

impact

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

4-H Outside the Box learning labs expand opportunities for youth

AT A GLANCE

Caring adults facilitate learning labs with youth to provide opportunities for positive youth development and learning through experiential activities promoting life skill development.

The Situation

Youth have experienced an interruption in their academic, social and life skill learning because of the COVID 19 pandemic conditions of 2020 and 2021. New ways of learning independently became a necessity immediately and in the following years to enhance learning. University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program was poised to respond by utilizing community partner networks and adapting peer-reviewed curriculum for individual and small group learning experiences outside of school time with a caring adult.

Our Response

The 4-H Outside the Box (OTB) learning labs were created to allow for individual as well as small group learning. Each learning lab contains all the materials needed to complete four to seven lessons in one subject matter area. The youth learning labs are packaged in a small box, one box per youth participant. Over time, a total of five different subject matter labs were created: Gardening, Art, Aerospace, Skillet Creations and Disaster Masters. Lessons were written adapting research-based curriculum and as well as creating original activities. Each learning lab includes detailed lesson plans with experiential, hands-on activities,



Youth participants in 4-H Outside the Box, Skillet Creations day camp, working together to cook skillet lasagna.

handouts and resource materials. An adult packet is provided for a caring adult to facilitate the lessons either with individual youth or a small group. The Skillet Creations program includes a kitchen equipment lab that could be checked out and returned by an adult partner to allow for four groups of up to four youth each to participate at one time. Each subject matter was designed for a designated age group ranging from age 5 to 13 years old.

The 4-H OTB program was pilot tested early spring 2021 through county UI Extension programs, then widely promoted beginning August 2021 when grant money came available through the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) to purchase supplies, hire personnel and distribute the learning labs. The 4-H OTB

program was promoted to county UI Extension programs, afterschool programs, libraries, out of school day care, other youth serving organizations, and home school co-ops and families statewide. With the ARPA grant funds, the National 4-H STEM Challenge was an added resource we offered in 2022 and 2023 with our outreach to community partners in addition to the 4-H OTB learning labs.

Program Outcomes

The ARPA grant funds were awarded over the last two years for the purpose of addressing at least one of the following:

- Education learning loss
- Educational activities that support student learning
- Behavioral health supports for children
- Expand access to services

Further stipulations included in-person programming with youth and serving youth ages 5-13. The 4-H OTB program meets each of these criteria.

From July 2021 through September 2022, 4,084 OTB learning labs and 71 (serving 810 youth) National 4-H STEM Challenge kits were distributed to youth workers and volunteers across Idaho to facilitate with youth. From September 2022 through September 2023, 5,655 4-H OTB learning labs and National 4-H STEM Challenge kits to serve 987 youth were distributed. Community partners serving youth from 36 counties and one reservation representing all four University of Idaho Extension districts participated in these programs.

Adult facilitators were surveyed to collect data on the effectiveness of the lessons and seek input on future topics to develop into additional OTB learning labs. Results are still being analyzed although feedback via

email and some quantitative survey data indicate very positive results. Samples include:

- “This program has been a huge success! We were able to accommodate 40 kids by offering two sessions... and have received an enormous number of compliments from both students and parents.” (Art learning lab)
- “My children are loving each activity so much and are learning so many new art concepts and ideas as well as being exposed to new materials.” (Art learning lab)
- “The material covered in each lesson was perfect and the pictures along with the instructions were crucial.” (Aerospace learning lab)

Youth participants were also surveyed to collect data on the effectiveness of subject matter learning and to measure Positive Youth Development indicators. Again, results are still being analyzed and preliminary indications are positive.

The Future

The conclusion of the ARPA grant funding takes the 4-H Outside the Box program into its next phase.

New local community partners were identified by state level 4-H professionals to facilitate the 4-H OTB materials and our new partners have learned of the resources that 4-H has to offer. To continue mutual relationships, partner contact information and the type of programming they have participated in will be shared with local 4-H programs.

Four of the five 4-H OTB topics will have resources posted to the UI Extension 4-H Youth Development website for local 4-H programs and community partners to download at their convenience and use. These will include all the lesson plans, activity worksheets, handouts and resources. Local programs may then individually purchase supplies and facilitate the program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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