Minidoka County 4-H Teens—Exchanging Memories

The Situation
A recent University of Idaho study of Idaho youth shows proof of just how important 4-H is to the positive development of young people. This research shows that youth who participated in 4-H for two or more years are significantly better at avoiding risky lifestyle choices than youth who did not participate in the program. Creative programs that keep teens involved in 4-H are especially important because they encourage individuals to have a positive self-identity and gives them the confidence to become positive role models for younger children. Teens also are more likely to take on leadership roles in their clubs, schools and community.

Our Response
Exchange programs are a great opportunity to experience life in a different part of the nation or even the world! Since 1997, 4-H teens, adult volunteers and UI Extension faculty from Minidoka County have traveled to visit other places as well as hosted youth and adults from Kansas, Montana and Indiana. Plans are underway to visit another state in 2004.

Program Outcomes
State-to-state 4-H teen exchange programs provide an opportunity to visit different areas of the United States, experience different cultures, provide educational and fun activities, leadership opportunities and keep teens involved and active in community programs.

Exchange programs are not limited to developing new friendships and enjoying sightseeing opportunities. Fund raising, promotion and planning create many opportunities for teens to sharpen their leadership, communication and organizational skills. As a result, teens who participate in exchanges have also become active in state and national leadership positions and were awarded national scholarships and trips. Exchanges are fun and an effective tool to develop strong life skills such as accepting differences, problem solving and teamwork.

Minidoka County 4-H Teen Association members are active in their project clubs, in schools and in their communities. The state-to-state 4-H teen
The exchange program has created interest in 4-H programs for older youth and strengthened the entire county program. As a result, there are more experienced youth able to mentor younger members.

Minidoka County teens are active with community workshops such as Building Communities, Charting Assets and Creating Change.

Involvement in 4-H by older members has encouraged more youth to participate in 4-H club work and non-traditional 4-H activities. Thirty percent of 4-H members 13 years of age and older in Minidoka County are active members of the Minidoka County 4-H Teen Association. Sixty four percent of these teens have participated in activities beyond the county level including state-to-state exchanges, leadership activities, state teen conference, 4-H Ambassadors and national trips.

Over 90% of the teens who become involved in the Minidoka County 4-H Teen Association continue to be active 4-H members until they graduate from high school. This continued commitment to 4-H is atypical. Many members drop out when they reach high school age.

Fund raising is an important part of state-to-state exchanges. Successful fund raising allows teens to participate that otherwise could not afford to and puts less of a burden on individual family budgets. Many committee leadership opportunities are available enabling more teens to build organizational and leadership skills.

Fund-raising activities such as “Get Your Goat” help promote 4-H in the community.

Future Plans: The Minidoka County 4-H Teen Association has posted their information on The National 4-H Web to inform other states they are looking for an exchange site for 2004-05.

For more information about 4-H state exchanges visit www.4-h.org.

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