Jerome County Exploring 4-H Day

The Situation
We must always strive to improve our greatest resource…youth. Positive group and individual experiences for youth in Jerome County that help them become productive citizens in the community are critical. The Jerome Juvenile Justice Department has indicated that the youth they see in trouble are those that have not participated in positive group activities. Since 4-H is an excellent group program, the Jerome Extension staff saw the opportunity to reach additional youth from our county and expand their horizons and future potential. By encouraging youth to get involved in group activities at a younger age and learn valuable life skills, we are hoping to help them become contributing members of the community.

Our Response
A recent survey of 4-H clubs illustrates the importance of encouraging as many youth as possible within our community to become involved in 4-H. The 1998 survey (n=3198) showed that youth who actively participate in 4-H for one year or more, had more of the following assets and/or skills than youth not participating in 4-H: leadership, conflict resolution, communication, self-confidence, ability to make healthy choices, knowledge of nutrition and food safety, and record keeping (Rodriguez et. al., 1999). Furthermore, Rodriguez et. al. referenced a 1996 study by Benson of 5,235 students in grades 7, 8, 10 and 11. Benson’s study showed a relationship between developmental assets and risk behaviors that held for both boys and girls across racial and ethnic categories. Benson’s study found if a young person had 0 to 10 assets, they were four times more likely to use illicit drugs and five times more likely to engage in violence. Conversely, with 31 to 40 assets, a young person was much more likely to have good health and do well in school. As evidenced by this research, increasing youth developmental assets within our community is very important.

We wanted to promote 4-H by doing hands-on projects and exposing youth to all the fun learning opportunities they could have if they were in 4-H. So we planned an Exploring 4-H activity day on a Saturday during March. We visited ten 3rd grade classrooms in Jerome to promote 4-H and inform students of our activity day. We handed out bookmarks with information about 4-H and a picture they could color and bring to the activity day for a prize. The Exploring 4-H Day was also included in our monthly 4-H newsletter.

Youth actively participated in seven different projects as they were rotated in groups. The activities they explored included entomology, aerospace, cake decorating, crocheting, ceramics, sport fishing, and animal trivia. Activities were 25 minutes each, with youth being able to take something home from each activity. The instructional and organizational team included four 4-H leaders, five 4-H teen leaders and three Jerome Extension staff.
**The Results**

Participating in all seven activities, youth were learning and experiencing a variety of life skills they were not even aware of, such as critical thinking, decision making, learning to learn, communication, cooperation, sharing, and self-esteem, to name a few.

A total of 79 people attended the Exploring 4-H Day. Participants included adults and youth ages 5 and up. Several of those attending commented they were unaware of the vast expanse of 4-H projects available. “The youth loved the insects, they were so excited to see all the new and out of the ordinary creatures,” said Pam Smith, a Jerome County 4-H leader. She also commented that these activities provided a wonderful opportunity for youth to try something new and increase their confidence and enthusiasm. Jay Gardener, a 4-H leader of one of the new members enrolled from this activity commented that, “networking with other youth, achieving a goal, gaining basic life skills and organization are critical aspects I have seen youth gain through their involvement in 4-H.”

We enrolled 10 new youth, ranging in age from 8 to 16, in 4-H from the Exploring 4-H Day. These youth completed 4-H Cooking, Sewing, Rabbit, Swine, ABC’s of Art and Tole Painting projects during 2000. Life skills and positive developmental assets that these youth gained are very valuable. Hands-on participation was provided to parents, leaders, 4-H members and nonmembers for the above projects.

We were successful in our desire to improve our greatest resource…our youth. We provided them with positive group activities, enhanced life skills and developmental assets that will enhance them as individuals, consequently providing a positive influence in our community. This educational program had multiple benefits, because it also encouraged and supported our current 4-H members and leaders as well.

**The Future**

We plan to have this activity day each year to promote the image of 4-H and have youth involved in positive hands-on activities. Each year we will diversify project activities to promote and add variety to our 4-H program.

**References**


**For More Information**

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