Successful Youth Development Program to Continue

The Situation
In Bannock County over 77% of the women in the labor force have school age children. In 1989, problems of safety and adequately supervised care for children left unattended after school had come to the attention of the Bannock County Youth At Risk Committee. At the same time, the committee had been approached by school district employees who felt a need for trained mentors who could work in elementary schools helping children identified as being at risk socially, emotionally or academically. The district had an 18% dropout rate, with many potential dropouts identified in the early primary grades. Another identified problem was junior high youth who had nothing to do after school. The county had about 500 incidents of youth involved in criminal activity and the teen pregnancy rate was at 40%. Junior and senior high school youth reported that 55% used alcohol at least three times per week while 33% used marijuana on a regular basis.

Our Response
The University of Idaho was represented on the Bannock County Youth At Risk Committee and was aware of competitive grant funds being made available through USDA. A grant was written in an effort to obtain $102,604 dollars, with a local match, to start an after school program in four elementary schools and to begin a youth mentoring program in cooperation with Idaho State University and School District 25.

The funds were obtained and both programs were implemented in 1991 under the direction of the University of Idaho Extension System. A program coordinator was hired to develop both programs, under the supervision of the Bannock County Extension Educator-Home Economics/Youth At Risk.

In 1992, the program expanded to include an after school program for junior high age youth and another program coordinator was hired. Each program coordinator hired staff and developed the individual programs. Granting from USDA, with local match, was continued through March 31, 1996. Grant funds totaled $466,847 while matching funds totaled $466,847 plus an additional above-match amount of $495,066.

Since grant funds came through the University of Idaho Extension System into Bannock County, Bannock County provided office space, three vehicles, and use of office equipment. Also, the county paid the salary for a bookkeeper.

Achievements
After School Adventures (K - 6) began at four sites with 24 students. By the end of March 1996, the program had expanded to five sites serving eight elementary schools. Enrollment reached 126.
Youth Mentoring began with six mentors who worked with 87 children during the first semester. Presently the program has expanded from 16 elementary schools to include a homeless shelter, local junior high schools and elementary schools in neighboring districts.

Early Teen Program struggled in its’ 1992 beginning with one junior high and 41 students participating. At its’ highest enrollment, the program membership was 262 students from four junior high schools and included a few sixth graders.

The three granted programs employ about 40 part-time UI employees.

Surveys indicate parents feel programs are highly successful, professionally operated, meet the needs of children and youth, are a good value economically and that employees and volunteers are highly competent in helping children increase social, emotional and academic performance.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors
Bannock County Youth At Risk Committee
Idaho State University
School District 25 and Cre-Act School
Bannock County Commission

The Future
After School Adventures, on April 1, became a not-for-profit organization. This corporation operates under a board of directors in the same schools where it operate under the USDA grant, with the same staff and a similar organization. The Board has hired a bookkeeper and retained the services of a CPA and an attorney. The program has banked over $125,000 in user fees during the five year granting period. At present the corporation will be able to operate at almost a break-even level financially. They will have the reserve to meet unexpected costs of the newly formed not-for-profit.

Youth Mentoring was transferred on April 1 to Idaho State University. Mentors will continue to receive two education credits for their course work and volunteer hours and the mentoring coordinator will become a full-time faculty member of ISU (she was employed by UI for 20% of her time).

Early Teen Program became part of the City of Pocatello Parks and Recreation Department on April 1. The program coordinator and staff are located in the city office complex.

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