

2011 Summer Camp Final Report

Situation:

More than two-hundred and twenty campers, staff and adults attended 4-H Summer Camp 2011. More than 165 of those that attended were campers, with the rest being camp staff, chaperones and cooks. Campers experienced a wide range of activities during the week of camp from swimming to dancing to crafts to athletics. In addition, campers participated in 4 hours of Science related activities as a part of the 4-H SET initiative that included and exploration of the solar system and boat building where campers enhanced or learned science skills (abilities) like critical thinking, problem solving, designing and communication.

The 2011 Los Angeles County 4-H Summer Camp hosted campers from as far away as Monterey County in California, the states of Arizona and Nevada as well as the surrounding counties of San Bernadino, San Diego, Ventura, Orange and Riverside. There were also 40 youth from our military partnership participating in camp, with about half from our local partnership with the Los Angeles Air Force Base 4-H Club.

The Los Angeles 4-H Summer Camp is organized by youth (mostly teen leaders) with careful supervision and guidance of adult volunteers. In fact, with the exception of the nurses, all adult persons at camp are volunteers who schedule their personal lives to accommodate spending a week at 4-H Summer Camp. Adult and Youth staff experience more than 20 hours of training prior to camp and spend many additional hours preparing for camp week. The 4-H program strongly believes in giving youth authentic and meaningful leadership roles in the execution of the program (including camp). This philosophical approach could leave some to perceive a lack of direction or program control, but positive youth development is about healthy adult and youth relationships, creating an environment where youth are allowed to safely explore; learn and lead; developing youth who are competent, confident, caring, connected, contributing and with character. Youth learn to lead in 4-H and the camp program is another vehicle for learning to take place.

Respondents to the survey were asked several questions designed to assess the process and the content of camp (see appendix A). More than 50 respondents (some families had multiple campers, so one survey per family was submitted) answered the survey.

Communication with County Office: Just about 75% responded that the communication was what was expected or exceeded expectation. A significant percentage, 20%, said the communication was adequate.

Camp Registration: 60% said camp registration was what was expected with an equal number saying it was adequate or exceeded expectations.

Camp Check-in: Forty percent said camp check-in needs improvement. Forty-six thought it was adequate or what was expected.

Camp Facilities: Respondents said the camp facilities were what was expected or exceeded expectations (39%)

Camp Cost: Ninety-eight percent reported that 4-H Summer Camp was a value and that the cost was reasonable.

Camp Staff: Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported that the camp staff was very good or extremely good, while 18% felt the staff was ok or not so good.

Returning to camp: Respondents reported that their overall camp experience was good or very good and plan to return to camp next year (88%).

Respondents were also asked to comment on what they learned during the SET activities (Solar System, Boat Building) and their overall camp experience.

4-H SET, Solar System: Responses included, "We are not alone and I learned the "order of the planets." Others said, " I learned planet names, origins and planet locations." One parent made the comment, "They enjoyed it, but did not have any particular thoughts. I am glad they received some educational experiences while there and hope something similar is presented next year." Another person said, "I learned [t]he order and orbit of the planets; about asteroids, meteorites and comets."

The skills youth learned include: teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, communication, follow-up investigation,

Respondents reported differing views of the overall camp experience. For example, one said, "My children said that they truly enjoyed themselves and are excited to return. I thought this a great experience. The cost made this a very affordable option for us. The check in process was drawn out, though." Others said, "The food was not as good as she expected and the water temperature of the showers was a little lukewarm. Overall the experience was a very good one. She (daughter) made a lot of friends by the time the week was over and wants to return next year, possibly as a counselor."

With respect to the camp staff and the check-in process, one said, "This is a common challenge, but the staff need to be continually pressed to participate with the campers in activities." " The check-in is still a bit painful." "The rules need to be enforced consistently with staff and campers, especially the dress code. There should be better organization for activities on the field because too many kids were doing nothing." "Camp was a great experience for the first timer. Staffers need to be examples with dress code. Dress code at camp not what was on camp site." "Give

people numbers at check in so they don't have to stand in line. Let people mingle and chat until their turn comes." "The age group 8-19 for camp is too broad. I don't think certain things (Abbey and Gabby) are appropriate for the younger kids. I would separate the cubs and the bears from activities like this and shorten the camp to 5 days.

Discussion and Recommendations:

4-H Summer Camp 2011 was a resounding success. Campers had a great time and learned new skills and knowledge throughout the week. They went hiking, learned how to tie knots, build boats, fished and met new people through the camp experience. According to the data, a significant number of campers expressed a general satisfaction with 4-H Summer Camp and very much look forward to attending camp next year. There were positive responses and comments about camp and the process of enrolling with camp, but there were also some critical ones. Namely, the check-in process was cited as one of the most frustrating aspects of camp. While a part of it is our need to better communicate to parents what check-in involves, it also requires us to continue to find more efficient ways to process campers. One suggestion is to stagger campers by surname. Another is to assign campers a group number and an appointment time and process them accordingly.

In terms of communication about camp and information flow, most respondents felt that it was more than adequate and in some cases exceeded expectations. Between the 4-H Summer Camp website and the county office, information about camp was provided in a timely and effective manner. However, the one area of concern that was raised more than once is better preparation and information for chaperones. In particular, we need to provide a more formal position description that clearly articulates the tasks, the roles, the expectations and the time commitment of being a camp chaperone.

Most respondents to the survey rated the camp staff very high. Camp staff received high praise for their leadership, planning and general accessibility for campers. However there were some concerns raised by some of the respondents. For example, a few respondents expressed disappointment with the tone, snappiness and language of some of the staff. It was reported that some staff constantly used inappropriate language around campers and other adults and when reminded of the code of conduct, seemed to ignore it. In fact, some expressed that some staff ignored the code of conduct completely (including the dress code) while expecting campers to follow it. For some it created an unfair and hypocritical culture for the week. One way to address these concerns is to constantly remind staff that as a condition of their position, they must adhere to the code of conduct and that when it's violated the consequences could include losing the privilege of being on staff. We must also provide adequate training on the code of conduct and its application to all 4-H members (including camp staff) at all times during a 4-H event.

We need to be sure to address the aforementioned areas in ways that do not undermine the fairness and openness of camp.

Overall, I recommend that we continue to provide an authentic leadership experience for 4-H teens. These staff positions are critical to the 4-H program's ability to provide an affordable and engaging 4-H camp. Through the guidance and leadership of adults, youth are able to truly exhibit leadership and decision-making skills that enhance the camping experience of campers. In addition, I recommend that we limit the number of campers to minimize the stress and pressure placed on camp staff. The number should be consistent with maintaining appropriate youth to adult ratios.

The 4-H Summer Camp Committee has already started meeting to begin planning for the 2012 summer camp. If you have other thoughts or ideas that you want to be considered, please forward them to me at kcathaniel@ucdavis.edu. I look forward to another great and rewarding camp next summer.