Bingham County Teens Encourage Other Teens to Gain Valuable Leadership Experience by Being 4-H Camp Counselors

**The Situation**

Leadership skills are learned by practice. However, it is difficult for teens to learn and practice leadership skills because they are not able to acquire positions that encourage this development.

Bingham County has approximately 90 children, ages 9 through 12 (children who have completed the 4th through 6th grades), annually attending 4-H camp. It is not possible to conduct a camp this large without the help of many teen and adult volunteers. Prior to 1995, the volunteer teens had little training as camp counselors. Although the teen counselors did an adequate job of helping with the camp, there was a need for improving their leadership skills.

**Our Response**

University of Idaho extension educators and Bingham County staff decided that 4-H camp would be more successful and operate more smoothly if the teen camp counselors were better trained as camp counselors. This training would also teach teens valuable leadership skills that they may not be able to obtain at other places at their age.

Teens wanting to be 4-H camp counselors were required to attend a minimum of four of five training sessions presented during 1995. Topics covered at these training sessions included leadership skills, counselor qualifications, campers' needs, counselor responsibilities, and other related camp and leadership topics.

The training sessions were one and one-half hours in length beginning with a get-acquainted activity. This get-acquainted activity was used so the teens would get to know each other well. They were encouraged to use these activities at camp to introduce the campers to each other. Teens were encouraged during the training sessions to participate in the discussion about the subject matter being presented. This held their interest and helped those teaching determine what the teens knew.

**Achievements**

Measuring the success of what people gain by attending a class or reading information provided by the extension system is, at best, difficult to quantify. The adult leaders who have attended the 4-H camp for several years felt that the 1995 camp was one of the most successful camps based on the participation of the campers and comments made by the campers and teens to the adult leaders.

Another measure of success of the teen camp counselor training program is the increase in the number of teens participating. Sixteen teens...
completed the training program in 1995, and this increased to 38 who have begun the camp counselor training program in 1996. Only one of the 16 teens who was a counselor in 1995 is not attending the training sessions in 1996. Also, most of the teens who are attending the training sessions for the first time in 1996 said they heard about the training program and camp from a teen who was a counselor in 1995.

Cooperators and Co-sponsors
The training sessions are conducted by University of Idaho extension educators, Bingham County staff, and adult 4-H volunteers.

The Future
The training program will continue to be an important part of the Bingham County 4-H camp program. If the number of teens wanting to be counselors continues to increase as it did from 1995 to 1996, then a selection process may need to be developed to more carefully select who will qualify for the counselor positions.

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