4-H Teen Mania hits it’s mark in Southwest Idaho

The Situation
The 4-H Youth Development program offers quality projects and activities for youth 5 to 18 years of age, although the majority of youth enrolled in 4-H are 11 years old and younger. In general, when youth reach about 12 years old they begin to make their own decisions with less parental input of what activities to be involved in. At the same age, youth are left with fewer choices of activities in 4-H, they are in between kids activities and teen activities, begin to have more school activities to choose from and so we see a decline in enrollment in this age group. Once youth reach 14 years old, there are more 4-H opportunities open for them to be involved in and the drop out rate is much less severe.

Each project and activity in 4-H is designed to be age appropriate and attractive for a specific targeted age audience. Yet there are few projects and activities to keep the interest of the 12-13 year old age range. To keep youth involved in 4-H during these few critical years means they will most likely remain involved through their high school years when more attractive 4-H opportunities are available. In 2007 and 2008, Theresa Araquistain, a Canyon County 4-H Volunteer along with a teen planning committee, organized an event targeted to this audience to keep their involvement in 4-H for a few more years. The “Blast” event attracted several youth, although the structure of an overnight event the first year, then as an event to end at midnight the second year did not prove to be a sustainable structure. Another approach was needed.

Idaho 4-H Ambassadors are challenged to promote and represent 4-H in their respective counties. Canyon County Ambassadors need opportunities to apply and practice leadership and planning life skills.

Our Response
The Super Saturday volunteer development program in Ada County has proven to be a format attractive to 4-H members as evidenced by the increase in attendance by teens and pre-teens when they were not the target audience. Adopting this format for a teen program and expanding it to an opportunity for all youth in Southern District II seemed appropriate. Using the same basic format of Super Saturday and applying a youth/adult planning committee to make changes, we created a program that is attractive and appropriate for youth.

Working with Canyon County Ambassadors to plan and execute a program attractive to 4-H members 12 years old and older seemed a natural fit.
in the planning meetings, along with one adult volunteer and one Extension staff. The youth were full partners in the decision process—everything beginning with planning the date, location, what workshops would be offered, recruiting volunteers, marketing, what was served for lunch, the registration process, workshop facilitation and final clean up after the event.

Program Outcomes

Teen Mania has been held the end of January or first of February for two years, exceeding the planning committee’s goal with over 100 participants each year. Participants came from five counties (Ada, Canyon, Elmore, Payette and Washington) including youth from the youth leadership program at Mountain Home Air Force Base. Youth from the Mountain Home Air Force Base leadership program chose to participate in this leadership development opportunity instead of attending a group ski trip they previously had planned.

Youth participants attended workshops in each of the three National 4-H Mission Mandated areas of programming: 1) Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), 2) Healthy lifestyles, and 3) Citizenship.

The youth Ambassadors on the planning committee had an opportunity to take a leadership role in planning a district wide event. They learned about:

- setting a budget and working within it
- negotiating for use of facilities
- marketing a youth program district wide
- delegating tasks and leading others

During the event, youth Ambassadors led ice breaker games, registration, lunch break, presenter introductions, workshops and facility clean up.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

University of Idaho Boise Center new student recruitment and TRIO program, Canyon County Paramedics, United Methodist Church.

The Future

Canyon County will continue to hold Teen Mania as an annual district event with youth Ambassadors playing a key role on the planning committee through execution for younger 4-H members to attend. Even more responsibility will be given to the youth on the planning committee, specifically, in recruiting workshop presenters and in summarizing the workshop evaluations. Additional efforts will be made to publicize the program’s reputation across the district for even greater participation of 12-14 year old 4-H youth.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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