

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Idaho 4-H Teen Conference Teaches Life Skills

The Situation

Idaho 4-H Teen Conference is a week-long leadership, citizenship, and life skills conference held every June on the University of Idaho campus in Moscow, Idaho. Teens from the eighth grade through high school are invited to attend the conference, which attracts an average of 200 participants each year. University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development has been providing a conference for teenage 4-H members since the 1920s. The conference includes educational workshop tracks, an election process to provide teen leadership to future conferences, and an opportunity for youth from all over Idaho to experience campus life at the University of Idaho.



The conference is designed to give youth numerous real world experiences. Participants live in dorms on campus, eat in the campus cafeteria, and attend workshops held in various buildings throughout campus. The conference is planned and carried out largely by a planning committee made up of elected

and appointed teen officers and adult partners. Teen officers are elected in a process that includes a nominating convention as well as a general election.

Our Response

In an effort to determine the benefits of the conference to the youth that attend, Brian Luckey, Ada County 4-H Extension Educator, developed an evaluation questionnaire that has been used at the conference since 2002. In 2004, the Teen Association president suggested adding the question, "What new thing that you learned will you take back to your county/club?" The question has proven to be an effective way to prove that teens gain valuable life experience at Idaho 4-H Teen Conference.

Program Outcomes

Responses to the question of what teens take away from Teen Conference gives insight to the short-term impact of the conference. Teen Conference offers a wide variety of personal growth opportunities to the teens. It is clear from the evaluation that youth take many valuable lessons home and their comments reflect the variety of experiences they have at the conference. Responses included below were taken from the 2005, 2006, and 2007 evaluation.

Many youth are impacted by the eight to ten hour workshop track they are in, and mention specific skills they learned in their track. Youth participate in a variety of workshop topics including fashion, animal science, fitness, and technology. Examples of these kinds of comments include: "my killer tennis serve," "how to halter break a foal," "my sweet dance moves," "photo shop and music editing," and

“better leadership skills.” Many of the skills youth say they will take home from the conference are a direct result of their specific track workshop. The planning committee works hard to come up with a variety of track workshops as a result.



Other youth comment on the lessons they learned as a result of living, working, and learning with their peers: “I learned to have respect for others,” “that even if you don’t know anybody you should just be yourself and let what happens happen,” “to not be afraid to stand out,” and “how to put yourself in others’ positions.” The intensity of the weeklong event provides youth experiences they do not get in their daily lives. Teen Conference helps youth learn how to interact with their peers on a different level than they are normally accustomed to.

Many youth comment on the overall experience of the conference in terms of the life skills they learned: “you always learn leadership; I learned a lot running for an office,” “how to cooperate skills,” “teamwork and trust,” “how to speak in front of a crowd,” and “how to accept more diversity in my life.” Life skill instruction is a big part of the Teen Conference curriculum, and youth prove that they indeed learn valuable life skills by their responses to the evaluation.

Teen Conference continues to provide 4-H teens a chance to interact with other teens from around the state. Whether learning specific skills in a workshop, social skills, or other valuable life skills, attending Teen Conference is a valuable experience for many Idaho 4-H members.

For More Information

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