

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Leadership retreat helps rural youth set goals and plan for the future

The Situation

Teens living in small rural towns have limited resources and opportunities to participate in leadership skill development. Not only are there limitations due to the size of the community, teens from rural areas must travel far distances to attend leadership training conferences. Registration costs for attending conferences can be costly and traveling is expensive.

Many youth living in southern Idaho rural communities are also living in poverty. For the communities attending this program, an average of 42% of the youth live in poverty.

The limitations of resources, small population, travel, and poverty puts these youth at a significant disadvantage compared with those from larger cities and greater financial means.

Our Response

Melissa Cummins, Bannock County 4-H Extension Educator also Community Coach for Lava Hot Springs, Angie Williams Community Coach for American Falls and DaNell Hennis Community Coach for Ashton, Ririe, Roberts and Menan organized "Fast Forward Your Future," a youth leadership retreat focusing on the development of life and leadership skills in teens from Horizons III communities.

Horizons is a program created as a partnership with the Northwest Area Foundation and the University of Idaho focused on reducing poverty. To qualify for the Horizons program, communities need to have a population of less than 5,000 and a poverty level greater than 10% of the total population. Teens from Ashton, Arco/Moore, Eden, Georgetown, Hazelton, Lincoln County, Menan, Ririe, and Roberts attended the retreat.



Participants increased team building skills and self-confidence at a ropes course. Photo by Angie Williams

Retreat participants attended workshops on financial planning, personality traits, goal setting, team building, leadership skills and life planning. They also performed group service projects aimed at reducing poverty.

Program Outcomes

Participants completed an evaluation measuring the strength of specific life skills before and after the retreat. Evaluation results indicate a significant increase in all of the life skills targeted by the retreat. Program participants displayed the largest increase in financial planning and working in group.

The most remarkable outcomes for the retreat came from the service project and ropes course.

Participants reported the service project helped them to:

- appreciate what they have
- reach out more to others
- learn more about being homeless

By far, the most popular aspect of the leadership retreat was the ropes course. Participants were pushed beyond their normal comfort levels as they worked together in small groups to help their entire group to succeed.

“The ropes course was the best way in the world to bring out the courage in people.”—Alicia Larsen

“I was really scared to climb at first, but then I got over my fears and did.” —Jordan Reynolds

“Trying new things and taking a risk helps in the long run.”—Hailee Linsenmann

Below is a table with the evaluation results. The evaluation used a likert scale to determine the level of life skill growth by participants.

Figure 1: Evaluation of Life Skills Before and After the Youth Retreat

Mean Score Before	Because of my participation, I am able to: No=1, Usually=3 Sometimes=2, Yes=4	Mean Score After
2.3	Plan how to use my financial resources.	3.5
2	Organize a group to reach the goal.	3.4
2.8	Contribute as a member of a team.	3.5
3.1	Have control over my own personal goals/future.	3.7
2.9	Feel like I have control over some things in my life.	3.7
2.9	Think about what I might do when I am older.	3.8

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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