Appropriate Adult Involvement in Youth Programs

The Situation
Some adults can’t resist trying to control activities that exist to teach youths responsibility for their own actions. Youths often feel powerless to resist their elders’ excesses.

Our Response
An educational program has been developed to convey the message of appropriate adult involvement in youth livestock programs. The “Pull the Plug” program makes use of a “fake” clipping competition between three adults and three 4-H/FFA youth. The purpose of the “Pull the Plug” educational effort is to empower young people to assume control of their livestock show and to encourage appropriate adult involvement in the preparation of show animals. The interactive and participatory “Clip-Master Contest”/“Pull the Plug” educational program illustrates through comparison. The inequitable “Clip-Master Contest,” where the adult clippers would not function properly, is compared to the inequitable situation at a youth livestock show when one youth participant tries to do his/her own work and across the aisle an adult or professional fitter is doing the majority of show preparation of another youth’s project animal.

During a six-month period, February to July 2001, data were collected during six Clip Master/Pull The Plug events in California, Idaho, and New Jersey. In all, 394 people completed the evaluation instrument. Of these 166 (42 percent) were youth livestock show exhibitors. The youth were evenly divided between 8- to 13-year olds (55.1 percent) and 14- to 19-year olds (44.8 percent).

Program Outcomes
As a group, the respondents clearly perceived that there has been excessive adult involvement in youth livestock shows. These data are illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1](http://example.com/figure1.png)

Figure 1. All respondents, “Have you ever seen situations of excessive adult involvement at a youth livestock show?”

When asked whether they thought that excessive adult involvement at a youth livestock shows was an issue that needed to be addressed, 94.4 percent (372) of the respondents said yes.

The second set of questions attempted to ascertain whether or not the 25-minute “Clip-Master/Pull the Plug” Educational program was effective in accomplishing its objectives. Question No. 3 asked, “Before being exposed to the ‘Pull the Plug’ educational program, have you ever taken steps to address the issue of excessive adult involvement at
youth livestock shows?” Responses were limited to “Yes” or “No.” Question No. 4 asked, “After being exposed to the “Pull the Plug” educational program, do you think you will ever take steps to address the issue of excessive adult involvement at youth livestock shows?” Responses were limited to “Yes” or “Maybe” or “No.”

The percentage of those indicating that they had not taken steps in the past (65 percent) and the percentage of those who indicate that they will not take steps in the future (9 percent) was dramatically different. Of the 16 respondents who indicated that they would NOT take steps to address this issue in the future, 14 were youth livestock show exhibitors and nine of those were under 14 years of age. Very young children can hardly be expected to confront adults other than their parents.

In examining the groups who indicated they HAD taken steps in the past (“Yes” on Question No. 3) and WOULD take steps in the future (“Yes” on Question No. 4), it was interesting to the researchers that the growth (135 to 163) was all from the youth, while the number adults reporting “Yes” actually went down. When offered the opportunity, adults chose “Maybe.” This reduction in adult “yes” responses seemed counter-intuitive to the researchers.

One possible conclusion is that their past experience(s) “taking steps to address the issue” were confrontational, unpleasant, etc. They would hesitate to engage in them in the future.

The youth livestock exhibitors had less hesitance, and were more willing to engage in such actions in the future. The data are reported in Figure 2.

**Conclusions**

In this study, youth livestock exhibitors were much more willing than adults to take action to deal with excessive adult involvement at a youth livestock show following the Pull the Plug educational program. The Pull the Plug educational program can serve as an effective model for the creation of educational efforts to inform stakeholders about the issue of excessive adult involvement at youth livestock shows.

One other major positive result has been reported with the implementation of the Pull the Plug educational program at county fairs in Idaho. The program is a non-threatening method to raise the issue of excessive adult involvement with youth livestock projects. In this manner, the message is delivered without county Extension educators, 4-H leaders, or show officials having to serve as policeman to insure proper adult involvement. The youth are empowered to regain some control of their youth livestock show.

**For More Information**

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