

# GOT JOB SKILLS?

Unique  
camp  
teaches  
4-H'ers  
these  
valuable  
assets



*"I learned that being responsible is about  
being aware of more than just you."*

## SITUATION

Camping is a tried-and-true method for campers and camp counselors to engage youths. Campbell County 4-H has used a work-based learning approach to camp counseling the past five years. The target population is teen camp counselors who are part of the volunteer staff for our 4-H camp. In a work-based learning approach, teens learn workforce skills employers desire through hands-on applications. The workforce skills emphasized are the life skills that transfer to a variety of work settings. Life skills focus on an individual approach to work, interaction with others, and the application of skills to work tasks and roles. The experiential nature of camp and the highly engaging counselor role provides an excellent opportunity to develop these skills.

Based on a review of resources, it was clear that preparing youths for the workforce has taken on new meaning in the knowledge economy of the 21st century. Employers, educators, and community leaders are concerned about a lack of connection between skills young adults have and those needed for workplace success.

A typical job for a teen does not provide opportunities that might enhance their development and help build conceptual abilities necessary for workplace success. The complementary nature of the positive youth development model used in 4-H allows for integration with an intentional workforce preparation program in the traditional camp setting.

The program consists of five components: application, interview, training and planning, serving as a counselor at camp, and a follow-up performance appraisal. Applications and interviews serve the practical purpose of selecting counselors; they are also used to prepare teens for situations such as college applications and job interviews. Youths are taught how to think of their skills as marketable assets. The interview allows teens to have the real-life practice of a job interview in a safe, secure setting with trusted adults and peers.

The training component, in addition to training camp-specific topics, has added a correlation of workforce skills teens will engage with in camp. This intentional focus teaches teen counselors how the skills they utilize are an asset for potential employers, and teen counselors are shown how to showcase the camp counseling skills in resumes.

The follow-up performance appraisal is a replication of an appraisal that would occur in a professional job setting and allows for the self-reflection necessary for individual growth.

This project is a collaborative effort between the University of Wyoming Extension in Campbell County, Campbell County Substance Abuse Prevention Advisory Council,

Campbell County Public Health Department, Campbell County School Board, and Wyoming National Guard Counter Drug Agency. These agencies have worked with the 4-H Young Leader and Camp programs to develop the life skills as workforce skills program. The collaboration to share lesson plans and strategies to introduce workforce concepts allowed for additional professional insight into the development of a successful program. The professionals from collaborating agencies also provided valuable implementation data through focus groups. In addition, each agency sends staff members to camp. These staff members work with teen counselors throughout the week.

Grants from the Campbell County Public Recreation District mill levy fund since 2007 has allowed this program to expand the training portion allowing teens to attend camp at zero cost. The funding has allowed expanding the training portion to two full days on-site and allows teens to stay an extra night following the main portion of camp. The time allowed by the extra night allows timely onsite performance appraisals. The financial assistance has doubled the number of youths in the program.

## IMPACTS

After two days of training prior to campers arriving, each counselor completed a survey to rate their confidence in knowledge gained with life and workplace skills learned while in the training. Team camp counselor meetings are held at the close of each day. They share the experiences they had that day. Events are reviewed giving each team member a chance to give and receive input on their work. This is designed to replicate team projects in the workforce.

Counselors made comments that reinforced their understanding of camp counseling skills and workforce connections:

- *"The interview process will help me forever. It was a great first experience. I was really nervous, and now I know that interviews are a place that it's good to be self-confident."*
- *"I have learned that input from others can be very helpful, sometimes they see things that you don't."*
- *"What I learned as a camp counselor will help me in the real world."*
- *"I learned that being responsible is about being aware of more than just you."*



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