

impact

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

Boys and Girls Club gain nutrition and garden knowledge

AT A GLANCE

The University of Idaho Extension educator and Eat Smart Idaho instructor teamed up with Boys and Girls Club of Pocatello to bring a cohesive summer nutrition and gardening program to youth.

The Situation

Children who participate in gardening activities are more likely to eat more produce and be open to trying different kinds of produce. An expanding body of literature also demonstrates that children who engage in gardening gain self-confidence, learn to be resourceful and be curious. It is also a great family activity. This activity aimed to demonstrate how productive a tiny garden can be while teaching the benefits of good nutrition.

Our Response

The Boys and Girls Club children in Pocatello participated in a weekly gardening activity and an Eat Smart Idaho nutrition lesson. Small Spaces Gardening aims to engage youth in gardening, create awareness of and appreciation for the environment, to increase knowledge about healthy eating and promote healthy behavior and more.

Fifty-two children attended the Boys and Girls Club on any given day. The classes were divided into two groups based on the children's ages. The two groups received two medium size portable mesh garden bags, seeds and various vegetable starts. Before planting the gardens, instructors led students in a game that



One of four portable garden beds planted by Boys and Girls Club students. Photo by Kathryn Hickok.

demonstrated how plants need space to grow to prevent overcrowding. Instructors discussed the edible parts of plants and what plants need to grow. The children recorded observations, weather, temperature and plant progress in a garden journal. The children were taught how to determine if the plants needed water, and the instructors observed the children practicing what they were taught on multiple occasions. The children were also taught how to pluck leaves carefully if they wanted to add a mint leaf to flavor their water.

The Eat Smart Idaho instructor taught weekly Choose Health, Food, Fun and Fitness lessons that were each 45 minutes long. The lessons were based on Social Cognitive Theory and included hands-on nutrition and problem-solving activities, tasting healthy snacks,

playing active games and goal setting. Activities included comparing Nutrition Facts Labels on food packages, visualizing the amount of sugar in drinks and fat in fast foods, and using photos of real food to create meals for a day with recommended cups of vegetables and fruits. The Eat Smart Idaho instructor used the gardens to reinforce each lesson.

The Boys and Girls Club met for six weeks, which meant the plants were not ready to harvest. The children decided to donate the gardens, and the Bannock House of Pocatello graciously accepted the four garden beds for their residents to tend to. Participants prepared attractive cards to give to the Bannock House residents, expressing their gratitude and wishing their gardens well. Bannock House is a licensed qualified residential treatment program providing a structured and a safe environment for youth who are not with their families for multiple reasons. The residents were excited to receive the gardens and directors were grateful to establish this partnership with UI Extension.

Program Outcomes

A total of 56 children grades kindergarten through fifth grade participated in the lessons, but due to the fluctuating nature of attendance at the Boys and Girls program, 28 completed the pre and post Eat Smart Idaho surveys. These surveys evaluated changes in behavior as it related to nutrition, physical activity and food safety practices. Results included:

- 30% of children reported eating more vegetables as a snack following participation in the program.
- 52% had an improvement in knowledge, skill(s) and/or behavior necessary to improve their physical activity practices.
- 70% had an improvement in knowledge and/or skill(s) necessary to choose foods consistent with federal Dietary Guideline recommendations.

- 43% reported gaining knowledge about and/or using safe food handling practices more often.
- 40% of children grades K-2 improved their knowledge related to food safety.

The adult leaders of the Boys and Girls Club were the same adults throughout the six weeks. The leaders reported that about 75% of the children (about 40) were obviously interested and engaged in the gardens and tending to them between Garden Club days. All the leaders agreed that the children were excited about the gardens, and they often overheard the children talking to one another about the gardens. They also confirmed that the children took the initiative and responsibility to water the gardens each day. The children would remind staff when it was their turn to water and enjoyed checking on their gardens each day. Four of the five leaders reported they engaged in some conversation about the gardens with the children.

The Future

The youth at the Bannock House will tend to the gardens and receive regular nutrition education lessons from the UI Extension educator in Bannock County. In partnership with horticulture Extension educators and Idaho Master Gardeners, Eat Smart Idaho has introduced students to gardening in their classrooms.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Funding for this project came from Eat Smart Idaho and Innovative Project Funds.

Eat Smart Idaho's administrative team: Kali Gardiner, Kristin Hansen, Kathryn Hickok, Cammie Jayo, Shelly Johnson, Siew Guan Lee, Joey Peutz, Annie Roe, Becky Woodhouse.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Kathryn Hickok, Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Bannock County • 208-236-7307 • khickok@uidaho.edu

37-23-khickok-club-garden • 10/23