

IMPACT

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4-H ambassador training: Meeting the needs of youth

The Situation

4-H Youth Development faculty and staff work conscientiously to ensure that youth development activities and programs are meeting assessed needs and interests of youth. One such program is the Idaho 4-H Ambassador program. This program provides an opportunity for members, 9th grade and above, to take on leadership roles at the county level and to represent the 4-H program to the community. Ambassadors need to learn about leadership, communication and public speaking. To learn these life skills, youth attend the annual Ambassador Training each fall. In addition to these life skills, youth attending the conference also expect to have fun and meet new friends.

Our Response

In an effort to meet youth expectations, provide a high quality learning experience, develop concrete skills and knowledge about the 4-H program, and have fun in the process, program designers have worked thoroughly to meet these needs and expectations. The 4-H Ambassador Training design includes:

- Developing concrete speaking skills by writing and giving a speech during the training.
- Understanding the mission and vision of 4-H Youth Development by participating in a Jeopardy style question and answer activity.
- Developing team building skills through group interaction to accomplish cognitive tasks as well as physical challenges.
- Having fun with new friends by attending a dance at the end of day.



4-H Ambassador youth writing and preparing a speech on the benefits of 4-H.

Program Outcomes

A total of 78 youth participated in the 2008 training. Second- and third-year 4-H Ambassador participants were asked why they returned to the Ambassador training, 31 responded. Responses were grouped into two strongly supported categories.

1. Positive learning experience

- “I came back to Ambassador training this year because I think it is a really great learning experience. I enjoyed my duties as an Ambassador this year so I definitely wanted to do it again. I love to meet new people and try new things. I think it is really good to get out of your comfort zone because it makes you stronger as a person.”
- “Ambassadors [training] was a great opportunity at first. Then once I got back I learned so much about how to really help my community. I met fun

and exciting people. Ambassadors taught me how not to be afraid to talk in front of a big group of people. After Ambassadors I wanted to reach out and be involved.”

2. Meet new people and have fun

- “I came back to Ambassadors because I had a lot of fun last year when I came and I learned an immense amount of information and I felt really accepted. I felt like I could express myself and be me. I went out into the world and I felt super confident.”
- “Coming from a small town and knowing almost everyone in your school you don’t really get the chance to meet new people. I have wanted to meet new people ever since I could remember. I really love coming to 4-H functions like Ambassadors and meeting a vast variety of people. That is one of the main reasons I keep returning to Ambassadors. Through Ambassadors I have made friends I will have forever and I want to make even more!”

Based on the responses from participants of the 4-H Ambassador program, leaders can clearly identify that youth interests and needs are being met through this program. The 4-H Program needs are also being met when trained Ambassadors return to their counties. These trained youth represent 4-H to their communities, take on leadership roles and promote the 4-H Youth Development program. For example, in Canyon County five 4-H Ambassadors took on leadership roles in planning and delivering a program specifically for other teens. These youth put their skills to work by designing, recruiting participants, and delivering this program to 110 youth.

The Future

The 4-H Ambassador program has come a long way since it’s inception to provide a safe environment for youth to take risks and try things that are outside of their comfort zone, such as taking on a leadership role or speaking in front of a group of their peers. The next step is to ensure that the planning committee has representation from youth. We need to emphasize the value of youth contributions to developing and designing all youth programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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