A Tarantula’s World—A Unique Way to Promote 4-H

The Situation
In Cassia County, Idaho, a large number of youth are not involved in positive youth development programs. In the year 2003 there were 5,051 school aged youth within the county; of these, 9.6% are members of the 4-H program. Bringing 4-H to area schools enables more youth to be introduced to the 4-H program.

In order to bring 4-H to Cassia County elementary school classrooms, a program needed to be developed that enhanced existing science curriculum.

Idaho Standard Achievement Testing requirements for schools restricts the time teachers have for extra curricular activities. Developing a unique 4-H program within these guidelines increases the opportunity for school visits.

Our Response
During the summer of 2000 a tarantula was found and brought to the Cassia County Extension Office. An acquaintance of Marla Lowder’s, who is a teacher invited Marla Lowder, Extension 4-H Program Coordinator into her kindergarten classroom for show and tell with the tarantula. Other teachers at the school saw the tarantula (a female named Fredricka) and wanted Marla to come to their class so students could learn more about spiders.

Marla Lowder identified this request as an opportunity to take 4-H into the classroom. Research was done through the internet and by contacting the National Tarantula Association to create a one hour program for local schools; grades K through 6th. These grades were selected because this is the age group that most often chooses to join 4-H. A craft project to make edible spiders was developed from 4-H curriculum and a bookmark was designed for students to take home after the lesson. The lesson consists of:

• Introduction to the Cassia County 4-H Program and what it has to offer
• General tarantula information
• Showing a video on tarantulas
• Learning about spider body parts
• An activity where “spiders” are made from gum drops and pretzels
• Summary and encouragement of youth to become involved in 4-H

Second grade teachers and class enjoy looking at Fredricka and learning about spiders.
During the fall of 2001 a letter and flyer was developed explaining the 4-H program and the spider program. After receiving approval from the local Superintendent of Schools, the information was sent to all K-6 teachers. Teachers called and scheduled this school enrichment program for their classes.

**Program Outcomes**
In three years, from 2001-2004, the program was presented to 1,193 elementary students. Teachers saw the educational value of the curriculum and are still requesting the program.

- “Thank you for bringing your tarantula. Fred is very interesting. My favorite part was the new molt.”
  James M., 2nd grade student

- “Their webs are strong. I learned a lot from you. My favorite part was the video.”
  Lacey Y., 2nd grade student

Due to the popularity of the program with Fredricka we are invited back to teach an average of 12 classes a year.

- “It is always fun to have someone outside of the classroom come in and share their knowledge with the kids.”
  Brenda B., 2nd grade teacher

Several teachers now use segments of other 4-H material in their class lessons after being introduced to 4-H curriculum.

Twenty five percent (25%) of new 4-H enrollments in Cassia County for 2003 were not affiliated with 4-H through friends or family. Many new members join 4-H due to promotional activities in the county, such as school enrichment.

**For More Information**
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