Youth Activity Camps Introduce 4-H to Underserved Youth

The Situation
A report from the National Institute on Out-of-School-Time, published in January 2003, states that during the school year more than 1 in 10 children regularly spend time alone or with a sibling under 13, but these children spend twice as much time unsupervised in the summer—10 hours a week more on average—compared to the school year.

Young people with nothing to do during out-of-school hours miss valuable chances for growth and development. The odds are high that youth with nothing positive to do and nowhere to go will find things to do and places to go that negatively influence their development and ultimately their futures.

Youth who spend time in communities that are rich in developmental opportunities for them experience less risk and show evidence of higher rates of positive development. A diversity of program opportunities in a community is more likely to support broad development and attract the interests of and meet the needs of a greater number of youth.

According to US Census Bureau data, approximately one in 20 families in the Lewiston-Clarkston-Asotin region earned less than $20,000 in 2000.

Our Response
Beginning in 2001, Extension Educators and 4-H Program Assistants from Nez Perce and Asotin Counties began working together to develop, facilitate, and teach a day camp to limited resource and non-4-H families as a safe and affordable enrichment program for out-of-school hours.

Research-based 4-H curriculum from Idaho and Washington was supplemented with the expertise of 4-H adult and youth volunteers, community volunteers, and Extension professionals from various counties in both states. Administrators from the Lewiston, Idaho, and Clarkston, Washington, school districts provided facilities at minimal or no cost. The Lewiston School District Summer Food Program provided free lunches and snacks for camp participants.

The Idaho Community Foundation and the Asotin County Developmental and Residential Services, as well as local retailers Wal-Mart, Costco, and Tri-State Outfitters, supported low-cost registration and scholarships for youth attendance.

Appropriate changes were made to camp based on the results of each preceding year’s evaluations. Classes were offered and eliminated based on interest and attendance. Safety protocols were reviewed and adapted as necessary. Structured transition activities were organized to eliminate random running and “hanging out.”

Program Outcomes
Over three years, 125 second through sixth grade youth from Nez Perce and Asotin counties participated in 24 classes at youth activity camp. Thirty-one percent of camp participants were introduced to 4-H curriculum and club activities as
non 4-H members in 2001, 63% in 2002, and 83% in 2003. Average class sizes consisted of nine youth in 2001, 12 youth in 2002, and nine youth in 2003. These numbers suggest we are meeting our goal of introducing 4-H curriculum to an underserved audience while maintaining small class sizes.

Based on retrospective surveys measuring parent perception of their child’s knowledge of class topics before and after participating in camp, parents rated their child’s knowledge increased an average of 2.1 on a 5.0 lickert scale in 2001, 1.34 increase in 2002, and a 1.79 increase in 2003.

In each of the three years, over 96% of parent respondents reported that their child/children shared information learned at camp.

A youth evaluation survey was implemented for the first time in 2003. With 44 out of 45 youth responding, 80% rated camp as great and 20% rated camp as OK. When asked to write one or two new things they had learned by attending camp, responses included: “making soil, rules of fishing, how to organize pictures, how to track animals, how to live in the wild, how to build a flower box, learning about water cycles, making stickers, how to build a rocket, weeds are something you don’t want, and what is happening in space.”

To date, these youth activity camps have received approximately $2,000 in grant funding.

**The Future**

Information and patterns from three years of evaluations will by used by the planning committee to guide the direction of future activity camps.

In addition to teaching camp classes, youth will be recruited to serve on the planning committee to ensure their ideas are heard and acted upon.

Collaboration plans for 2004 include working with the Director of Community Programs at Lewis-Clark State College to offer a 4-H track at Kids College, a summer youth program.

Presentations will be given at Head Start parent meetings to introduce 4-H Cloverbud activities and other 4-H opportunities to limited-resource families.

Effort will continue to focus on marketing 4-H programming as a positive developmental opportunity available to area youth during out-of-school time throughout the academic year and summer months.

**For More Information**

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