Developing a Diversified Program: The Madison County 4-H Youth Outreach Project

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Need for Idea

Madison County, Texas has a rich mixture of people from different economic and ethnic backgrounds. According to the latest census, people of color represent over 40% of the county's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Economically, the median household income is $29,613 per year while 20 % of the county's population lives under the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). While the county's 4-H program is vibrant and growing, children of color and non-traditional youth have typically been underrepresented in many of the county's 4-H initiatives. Although there are many contributing factors that may potentially play a role in the lack of participation by these groups, the Madison County 4-H Youth Outreach Program was implemented to eliminate many of these tangible barriers. With the assistance of community leaders, extension agents, and local businesses, the program is on track to enhance the educational and personal growth opportunities 4-H offers.

How it Works

Prior to the start of the program, potential students are recommended by teachers, community leaders. After recommendations are received, needs assessments were conducted by county extension agents to determine if students qualified for the program. Once identified, information letters describing the purpose of the program were sent to parents for consent. Following the initial agreement from parents and students, a second assessment is conducted to determine what type of livestock would best fit each student's ability. Once students select the species of livestock they wish to show, the county agent serves as a liaison to ensure that proper care and maintenance of the animals is being completed by the students. The goal is for students to raise and show the animal at the Madison County Fair. Funds generated from the sale of animals are placed in a trust fund under the student's name. The funds are governed by a three signature system. Students receive the profit at the completion of high school and the entrance to a trade school, junior college, or university.

Educational Benefits

Students are required to attend monthly 4-H club meetings. Animal care, health, and nutritional needs of livestock are topics discussed. Students are also required to attend livestock showing practices that provides them with the opportunity to learn techniques of exhibiting livestock while gaining knowledge regarding shearing and fitting animals. Students are also required to be present at workshops offered at the county and district levels. The objective is to acquire more knowledge about 4-H and encourage other youth to develop an interest in agricultural education.

Results

During the first year, ten youth participated in the program. Because the program is in the beginning phases, the results of knowledge gained and change in attitude are difficult to determine. However, as the program progresses, students become more familiar with their projects. Students are attending meetings, livestock project clinics, and showmanship practices. Every student has been enthusiastic and eager to learn. The reward is witnessing students working with their families on a livestock project that would not have been possible without this

program. At the conclusion of the program, the students will be required to complete a program questionnaire that will assist in evaluating their experience and improving the program.

Future Plans

The program is in the first of two years of operation. As the students progress with their livestock projects, there will be an effort to expand the youth's experiences to other aspects of the 4-H program. More specifically, the students will be recruited for leadership roles at the club level. The program will be evaluated at the conclusion of the second year for success and merit in Madison County. A needs assessment will be administered to determine if the 4-H program is effectively recruiting and maintaining underrepresented youth in the Madison County 4-H Program.

Costs/Resources Needed

The program operates on a $2000 fiscal budget provided through the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Because many items were donated by outside resources, total operation cost is difficult to determine. A list of items needed and the source of donations is provided.

- Animals: Donations secured by the county extension agent. The donation of the animals is recorded with the local educational foundation. The foundation provides the donor with documentation for federal income tax reduction purposes.
- Feed Cost/Show Supplies: The county extension agent secured monetary donations to cover the cost of feed and show supplies from a local bank.
- Livestock Feed and Showing Supplies: The county extension agent facilitated collaboration with local feed stores to provide feed and supplies to the program, at cost to the store.
- Housing: The county extension agent coordinated with county's school district to utilize the high school agriculture farm to house animals in the program.

A local bank has agreed to fund the program in 2009-2010, however additional funds are always needed as veterinarian bills and unforeseen costs arise.

References

U. S. Census Bureau. (2007). *State and county quickfacts.* Retrieved January 21, 2009, from: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48313.html