

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Bonnors Ferry Takes 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 Northwest Area Foundation to develop community leadership to address poverty. The ensuing Horizons program is a community leadership program aimed at reducing poverty in small rural and reservation communities with a population less than 5,000 and facing economic decline and demographic change. Horizons focuses on poverty reduction, leadership development and community mobilization.

Bonnors Ferry, Idaho with a population of 2,515 and an overall poverty rate of 20 percent has been a part of the Horizons program since fall 2006.

Our Response

Bonnors Ferry, Idaho, was one of 14 communities in northern Idaho that participated in the Study Circle Resource Center's program, "Thriving Communities: Working Together to Move from Poverty to Prosperity for All." 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 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.

Fifteen community members were trained as Study Circle facilitators in January 2007. These trained facilitators led 7 study circle groups comprised of 8-12 community members.

Program Outcomes

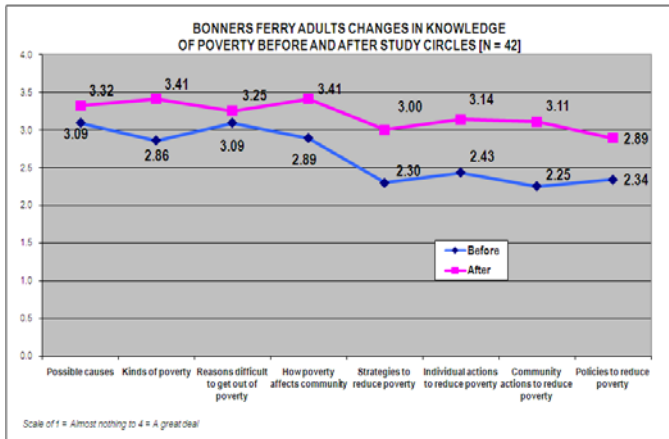
From January - April 2007, one youth and 56 adults from Bonners Ferry were among 721 northern Idaho residents who participated in these facilitated, small-group conversation about poverty.

Post program surveys measured community members' knowledge and understanding of poverty before and after their study circle experience.

Surveys completed by the participants indicate:

- 73% of adults increased their knowledge and understanding of poverty
- 74% of adults felt they could work to help reduce poverty in their community
- 86% of adults reported they had already taken action to reduce poverty in their community
- 62% of adults felt like in the future it was very likely they would take individual actions to reduce poverty
- 78% of adults felt like in the future it was very likely they would join in community actions to reduce poverty

- 71% of adults were very likely in the future to speak up for/support policies that would reduce poverty



The small group discussion concluded in an Action Planning forum. At this forum, 45 Bonners Ferry study circle members came together to discuss and prioritize potential community action items which emerged during the small group conversations. The two action items that were identified were:

- Networking community organizations and communication strategies.
- Job creation.

Action teams are currently moving ahead in their efforts to help Bonners Ferry become a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Visit the University of Idaho Extension Horizons website: <http://extension.ag.uidaho.edu/horizons>.

For More Information

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