

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Today's 4-H youth volunteers become tomorrow's community leaders

AT A GLANCE

Providing meaningful engagement opportunities for 4-H teens is a key element to retaining their interest in 4-H youth development and continued commitment to their communities.

The Situation

Providing opportunities for 4-H youth to engage in decision making and serve in leadership roles allows these individuals to build skills in mastery and independence while creating a culture of belonging and ownership in their county's 4-H program.

Some counties lack enough engaged and competent adult volunteers in 4-H youth development and community programs often struggle for program assistance. However, by developing a strong affinity and advanced leadership skills as teen members, these youth become confident and engaged adult volunteers for 4-H and community programs.

Our Response

Youth age 13-18, with two or more years of 4-H experience in Benewah County, and currently enrolled in 4-H were encouraged to apply to become Benewah County's 4-H Ambassadors. The application process included a letter of interest from the youth, a letter of support from a parent or guardian, two letters of recommendation from non-family community members (4-H volunteer, teacher, clergyman, supervisor, friend) and a 4-H resume.



Benewah County's 4-H ambassadors at the Northern District Ambassador Retreat, January 2020.

There were seven candidates accepted, all with outstanding applications, whom fit the criteria. These youth ranged in age from 13-17 and from two to seven years of experience in Benewah County's 4-H program.

Program Outcomes

Program goals and meeting schedules were set at the first meeting of the year. The youth decided to meet monthly for one hour. Thirty-minutes of training was provided at each meeting in a topic associated with youth development, life skills, public speaking or other leadership topic areas. The following 30 minutes of each meeting was spent working or reporting on projects.

impact University of Idaho Extension

The Extension educator provided a list of 12 projects. Each ambassador could pick one project to lead, this individual was responsible for working with the Extension educator to create a timeline, action items and implementation plan for that event or project. All ambassadors worked together to complete the event or project, but one youth was the lead contact and responsible for completion. Seven projects were accomplished, some of the remaining five projects were given a lower priority and not completed this year. Others were led by the UI Extension office and ambassadors assisted with the delivery of the event or project. Due to COVID-19, some of these projects changed or were canceled and other projects were added to the original list due to the pandemic.

Between Oct. 15, 2019 and Oct. 10, 2020; Benewah County's 4-H ambassadors successfully completed the following projects:

- Two service projects that engaged participation from 4-H members across the county.
- Gave virtual presentations to volunteers and community organizations about 4-H's Know Your Government Conference and 4-H Ambassador Summit/District Retreat programs, as well as Targeting Life Skills through 4-H.
- Each worked with their 4-H club volunteer to teach at least one lesson in their subject matter area to their 4-H peers.
- Led help sessions for accessing and completing ZSuite record books and involvement reports.
- Assisted with Facebook Live and YouTube live streaming for all aspects of the Benewah County Fair. This provided social distancing and public safety standards for COVID-19 protocols during fair week.
- Were featured in the St. Maries Gazette Record with three separate feature articles regarding 4-H programs in Benewah County.

- Hosted National 4-H Week activities that challenged 4-H clubs to paint windows throughout their communities to celebrate 4-H. Painted and hid 4-H rocks in the community to engage community individuals in finding their way to the UI Extension office and learn more about 4-H programs. Hosted a Facebook campaign during the week to highlight 4-H project areas.
- These youth also participated in state and district level 4-H leadership events including Know Your Government, Ambassador Summit, District Ambassador Retreat and State Teen Association Convention.

Involving youth volunteers in these key leadership roles not only increased the awareness of the community about 4-H, it also provided a substantial financial support to the county program. According to national-service.gov, the value of volunteers is the average state wage for that sector + 15.7% for fringe benefits. In Idaho, the average wage for teenage employees is \$14.20 per hour + \$2.22 for fringe benefits, equaling \$16.42 per hour for teen volunteers. Throughout the year these youth volunteered approximately 36 hours each, giving the program \$4,137 in volunteer value. A significant savings to a small county 4-H program.

The Future

As these youth move forward in their life experiences and careers, they will have a stronger understanding of self, leadership and have developed essential life skills that are sought by employers. Engaging in this opportunity also provided them the confidence and knowledge to feel comfortable searching out or accepting volunteer opportunities in local 4-H and community youth development programs.

Benewah County's 4-H Ambassador program provides the possibility for more youth to engage in opportunities for service, remain involved in their community, feel connected to their peers and mentors, advanced skill development and community recognition of their ideas, talents and passion for leadership.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Gail E. Silkwood, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Benewah County • 208-245-2422 • gsilkwood@uidaho.edu

49-20-gsilkwood-4-h-ambassadors • 11/20