

IMPACT

 University of Idaho
Cooperative
Extension System

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Play Group Jump Starts Parent Meetings

The Situation

University of Idaho Parents As Teachers Demonstration Project in Boundary County began enrolling families in February 2001 with four, then six, then ten and now 17 families with 23 children. Parents As Teachers provides families with individual lessons tailored to their child's development and group meetings that further support parents and children zero to five years of age. While family enrollments and lessons were progressing nicely, parents were missing the important concepts and support offered at the group meeting. Attendance was disappointing. Various meeting times, days, and formats were tried but attendance remained very low.

Our Response

After brainstorming ideas we decided to try "jump starting" parent group meetings by offering a series of weekly summer playgroups on a range of fun topics and related parent education at the fairgrounds park in Bonners Ferry. Topics included "How Does Your Garden Grow?"—ages and stages of child development; "Bugs! Bugs! What's Bugging You?"—parental dilemmas; "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe"—math for toddlers; "Bubble Works"—summer safety; "Water Play Day"—ways to learn with water; "Down by the Sea"—parents time to relax; "Teddy Bear Picnic"—children and friendships; and "Beautiful Butterflies?"—building confident children.

Each playgroup included age-appropriate center-style activities, stories, games and songs that revolved around the week's theme. Nutritious snacks also reflected the day's theme such as pudding dirt cups for gardening day and fish crackers and jello for Down By the Sea day. Parents received additional activities and handouts to reinforce the day's concepts during the parent education portions of the meeting.

Program Outcomes

It took extra thought, planning and some hard work by Candice Kelly, Parent Educator, but it was worth it. Parents made connections with other parents involved in Parents As Teachers. Families had lots of fun while learning and networking with others in the process. One parent commented, "I really enjoyed it. It was good interaction for the kids and I enjoyed meeting the other parents. Eric really enjoyed the sidewalk chalk activity and just playing on the swings and playing with the other kids." Soon attendance started climbing, achieving an all time high of 26 at "Water Play Day." Seven families enrolled in Parents As Teachers. Overall the summer fun playgroup was very successful and helped to get PAT families connected with each other.

The Future

The PAT family connections made this summer will be further strengthened at the monthly group meetings. The fall and winter program will expand upon the successful summer program and provide a

forum for waiting list families to participate in
Parents As Teachers.

For More Information

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