

impact

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

4-H Adventure Camp is getting youth unplugged, outside and living real life

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development's 4-H Adventure Camp empowers youth in southern Idaho to "learn by doing" in community with others in the outdoors.

The Situation

For young people in today's world, it can be hard to unplug. Social media, video games and even school-work can draw youth into screen-filled days and nights. Youth ages 5-18 are facing more psychological stress now than ever due to a variety of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The U.S. Surgeon General has issued an advisory prioritizing youth mental health, listing access to green spaces, relationships with peers and community support as factors that can shape the mental health of youth. Among youth in Idaho, the most vulnerable to mental health crises include minority and marginalized populations.

Outdoor recreation and physical activity can significantly improve mental health in youth and adults alike through strengthened community connections and the development of a sense of self-efficacy.

In an increasingly tech-focused world, there is a need for more hands-on, community-focused, experiential education.

Our Response

4-H Adventure Camp was supported by ARPA COVID-19 relief funding from the Idaho Department of Health



Teen Counselor Tristan sends off a "wish boat" representing the hopes, memories and lessons learned at camp.

and Welfare. In the summer of 2022, 4-H Adventure Camp offered a chance for youth to get outside and get connected. Young people from counties across southern Idaho attended one of five overnight camps at Cascade Lake 4-H camp, where they engaged in hands-on learning alongside trained 4-H staff and teen counselor mentor.

Focused on group-centric activities, 4-H Adventure Camp offers youth a place to let their guard down, disconnect from technology and form genuine community connections while learning valuable outdoor recreation and environmental education skills. A day at camp begins with a family-style breakfast in the lodge and continues with canoeing, fishing, crafts, archery and group

games before concluding with community time around the campfire before heading to sleep in a cabin.

In the offseason when the leaves fall and the lake freezes, 4-H Adventure Camp staff stay busy delivering relevant, hands-on, outdoor education to youth across Idaho's Treasure Valley through day camps, in-school and afterschool programs and community events.

In partnership with local schools, libraries and community organizations, staff have engaged youth in hands-on programs such as birding, navigation, animal tracking, Dutch Oven cooking, archery and more. These programs help facilitate youth learning in conjunction with the natural world and environment—teaching youth to tap into their intrinsic sense of wonder.

Program Outcomes

In the summer of 2022, 309 youth from counties across southern Idaho attended an overnight summer camp through 4-H Adventure Camp. A survey conducted at 4-H Adventure Camp showed that 99% of campers reported experiencing something new at camp. The study also found that most campers cited “making and spending time with friends,” and engaging in “games, activities and workshops” were their favorite parts of summer camp.

4-H Adventure Camp programs continued to positively impact youth in the fall through day camps, in-school and afterschool programs, reaching 1,088 youth in the Treasure Valley in partnership with local organizations. Each program is designed to connect youth to nature and to each other. 4-H staff and the families of youth have noted the impact of outdoor and experiential programming on youth. At camp, staff, counselors and volunteers spend intentional time building relationships with young people.

- “My daughter attended 4-H camp last year. She struggles with anxiety, and we were worried she wouldn't do well at camp. When we picked her up, she would not stop talking about how much she

loved camp. She wants to go back so badly this year and I want to make that happen for her. She came out of her shell at camp and all the memories she shares with me remind me of when I went to camp as a kid.” – 4-H parent

The impact of this is profound: youth who engage in 4-H programming in relationship with a caring adult are more likely to contribute positively to their communities in the future, according to a study conducted by Tufts University on Positive Youth Development.

Staff member Arabelle Britton reflects that 4-H Adventure Camp gives youth the “opportunity to participate in activities that they might not otherwise have access to. Being ‘unplugged’ during summer camp gives youth the opportunity to be fully present in activities and engage in more meaningful relationship building with their peers.”

Young people need community now more than ever. 4-H Adventure Camp allows youth to disconnect from technology and connect with nature and each other through meaningful outdoor learning experiences.

4-H Adventure Camp at a glance in 2022:

- 13 program partners participated in the fall
- 1,397 youth participated in overnight camps, day camps and afterschool programs in summer and fall
- 72% of youth at camp were first time attendees, many of whom were grant-funded, need-based scholarship recipients

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Amanda Palmer, MS; Idaho Department of Health and Welfare; EverWild Forest School; Future Public School; Sage International School of Boise; Emmett Library; Lake Hazel Middle School; Library! at Cole and Ustick; Bown Crossing Library; City of Star; Idaho Rescue Committee; Girl Scouts of Silver Sage; Compass Public Charter School; Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation; eSage.

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