

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

Latah County

208-883-2241, Fax: 208-882-8505

200 S. Almon Street, Suite 201, Moscow, ID 83843

Learning to be an adult... That's Life goes statewide... again

AT A GLANCE

Students living in low income situations are at a higher risk for missing important financial skills education. That's Life simulation provides a real-life exercise to help bridge this gap.

The Situation

High school students have many challenges as they navigate their secondary education. Will I pass the calculus test? What college do I apply to? Do I want to go to college? Yet, many don't think about the fundamentals of living as an adult. Paying bills, managing money to cover everything, finding a job that meets their needs and having a plan if the money runs out. These are real concerns for every adult. Then throw a family into the mix. According to a NEFE research study, 10 percent of U.S. students can solve financial problems/make financial decisions successfully. Students from lower-income schools can only claim 3 percent of this "high performer" status compared to 45 percent in higher-income schools.

Our Response

Offering a popular simulation in north Idaho called "That's Life," University of Idaho Extension brought this two hour simulation to students in Pocatello, Idaho. Students "live" a pretend life where they are given a job and an income, introduced to different education levels, and presented with a family situation. Volunteers serve as the "vendors" at 20 different expense booths. "Uncle Sam" is the first booth students visit where they receive their random game card with a family situation and are instantly introduced to income taxes. Many are thrilled at the "large" paychecks until Uncle Sam takes his first bite off the



Pocatello High School students take on the challenge of managing their pretend job and family finances.

top. Next, they visit the "Bank of Life" where they are encouraged to open up a checking/savings account and learn about the benefits of being "banked." As in life, the students are given minimal instructions on what to do next. They make their financial choices and are "encouraged" by the wandering "police officer" issuing tickets for speeding (running through the simulation) and child neglect (avoiding day care expenses or having inadequate housing for family size). The officer has even been known to congratulate the bragging childless doctor with triplets sending that student through the simulation process again. The additional 18 booths include housing, child care, personal care, groceries, utilities, entertainment, clothing, communications, credit card, furniture, medical insurance, transportation, contributions, crystal ball (positive or negative unexpected expenses), impulse items, supplemental income, SOS (financial counseling booth) and jail (if needed).

Program Outcomes

To share this experience with southeast Idaho, two Extension educators collaborated with the Pocatello High School to arrange for “That’s Life” to come to their freshmen class. UI Extension Bannock County contributed all of the travel costs for the simulation and the materials. Parents, teachers and aides served as our volunteers for the booths. With 208 students participating and 40 volunteers sharing their expertise, this simulation provided an opportunity for Extension to introduce careers students may not have thought about before, financial decision-making tips to help them when they reach adulthood, and a reality check for many that have never thought about the cost of life. For the teachers, it presented an opportunity to continue the discussion with students about financial wellness and future success.

Coming from an 85 percent graduation rate five years ago to a 90 percent graduation rate, these students are aware of the importance of an education. The neighborhoods surrounding the school are lower income homes and many of the students come from these areas. Our goal was to provide a glimpse into reality without the fear of failure. From the 208 students, we received 99 completed surveys.

From responding students, they are aware of the importance of an education and earning potential (87 percent saw the connection between earning and education). 87 percent also planned to go on to technical college or higher education degrees. When asked about unexpected or sneaky expenses and how they would take care of them, 29 percent said they never thought about it before, 27 percent always save money from jobs or gifts, 29 percent think about saving but never do and 11 percent don’t worry about it because parents save for everything. When asked if they planned to change behavior with unexpected expenses after the simulation, 66 percent said they would start saving 10 percent (or part) each month of their money and gifts.

Students also shared some new possible action plans:

I believe it is important and I plan to:	YES	NO	MAYBE	ALREADY DO THIS
Think about my needs & wants & prioritize which should get my attention and money first	51%	5%	14%	27%
Create a livable spending/savings plan just right for me	60%	7%	11%	14%
Open a saving account in the near future and make it a priority in my spending plan	43%	7%	24%	22%
Make smart career and education choices now	43%	4%	6%	18%
Prepare for my family ahead of time - kids are expensive!	61%	9%	11%	11%
Stay in school and save for my future	63%	4%	6%	21%

Comments from the students included “Wow, I don’t want kids! They are expensive!,” “Why do I need insurance?...Oh, that’s why!,” “Wow, this is stressful,” “I’ll take the cheaper car, I need to make sure I can feed my kids,” “Oh, I need the bigger car that will fit all my kids” and “I am totally going to college. I want to have her job (referring to a friend’s random life).”

An added bonus was that all the volunteers were either parents or teachers. Their comments included “such a terrific activity to show that choices make a difference;” and “students seemed to be surprised by everything required and how much it costs. This was a good reality check for them.” When asked what they learned from being vendors, they said that “students don’t understand the concept of money or how much everything actually costs” and “the kids need more exposure, education, to what life as an adult is really like. They need as much preparation as they can get.” The simulation opened the door for more home and classroom conversions on preparing for financial futures.

As UI Extension continues to offer this simulation, a longitudinal study is being prepared to record long-term impact and to collaborate with schools to provide resources for continued student discussion.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Karen Richel, Extension Educator, Financial Literacy
 University of Idaho Extension, Latah County
 200 S. Almon Street, Suite 201
 Moscow, ID 83843
 Phone: 208-883-2241
 Fax: 208-882-8505
 Email: krichel@uidaho.edu

Nikola Dalton, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development
 University of Idaho Extension, Bannock County
 10560 N. Fairgrounds Road, Bldg. A
 Pocatello, ID 83202
 Phone: 208-236-7312
 Fax: 208-236-7316
 Email: nmdalton@uidaho.edu