

# impact

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

## Walking career fair allows youth a look at local opportunities

### AT A GLANCE

Youth experienced careers on site to learn about local opportunities of which they weren't aware.

### The Situation

Lemhi County used to host one of the largest career fairs in eastern Idaho. It attracted over 500 students from as far as 100 miles away and businesses from across the state and neighboring Montana. A decline in funding for school travel, loss of key organizations and budget cutbacks within the Idaho Department of Labor and the economic development program forced the event to end in 2014. Several other options were attempted to help local youth experience careers and help them make future decisions. The events didn't seem to be helping students find careers in which they had interest. It became increasingly difficult to get businesses to participate despite the Lemhi County's UI Extension advisory board requesting career exploration and the Lemhi Education Project and local Jr./Sr. High's desire to host one.

### Our Response

Lemhi County's UI Extension advisory board, Lemhi Education Project Director Dana Cotton and Salmon Jr./Sr. High School Counselor Ashley Tarkleson decided that students still needed a career fair but they needed a better way to engage students and increase businesses participation. The Walking Career Fair was created to get students out and about and make it



Young entrepreneurs pose with entrepreneur Dylan Brewer at their stop on the Jr./Sr. High career walk. Photo: D. Braswell.

easier for business because they didn't need to close to participate. To increase effectiveness, students took an online test based on the Holland Code to group them into career aptitude areas. The six aptitude areas were realistic, conventional, entrepreneurial, artistic, social and investigative. The businesses were also grouped by the areas. Thirty-five businesses and 350 youth participated in the event. Groups of about ten students walked to six local businesses each to meet the owner, discuss training and education for the career, learn about their particular business and ask questions.

Each business was visited by four groups. Teachers and volunteers guided the students on their walks. Home-based businesses further than walking distance or mobile business met with the students in the school

gymnasium. Some businesses were very excited to participate and provided snacks, giveaways, demonstrations for their visiting groups. A local pilot even arranged a field day for students especially interested in becoming a pilot. Students in the realistic grouping were even able to travel to a construction site for a new home. The walks took place from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and included all the eighth to 12th grade students. A survey was handed out to participating businesses the day of the event; and a follow up survey was provided to the students the next day.

### Program Outcomes

All of the 25 businesses surveyed said they were very happy with meeting the students at their business. All of the businesses said it was either very helpful or somewhat helpful to have the students grouped by aptitude. Seventy percent of the businesses reported that the students were very to somewhat interested in their career. A majority, 72%, of the businesses had never had an internship or job shadow, but 50% stated they were very likely to have one after the event.

The career walk was well received by the students as well. Fifty-nine percent of the 184 students that participated in the survey reported that they found it very helpful to visit the actual businesses. Forty-seven percent reported that the careers they saw somewhat closely matched their interests while 18% said the businesses they visited very closely matched their interests. Forty-four percent of surveyed students were somewhat likely to follow up with a business they met and 8% were very likely. A majority, 57%, of students

surveyed were more informed about local careers after attending the walk and 11% felt there were a lot of possibilities in their area of interest in Salmon. Students reported learning about the difficulties of starting a business. Some stated they saw careers they didn't even know existed and there were more career options locally than they thought. They also gained specific knowledge on training and education needed for certain careers.

The career walk allowed a large number of businesses to participate and really show students an inside look at their career. Students were able to see parts of a career they may not have otherwise been able to see in a traditional career fair. The aptitude test helped students focus on careers they may like or be good at instead of getting discouraged looking at careers they weren't interested in. Some students were surprised by the businesses they matched up with. Many students learned their home community of Salmon had a lot more career opportunities than they thought before which may provide possibilities for students to remain in the community. The career walk got businesses excited to talk to students that were engaged and inspired them to want to take on job shadows and internships with local students. This would allow the students to really explore deeper careers in which they have an interest.

The group hopes to continue the event every other year. The next career walk is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2021.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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