

4-H Camp Counselors learn leadership from each other at Teen Conference

The Situation

More than half of the counties in Idaho offer a 4-H overnight camping experience for youth. Overnight camps give 4-H members a chance to experience the rustic outdoors through a set of structured, fun, educational activities. 4-H camps in Idaho typically include many different types of science, shooting sports, hiking, campfires, and outdoor cooking.

For many years, the University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development Program has promoted a teen counselor program to assist with leadership of the 4-H outdoor camps in Idaho.

Camp counselors are generally the heart and soul of the 4-H overnight camping program in Idaho and across the country. An overnight camp provides an ideal real-world environment for teens to practice a wide variety of life skills, including leadership, communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, decision making, teamwork, and concern for others. Most camps take more teen counselors to camp than adult chaperones, and in many camps, the camp counselors do the bulk of the work, including teaching workshops, leading games and songs, and staying with the campers in their cabins.

The training program for camp counselors varies across the state, ranging from a few hours of orientation to a full 50-hour program that includes an overnight counselor retreat on site. Providing an opportunity for camp counselors to share their experiences and activities with each other can strengthen the entire Idaho 4-H overnight camping program.

Our Response

An eight-hour Camp Counselor workshop track was offered to teens attending Idaho 4-H Teen Conference in June 2012. The outcomes for teens included the



4-H Teen Counselors demonstrate how to play the game "Pterodactyl" for day campers in Moscow. Photo by Brian Luckey

following: 1) lead a camp game, song, skit, or story for their peers; 2) create a "bag of tricks" to take home and use at camp or other large group settings; 3) learn at least five new games, songs, skits, and stories to share at home; and 4) develop relationships with other camp counselors from around the state. Brian Luckey and Missy Cummins, Extension Educators, developed the workshop.

The first three (two-hour) sessions were devoted to understanding the developmental stages of and how to interact with youth ages 6-12, learning how to lead games, songs, skits, and stories, and sharing ideas with each other. The final session was spent at a local day camp program leading the day campers through the activities the counselors learned throughout the week. Twelve teens from across the state participated in the workshop.

Program Outcomes

A seven-question retrospective survey was used to measure the effectiveness of increasing the abilities of teen camp counselors. The evaluation results show an impact on the counselors' perceptions of their camp counselor skills, especially in their comfort with leading a camp fire program and knowing how to get others to share in leadership. The survey asked the teens to rate their confidence level on a scale from numbers 1-4 (4 being the highest).

Table 1.

Camp Counselor Training Workshop Evaluation Results		
	Average Response Before	Average Response After
1. I can use different leadership styles.	2.7	3.8
2. I know at least five different activities to do with younger 4-H members.	3.0	3.8
3. I am comfortable leading a camp fire program.	2.3	3.7
4. I understand developmental stages and how to work with younger 4-H members.	2.8	3.8
5. I understand the role of a camp counselor.	2.8	4.0
6. I know how to work with a group to accomplish a goal.	3.2	3.8
7. I know how to get others to share in leadership.	2.7	3.9

Participants were asked to provide additional comments about their experience. All comments were positive:

- "I learned that you have to use different teaching techniques for different ages."
- "Different age groups require different responsibilities."
- "I learned it is better to plan and do decision making as a group."
- "I learned how to lead a group."

These results suggest that camp counseling is a valuable leadership experience for teens. Creating more opportunities for youth to share and gain new camp skills will enhance our statewide 4-H outdoor camp program. In the future, we hope to create an Idaho 4-H camp counselor training, adapted from other states, which can be used to enhance the leadership skills of counselors statewide.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Brian Luckey, Extension Educator
 University of Idaho Extension, Ada County
 5880 Glenwood St
 Boise, ID 83714
 Phone: 208.287.5900
 Fax: 208.287.5909
 E-mail: bluckey@uidaho.edu

Missy Cummins, Extension Educator
 University of Idaho Extension, Bannock County
 10560 N Fairgrounds Rd
 Pocatello, ID 83201
 Phone: 208.236.7306
 Fax: 208.236.7316
 E-mail: mcummins@uidaho.edu

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