4-H Camp Empowers Youth through Community Service

The Situation
The traditions of 4-H are organized around the notion of building community spirit and connections between individuals. Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By participating in community service activities, youth can connect to communities and learn to give back to others. It is clear that these experiences provide the foundation that helps us understand the ‘big picture’ of life, and as a result we find purpose and meaning. Research shows that there are 40 developmental assets that help young people make wise decisions, choose positive paths, and grow up competent, caring and responsible. Many of these factors influence why some young people have successes in life and why others have a harder time. Participation in 4-H camp plays a role in building assets for youth. Boulder Mountain Youth Camp planners targeted assets that are grouped under positive values; they included caring, equality, social justice, integrity, honesty, and responsibility. Within the South Central District Health region 51% of youth surveyed thru HealthNet stated they possessed the asset of caring for others. Camp organizers encouraged youth to participate and take an active role in serving their community.

Our Response
An American Camp Association survey of camps showed that 63% of parents say, “My child continues to participate in activities learned at camp”. With this in mind camp planners dedicated one set of workshops (seven classes) per year to projects that youth could create and then give to a variety of community organizations. Extension Educators, 4-H Volunteers, and 4-H Program Coordinators worked together to plan and organized the camp service projects. Receiving organizations were sought out and materials for activities were donated or purchased. Once the items were made, camp groups of 2-4 youth were selected from each of the counties (Blaine, Camas, Lemhi) to present the donations.

Workshop activities included:
- Building bird feeders and houses
- Creating pot holder/dish towel angels
- Making soap
- Decorating vanity bags
- Fashioning memory boxes
- Making cookies in a bag
- Assembling fleece blankets or hats
- Painting forest signs
- Cleaning up trails
- Spreading chips at the campgrounds.

Organizations receiving the youth’s donations have included a variety of Community Hospitals (3), the Idaho Veterans of Foreign Affairs Hospital, women...
and children shelters (3), senior centers (2), home health and hospice centers (2), assisted living centers (3), elementary schools (2), and the 4-H camp board.

**Program Outcomes**

Approximately 100 youth and adults participated at camp every year from 2000-2005. A 2005 survey indicated that 32% of the campers were non-4-H members and that 17% stated this was their first community service project. Youth indicated that new skills learned were; Giving 13%, Community Service Volunteering 33%, Contribution to Group Effort 24%, Leadership 41%, Teamwork 16%, Service Learning 48%, Concern of Others 21%, and Planning/Organizing 33%.

Youth stated in the survey:
- I have learned that it does not matter what you look like and that what counts is inside
- I did nice things for the poor
- I learned that helping others is a good thing to know
- I learned that this is what life is about
- I learned how to help people you don’t know
- I learned that you should treat people with respect
- I learned that it is great to share things
- I learned that you can make a really simple great gift by making cookies and packaging in a jar
- I learned that just adding little things to something can make a big difference

Many thank you notes and calls of appreciation have been acknowledged from the organizations that received the gifts.

**The Future:*** Recommendations for the future are to invite the receiving organizations to camp and have the campers present the created items.

**For More Information**

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