

4-H Teens as Mentors – developing positive role models for youth

AT A GLANCE

In-depth leadership trainings encourage teens to serve as mentors to youth and empower them to teach these skills to other teens.

The Situation

In order to expand and improve 4-H programs in Idaho's Magic and Wood River Valleys, additional trained staff was needed to work directly with younger 4-H members. Mentoring youth is an important job; and teens are the best and most successful mentors for young people. Teens were willing to help Extension staff at area camps and activities, but there lacked a formal training program to develop a cadre of trained teens with the leadership skills that assured they would become successful youth mentors.

Our Response

A series of Teens as Mentors trainings were held to help teens become effective and confident youth mentors for a wide variety of 4-H events and activities. Three evening and one overnight weekend training sessions were offered. Trainings were held at four different Extension offices with local teens providing leadership for flag ceremonies and get-to-know-you activities. The overnight retreat provided an opportunity for each teen to be interviewed for a mentoring or camp counselor position. Twenty-two teens completed the Teens as Mentors trainings in 2014.

Topics discussed at the trainings included:

- Team building activities
- Protecting minors



Participating teens gained leadership skills to become well-trained, successful mentors for youth. Photo by Donna R. Gillespie.

- UI Extension 4-H Policies and Procedures
- Ages and stages training
- Emergency and medical situations
- Leadership self-assessment
- Appropriate dress
- Mentor position descriptions
- Camp counselor training

In addition, participants received a handbook of teaching materials, polo shirts and certificates reflective of the trainings they completed. The overnight retreat also provided workshops on résumé building, conflict management, communication skills, writing correspondence/thank you's and effective interview skills. Survey Monkey was the evaluation tool used to collect data from youth participants as well as parents.

Program Outcomes

Youth evaluations indicated that 80% of the youth attended to increase their personal leadership skills and 88% would attend again. The evaluation also reported that 94% of the teens used the handbook information at least once since the training and 62% felt camp counselor training needed to continue as part of the training series. The training topics were all highly rated and all participants indicated they had gained knowledge from the trainings. In 2014, trainings were all taught by Extension staff; evaluation results showed that the teen participants are able and willing to teach the 2015 sessions with 56% of the teens indicating Teens as Mentor alumni should teach the majority of the topics offered. Teens indicated they felt very comfortable teaching flag ceremonies, dress codes, campfire duties, team working activities and event planning. With some guidance, teens were also willing to teach UI 4-H Policies and Procedures, leadership self-assessment, ages and stages training and would be willing to lead discussions about camp scenarios. A four-question survey was also distributed to their parents. Parents were asked to share their thoughts on the time commitment and travel requirements. All agreed the value of the leadership and experiences their youth received far exceeded the travel required. They also all indicated that they had seen their youth take on additional leadership responsibilities as a result of attending Teens as Mentors and appreciated the inclusion and support felt by everyone.

The Future

In response to the evaluation results from participating youth and their families, the 2015 Teens as Mentors trainings have been adjusted to incorporate many of the suggestions received. Three evening trainings and one overnight retreat are still scheduled but teens will be required to attend one less evening training and can still be considered for a camp counselor position. The trainings will also start one month earlier in the year. Since parents were very complimentary of the trainings and felt the additional time and travel were not detrimental, the trainings will again be held at four different Extension offices. Most importantly, teens who attended training in 2014 will be teaching and facilitating many of the training topics in 2015.

Our vision for Teens as Mentors includes developing and implementing a three-year cycle of training that includes the required yearly 4-H trainings such as leadership styles and self-assessment, protecting minors, code of conduct, as well as ages and stages. Curriculum that staff find relevant for any year could be incorporated in the cycle.

Examples of such trainings include, but are not limited to, anti-bullying, suicide prevention, updates to district and state leadership project requirements and event planning. Teens

who complete all three years of Teen as Mentors will be better prepared to take on leadership roles and positions in their post-secondary education as well as the workplace.

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