

IMPACT



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Engaging Youth, Serving Communities: A Rural Youth/Adult Partnership

The Situation

Research studies and public opinion polls indicate there are several important issues facing rural youth that can be addressed through existing youth development organizations. The literature reveals that rural youth:

- Experience less community interconnection of people due to long commute times of parents to work and children to school which leads to:
 - a. Lack of first hand observation of potential career opportunities;
 - b. Fewer adult role models for civic responsibility and volunteering; and
 - c. More unsupervised time, generally after-school.
- Are impacted by diverse populations, especially Hispanic, moving into rural communities;
- Experience geographic isolation due to distance between homes and towns, and a lack of public transportation;
- Have fewer physical locations in which to interact with peers and adults;
- Have limited programs and opportunities;
- Have limited employment opportunities, especially meaningful employment;
- Experience increased isolation and alienation due to high teacher turnover;
- Live in cultures characterized by prejudice, ethnocentricity and intolerance to nonconforming ideas that could lead to violence;
- Experiment with negative behaviors such as alcohol, tobacco and/or sex;
- Have seen a three-fold increase in gang-related activity in many places;

- Tend not to return to communities due to a lack of a sense of belonging and connection to the community.

All of these issues have direct impact on Idaho's rural youth. By involving youth and adults working together, youth can become more engaged in the decision making within their communities.



Members of the Notus Youth Council Address the Notus High School student body at a recent recruiting event.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development received a \$25,000 from National 4-H Council to address rural youth issues. This grant is focused on developing leadership and life skills in youth so they can work in partnership with adults to improve their own lives and the communities in

which they live. A core training team was trained in community issues identification and meeting facilitation skills. The state core team trained rural community teams in Notus, Salmon, Donnelly, and Soda Springs. Each rural community planned and conducted a community forum to identify the top youth issues within their community. They developed action plans to address the issue. Each rural community received up to \$2,500 in funds to conduct the community forum and to begin implementing their plan.

The issue identified by the Notus community team was “out of school opportunities for Notus youth.” A core group of seven youth and three adults worked on the agenda for the community forum. The forum brought together a small group of youth and adults that decided that the best way to address the issue was to support the formation of a Notus Youth Council that could support the formation of out of school opportunities for Notus youth from a youth perspective. The current council is comprised of the seven youth who were on the original Notus EYSC Training Team, and 25 new youth members have been identified from a recent recruiting event.

The Notus Youth Council has the support of the Notus City Council, the Notus Superintendent of Schools, and the principal of Notus High School. The council has also met with the Mayor of Caldwell and the Caldwell Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council to garner support and to learn how to run an effective youth council. The council has met four times, has elected officers, is in the process of drafting by-laws, and has already conducted a successful community service project. The committee is advised by the Canyon County 4-H Extension Educator, and two other adult mentors, but is youth-chaired and directed. The council has been approached by the Idaho Press Tribune for a feature article for their successful beginnings, and hopes to begin sponsoring day camps for elementary school children in the community very soon.

A total of 14 youth and 25 adults have been reached through the Notus EYSC Project. An additional 136 youth and 15 adults were recently approached as part of a recruiting event for the Notus Youth Council.

Program Outcomes

Following community forums, youth and adults will maintain partnerships together to implement community action plans that will vary as specific communities will confront different issues and will have unique resources to address them. Completing implementation of the action plans will help youth move through a process of meaningful problem identification and problem solving and will allow youth to see their impact as effective change agents to expand the human, social, cultural and political capitals in their communities. This provides youth with further opportunities for meaningful civic involvement. University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development has been approved to apply for up to \$25,000 in renewal grant funds for further implementation of the community action plans and involvement of additional rural communities.

For More Information

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