

New 4-H volunteers benefit from orientation

The Situation

4-H is dependent on adult and teen volunteers to help deliver programming to youth. Idaho 4-H has nearly 3,000 volunteers across the state helping to deliver programming with almost 300 volunteers in Canyon County. Each year, new volunteers offer to give their time to work with youth in the 4-H program; some are very familiar with 4-H and others are not. To maintain the consistency and reputation of the program and to ensure the quality of program delivery, an orientation for new volunteers is essential. New volunteers need to be fully aware and understand the expectations of their volunteer role and in some cases to develop the skills needed to fulfill their role.

Volunteering with the 4-H program involves more than just helping youth work through a project. They are expected to provide a safe learning environment and keep youth safe by following state policies and procedures, risk management guidelines, and child protection guidelines. Volunteers are also expected to help youth learn life skills by following project and program guidelines and requirements, and to complete administrative requirements for their club members. This can be an overwhelming amount of information to absorb and responsibility to take on.

Our Response

Statewide, an orientation is required to certify a volunteer, allowing them to work alone with youth in the 4-H program. Child protection is a required component of the orientation, the remaining topics of the orientation are left to the discretion of each county. To prepare new volunteers to be successful in their role in Canyon County, nine key concepts have been identified to be included in the orientation: volunteer requirements, getting a club started, leading a project



Volunteers at New Leader Orientation demonstrating how to give an oral presentation.

meeting, 4-H project requirements, using record books, oral presentations, child protection, risk management, and 4-H policies and procedures.

Orientations are four hours long and are scheduled to be repeated four to five times over the course of the 4-H year. They are scheduled alternately for Saturday mornings and weekday evenings to accommodate most schedules. The orientations are lead by a training team consisting of two Extension staff and two volunteers. The agenda includes all of the identified key concepts as well as incorporating the life skill wheel and experiential learning model as the frameworks to apply what they learn. The key concepts are taught using a variety of teaching methods, modeling different methods and styles that the volunteer may use with their club program. Teaching methods modeled include kinesthetic activities, discussion, demonstration, game simulations, and group teamwork activities.

Program Outcomes

To assess the impact of the new volunteer orientation and measure the amount of learning taking place, a pre-post retrospective evaluation is used. The participants self report their level of knowledge before attending the orientation and their level of knowledge after the orientation on each of the nine key concepts. A likert scale of 1 to 10 (1= no knowledge, 10=extensive knowledge) is used. The assessment also asks open-ended questions: What did you hope to learn and did you learn what you had hoped to learn? What are the two most important things you learned and how do you plan to use these things?

A statistical analysis of 151 responses from the past four years of new volunteer orientation shows a strong statistical difference of knowledge before the orientation to after the orientation. The two key concepts that showed the highest level of knowledge gain were 4-H Policies and Procedures and volunteer requirements. The overall mean score of level of knowledge of 4-H Policies and Procedures before the orientation was 4.06, after the orientation it increased to 8.48 showing a significant increase in knowledge. The overall mean scores for the concept of volunteer requirements was similar, the before mean was 4.14 and the after mean was 8.26.

The two key concepts that showed the lowest level of knowledge gain were child protection and oral presentations. While it may seem to be of concern that child protection was the area of the least amount of knowledge gain, it was also the concept that had the highest level of knowledge before the orientation (6.51). This is attributed to the overall increased awareness and training on child protection issues of all volunteers and paid workers who interact with youth in any youth program.

The Future

Each year the training team for the new volunteer orientation will continue to meet to review the needs of new volunteers so they can be successful and to review the results of the assessments completed by new volunteers. The orientation will not remain the same year after year as needs change and are addressed. Orientations will continue to be held four to five times a year for new volunteers to learn how they can best contribute to the success of the 4-H program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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