

impact

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

Homeschool groups, the untapped educational opportunity

AT A GLANCE

As homeschool groups are growing, opportunities for additional programming are needed and University of Idaho Extension programming is a great solution.

The Situation

Due to changes in public education and with the impact of COVID-19, more individuals and families are choosing to homeschool their children. These individuals and families live, work and serve in our communities in many different capacities. Existing homeschool groups and many new ones are looking for opportunities to improve the selection of course offerings and provide their children with a high-quality education. As a result, many are searching for quality education programs. As our mission in UI Extension is to provide researched-based information to the communities in Idaho, many of our existing programs can be used to meet this need and offer a high-quality education programming and materials to these groups.

Our Response

With our youth development educator, UI Extension office in Twin Falls County, organized a group of after-school classes and programs that we offer during the day as one way to fill this need. Enrollment in these programs was strong, but then COVID-19 hit, and it impacted registration in these programs.

As my children are homeschooled and belong to one of these groups, an opportunity was available to provide a



Horticulture educator Andy West teaches soil sampling during “Fun with Plants” at Snake River Academy homeschool group.

class for grades K-2nd. I modified the curriculum used for one of our afterschool impacts programs to fit the scheduling of the homeschool group. The class, titled “Fun with Plants” introduced the students how plants grow and function and to help understand the soil and its role, climate and weather, different types of fruits, the medicinal qualities of plants and how we use plants and plant parts in our lives. The class was a success, and many of the older siblings of this age group also wanted to take the class. It has now been offered to all age groups (K-12) in this homeschool group. The homeschool group began making recommendations after a request for additional programming to be provided. From the feedback received, classes that have now been offered are Botany, Propagation, Basic Gardening, Ecology and Flower Arranging. The

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homeschool group provided funding to cover the cost of materials and supplies needed based on establishing a cost per student set by the instructor to cover expenses.

Working with an existing homeschool group makes advertising, registration and management easy as these are all handled by the group. The UI Extension educator can focus on the educational programming. Most groups are large and have approximately 100 or more families that participate with a waiting list of families who would like to join. In the last two years, I know of the creation of four new groups in the Magic Valley area. Many homeschool families participate in multiple groups, and this provides opportunities to do presentations and programming for these other groups. With families from multiple counties throughout the area involved in these groups, I have been able to connect these individuals with the UI Extension offices in their counties for additional programs and resources.

Program Outcomes

The programs that UI Extension has offered to homeschool groups has expanded our reach to many more individuals in our communities, helped provide a high-quality research-based education to many, educated more individuals and families on who and what

University of Idaho Extension is and has to offer, increased enrollments in other programs and disciplines, and opened a new avenue for additional programming to be provided by UI Extension. Participants in these courses have requested that the programs continue to be offered and made available to these groups, mainly the STEAM and robotics programs. The advantage that UI Extension programming provides is high-quality science and research-based information that qualified instructors and educators can deliver.

The Future

Looking to the future of providing programming to homeschool groups, a few key areas could be addressed. These include making programming available through social media and online formats that would reach additional individuals and even public school students as more and more programming is being completed online. Educators and instructors need to continue to reach out to these and other groups in their respective communities to form partnerships that would expand the programming opportunities.

Branching out to reach different groups and organizations provides UI Extension the opportunity to reach and educate more of our clientele and help create a more prosperous Idaho.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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