Youth Step Up to Leadership in Bingham County

The Situation
Formerly a largely rural community, Bingham County is beginning to catch up with the “latchkey” generation. Both parents in many families are working to make ends meet, and an increasing number of children are being raised in single-parent households. Several of the county’s school districts are seeing the need to develop programs to benefit the youth who lack after-school supervision in their homes.

University of Idaho extension educators have long been recognized in Bingham County for their youth development abilities. The 4-H program is also very visible and is recognized for its ability to help youth gain life skills. The Snake River School District after-school program coordinator values extension programs and came to the UI educators in Bingham County for help with curriculum and program delivery for grades 7-12. A local elementary school contacted the county extension office at the same time for help so extension office resources were limited.

Our Response
Programs were initiated in two school districts for the 2005-2006 school year. Due to time and budget restraints, Bingham County extension educators needed to hire additional staff to meet the needs of the Snake River program and the elementary school. A University of Idaho Community Development grant was acquired to help pay for additional staff and transportation.

The extension educators involved had to hire and train a part-time 4-H program assistant to assist in delivery of the program. The “Step Up to Leadership” curriculum, part of the 4-H Cooperative Curriculum Series, was purchased as a teaching tool. Lessons were adapted from the curriculum to teach the youth.

Extension educators took turns traveling to the junior high for 12 weeks. They were able to train two school staff to assist in program delivery and involve 29 youth in the leadership program. The 4-H program assistant traveled to the elementary school for 12 weeks, training four school staff and teaching 65 youth.

The youth were given the opportunity to experience hands-on leadership activities and make group decisions. The youth were introduced to the 4-H program and were able to work on a 4-H project.

Program Outcomes
The older students were involved in leadership activities such as conducting a meeting, making decisions as a group, speaking in front of a group, taking responsibility for actions and the power of leadership (good and bad). This group was always in transition with youth coming and going. Fourteen youth completed a project and all 29 youth were able to speak in front of the group.

As part of the group decision-making process these youth voted not to display a project at the fair. In the beginning the older youth were not willing to...
participate and the first couple of sessions were total chaos but near the end of the program the teens were anxious to know what the activity was and how they could help. It’s hard to show the change in the youth on paper or see a defined, measurable impact. It was amazing to work with the youth, to see them come together to make group decisions and complete a project.

The younger youth were involved in some hands-on 4-H activities. Of the 65 youth that were involved in the activities, 59 were able to complete all project requirements, including giving a demonstration (speech) and exhibiting the project at the fair.

The Future
This school year the extension educators have been asked to come back to the junior high to teach the older youth and the program assistant has been asked to come back to work with the younger youth. Due in part to the success of this program and others, the county commissioners funded the program assistant’s salary.

For More Information
Scott Nash, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension—Bingham County
583 W. Sexton
Blackfoot, Idaho 83221
208-785-8060
Fax: 208-785-2511
Email: snash@uidaho.edu

Marnie R. Spencer, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension—Bingham County
583 W. Sexton
Blackfoot, Idaho 83221
208-785-8060
Fax: 208-785-2511
Email: marniers@uidaho.edu