

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Prairie Communities Move from Dialogue to Action on Poverty

The Situation

Many of our north central Idaho communities have struggled with significant population change and economic decline. To help create prosperous communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, the University of Idaho partnered with the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAf) to develop community leadership to address poverty. University of Idaho Extension delivered the Horizons program to the Prairie communities of Cottonwood, Ferdinand, Keuterville, and Greencreek as well as 22 other rural Idaho towns. Cottonwood is the hub of the four communities and has 944 residents with a child poverty rate of 7.3%, an elderly poverty rate of 6.2% and an overall rate of 10.7%. In addition, 37.1% of household incomes are less than 200% of the federal poverty rate.

The Nez Perce County Extension Educator served as the community coach for these Prairie communities as they moved through the Horizons program with focuses on poverty reduction, leadership development and community mobilization. The educator worked with a steering committee comprised of 16 local individual volunteers for 18 months to guide the program.

Our Response

To help learn about poverty in their community, the Prairie 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 - 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 January 2007, nine community members were trained to facilitate small group conversations, or "study circles" at a Study Circle Facilitation training session held in Cottonwood.

In meetings totaling 12 hours, citizens met in study circle 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

The community coach and steering committee engaged partners in recruiting, marketing and delivery of the study circles program. Key partnerships included St. Mary's Hospital, Monastery at St. Gertrude, Prairie School District, and the North Idaho Correctional Institute.

Program Outcomes

Fifty-eight community residents (33 youth and 25 adults) participated in one of five study circle groups comprised of 8 - 12 members each. Fifteen percent of participants lived in poverty and post program

surveys completed by 20 adults and 29 youth indicate:

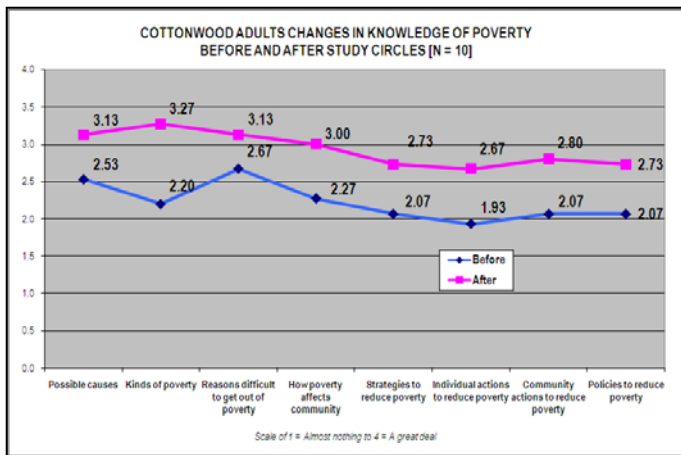
- 93% of adults and 90% of youth increased their knowledge and understanding of poverty (*see charts for further information*)
- 66% of adults and 45% of youth felt they could work to help reduce poverty in their community
- 53% of adults and 18% of youth reported they had already taken action to reduce poverty in their community
- 7% of adults felt like in the future it was very likely they would take individual actions to reduce poverty
- 40% of adults felt like in the future it was very likely they would join in community actions to reduce poverty
- 20% of adults were very likely in the future to speak up for/support policies that would reduce poverty

The study circle groups ended with an Action Planning Forum. Eighteen community members attended the Action Planning Forum to discuss and prioritize their community’s action items that emerged during the study circle conversations. Initial action items included a town clean up event, community resource guide, community celebration, and renovation of the community center.

For More Information

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



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