

Workforce-Ready

4-H COLLABORATION PREPARES YOUTH FOR JOBS



Sublette County business leaders and “Ready for the Workforce” participants gather for an end-of-year barbecue celebration.

Situation

According to the Wyoming Department of Education, only 44% of high school students describe themselves as meaningfully engaged in high school and only half of 16- to 24-year-olds had a job in 2011. These are levels that have not been seen since the Great Depression.

Educators and communities recognize that workforce readiness is critical to lifelong earning potential and, ultimately, the overall strength of our nation. A recent statewide stakeholder input survey conducted by the Wyoming 4-H program indicates both intrapersonal (soft skills) and job/trade skills make up about 44% of what respondents feel is not being addressed by youth-serving agencies. What's more, employment and lack of skills were identified by 26% of respondents as a significant emerging issue facing our youth.

In response, representatives of University of Wyoming Extension 4-H, Sublette Chamber of Commerce, Sublette Board of Cooperative Educational Services, and Sublette Economic Resource Council collaborated to develop "Ready for the Workforce," a skill training program for high-school-age youth. Funds were acquired to provide educational programming and a partial stipend to each student who completed an internship program. The Sublette Chamber found businesses willing to mentor students through hands-on internships and to match funds for the student stipends.

Funds were secured for 15 youth to participate, and 13 businesses committed to providing internships. Participating businesses included opportunities in engineering, food service, range management, recreation and fitness, lodging, insurance, tourism, museum, social services and youth development. Two additional businesses that were either handling proprietary information or could not provide internships for youth under 18 participated by donating funds. Twenty-one applications were received, and the top 15 were selected for interviews with the business or organization they ranked highest on their area of career interest.

In May, the following five workforce skill educational programs were provided for participants:

- True Colors—Understanding your Personality to Build Capacity in the Workplace (UW Extension)
- Customer Service (UW Extension)
- Business Etiquette (SERC)
- Communication—Application and Interview Skills (SERC)
- Civil Rights and Conflict Resolution (Judge Curt Haws, Circuit Court of the Ninth Judicial District).

Participants were required to attend at least four of the five programs prior to beginning the 40-hour internship with their business match.

Impact

All 15 program participants completed the program and were awarded a \$500 stipend. When asked before their internships, all youth either agreed or strongly agreed the information in the program would be beneficial as they applied for jobs, and they would recommend the program to others. Upon completion of the internships, youth indicated the experience was very valuable in terms of feeling more confident about entering the workforce, and four youths indicated their practical internship experience helped them better understand their career options.

Participating businesses also indicated they felt the program was a great way to connect youth with professionals in the community and to explore potential career opportunities. All of the businesses indicated they would participate again and provided ideas to engage even more businesses.

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