

## North Dakota Sioux County and UI partner: National 4-H in Indian Country discussion

### AT A GLANCE

4-H hosted a national summit to bring tribal 4-H educators and volunteers together to identify the best practices of implementing effective 4-H programs in Indian Country.

### The Situation

4-H is a national youth development program that is hosted through USDA-NIFA and the land-grant university system. There are nearly 4,000 youth development professionals across the nation and some of these professionals are located in tribal nations. 4-H programs offer a variety of projects for youth to choose from including STEM, natural resources, leadership, local government, arts and shooting sports programs. The 4-H program relies on community volunteers to lead clubs and/or volunteer programs at 4-H hosted afterschool events. 4-H programs are responsive to needs and look different in each community depending on local leadership and interests.

It was identified that 4-H youth development educators and volunteers in tribal communities might benefit from a national discussion and information finding to share the best practices of implementing 4-H programs in Indian Country at the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals Conference (NAE4-HYDP). A USDA-NIFA conference grant was written to invite program partners from tribal Extension programs to attend. Partners invited included faculty and staff that work with youth



Sue Isbell, educator in Sioux County redesigned the 4-H logo to more appropriately market 4-H programs to her community.

programming from the 1994 land-grant universities (LGU), the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program and LGU partners from the Pacific Islands.

### Our Response

A conference session, 4-H in Indian Country, was hosted at the first virtual NAE4-HYDP conference. The discussion focused on participant networking with their national peers to share best practices. A pre- and post-survey was implemented to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOT) when implementing 4-H youth development to understand the common ground with the implementation of 4-H programs in tribal communities.

## Program Outcomes

The SWOT focused survey identified that common strengths of 4-H in Indian Country included: strong community partnerships, support from tribal elders, inventiveness, cultural awareness and tight community ties. Some of the weaknesses identified included: shortage of staff, funding, record-keeping, experience, technology, and the ability to provide hands-on learning during COVID-19.

Opportunities identified the inclusion of a variety of program delivery methods such as in-school, after-school and summer programs. 4-H projects highlighted cooking, livestock showing, shooting sports, climate, food sovereignty, sewing, food preservation and gardening. Some of the challenges identified include youth/family commitment to the program, retention of teens, tribal support, transportation, technology, internet access, lack of meeting spaces, limited educator time to serve region, isolated communities, COVID-19, fundraising and collaboration.

If there were infinite financial resources participants would like infrastructure including meeting spaces, community barn, commercial kitchens, maker spaces and STEM labs. Program vehicles and technology to connect the digital divide and provide internet connectivity for participants would be a priority. There was discussion surrounding young adult 4-H participants as income earners for the family and the need for paid participation for teens was desired if funding was available. Curriculum development in environmental outdoor education and funded travel opportunities were also identified as desired funded activities.

Survey respondents were asked to share a story of hope. One of the stories shared demonstrated the importance of 4-H in all communities, "I have seen a

volunteer transform a youth's life. The child would have outbursts, but by having a positive experience in the archery program and a great role model of an archery instructor, he has learned to channel his outbursts. This is a skill helping him cope and will help him become an upstanding citizen in the community."

Through storytelling and information sharing participants were able to listen and interact with peers across the nation to learn about effective and innovative program strategies to serve the target audience needs. Creative solutions were shared to address challenges and participants left the national meeting with a better understanding on how to design programs for this audience.

Bringing people together for national conversations is an important step in addressing and understanding collective strengths, challenges and opportunities. Extension educators across the nation gather community members to educate, support and foster positive youth development. Sharing these stories reminds us that we are not alone in our Extension work. "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." — Helen Keller

## Cooperators and Co-Sponsors



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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Melissa B. Hamilton**, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Valley County • 208-382-7190 • [mhamilton@uidaho.edu](mailto:mhamilton@uidaho.edu)  
**Sue Isbell**, Extension Educator • North Dakota State University, Sioux County • 701-854-3412 • [sue.isbell@ndsu.edu](mailto:sue.isbell@ndsu.edu)

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