

## **After School Programs Improve Family Life**

### ***The Situation***

Many parents work due to economic necessity. Sixty-nine percent of children under 18 in Gooding and 71 per cent of children under 18 in Shoshone have both parents or their only parent in the work force. Without affordable care, these children would be left unsupervised from the end of school until their parents return from work. These children are at higher risk for drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, delinquent behavior, teen pregnancy, and victimization than their peers who are supervised during out of school hours.

### ***Our Response***

Community-based groups formed advisory committees and obtained a USDA state-strengthening grant to begin after school programs in both communities to offer supervision, education, and activities to children of working parents. As a result, Kids After School Help (K.A.S.H.) was begun in Gooding, and Lincoln County Adventure Club was begun in Shoshone. These programs give kids a safe place to go from the time school is out until their parents return home from work. Both programs are administered under the University of Idaho State 4-H office through the Cooperative Extension System office in Gooding County. The major focus of both after school programs is to provide a safe, educational environment for school age children, grades K-6.

The children receive homework tutoring and reading encouragement, and education in conflict resolution,

team building, and self-esteem building. There are planned activities and also free choice educational centers. Parent nights and a parent newsletter provide program information.

Computer skills are necessary to be competitive in the workforce and to utilize the information available on the Internet. To give each child learning experience on computers there are provided 3 computers, software, scanner, printer, and Internet access. Time on the computers is rotated to include all children.

The program is marketed to the community through displays at county fairs, back-to-school nights and other community festivals, and fliers on community bulletin boards.

### ***Achievements***

Some children come into the program withdrawn and hostile, refusing to talk or interact with the other children or teachers. As they learn life skills through direction, example, and reinforcement of acceptable behavior, their behavior slowly changes. Within a few weeks they are interacting and learning to work out problems together.

Parents report that their children are using these life skills in the home also and that it benefits their family life.

Because the adult to child ratio is greater than in the schools there is more adult mentoring for the children. The atmosphere is more relaxed than school with more free choice activities and the

learning process is a byproduct of a fun activity rather than learning by itself. This relaxed atmosphere promotes more personal interaction between children and adults with just enough supervision and structure to guide informal learning. This personal interaction gives children more opportunity to learn relationship skills. The “learning by doing” or experiential process encourages children to learn through a fun activity.

Survey responses show a high level of satisfaction from participating parents; 95% were “very satisfied” with the program and 72% felt the program was “very successful” in developing life skills. Working parents reported feeling less stressed knowing their children were safe and well cared for. Parent comments include:

“My child gets along with other children better.”

“I appreciate the structure that I am not able to provide for my kids.”

“Both children have become much more confident with interaction with other children.”

“The help with homework helps the family.”

“My kids are better at finishing what they start.”

“Kids are happier at the end of the day.”

## ***The Future***

Our goal is to provide every child, regardless of income, access to a safe, fun, and educational environment with adult supervision after school is out until parents return from work. To help with this goal, the focus for the future will be more involvement from parents' employers, recruitment of volunteers, and summer enrichment programs.

## ***Program Locations***

Kids After School Help is located in the United Methodist Church at 805 Main Street, Gooding. Lincoln County Adventure Club is located in the Lifestyles for Kids child care building at 116 West 4<sup>th</sup> Shoshone.

## ***For More Information***

Diana Christensen  
Extension Educator  
University of Idaho  
Gooding County Cooperative Extension System  
202 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue East  
Gooding, ID 83330  
Phone: 208 934-4417  
Fax: 208 934-4418  
E-mail: [dianac@uidaho.edu](mailto:dianac@uidaho.edu)