

impact

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

Creating a Spark in young people ages 5-13 in Ada and Canyon counties

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension educators engage youth in 4-H programs to aid learning and behavioral health.

The Situation

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the COVID-19 pandemic had severe and long-term consequences for health systems, economies, and societies. Many people have died, lost their jobs, and families and communities have been stressed and disconnected. The pandemic has been particularly difficult for young people who have lost formative learning, socializing and other developmental steps.

The WHO reported that youth of all ages are seriously suffering and that COVID-19-related measures are having a profound effect on their health and well-being. One example the WHO reported was that COVID-19 has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting 1.6 billion students in more than 190 countries. Safety net programs with caring adults including teachers, counselors and health care workers were limited or not available to youth.

Our Response

To address the impacts on the social, emotional and educational needs of youth, University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development and family and consumer sciences educators applied for a community program grant from the Idaho Department of Health



UI Extension Educator Sindy Martinez helps a youth use a plant press at an overnight outdoor science camp.

and Welfare. The educators were awarded the grant in 2021 and launched the “Creating a Spark in Treasure Valley Youth” program. Through this new program, the educators expanded 4-H programming to reach more young people, increasing access to activities that support educational learning and provide behavioral health support. To deliver the Creating a Spark in Treasure Valley Youth program, educators partnered with schools and community programs to offer out-of-school-time programs. Educators hired and trained 4-H professionals to implement educational activities with youth, connecting them with caring adults. The educators worked with the staff to select curricula and develop lesson plans and activities to engage participants in learning.

Program Outcomes

In this program youth participated in experiential learning activities to continue to build upon skills being learned in school. They learned math and science, making a flashlight with circuits and programming a robot. They explored diverse cultures, making art creations and learning about community cultural events. They discovered food science, experimenting with dehydrating produce and making ice cream. The educational experiences build competency and readiness skills in young people for success in K-12 education.

A sample of 53 youth in the Creating a Spark in Treasure Valley Youth program completed a 4-H Common Measures survey. The 4-H Common Measures survey is a validated and reliable national 4-H survey to assess 4-H program quality. The youth surveyed indicated an 85-98% positive “Yes” or “Usually” response to the following questions:

4-H Common Measures Survey	Yes/Usually
Is 4-H a place where you feel safe?	98%
Is 4-H a place where it is okay for you to make mistakes?	92%
Is 4-H a place where adults care about you?	92%
Is 4-H a place where you get to figure things out for yourself?	85%
Is 4-H a place where you get to do things you like?	87%

The Search Institute, a youth research organization, identified 40 Developmental Assets that support young people’s need to succeed. Half of the assets focus on external assets such as relationships, stressing that young people need caring, supportive adult mentors. The remaining focus is on internal assets, social-

emotional strengths, values and commitments nurtured in young people. The Creating a Spark 4-H staff provide both external and internal positive support for youth to assist them in developing life skills and improve behavioral health.

Program highlights:

- Delivered programs at 43 sites
- Reached 5,597 youth
- Conducted 10 trainings with 25 faculty and staff
- Developed 13 key partnerships
- Implemented an overnight outdoor science camp

The Future

The Creating a Spark program will continue into 2023 with additional grant funding from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. Educators will continue to build and expand 4-H educational opportunities for youth and families in Ada and Canyon counties. In current programming efforts, educators are developing and training more 4-H volunteers to sustain this programming in future years.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

The Creating a Spark program is supported by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and University of Idaho Extension, Ada and Canyon counties. Partners include schools in Caldwell, Nampa, Parma and Boise School Districts; Nampa and Caldwell Housing Authorities; NeighborWorks Boise; Boys and Girls Club of Garden City; community centers and parks and recreation in Middleton, Caldwell, Star, Wilder and Boise; Bowmont Community and Ten Mile Trinity Churches; and University of Idaho McCall Outdoor Science School.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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