Vista Volunteers Make a Difference

The Situation
The Ada County Extension office supports community outreach. Our goal is to serve low income and at-risk populations with 4-H activities. We reach these diverse audiences by working with youth in local schools and Boys and Girls Clubs.

Additional programming requires more human resources. Currently the Ada County Extension office has one part time program manager bringing 4-H programs to the schools and after-school programs in Boise and Meridian. An identified need was for a full-time volunteer to expand 4-H programs in schools and after-school programs, and the community.

Our Response
The 4-H program applied for an AMERICORPS*VISTA Volunteer to work with youth in Ada County to increase our outreach and bridge the gap between knowledge and practical application.

The Ada County Extension office selected a volunteer using the Corporation for Community and National Service (CNCS)/AMERICORPS*VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America). The first AMERICORP*VISTA Volunteer to work in Ada County was Dave Wallas. Dave’s mission was twofold: First to recruit and train volunteers within the afterschool and school enrichment classrooms and second to teach low-income and at-risk youth using 4-H hands-on methods and curriculum.

Dave received training in 4-H and VISTA curriculum, youth development, Junior Master Gardener, policies, procedures and experiential learning. His first assignment was to recruit school principals, organizational leaders, and interested teachers. Dave’s positive marketing and communication with classroom teachers allowed him to successfully initiate this program in three elementary schools (Whittier, Garfield, and Ridgewood) and one secondary program (ASPIRE Assisting Students Pre-vocationally in Reaching Employment). He also taught Junior Master Gardener lessons to children attending the Boys and Girls Club in Garden City. Additionally, Dave instructed many summer day camps held at the Ada County Extension Office. He taught bicycling, Junior Master Gardener, aerospace and helped with numerous others.
**Program Outcomes**

Our partnership with AMERICORPS*VISTA provided Extension the chance to work with youth that would not normally participate in the 4-H club program. Dave reported a total of 778 youth were actively engaged in 4-H hands on activities. This exposure gave youth the opportunity to learn life skills and have fun with 4-H! Because of this “new” partnership the Ada County 4-H program is achieving their goal of reaching new audiences.

The AMERICORP*VISTA Volunteer provided increased 4-H staff time to improve working relationships with school administrators, teachers and youth in local schools and youth agencies. The Boys and Girls Club program director stated “It’s a great partnership for us because we can provide a wider range of programs for our kids. It just expands everything that we do.”

Dave’s thoughts on his year with the 4-H program: “The year I spent with the 4-H clubs of Ada County opened my eyes to the wonderful and diverse programs currently being promoted by 4-H. The staff, members, and volunteers I met were so committed to the mission of ‘Making the Best Better’ and took curriculum, personal skills, and knowledge to the community and truly made people’s lives better.” His concluding remarks were “I have gained as much from this program as I have invested in its success.”

The parents of young gardeners at the Boys and Girls Clubs reported an increase in gardening interest; the children were willing to eat new types of fruit and vegetables. Dave’s Junior Master Gardener efforts were reported in the local newspaper, radio, and TV.

**For More Information**

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