

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

Bannock County, 208.236.7312, Fax: 208.236.7316
130 N. 6th Ave. Ste B, Pocatello, ID 83205

Juvenile offenders set goals and plan for their future

The Situation

It currently costs the state of Idaho, \$79,000 per juvenile to be in State's Custody. The Bannock County Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) works with the most high-risk youth. For many of these youth, this program is an alternative State's custody. For others it is a transition from State's custody back into the community.

The program is committed to providing the youth with an opportunity to develop the skills they will need to become productive members of our community. The amount of time these youth spend in this program varies from a few weeks to several months. On average, they are in the program for three months. The youth in ISP lack an ability to effectively plan ahead and many of them do not have a home life that develops or encourages critical thinking.

Our Response

In coordination with the Bannock County Juvenile Intensive Supervision Program Office, the Bannock County 4-H Extension Educator has worked with the youth in the Intensive Supervision Program an average of twice a month for an hour and a half each time. A total of 25 individual juvenile offenders attended these workshops, an average of 12 youth in attendance each session. These workshops were held in two locations, the Bannock County Extension office and at the Intensive Supervision Program offices.

For several months, the 4-H Educator focused on activities and exercises designed to develop financial management, goal setting and critical thinking skills in these juvenile offenders. The 4-H Extension Educator developed curricula on the following topics: money management, values clarification, S.M.A.R.T. goal setting, and team building. Each participant



Youth in the ISP build spaghetti towers to develop goal setting skills. Photo by Melissa Cummins.

used a "Goal Tracker," a notebook developed to journal answers to specific thought provoking questions. This exercise encouraged them to reflect on the values they hold and goals they want to achieve throughout their lives.

Participants also learned the importance of working as a team. They completed a variety of tasks including spaghetti/marshmallow towers and duct-tape sculptures to help them work with others in setting goals and accomplishing tasks.

During the values clarification lessons, participants identified traits they admired in others and individual characteristics important to them. After completing a series of questions to help them narrow down their personal values, they traced one of their feet and listed their values inside the footprint outline. At the top of their paper, they wrote "What I Stand For" and were encouraged to display this in a place where

they would see it and be reminded to keep their actions consistent with their values.

To teach financial management skills, the Extension Educator used the “Bean Game,” an exercise from the National Endowment for Financial Education curriculum for high school students. In this activity, each participant is given a specific number of beans that represent income. Then they “manage” their beans to meet their basic physical needs such as housing, food, and transportation. Throughout the activity, the Extension Educator would make them take out beans if they had probation fees, or participated in risky behaviors such as smoking cigarettes and having unprotected sex. This activity is valuable in helping them decide between needs and wants and to learn their behavior truly will “cost” them.

Program Outcomes

At the conclusion, these young people were given a life-skill evaluation to determine their abilities to manage their resources, plan for the future, and set effective goals. These youth are now better equipped to plan for their futures. The following are responses from the participants:

- “I learned that doing right in my life will get me to my goals.”
- “I will think more about what I value and base my decision off of it.”
- “As a result of this workshop, I am going to be honest and follow the law to get off probation.”

Managing Financial Resources

The evaluation results on a 5 question multiple choice test indicated the most significant growth in their ability to manage their financial resources. The average correct scores on the question that measured their ability to plan how to use their financial resources were 2 (before) and 3.2 (after). Before and after scores show an increase in knowledge regarding credit, debt, and managing finances.

Control Over Personal Goals and Future

The average scores on the question that measured their ability to have control over their personal goals/future were 2.7 (before) and 3.2 (after). The average scores on the question that measured their ability to feel like they have control over some things in their life are 2 (before) and 2.7 (after). Apparently, these ISP youth are already thinking about what they want to do when they are older. The average before and after scores for the question that measured their ability to think about what they might do when they are older was 2.7.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Melissa McElprang Cummins, Extension Educator-4-H Youth Development
University of Idaho Extension, Bannock County
130 N. 6th Ave. Ste. B
Pocatello, ID, 83205
Phone: 208.236.7312
Fax: 208.236.7316
E-mail: mcummins@uidaho.edu

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