



University of Idaho
Extension

Idaho Horizons, PO Box 442334, Moscow, Idaho, 83844-2334; 208-885-4017; Fax: 208-885-5759

North Idaho Communities Take Action on Poverty

The Situation

Many of our North Idaho communities have struggled with significant population change and economic decline. Currently, thirty-eight percent of rural Idahoans do not have enough income to meet their basic needs. To help create prosperous communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, the University of Idaho partnered with the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAFF) to develop community leadership to address poverty. University of Idaho Extension delivered the Horizons program to 26 rural Idaho towns. These communities have between 226 and 4,900 residents, with poverty rates from 11% to 26%. Horizons focused on poverty reduction, leadership development and community mobilization. A coach and steering committee comprised of local individual volunteers helped guide the program.

Our Response

To help learn about poverty in their community, residents from each of the 14 Idaho Horizons communities participated in the Everyday Democracy's Dialogue-to-Change program, "*Thriving Communities Working Together to Move from Poverty to Prosperity for All*" in January through April 2007. This program fosters open dialogue between community members about issues such as poverty and how to move people from "talking about poverty" to working on specific actions to address poverty.

In meetings totaling 12 hours, citizens met in small groups (Study Circles) to discuss the following five topics:

- How are we connected to our community and to poverty?
- What does poverty look like?
- Why is there poverty in our community?
- Reaching our vision to reduce poverty.
- Moving to action.

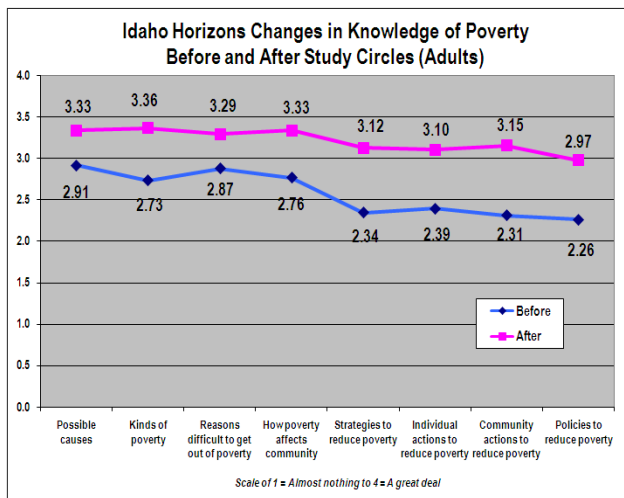
Community coaches and steering committees engaged 105 partners in recruiting, marketing and delivery of the Study Circles program. Partnerships varied by community but included libraries, local Community Action Partnership organizations, local Chamber of Commerce, GEM communities, churches, schools, government agencies, and area non-profits.

In January 2007, 127 community members were trained to facilitate small group conversations, or "study circles" at one of four main Study Circle Facilitation training sessions that were held in Post Falls, St. Maries, Riggins and Cottonwood. An additional 23 facilitators were trained in four other alternate trainings in Grangeville, Plummer, Bovill, and Bonners Ferry. Overall, 150 facilitators were trained to guide the Study Circle process in their own communities.

Program Outcomes

Seven hundred twenty-one community residents (116 youth and 605 adults) participated in one of Idaho's 62 Study Circle groups comprised of 8 – 12 members each. Fifteen percent of participants lived in poverty. Post program surveys completed by 542 adults and 82 youth indicate:

- 78% adults and 87% youth increased their knowledge and understanding of poverty (*see chart below for further information*).
- 87% adults and 74% youth felt they could work to help reduce poverty in their community.
- 79% adults and 61% youth reported they had already taken action to reduce poverty in their community.
- 47% adults and 24% youth felt in the future it was very likely they would take individual actions to reduce poverty.
- 61% adults and 41% youth felt in the future it was very likely they would join in community actions to reduce poverty.
- 59% adults and 24% youth were very likely in the future to speak up for/support policies that would reduce poverty.



The small group discussions ended with an Action Planning Forum. Four hundred fifty-one community members attended their community's Action Planning Forum to discuss and prioritize their community's action items that emerged during the Study Circle conversations. Initial action items varied by community, but included town clean up

events, community resource guides, expanded or created community festivals and/or farmer's markets, and enhanced community communication structures.

Study Circle participant comments include:

- "We are seeing increased community engagement from all economic and age levels."
- "A real sense of community is being developed among those involved to this point. People who didn't even know each other before have started to develop relationships."
- "People involved in Study Circles are looking for ways to help low-income people they met through study circles. People are positive and feel like they can in fact make a difference."

Idaho Horizons Communities 2006/08

The fourteen Horizons clusters (comprised of 26 communities) include: *Bonnors Ferry, Silver Valley (Kellogg, Pinehurst, Smeltonville, Wardner), Coeur d'Alene Reservation (Desmet, Plummer, Tensed, Worley), UpRiver (Fernwood, Santa, Emida), St. Maries, Bovill, Troy, Kendrick/Juliaetta, Prairie (Cottonwood, Keuterville, Greencreek, Ferdinand), Kooskia, Stites, Grangeville, Riggins, and Cascade.*

For More Information

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