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4-H Wildlife Stewards--A New Delivery Model for 4-H

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4-H Wildlife Stewards--A New Delivery Model for 4-H

Abstract

This article reports that 4-H Wildlife Stewards volunteers trained in building community capacity and how to work collaboratively with schools and community partners are making a difference in the lives of thousands of youth. 4-H Wildlife Stewards work with students and teachers to create, use, and sustain Habitat Sites on school grounds for science learning. Evaluation of the project documents that student interest and knowledge in science increases when 4-H Wildlife Stewards projects are initiated. Today, 188 active 4-H Wildlife Stewards work with 376 classroom teachers and over 12,000 youth to deliver hands on science education.

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Introduction

Oregon 4-H is delivering environmental education in new ways and unleashing a new force and vitality in 4-H volunteers. Today during school, after school, and on weekends, young people are working side-by-side with adult 4-H Wildlife Stewards <wildlifestewards.4h.oregonstate.edu> to transform 49 small plots of land into wildlife education habitat sites. The 4-H Wildlife Stewards Program model, a new model for delivering 4-H education, demonstrates that volunteers trained in building community capacity and how to work collaboratively with schools and community partners is making a difference in the lives of thousands of youth.

In August 2001, the 4-H Wildlife Stewards Program was awarded an \$896,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to develop this program into a national model and document the educational and scientific impacts of this project on students, teachers, and communities.

Today, the program brings new wildlife to local communities and has community leaders excited. The program currently supports 188 active 4-H Wildlife Stewards volunteers. These volunteers assist 376 classroom teachers and over 12,000 youth in 49 schools to create, use, and sustain wildlife habitat sites on school grounds for science learning.

Program Description

The mission of the 4-H Wildlife Stewards program is to promote science learning and stewardship among youth and to inspire, educate, and connect communities, schools, and community partners. 4-H Wildlife Stewards complete a 24-hour training course and in return give back 50 hours of volunteer service to a 4-H Wildlife Stewards Member School. The training includes 20 learning modules. Some of these modules include science inquiry, native plants, principles of wildlife, curriculum lessons, site inventory, grant writing, summer maintenance, creating a habitat team, marketing, and vandalism prevention.

Schools interested in becoming a 4-H Wildlife Steward Member school must complete a Member School application and complete an annual enrollment report each year.

Through the on-site support of 4-H Wildlife Stewards participating elementary and middle school students and teachers have designed and created courtyard ponds; bird and butterfly gardens; bioswales; wetland, woodland and stream restoration projects; and on-site school nurseries. They have installed nest boxes, started worm composting, and created learning shelters. They have also

organized community work parties, hosted special events and site tours for the community, conducted science inquiry projects, shared their results through presentations, collected historical data of the site, kept journals of their project, and created interpretive signs and murals,

A Different Model

In many ways the 4-H Wildlife Stewards Program is not unlike traditional 4-H club programs.

- Trained volunteers deliver research-based education to youth.
- Youth acquire subject matter knowledge and build life skills.
- Youth participate in 4-H camps, county fairs, and other 4-H enrichment programs.
- The program is project-based.

In other ways, the 4-H Wildlife Stewards Program is significantly different from traditional 4-H clubs. 4-H Wildlife Stewards:

- Complete a 24-hour training course;
- Directly affect, on average, 90 youth;
- Support team-based projects for youth;
- Work exclusively in schools;
- Receive subject matter training (native plants, wildlife and habitats). However, they are also trained to recruit and support other parent volunteers, write grants, establish school habitat planning committees, market their program, and partner with community groups; and
- May lead and instruct youth but more likely become a "science education broker," facilitating the delivery of science inquiry based education to youth.

Fifty-six percent of 4-H Wildlife Stewards Member schools responded to a survey. On average, each week, 42% of students spent 1-2 hours in hands-on learning related to this project, 33% spent 3-5 hours a week in hands-on science, and 25% spent 6-15 hours per week in hands-on science.

Building Community Capacity

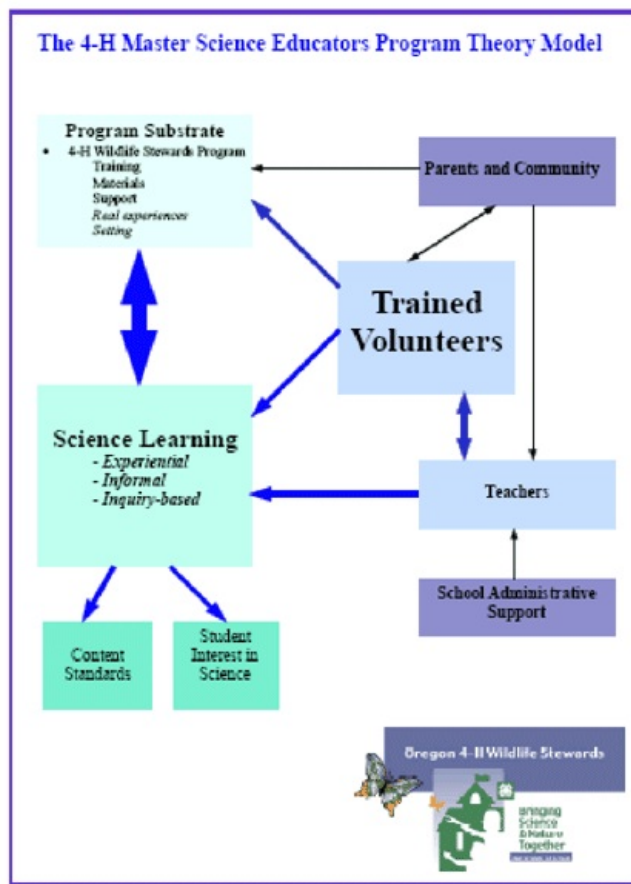
With a small grant of \$1500 in 1997, the first class of 14 4-H Wildlife Stewards was trained. How did this small program with a few dollars and a handful of dedicated volunteers spread into a program that has grown almost tenfold? A key aspect is that the program is based on facilitative change, not just skill acquisition. 4-H Wildlife Stewards volunteers are the organizers, dreamers, visionaries, and catalysts for change in their local community.

By recruiting and supporting other parent volunteers and teachers, 4-H Wildlife Stewards affect an entire community. As an example, one Oregon 4-H Agent works with 350 club-based volunteers, and these volunteers in turn work with 1,400 youth. Another agent, using the 4-H Wildlife Stewards model, works with 11 volunteers. These 11 volunteers recruit and support 134 teachers and 50 parent volunteers to deliver hands-on science education to 2,843 youth.

The 4-H Wildlife Stewards Program Model is validated by the research on school and community connections and further demonstrates that youth outcomes are improved when the many interdependent variables are in place and working toward common goals. Evidence suggests that 4-H Wildlife Stewards volunteers alone cannot drive a successful program. 4-H Wildlife Stewards volunteers must work collaboratively with each of the stakeholders represented in the model shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

The 4-H Master Science Educators Program Theory Model



Program Impact

A formative evaluation of the 4-H Wildlife Stewards Program took place during the first 3 years of the grant. The evaluation revealed that the 4-H Wildlife Steward workshops targeting volunteers provided the needed training and information for volunteers, teachers, and schools to work together to create habitat sites on school grounds. Once habitats are in place, they are used as informal science classrooms, allowing teachers to engage students in long-term, inquiry-based investigations. Teachers report that this type of engaging informal science project would not be possible if it were not for the active involvement of the 4-H volunteer who often serves as the catalyst to make the project possible. Follow-up evaluations reveal an increase in parent and community involvement in the school as a result of the program as well and student science interest and knowledge increased. (Arnold, 2004).

Through new methods of delivering youth education, 4-H demonstrates that what underlies successful unified programs of change, in the end, is a bedrock belief that change is possible and that people can radically transform their behavior, beliefs, policies, and practices with the right kind of impetus.

References

Arnold, M. E. (2004). *Oregon 4-H Wildlife Stewards program final evaluation report*. Corvallis, OR: The 4-H Youth Development Education Program Evaluation Project.

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