Getting Teens “Wired” in 4-H Afterschool

The Situation
Many working parents face difficult decisions regarding afterschool childcare issues. They turn to daycare centers, home providers, afterschool programs and many depend on grandparents or relatives. As these children become older and grow out of the daycare system, the options become less and less for families. As youth enter middle and high school there is a large percentage that does not participate in extra-curricular activities and are left alone after school. These middle and high school youth who are not involved in an activity or program are the most at-risk for dropping out of school.

According to a speech delivered by Margaret Spellings, U.S. Secretary of Education, there are one million students who drop out of high school each year. This costs our nation more than $260 billion dollars in lost wages, lost taxes, and lost productivity over their lifetimes. She suggests that student performance is not just an “education issue.” It’s also an economic issue, a civic issue, a social issue, and a national security issue. And... it’s everybody’s issue. Tomorrow’s jobs will go to those with education in science, engineering and math and to those with high-skill technical training.

Our Response
Technology has always been a key component of the 4-H program. In the past, 4-H has used technology and been a leader in the adoption of innovative techniques and strategies. However, with the move into the technological era, there has been a growing need for education and skill development in the use of information technology.

GIS/GPS Mapping Project (Jump Creek)

In response to the needs of communities in the rural Treasure Valley, University of Idaho Extension engaged in afterschool programming for middle and high school teens. Through a USDA funded CYFAR (Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk) New Communities Project, 4-H in Canyon and Owyhee Counties are utilizing and integrating information technology in the 4-H programs. Hired staff work with youth in developing skills in the areas of GIS/GPS, robotics, digital photography, website development, and other information technology. For example, youth have participated in a “mapping your favorite place” on-line activity. The skills needed for this activity included understanding global positioning systems, on-line mapping resources, spatial data, and basic internet skills.

Program Outcomes
Local “4-H Tech Teams” formed as a result of these afterschool programs. In these teams, youth have opportunities to not only engage in activities to learn
new technology, but also attend state and national conferences. The teams provide a supportive atmosphere to the development and improvement of leadership skills, group work, and individual growth, as well as technology skills.

To date, all of the youth with the exception of one, are still in school or have completed high school. Several have continued on to higher education. The program has introduced middle and high school youth to the technology opportunities 4-H can offer.

Over sixty middle school and high school youth in rural Owyhee and Canyon Counties have developed information technology skills that will support them as they prepare for the workforce (benchmarks were used to assess skill development).

![Robot designed and programmed by middle school youth using Lego Mindstorms](image)

**The Future**

The CYFAR (Children Youth and Families At-Risk) grant helped to develop resources, train staff and volunteers, and build models to further the movement of information technology into 4-H afterschool programming in Canyon and Owyhee Counties. The programs have built partnerships with schools and staff to continue a relationship to provide 4-H afterschool in these communities.

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**For More Information**

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