

impact

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

Eighth graders build little free libraries to improve their community

AT A GLANCE

Youth matched a \$2,000 grant with \$7,000 worth of in-kind donations to build little free libraries to help improve their community by making reading material available over the summer.

The Situation

Salmon's Fernwaters Public Charter School 8th Grade class was selected as the Idaho participant in West Virginia University (WVU) Extension, My Hometown is Cool program. Youth took a four-lesson class learning about their own community and the assets around them. They then were encouraged to split into two teams to develop a project that would improve their community. The two teams pitched their ideas to each other and voted on one project to pursue. Once a project was picked, the group was awarded a \$2,000 grant to implement it.

Our Response

Extension educator, Katie McFarland, coordinated the My Hometown is Cool program with 13 8th graders at the Fernwaters Public Charter School during their spring semester community outreach class. Two teams of youth picked topics, researched viability and presented their projects to each other. Team One chose to research putting safety flags at crosswalks downtown. Team Two chose to research building little free libraries. The two teams presented their ideas and the class voted to focus their efforts on building little free libraries. Youth felt that reading is important to everyone, and not everyone has access to books. Some adults



Students install the little free library they designed, built and filled. Photo by Katie McFarland.

work long hours that don't match public library availability, some youth and adults don't have transportation, and youth have a large reduction in available reading material over the summer and after school hours. The students found online plans, bought materials and built the libraries in class. After completion, they collected books from the library and through a book drive. They also registered with the nonprofit Little Free Libraries and began official charters. This allowed their libraries to be listed on the Little Free Library website and app.

Program Outcomes

In class, the youth were able to build two library cupboards. They recruited two community volunteers who helped design the plans from online templates they

downloaded and provided instructions on tools and building (10 hours). Another volunteer donated the use of tools. Thirteen students were involved in the process of designing, building, painting, filling and installing the libraries (190 hours). One full-time teacher at Fernwaters Public Charter School supervised the semester-long class one day a week (13.5 hours). The Salmon Public Library donated books, and community members donated more books during a book drive (\$150). The Salmon Presbyterian Center donated space to place the first library. The Salmon City Police also donated space for the second library.

The class leveraged over \$7,000 in in-kind match against the \$2,000 grant from West Virginia University to create the libraries and improve their community. They are located next to two little free pantries and see lots of use. Salmon has four little free pantries providing free food to youth, so they are already a gathering place for children.

The Future

Fernwaters Public Charter School was so impressed with the students' impact they have implemented an annual spring semester course on community service. Since the grant funds have run out, they now offer a fall semester entrepreneurial class for the 8th graders to sell a product and use the revenue to fund the next semester's community project.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Fernwaters Public Charter School
- West Virginia University Extension

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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