Bringing 4-H to the Notus Community

The Situation
Notus is one of several small rural communities throughout southwestern Idaho that are economically depressed with limited resources. Surrounding agriculture supports the Notus economy. The population is 28 percent Hispanic. Sixty-seven percent of the student population qualifies for reduced or free lunches. In a majority of the families, both parents (or single parent) work outside the home. These at-risk youth have no public transportation and are isolated from surrounding communities’ resources and summer opportunities.

Our Response
Through the collaborative efforts of Canyon and Owyhee Counties Cooperative Extension Systems, the University of Idaho State 4-H Office and the Notus School District funded a month long 4-H summer program. The New Communities Project Grant provides $150,000 per year for Canyon and Owyhee programs and is renewable over a five-year period.

The Notus program is based on the 4-H model of learning. Experiential and informal educational methods provide safe, drug free settings supervised by appropriate adult role models. This has proven to be a cost effective way to provide the resources that successfully address the needs of youth in an at-risk environment.

Fifty children from the Notus community participated in a four-week summer day camp that drew a diverse group in which 2 percent of participants were black, 4 percent American Indian, 32 percent Hispanic and 62 percent white. Educational opportunities were offered in computer technology, visual arts, performing arts, science, aerospace, and healthy lifestyle and nutrition.

Eight teen-aged leaders from the surrounding area participated in training, planning sessions and had a major responsibility of coordinating and teaching children in the program.

Program Outcomes
Program goals and objectives were met in the children, teens, and families in the Notus community. Community partnerships were developed and resources were maximized.

A significant impact for the families was that their children participated in a healthy, safe, educational summer program. The majority of these children would have been home alone or in a childcare facil-
ity. Parents indicated that in 94 percent of the families with children in the program, both parents (or single parent) work outside the home.

The children developed an appreciation for the traditions, arts and talents of various cultures. Field trips to a museum, cultural center, park, library and airport exposed children to assets of the surrounding area and resources available, and instilled a connection to the larger surrounding communities.

Children were exposed to technology through hands-on experiences in robotics, computer, and aerospace. One experience challenged participants to build a robot and program it to manipulate objects and interact with other robots.

Some of the responses from parents when they were asked what their child learned or gained from the program: “He is more excited about learning and doing than I’ve ever seen before.” “My daughter learned to play well with others and is taking more responsibility for herself.” “My son learned that differences are good in all cultures and every culture has different things to like.”

Teens developed work force preparation skills through training provided by University of Idaho Canyon County Extension personnel. These skills were reinforced through planning activities, teaching and mentoring younger children and shadowing adults.

The Future
University of Idaho Canyon County Extension will continue to secure funding for the program for five years. During this time steps will be taken for the community to sustain the program. Future expansion goals include offering a technology component specifically for teens.

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