4-H Campers Learn Life Skills with Camp Project

The Situation
Participation at Alpine 4-H Camp by Bingham County 4-H youth had been declining. In 1998 there were only 70 participants at camp. There were no defined goals or curriculum used by the camp committee. Only youth enrolled in traditional 4-H projects could participate in the 4-H camp program. Teen camp counselors were not involved in teaching classes or leading activities. Establishing some measurable, attainable goals and inviting non-traditional youth to attend camp seemed to provide an educational opportunity for more participants. Developing a curriculum to allow youth to complete a 4-H project at camp appealed to the parents and provided a hands-on educational experience for the campers.

Our Response
With the large number of youth enrolled in 4-H school projects, recruiting at the schools was a logical place to start. Camp applications were distributed to three elementary schools in Blackfoot and a “What is 4-H?” skit was presented to recruit youth in 3rd – 5th grades. A coloring contest was held at the Aberdeen Elementary School with the Bingham County 4-H Endowment Committee awarding camp scholarships to the top three students in 3rd – 5th grade.

Four years of curriculum was developed to provide a new educational experience each year a camper attended camp. The curriculum was rotated each year to reduce camp planning and preparation time allowing more time to focus on the youth.

The Fort Hall Indian Reservation 4-H Program Director was involved in teaching the curriculum at camp. Teen camp counselors were given responsibility to teach classes, lead the campfire, flag ceremony, carnival and dance activities.

All campers were involved in classes with interesting and educational subject matter. Campers made a craft, completed a record book and participated in a demonstration. The projects were exhibited at the Bingham County Fair and the Eastern Idaho State Fair. An evaluation tool was developed to determine the number of returning campers and evaluate camp activities.

Program Outcomes
4-H camp enrollment has increased 71 percent since 1997, from 70 participants to 120 participants. In the same time period, Native American participation from Fort Hall has increased from 12 individuals to 34 or 180 percent.

The rotating curriculum allowed camp organizers to spend time preparing for camp classes and activities instead of trying to plan what to do. The teen-led activities and classes were more youth friendly, and teen counselors took more ownership in camp. One counselor commented, “Even though it was hard being in charge of something, I felt like what I did at camp makes a difference.” Another counselor stated, “I know how I felt when I was a youth camper, so
when I was put in charge of the campfire I knew what to do to keep them involved.”

In 2002, 47 percent of the youth campers were attending camp for their second or more times. Fifty-seven percent of the campers listed that they learned something new at camp. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=poor, 5=great), campers rated their overall camp experience at 4.4.

Exhibiting the camp projects at the fair has brought community awareness to the educational opportunity youth are provided at 4-H camp. The enrollment increase indicates parents are willing to have their youth come to camp. The 4-H camp experience provides a positive environment for youth, teens, volunteers and educators to work together. The 4-H faculty and staff continue to work with community leaders to provide useful programs to Bingham County youth.

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