

IMPACT

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Extension

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4-H Healthy Living Teen Advocates teach nutrition education classes

AT A GLANCE

Youth need nutrition education to help them develop lifelong healthy eating habits. These lifelong habits can lead to reduced medical costs.

The Situation

Obesity has significant consequences to our health and economy. The state of Idaho ranks 11 in overall prevalence with 27.5 percent of children being considered either overweight or obese. The National Center for Disease Control and Prevention states we need to establish successful and sustainable interventions to support healthy eating and active living. The goal of these programs would be to improve dietary quality, increase physical activity and reduce obesity across multiple settings including schools, child care facilities and communities (Idaho State Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Profile).

Our Response

In 2014, University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development received a grant from National 4-H Council in partnership with ConAgra Foundation to conduct nutrition education programs for 2,500 youth across Idaho. To achieve this monumental task, 4-H partnered with Eat Smart Idaho and started the 4-H Healthy Living Teen Advocate (4-H HLTA) program. Having a solid teen base in our state 4-H program, the recruitment potential for teen advocates was strong.

Teens were recruited across the state through county 4-H programs, high schools and migrant programs. Interested teens filled out an application and went through a selection process that looked at interest



4-H Healthy Living Teen Advocate teaching about nutrition labels.

level, ability to complete required hours and the needs in their communities.

Teens received 14 hours of training on healthy living curricula: “Up for the Challenge” and “Choose Food Fun and Fitness” and/or “YA4-H! (Youth Advocates for Health).” Trained teens were asked to complete 20-100 hours of teaching, assisting with community events and a healthy living service project in their local area. Since 2014, there have been 31 4-H Healthy Living Teen Advocates trained. Three teens have been advocates for three years and six have committed to two years of advocacy.

Program Outcomes

4-H HLTA were evaluated at the end of each year to measure improvement in their own healthy habits and to see if the program helped them to become more community focused.

Table 1: Percentage of teen advocate survey responses who responded “strongly agree” to questions about healthy habits and communities.

	2014, n=15	2015, n=14	2016, n=5
They NOW take the following actions:			
I eat more fruits and vegetables	66	75	80
I drink more water	80	75	100
Encourage my family to eat meals together	93	92	80
As a result of their experience in this program:			
I am encouraged to volunteer more	73	100	100
I plan to work on projects to better my community	66	85	NA*
After high school I will continue to work to better my community	80	71	NA*
I can make a difference in my community through community service	80	87	100
I gained skills through serving my community that will help in the future	66	62	100
* These questions were not asked in 2016.			

Advocates were also asked to give some narrative responses. When asked, “What was the most important skill you developed as a teen teacher,” some of the responses were: speaking in front of people, how to work with young kids, and how to communicate the importance of nutrition and food.

Nutrition education for youth is needed to help them develop lifelong healthy lifestyles. It is documented that Idahoans who have unhealthy lifestyles can have diet-related health care costs of around \$1,200 annually.

The Future

Idaho 4-H Youth Development continues to make healthy living education programs a priority. The Healthy Living Teen Advocate program will continue with advocates attending the National Youth Summit on Healthy Living as well as participating in on-going efforts of nutrition education across Idaho.

Resource: Raidl, M. 2015. Idaho Extension health and nutrition programs can decrease health care costs. University of Idaho Extension Impact statements.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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