

impact

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

Youth find belonging and connect with nature at a summer 4-H camp

AT A GLANCE

Youth create new friendships, connect with nature and build self-confidence. Teen counselors develop leadership skills while fostering a sense of belonging for 4-H campers.

The Situation

Summer camps provide youth with opportunities to spend time away from home in a supportive environment where they can build self-confidence and independence, develop personal responsibility and practice making decisions on their own. Youth create new friendships and “unplug” in an area without cell service or internet to reconnect with nature.

Our Response

The CL2NI (Clearwater, Latah, Lewis, Nez Perce, Idaho) 4-H Camp has been offered since 1985 between four of the counties and Idaho County that joined recently within the last five years. The multiday, overnight camp incorporates hands-on, STEAM education in an outdoor environment to promote positive youth development.

Approximately 100 4-H’ers ages 8-12 participate in classes and activities to reengage youth with nature and promote healthy living within the environment around them. Some class topics focus on natural resources such as forestry, entomology and water, while others incorporate non-traditional, inclusive sports like canoeing, hiking, swimming, fly fishing and archery. Additional classes focus on preparing youth to



Campers are competing in a sponge race during Minute-to-Win-It games. Photo by Hailey Ellerbroek.

be actively engaged in their community by promoting communication and teamwork during games and giving back during a service project. Group activities involve competing in minute-to-win-it games, a talent show, capture-the-counselor and movie night.

Around 40 teens are counselors at camp. Cabin leaders assist adults teaching classes and guide campers in sleep and hygiene monitoring as well as cleaning cabins. Group leaders take campers to each class and encourage engagement with teachers and other youth. Prior to camp, virtual training goes beyond expectations for creating a positive environment for the campers. An in-person, day-long training involves team-building and public speaking exercises, which the

teens can use to engage campers and foster a sense of belonging.

Program Outcomes

For some youth, camp may be their first time away from home. By interacting with other youth and adults, campers learn social and emotional intelligence, which can be the largest learning curve. Staff work to promote a sense of safety and security, while also forming a developmental relationship with the youth to encourage engagement. Youth are supported to develop self-control and healthy habits for the wellness of body, mind and being. With guidance from adults and teens, youth choose from food options, self-regulate sleep and monitor hygiene.

Youth are expected to clean their cabin daily and assist with cleaning the bathrooms, recreation areas and dining hall. Previously, teens have needed to teach campers how to sweep or mop as they may not have needed to do so at home.

Each year a survey is sent to camp families asking about their experience (Table 1). Campers felt safe and secure, as well as welcomed and liked by adults.

Table 1. Campers rated how true statements were on a scale from zero (not at all true) to 10 (very true).

Statement	2025	2026
I felt safe.	9	9
Adults treated me fairly.	9	9
Adults respected me.	9	9
I felt supported by other kids.	8	8
I felt like I mattered.	8	8
I felt welcomed.	8	9
Adults liked me.	8	9
Adults paid attention to me.	8	8

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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As the community service project in 2025, youth collected old T-shirts and jeans to make dog toys for local animal shelters. In 2026, youth crafted leather ornaments to be hung on the Capitol Christmas Tree in Washington D.C. that was sourced from a local forest.



Camper crafting a leather ornament. Photo by Hailey Ellerbroek.

The Future

Recent feedback from campers requested being more involved in decisions. In 2027, teens will decide on the camp theme, shirt colors, movie options and classes. At camp, campers will vote on the movie selected and will provide ideas for the 2028 camp theme.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

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