



# RURAL YOUTH IN ACTION

DAVID CUSHMAN COYLE

# **Rural Youth in Action**

by

**David Cushman Coyle**

*Prepared for the  
American Youth Commission*

**American Council on Education  
Washington, D. C.  
1942**

MEMBERS OF  
THE AMERICAN YOUTH COMMISSION  
*Appointed by the American Council on Education*

OWEN D. YOUNG, New York  
*Chairman*

HENRY I. HARRIMAN, Boston  
*Vice Chairman*

MIRIAM VAN WATERS, Framingham, Massachusetts  
*Secretary*

WILL W. ALEXANDER, Chicago

CLARENCE A. DYKSTRA, Madison

DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER, Arlington, Vermont

WILLARD E. GIVENS, Washington

GEORGE JOHNSON, Washington

MORDECAI W. JOHNSON, Washington

CHESTER H. ROWELL, San Francisco

WILLIAM F. RUSSELL, New York

JOHN W. STUDEBAKER, Washington

HENRY C. TAYLOR, Chicago

MATTHEW WOLL, New York

GEORGE F. ZOOK, Washington

---

FLOYD W. REEVES, *Director*

COPYRIGHT 1942  
BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, D. C.  
PUBLISHED AUGUST 1942

Brief parts of this report may be quoted without special permission, provided appropriate credit is given. Permission to quote extended passages may be secured through the American Council on Education, 744 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C.

## Rural Youth in Action

**T**HE AMERICAN PEOPLE, during the period after the beginning of 1940, were transforming their activities and their thoughts from the ways of peace to the ways of all-out war. The American Youth Commission's project among rural young people, from January 1940 to June 1942, covers this same period of transformation. The growing strain of war brings out clearly the meaning and usefulness of many social organizations, and may indicate how these same activities are related to the needs of peace. The phrase "all-out war" has sometimes created the illusion that only the direct production and use of military supplies can be justified in a nation fighting for its life. As the war effort grew in volume, however, the list of military necessities grew to include not only all kinds of supplies, but also housing, health, and even recreation. Public opinion came to recognize that many purely civilian activities have a vital place in maintaining national strength and morale.

The war effort, both military and civilian, must take first place in both rural and city activities, but a close second is the need for creating a sound community life that will be able to absorb the soldiers and sailors and the war workers when they come to be demobilized. Large numbers of young men and young women have been drawn into the defense program before and since Pearl Harbor, and for the time being their chief personal problem has been answered. They are employed and know what their country wants them to do. But the peacetime problems of young people on farms and in villages still exist for those who have no direct connection with the war, and they will again become acute when the war is won.

In rural districts, social life has suffered from the changes brought by the automobile, expanding the effective size of the neighborhood beyond the scope of the existing schools, churches, and various informal social groups. New organizations covering larger geographic areas are being formed, and

leadership is being developed to carry programs and activities that are adapted to the modern forms of rural life. This report deals with stimulating, planning, and carrying out some of these activities.

To maintain a sound relation to life and to the community, any normal person needs some place to go and something challenging to do. Young people especially need the benefits of organizations in which they can talk over their ideas and interests with their friends, and can assure themselves that they belong with others in their communities. This assurance of belonging to the community and the nation is the main foundation for morale in war or peace. There are encouraging signs of successful programs among rural young people, though much further progress has to be made before the majority are satisfactorily reached with the activities that so far are being promoted by existing organizations.

The American Youth Commission representatives found opportunities to assist groups of young people and their leaders in many activities directly connected with the war, and in others, such as public health, which though essential in war, will be equally valuable in peace. Other organizational work, such as the training of leadership is clearly useful for strengthening the community life both now and in the future. The report of these activities illustrates the wide variety of ways in which young people who are not called into the armed forces can still be of vital services to the country.

### **Pushing the War Effort**

With the development of the war, rural youth organizations have been quick to adapt their programs to the new conditions. Among their war activities are enlarged farm production, victory gardens, nutrition programs, stamp or bond drives, and parties for departing draftees or for service men home on furlough.

The young people's club at Haymarket, Virginia, after a successful year of work on community recreation, decided to do something more definitely for defense. Each member was

asked to bring a bundle of paper or a piece of scrap iron for admission to the next meeting, and a speaker from the county OCD was invited. This simple procedure set off a discussion in which visiting adults also took part, and a general meeting resulted where plans were worked out for a full-sized local defense program. To quote the president of the youth club: "The only thing we did was start it. But, just think, everybody's doing something."



*Rural youth invest in the future*

In Peach County, Georgia, the Negro Youth Council at Fort Valley conducted a salvage campaign that resulted in the collection of thousands of pounds of scrap iron, magazines, and newspapers. The proceeds were given to the Red Cross.

At La Fayette, a county seat and mill town of 3,000 population in northwest Georgia, the young people organized a nursery where the women attending Red Cross classes could leave their children during the day. From this successful venture, they moved on to providing leadership for play activities at the schools and later at the mills. These services have stimulated interest among town and county officers and local organization leaders, who have set up a committee to promote recreational and other services between town and country.

A Young People's Society of the Ramsey Reformed Church

at Titonka, Iowa, with an average attendance of about fifty at its weekly meetings, has undertaken to write letters to those of its members who are now in the armed forces. A schedule is posted in the church basement where the meetings are held, and each member is allotted his share of the letter writing.

Many local groups are taking part in war stamp and bond sales. One club uses the ingenious plan of having every member contribute a dime for each American battleship or cruiser and a nickel for each transport or navy auxiliary vessel sunk. With the hope that this will be a small amount, they are supplementing it effectively through talent shows, skating parties, and pastry sales.

Activities such as these are being conducted in many rural communities. They are most easily started and most successfully carried through by groups which have the habit, or at least the idea, of doing things together. The most successful clubs are likely to be found working in cooperation with agencies that are already established, and on a basis of plans resulting from a survey of the community needs. They fit themselves into the pattern of adult organizations in the community and assume their share of responsibility for community welfare. In these ways, the young people, through their own organizations, become part of the community life and gradually attain standing as full-fledged citizens who carry their part in the give-and-take of democracy.

### **Building Good Health**

The American people have been shocked to learn that in some rural districts as many as half the draftees for the present war were rejected as physically unfit. This disconcerting fact called attention to the acute need for better health services, and for making available to those with defective eyes, teeth, feet, the means for corrective treatment.

The need for physical fitness is also emphasized by the present-day requirement of eighteen civilian workers to maintain one man at the front, as compared with five in World War I. These wartime necessities merely serve to underline the basic



value of health, which is of equal importance in peace, although more apt to be overlooked. The general recognition of the need for improved health furnishes an opportunity to supplement the expanding public health services with voluntary work by local groups.

An example of what can be done is a cooperative project in the Cedar Creek Community in Shenandoah County, Virginia, which was organized for the correction of defective teeth. Four dentists at Woodstock who do most of the work in this community agreed that as their professional contribution to national defense they would contribute one-third of the cost of dental work for the members of the Older Rural Youth Club. The club undertook to raise funds to cover another third and the individual patients pay the remaining third. This type of setup may well be repeated in other communities and in connection with other types of physical handicaps.

While good health depends in part on medical care and on the availability of modern equipment for diagnosis and treatment, an equally important factor is personal attention to healthful living. A successful health program also depends on knowledge of proper diet and exercise, personal hygiene, the habit of periodic checkups, and particularly on a general attitude in the community that favors the following of wholesome living standards. There is a large place for community activity in supplying this foundation of knowledge and custom on which a sound public health program can be built.

Rural young people are in a position to make a valuable contribution to the nation's health program. They are realizing that health is more than a personal matter; it is a vital interest of the community and the nation. At the same time the good management of the community affects the health of the individuals in it. On this basis, many older youth clubs are giving special attention to health in their programs.

For example, the Rural Youth Council of the State College for Negroes at Fort Valley, Georgia, was notably successful with a health program in Peach County during the winter and spring of 1941-42. Their work was done in cooperation with

the Agricultural Extension Service, the Farm Security Administration, and other agencies.

A health week was planned, and handbills announcing a community cleanup were printed and distributed through the schools and churches. The group visited teachers, ministers, organization leaders, and other influential citizens and asked their vigorous participation. The teachers were urged to teach and the preachers to preach about the importance of better health and ways of attaining it.



*Rural youth are building national strength by keeping fit*

On the final Sunday a mass meeting was held at the county courthouse. Accomplishments were reported and modest awards were made to schools, churches, and neighborhood groups that had made an especially good showing in the clean-up work. The awards, in the form of neatly made plaques prepared in the college workshop, were given on the basis of an inspection by members of the council in collaboration with the health officer and extension agents.

Having succeeded with this program, the health committee of the council constructed a pit privy on the grounds of a

combination church and school building, as a demonstration for the families of the community. They furnished a part of the materials and supervised and helped with the actual work of construction, making clear the importance of building according to regulations. "This," they stated, "is one of the necessary safeguards for better health in Georgia that needs attention for some time to come. Older youth can learn and demonstrate building skills, and at the same time help people to realize that cleanliness for better health is an important aspect of community living."

In Iowa during the past year, rural youth groups undertook an aggressive health campaign. In response to requests for help from many local clubs, the state adviser, who was serving as field worker for the American Youth Commission, obtained assistance from the agricultural extension and college teaching staffs to prepare and distribute "health program features." These included a dramatic skit, a Doctor I. Q. quiz, and a set of score cards by which each member of a group could find his own rating in healthfulness and take steps to improve his score. Rivalry is stimulated by the offer of a health award to the club that shows the greatest gain over a period of several months.

In line with this statewide emphasis, many local health programs are getting under way. Often a club will call in a doctor to help plan an effective program, and usually group physical examinations are a main feature of the work, together with health education. For example, the Wichita Young People's group in Guthrie County opened one of its meetings with a roll call in "Good Health Habits" followed by a quiz and an informal discussion on "Health as a Necessity for Success."

With the great shortage of doctors and nurses in rural areas, particularly now that they are being drained off for the armed services, it is encouraging to find that many of the youth groups are taking the Red Cross first-aid and home-nursing courses where they are offered. Often it is the youth group that gets such a course set up. In Walker County, Georgia, when it was found impossible to get instructors in the rural

districts, several of the young people went into the county seat and took the beginners' and then the instructors' course so that they could hold classes in their own neighborhoods.

The activities of these groups are a forerunner of what young people can and will contribute to better community health through their own efforts. More and more they can be effective in making their homes and communities more sanitary and in cooperating with county health authorities and local doctors. They will set the example of taking medical and dental examinations and will urge others to profit by every opportunity to improve sanitation, nutrition, and health. They are already doing much to create an understanding of the principles of good health, as a definite contribution to the winning of the war and the establishment of a good peace.

### **Finding the Right Job**

To make the right choice of a job—or to get a job at all—was the pressing problem with the young people in the 1930's. Training as well as occupational guidance are still vital aspects of the employment situation as it faces rural young people and their leaders. Youth are wondering if they should go to the cities for jobs, what will be expected of them if they do, and what farmers will do for needed workers.

During the depression national agencies which were set up to combat unemployment of youth were able to reach out with considerable success into the country districts. The Civilian Conservation Corps drew young men from the farming areas as well as from the cities. The National Youth Administration offered valuable training for farm and village young people through the high school and college student-aid programs and through the resident training centers. But there were still many instances where these agencies were unable to meet the needs, either on a cooperative basis or working singly. In many cases, too, the local people, though they appreciated that there were needs in this field, were not successful in defining them or in finding means to meet them.

In view of this situation, the American Youth Commission's

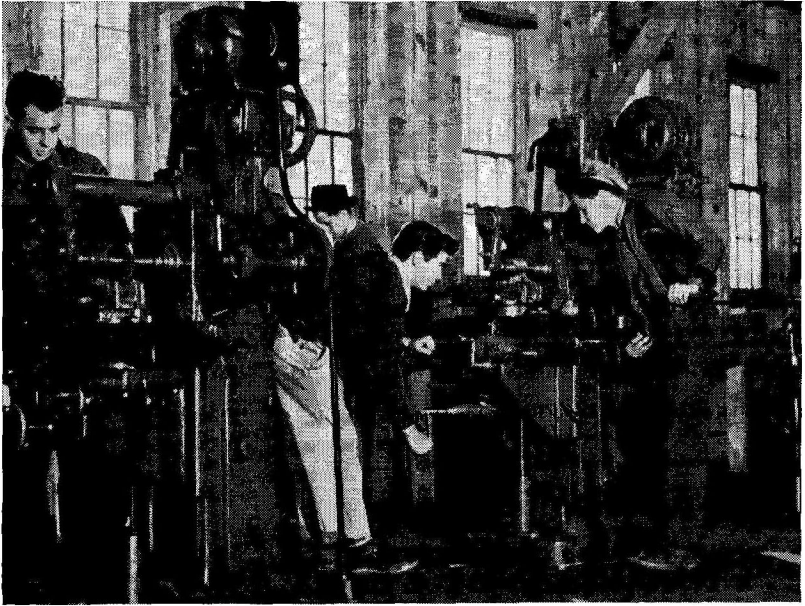
representative in the Copper Country of Michigan was able to bring together the State Employment Service, the National Youth Administration, and local teachers and organization leaders in a combined effort to tackle the difficult employment problems of the young people. This area was formerly one of the richest in the state, but with the depletion of the mines had fallen on hard times. The young people found themselves obliged to look to the industrial centers for jobs. Recognizing this necessity, the cooperating agencies, in 1940, made an extensive job inventory in relation to the training that would be needed. As a result, the young people have been able to study their own problems with some hope of finding a solution. Conferences were attended by more than six hundred young men and women between the ages of 16 and 24.

One of the most important results of this work in the Upper Peninsula has been the formation of community councils, to handle the many local problems that were recognized as needing special community enterprises for their solution. There are five of these councils now in operation.

In Bay County, Michigan, the field worker was able to help in working out an arrangement for getting many out-of-school farm boys into the defense training program. In this county there were hundreds who had ability but no chance to demonstrate it for lack of high school opportunities. They were located by means of an analysis of the school census and personal visitation in their homes. Through the cooperation of several agencies working with the county school system, 650 boys between 16 and 24 have been given training in some mechanical skill that will help them to find jobs in war industries and will be of permanent value on the farm. These boys were trained in rural garages by local mechanics. Thus it was proved that the county had many potential leaders who had not had an opportunity to develop their capacities.

The need for vocational guidance and apprentice training became so critical in the depression and the subsequent war effort that in different parts of the country many ways were tried for meeting it. Where county or state resources were

lacking, often groups of interested people tried some plan on a volunteer basis. For example, in Powhatan, Virginia, several adult leaders became concerned with the migration of young people from the county and with the poor level of employment that they were able to find. A group, including a banker, a doctor, a lawyer, a woman's organization leader, and several school teachers, began to study the best ways of guiding the young people, and to inventory the actual and potential job

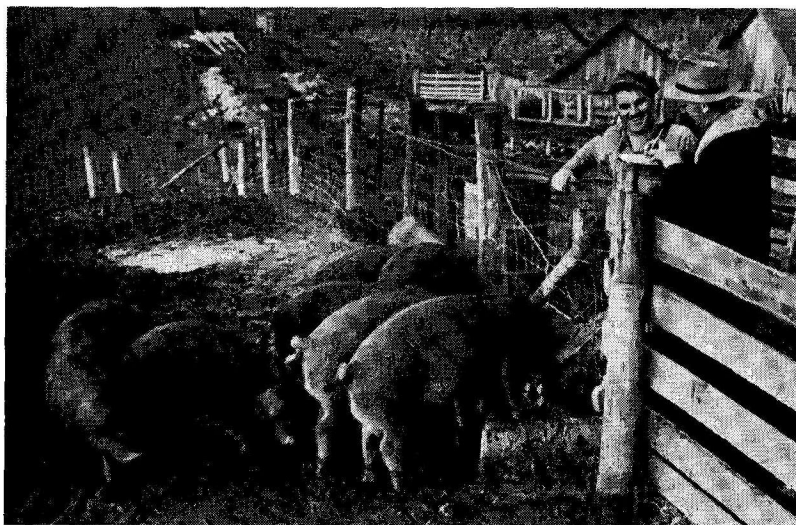


NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION

*Youth prepare for the job by taking special training*

possibilities. They started a library shelf of usable books, bulletins, and trade journals on occupations, employment, guidance, and counseling. They were able to get members of the Junior Employment Service from Richmond to give them a series of informal talks on the techniques of volunteer counseling. The result not only was most useful to youth leaders and young people of the county, but, equally important, it helped to arouse the interest of the Junior Employment Service in the rural situation.

Counseling and guidance are most effective when connected as closely as possible with actual training. This was the philosophy of the superintendent of schools in Hart County, Georgia, who for some time had been working on vocational guidance, with special attention to finding satisfactory jobs near or within the home community. As a part of the American Youth Commission project, a survey was made to determine why so many students dropped out of high school before graduating. Job opportunities in the area were canvassed, and the young people were asked to fill out questionnaires indicating their vocational preference. The replies were used as a basis for planning a system of apprentice training. Local businessmen took an interest in the plan, and a number of young men and women were taken on as apprentices. The progress of these young people is being watched with interest by the businessmen, teachers, and other leaders with a view to making the training as effective as possible.



EXTENSION SERVICE, U. S. D. A.

*The teacher visits the farm apprentice*

In the town of Dowagiac, Michigan, an apprentice system in agriculture is operating in connection with the high school. Ten boys are working as apprentices on farms in the district,

half of them dividing their time equally between school and farm, the others working on the farm all day and attending evening classes. The teacher in charge of this work makes a practice of visiting the cooperating farms, which adds greatly to the value of the program. The American Youth Commission's field worker who accompanied the teacher on one of his trips reports: "I learned from Mr. A— that the apprenticing program has the approval of adults throughout the area. It is directly in line with improved farm practices. The farmers are getting many helpful hints from the teacher and from the boys themselves."

In addition to the encouraging technical accomplishments of this program, another result has been to establish the teacher as an adviser to young men on the purchase of farms or of animals and equipment. The fact that the farmers, both young and old, are less likely to be "stung" by sharp dealers has added to the prestige of this high school's agricultural work. Farm supply dealers, credit organizations, and other business interests are cooperating in the project. As a result of the program a number of young men have made a start at farming within their own home community, and several years earlier than would otherwise have been possible.

### **Training Leaders for Recreational Work**

The *New York Times Magazine* in a recent issue carries a persuasive article, "No Blackout for the Arts," urging the careful maintenance of literature, music, painting, and sculpture even in the storm of war. Rural young people can easily understand the need for protecting and developing the arts, especially in dramatics, folk dancing, music, and handicrafts. Recreation of the noncommercial kinds is being developed as a stimulant, a tonic, and a restorative in time of universal strain. The demand for re-creative activities has led to the formation of leadership institutes of various kinds, to encourage young people to take the lead in creating and carrying their own programs.



In Iowa, for example, two annual recreation leadership schools have been held at the state college of agriculture. The four-day meetings were scheduled in the early winter so that the young people could use their new skill during the following months when their local groups are most active. Delegates to attend the sessions were selected by various agencies such as the service clubs, churches, vocational education and agricultural extension services, and farm organizations. Fifty or sixty young people, from half as many widely scattered counties, attended each of these schools.

The Iowa institutes were organized on a plan of learning by doing. Considerable responsibility was placed on the young people themselves even though specialists were on hand to teach techniques. In their comments and letters, the delegates indicated that the experience gained had been of great value to them in developing programs in their own communities. One young man, for example, wrote:

First thing in the morning we had an assembly of demonstrations and discussions on planning and conducting recreational activities. Following this were periods for music or dramatics, whichever one chose. The music consisted of leading and conducting group singing and selecting songs for definite programs. The dramatics course dealt with directing plays and pageants. I preferred dramatics and helped to give a walking rehearsal of a one-act play at a Little Theater party held one evening of the institute.

A good share of the afternoon was spent in skill, party, and folk games. The first included badminton, pingpong, and the like, which we learned by actually playing them. In the party game class, we learned how to get ready, what things to play, how to do them, and what songs to sing. The main points were to have enough games scheduled, and stop each before it got tiresome. The folk dance sessions consisted of learning how to do different circles and squares and also how to call them.

Our group at home has made very good use of the things I learned. At a special party, we had folk dancing and games of the relay and paper-pencil types. We kept every one of about a hundred and thirty people who attended busy and as a result got a large number of new club members.

Experience gained at these institutes is also proving helpful