4-H Day Camps Significantly Increase Participation in Clark County

The Situation
In 1999 the 4-H program in Clark County was almost non-existent. There were only 34 projects at the fair. Leaders were difficult to find since about 80% of all adults were working outside the home. More land was being farmed in the area and a hay processing plant had been built. Due to the labor needs of these two industries the population of Clark County was increasing. Most of the laborers were Hispanic. Few Hispanic youth were involved in any activities in the community.

Because Clark County has less than 1000 people, there are few opportunities for youth to become involved in community activities. The 4-H Council and the Extension Office met to decide how to increase participation in 4-H and how to get the Hispanic youth more involved. A decision was made to try 4-H Day Camps, an accelerated method of finishing a 4-H project. 4-H projects, including demonstrations, record books and exhibits are finished in a day-long session. A fee is paid to cover the cost of the materials and all materials are then provided for the youth to finish the project.

Our Response
The Extension office went to the schools and explained the program to the 3rd through 7th grade students. We got preliminary sign-ups for four different projects. After dates were set youth and parents were contacted. When asked, people in the community were willing to assist with the Day Camps since it would only take one day. Enrollment increased from 34 to 88 projects the first year. After our second successful year we approached a local business, Larsen Hay Farms, and they agreed to support the Clark County 4-H Day Camp program. This enabled us to offer all projects to all youth for a very nominal fee. Even for projects that are more costly, such as photography, advanced rocketry and cake decorating, the fee is the same so all youth can afford to participate. If they cannot afford to participate we do have funding from the 4-H Council available to pick up the fees.

We now offer 16 different day camp projects. Some of the teachers in the schools are now doing school enrichment projects with science, lapidary and leathercraft. In 2004 we had 86 youth with 192 projects in day camps and school enrichment. We also increased our livestock participation from 0 projects in 2000 to 17 in 2004.

The advantages to this type of program are:
- All projects are equal in a Day Camp – all costs are the same, all materials are provided.
- Culturally this type of programming is more appealing to Hispanic youth.

Less time commitment for leaders and youth.
Projects are completed in one meeting.
Education is more intensive.
More projects could be offered because people were willing to be available and assist for one or two days.

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**Program Outcomes**

In 2004 we surveyed parents who came to the fair in Clark County. Fifteen parents responded. Half the parents had children who were first or second year members and 38% had children who had been in 4-H 3-6 years. The total number of projects taken by their children in the past year ranged from one to ten.

The aspects the parents liked best about 4-H Day Camps correlate closely with the critical elements necessary for positive youth development:
- It gives the children a chance to try new things.
- It is something for the kids to do and still learn.
- Opportunity for everyone to work together.
- Great leaders/Extension people.
- Wholesome activities/projects that contribute to useful life skills.
- Includes ALL children.
- Teaches leadership.

Youth leadership has also increased through this type of program. In 2003 we finally had youth old enough and experienced enough to become junior leaders in 4-H projects. We had spent 4 years building up the program and keeping youth involved for more than one or two years. In 2004 we had six teen leaders who helped with ten different day camp projects. These youth have assisted in teaching skills, and were in charge of record books and demonstrations.

Comments from their teen leader record books indicated the number one thing they gained from leading a 4-H project was patience. They also indicated they learned how to teach skills. They increased their public speaking ability and they learned better how to work with younger children.

Eighty-six youth is about two-thirds of the eligible youth in the county. The percentage of Hispanic youth ranges from 25-35%. About 70% of the youth take more than one project during the year. Ninety percent of first year members join 4-H a second year. Sixty three percent have been in 4-H more than two years.

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**For More Information**

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