a professional outside of the context to review the findings of the researcher (Erlandson et al., 1993). It is best to conduct the debriefing throughout the entire study to review “perceptions, insights, and analyses with professionals outside the context who have enough general understanding of the nature of the study to debrief the researcher and provide feedback” (p. 31). Feedback might include necessary changes in order to refine or redirect the study. Faculty members served as peer debriefers for this study.

Finally, the researcher used reflexive journaling to establish credibility in this study. Journal entries by the researcher included reasons behind crucial decisions, logistics, scheduling, and insights into the study. This journal is part of the audit trail as it documents everything that took place throughout the study (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Transferability establishes the applicability of a study (Lincoln et al., 1985). In order to determine transferability a researcher can use thick description, purposive sampling, and reflexive journaling. In this study, the researcher used all three methods.

In order for a naturalistic inquiry to be dependable it must be consistent. The study must provide evidence (i.e., audit trail) in order that other researchers may replicate the study if necessary. If replicated, the researcher’s findings should be consistent with the findings of the original research (Erlandson et al., 1993). The researcher in this study used an audit trail and reflexive journaling to keep adequate records throughout the study and to assure dependability.

Confirmability is the process of checking to make sure the findings in the study are true to the alumni’s thoughts and not the biases of the researcher. To establish confirmability, the researcher used reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and confirmability audit (Erlandson et al., 1993).

## **Findings**

The first objective was to describe the demographics of alumni of the Boys & Girls Club (BGC) and Keystone Club (KC) in Bryan and College Station, Texas.

The sample of the BGC alumni from Bryan and College Station consisted of seven Keystone Club members (four females, three males), and seven BGC members (one female, six males). Those members in the BGC did not participate in any Keystone Club activities; however, those in the Keystone Club did

participate in additional programs offered by the BGC. Participants in the study ranged from 21 years of age to 47 years of age. The researchers were able to find several alumni that started within the first year of the BGC's opening in Bryan. Of the participants, seven were between the ages of 21 and 30, five between the ages of 31 and 40, and two between the ages of 41 and 50.

All alumni had one or more years of college. Three participants' highest level of education completed included some college courses (six participants had a Bachelors degree; four participants had a master's degree; and one participant had a professional degree. Jobs varied from attorney to teacher, coach to salesman, and nonprofit director to program managers.

An objective of the study was to determine the influence of the Keystone Club program on alumni's character and leadership development. Leadership and character traits such as patience, integrity, confidence, respect and honesty, and others were mentioned several times as traits the alumni learned through the Keystone Club. Representative quotes from study participants illustrate their assessment of these skills and traits:

- **Leading Groups** – “Served as point person for club service projects.” (MYK9) and “Take the lead with issues...in the community.” (FYK2)
- **Patience** – “Learned to be patient and to be less temperamental.” (MYK9) and “Gave me the experience to endure, to know where the students are coming from and to be patient with them.” (FYK3)
- **Integrity** – “Integrity. A lot of people are watching you when you are leading hundreds of people. As a leader you cannot do just whatever you would like to when people are looking to you to be a leader.” (MYK9)
- **Confidence** – “After that experience I was very confident in myself.” (FYK2) and “Confidence to build relationships with younger kids and to be a role model. [It] has built my confidence up so that I was not as nervous when I taught the first time.” (FYK3)
- **Respect and Honesty** – “Being honest and being respectful to other club members and the community was expected.” (MYK4) and “The main one [trait] would probably be honesty and loyalty as well. And definitely commitment, you have to be committed to the Club.” (MYK14)
- **Altruism and Passion** – “Passion to help my community and to give back.” (FYK3) and “This carried on to me as an adult and giving back to the community and especially other youth.” (MYK9)
- **Encouragement, Motivation, and Persistence** – “Learned to support people.” (FYK8) “Encouraged me to be more motivated to do more.” (MYK4), “Dedication. You have to be dedicated to something. Keystone took a lot of time but we had to be dedicated to the Club to reach our final goals.” (FYK8), and “Motivation. Learned to motivate each other because a lot of times we didn't want to do some of the projects and work so we learned to call each other and to motivate each other.” (FYK8)

Keystone Club provided members with the ability to build character and leadership traits, but it also helped to produce members who learned to be leaders, to have a voice, and to be responsible. As one alumni stated, Keystone Club “planted seeds for leadership development.”

Five of the seven alumni discussed specific activities that helped them become leaders in the club and community (FYK2, FYK3, MYK4, MYK9, and MYK14). Activities they mentioned included leadership retreats and conferences, leading service projects and fundraisers, and participating in the Youth of the Year program, and serving on National Steering Committees.

- “The main one [activity] would probably be the National Steering Committee because outside my own Keystone Club I was being asked to design and implement a whole program for the National Keystone Club Conference.” (MYK14)
- “When I was 17, I was selected to run the regional Keystone Conference for 2,000 people.” (MYK9)
- “The Keystone Club is the number one impact in my leadership.” (MYK14)

Six of the seven alumni held leadership positions within the Keystone Club. Positions included Treasurer, Secretary, Vice President, and President of the local Keystone Boys & Girls Clubs as well as co-chairs for the National Keystone Conferences.

All seven alumni discussed the impact the Keystone Club had on their ability to lead groups:

- “In the Keystone Club as an older member we were told to be a leader or mentor to the youth by leading by example.” (MYK14)
- “Keystone Club helped me learn to take the lead with issues and with volunteering in my community.” (FYK2)
- “Advisors were huge impacts in my life. Had a different advisor every year which taught me different ways to be a mentor and different ways to lead groups.” (FYK12)
- “A big part of my leadership development. [It] set the stage to be leaders inside the Club and in the community.” (MYK4)
- “[I] learned to plan and lead meetings,” “[I] learned different ways to lead groups.” (FYK12)

Being a leader taught three of the seven that they had a voice even as a teen in the community and that they needed to use it:

- “It [Keystone Club] played a lot in my leadership [development] because it allowed me to have a voice about issues in my community.” (FYK8)
  - “Taught us that we had a voice as much as any adult did.” (FYK12)
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Another objective was to determine the influence of the BGC on alumni's character and leadership development. The BGC helped alumni develop character and leadership skills through its regular programs and activities. Leadership and character traits such as sportsmanship, competitiveness, hope, caring, dependability, honesty, and others were mentioned several times as traits the Alumni learned through their experience in the BGC.

- **Sportsmanship, Competitiveness, and Fairness** – “Taught me to calm down and to be nice. To have the right attitude for every situation. Learned how to have a good attitude even when I did not want to.” (FNK13) “Taught me fairness and fair play.” (MNK7) “First time to realize that hard work gets good results.” (MNK10)
- **Honesty and Trust** – “Learned to be honest, loyal, and trustworthy.” (MNK6) “Taught me to be honest.” (MNK11) “Trusting teammates and coaches on what they were doing.” (MNK1)
- **Dependability** – “Learned to be a person people could always count on. To be dependable.” (MNK10) “To follow through on tasks that I'd agreed to.” (FNK13)
- **Hope, Confidence, and Caring** – “Taught me to be a caring person. To realize that there are people that do not have the same things that I do and that I need to care for them as well.” (MNK6) “Confidence building at the club. Ability to get involved in club programs and team athletics helped build confidence in members.” (MNK10) “Gained self-confidence, received affirmation from people I looked up to.” (MNK10) “The club gave me a place to escape that life, get involved in sports, attend camps, and therefore gave me hope for my future.” (MNK11)

The BGC not only helped develop alumni's character traits but also their ability to work with others and those from different cultures. Five of the seven alumni felt the club gave them the opportunities to meet new people and interact with kids of all ages and backgrounds).

- “Being at the club almost forces you to interact with new people” (MNK6)
- “Really taught me how to work with people on all levels” (FNK13)
- “Learned to conform and adapt to different people” (MNK11)

Specifically, the BGC members developed leadership skills through mentoring and tutoring kids, teaching art classes, and participating in sports and tournaments (MNK5, MNK11, FNK13, and MNK7). “Staff found places to naturally put me in to be a leader” (MNK7). Through the activities the BGC alumni learned about being a leader and what it takes to be a good leader.

- “Learned to lead by example....if you are a leader, it is seen through your actions.” (MNK1)
- “[I] learned to read people and make decisions based on the situations or present the decision in a way that is fitting for the situations.” (FNK13).

- “[The club played] a big role [in my leadership] without me realizing it.” (MNK7)
- “Teaches you how to follow. Following is a big part of learning to be a leader.” (MNK1)
- “As a salesman, I know now how to lead my team of salesman.” (MNK6)

Not only did the BGC alumni learn about leadership but also the responsibilities of being a leader and the job that goes along with the task

- “As a leader I am able to handle responsibilities through my experience with the club.” (MNK6)
- “Knowing your job, what it is and your responsibility to the team.” (MNK1)

All seven BGC alumni had the opportunity during their membership years to be a leader in the organization. Leadership roles included Junior Staff positions, Youth of the Year, captain in basketball or football, All-Stars, being a student worker at the club, and mentoring younger members.

Objective three was to compare and contrast the impact on the alumni of the BGC with the impact on the alumni of the Keystone Club. It appears that both facets of the organization helped members develop leadership skills and positive character traits, though by different means. BGC members gained team and cooperative skills by participating in sports activities and mentoring younger participants. BGC staff members tried to identify participant’s talents and place them in leadership roles that used those talents. BGC teens often mentored younger members through various activities. In addition, those who exhibited potential often found themselves as captains of various sports teams where they had to develop communication and motivational skills.

Keystone participants had more intensive opportunities, serving in elected or appointed leadership roles, and organizing and attending leadership conferences. These direct leadership roles allowed them to develop their organizational and communication skills as well as thrust them into public relations roles. Keystone officers often interacted with community leaders and sponsors. They not only raised funds for Keystone Club activities, but organized leadership events for thousands of other Keystone members from across the nation.

In the final analysis, alumni of both the Boys & Girls Clubs and Keystone Clubs went on to become leaders in their communities.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study explored the Boys & Girls Club’s and Keystone Club’s impact on the development of leadership skills and character in their participants.

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Almost all alumni interviewed perceived that they gained leadership traits and skills through their experience in the Boys & Girls Club (BGC) and Keystone Club (KC). It can be concluded that the both organizations in Bryan and College Station are successful leadership development programs. 11 alumni held leadership positions in the community and in high school that helped to further develop their leadership traits. All stated that BGC and KC gave them the confidence to seek those leadership roles. Through KC, alumni had the opportunity to take on leadership positions as President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Furthermore, almost all alumni interviewed said the program impacted them in their ability to lead groups. Through attending leadership conferences and seminars, and serving on national committees, all seven alumni noted that they are now able to lead groups through their experience in the Keystone Club. Public speaking helped all alumni build their self-confidence for speaking in front of groups and improved their facilitation skills.

Based on this conclusion, it is recommended that the BGC/KC continue to encourage members to be leaders in their Boys & Girls Clubs and community. Many just need to have someone believe in them and to put them in leadership roles. With support of advisors, staff, and volunteers, members experienced new leadership roles and achieved new challenges. Since most Boys & Girls Clubs have more than four youth involved in the club, it is further recommended that Keystone Boys & Girls Clubs create additional leadership positions beyond the four executive positions. Similar roles should also be created for BGC participants. The majority of the officers held a position their junior and senior years. Additional roles for the freshmen and sophomores need to be created in order for them to assume leadership responsibilities. Additional positions could include hospitality chair, web-page designer, social coordinator, or historian. By giving all students, regardless of age, leadership responsibilities, they can experience new opportunities and find their role as a leader.

Because members found leadership conferences and seminars valuable to their leadership development, it is recommended that the both BGC and KC strive to send all members to workshops or conferences focusing on leadership. The alumni were impacted by motivational speakers at the conferences and were challenged to be leaders. If funding to out of state conferences is prohibitive, the BGC and KC should consider hosting local mini-conferences on leadership for both the BGC members and other youth in the community. This would not only strengthen the BGC/KC members, but also help recruit new youth to both programs.

One-half of the alumni interviewed said that BGC and KC helped them break out of their shell, because they were very shy. One of the KC alumni noted that her mom signed her up for the BGC, and more specifically, encouraged her to join the

Keystone Club to help her overcome shyness. She ended up assuming leadership roles all four years in the Keystone Club. Nine of the 14 alumni said that the Keystone Club and BGC helped with public speaking and improving their speaking skills. This gave those alumni the confidence to seek other challenges. It is recommended that both facets of the organization continue placing members in situations, such as public speaking, that build their confidence, and create additional opportunities as well.

Alumni from both groups perceived that they were taught how to set goals and follow timelines in order to achieve the goals. In order for the Keystone Club members to go on trips they had to raise money to pay for expenses. By doing so, they learned how to set goals and follow a timeline to obtain their reward. Alumni from both groups learned to set goals for their personal lives regarding education and career aspirations.

Through its free enterprise and fundraising projects, the youth learned the value of money, that it takes hard work to earn money, but in the end it is well worth the time and energy. They learned to budget their money and their time. All skills they took with them into their careers. It is recommended that the Boys & Girls Clubs/Keystone Club continue this part of their programming. In addition, both organizations must continue to promote goal setting as a leadership and life skill. Participants can gain this skill through self-government and having a voice in decisions affecting them.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Researchers should examine the leadership positions the BGC/KC alumni have served on or currently serve as adults. I asked about the alumnis' leadership roles as a youth and then how they continue to serve their community today. I did not specifically ask about their leadership positions today. By doing so, leadership roles as a youth can be compared to leadership roles as adults and see if there leadership role as a youth influenced their continuation of being in leadership positions as adults.

Researchers should ask KC and BGC alumni if there is anything they would change about their BGC experience. In this study, I looked at the impact the Boys & Girls Clubs had on their lives but I never asked if there was anything that they did not enjoy or would change about either program. This would be beneficial for Boys & Girls Clubs when evaluating the programs in the future.

Regarding scholarships, it would be beneficial to see if youth were more likely to receive scholarships from Boys & Girls Clubs of America or other entities if they were part of the Keystone Club versus just the BGC. This would be beneficial in

recruiting new members to the Keystone Club if it proved to provide scholarships to members.

Researchers should develop a quantitative study using the 40 Developmental Assets Model and this study to ask alumni specific benefits they received through the Boys & Girls Clubs and Keystone Club programs. This would be beneficial to see how many people gained the specific assets, which ones were more prominent in each club, and which assets were not gained through the program.



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