Reaching Hispanic Youth Through 4-H

The Situation
High school graduation rates are at an all time high (87%). However, minority youth lag behind. Only 63% of Hispanic youth graduate from high school. The national KidsCount project points to high school graduation as one of three ingredients necessary to avoid family poverty. When young adults delay having their first child until they have graduated from high school, are 20 years of age, and married, only 8% live in poverty. For those who don’t meet these three goals, 78% live in poverty.

Specific challenges for Latino youth are that Latino youth are entering kindergarten and the lower grades from homes where only Spanish is spoken, having limited or no knowledge of English. These children struggle, and are at risk to drop out later. In addition, Latino youth in higher grades with limited English skills learn enough English to handle social situations, but do not have language skills for the academic subjects. These students are more at risk to drop out of school and take the lower paying jobs.

Our Response
University of Idaho Extension educators in Gooding County working in youth development, after consulting with county school districts and the county extension advisory board, identified poor English literacy as a significant barrier to school achievement for Hispanic youth in Gooding County.

To help overcome this barrier, a three point program was planned. As reading and writing are the foundation for effective learning in almost every subject, tutoring in English literacy was chosen as an essential component. Research shows that mentoring and tutoring programs started at elementary and middle school are more successful in keeping kids in school than such programs in the later grades; therefore, youth in the lower grades were targeted. The educators felt that this tutoring would be more valid for the students being tutored if it came from other Latinos—persons who understood both cultures and both languages, could relate to the literacy struggles of the Latino youth, and by understanding the language and culture could be contacted by Latino parents.

In addition to the tutoring, 4-H was chosen because it is a youth education program that has been shown to increase educational attainment. The 4-H club environment includes the critical elements necessary for positive youth development: positive relationships with caring adults, opportunities for self-determination, an accepting environment, community service opportunities, a safe environment for learning and growing, opportunities to develop and master skills, and engagement in learning.

Accordingly, with funding from the Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation, the Hispanic 4-H program was instituted by the Gooding County Extension Office. A recent small grant from the Idaho Community Foundation will help expand the program.

Program Outcomes
During the two years the program has been in effect, the two Hispanic 4-H/school assistants have tutored and mentored students in the Gooding, Wendell, Bliss, and Hagerman school districts in Gooding County. The mentors tutor students in the
kindergarten classroom and other elementary grades, both one-on-one and in small groups. They attend selected school classrooms for homework assignment awareness. Occasionally they interpret for parents at school meetings.

Youth are being tutored and helped to understand academic concepts. Kindergarten students fresh from Spanish speaking homes don’t spend several months in “dead” time not understanding the teacher. Parents know they can call the tutors with questions about school and their children. Eleven Hispanic youth are enjoying the project learning in the bilingual 4-H club, Los Hojas de la Suerte (Lucky Clovers).

Teachers are enthusiastic about the help students are receiving. Students are raising their grades, sometimes from D’s and F’s to A’s and B’s. Six tutored middle school students are on the honor roll in one district. One ESL coordinator commented, “There are just too many students with needs for me to cover them all. We need all the help we can get.” Another “very influential in helping teachers meet the needs of our Hispanic students.” “She talks to them about coping skills and striving for excellence. Because of her presence, several have increased their grade level and ISAT scores.” “Great impact that is measurable and significant.” Although the specific number of students needing help varies by semester and by year, the general number of students served in Wendell is 25-40, in Hagerman 10-25, Gooding 15-30, and in Bliss 10-20.

For More Information
Diana Christensen, MS, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences
Gooding County Extension
203 Lucy Lane
Gooding, Idaho 83330
208-934-4417
Fax: 208-934-4418
Email: dianac@uidaho.edu

Sagrario Rodriguez
Phone: 208-934-8525
Email: SRRodriguez14@aol.com