

4-H teen counselors gain hope and decision-making freedom in Bannock County

AT A GLANCE

Teen camp counselors gained greater hope for their future and freedom to make decisions after leading at Alpine 4-H Camp, advancing University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program goals.

The Situation

Youth ages 12-18 need meaningful leadership opportunities to develop confidence, motivation and life skills that prepare them for the future. This program gives teens the chance to practice responsibility, build positive relationships, and discover purpose. Without these experiences, young people may struggle with low self-efficacy, reduced hope and weaker community connections. This can affect individual wellbeing and future workforce readiness.

University of Idaho Extension's 4-H programs address this problem by placing teens in real leadership roles as camp counselors. 4-H faculty and staff, 4-H volunteers and parents help recruit participants and support the three-day overnight camp. Expected benefits include stronger individual skills for the teens, more capable youth leaders who contribute to their communities and long-term gains through resilient, engaged youth.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension faculty designed and delivered a research-based pre/post evaluation for 18 Bannock County 4-H counselors in 2026. The survey measured three constructs grounded in the Intrinsic



Counselors, campers and chaperones reach the top of the hike at Alpine 4-H Camp.

Motivation Inventory and 4-H Thriving Model: motivation for the counselor role, leadership skills and connection and growth.

Counselors completed surveys before camp and again immediately after camp. Their feedback helps shape future camps.

Extension staff and camp volunteers partnered with and supported the counselors throughout the three days of camp. The counselor position was advertised through school districts and 4-H clubs in Bannock County. Youth ages 12-18 participated to gain leadership skills and recommended the program to other teens, supporting continued recruitment. Participants received recognition through a counselor sweatshirt, bag and certificate at the end of camp.

Program Outcomes

The desired results of this program were to increase motivation, strengthen leadership skills and support growth among the teen counselors. With scores based on a one-to-five scale, counselors showed modest gains across all three constructs:

- Motivation for the counselor role increased from 4.15-4.23
- Leadership skills rose from 4.13 to 4.26
- Connection and growth moved from 4.31-4.35

Two individual items reached statistical significance. Freedom to make decisions improved from 3.89 before camp to 4.39 afterward. Hope for the future rose from 4.06 to 4.53. Self-confidence also trended upward.

When asked what they were most excited about before camp and what the best part was afterward, counselors consistently highlighted two themes:

- Building relationships and a sense of community
- Helping campers grow, learn and have fun

The same themes dominated post-camp responses, showing that the experience matched what the teens valued most.

Serving as counselors helped teens develop greater autonomy and optimism. They also formed meaningful relationships and experienced the satisfaction of watching younger campers grow. These results show that Alpine 4-H Camp successfully strengthens the motivation and leadership skills of Idaho youth.

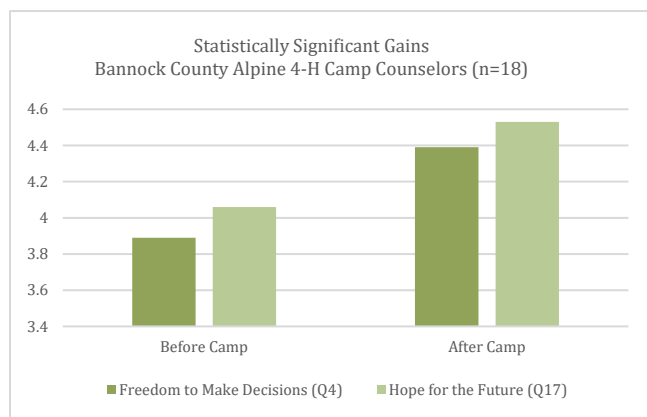


Figure 1. Statistically significant gains in freedom to make decisions and hope for the future among Bannock County's Alpine 4-H Camp counselors (n=18).

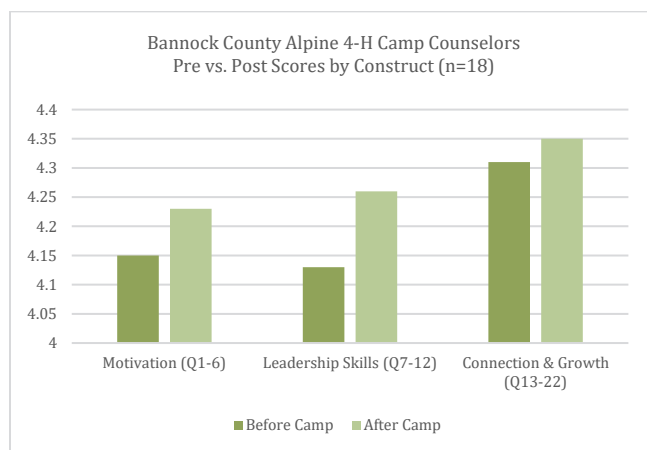


Figure 2. Pre- and post-camp average scores for the three main constructs among Bannock County's Alpine 4-H Camp counselors (n=18). Scores are on a one to five scale.

The Future

Plans include adjusting activity groupings based on counselor feedback and continuing pre/post evaluation to keep building on these positive outcomes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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