

impact

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

Two years of impact with Soccer for Success in Kootenai County

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension educator pools resources to deliver the Soccer for Success obesity prevention program for a second year, focusing on at-risk youth.

The Situation

In Idaho, 12.2% of children are overweight or obese, a condition that increases the risk of developing chronic diseases. Additionally, 12.4% of children do not participate in any physical activity. Obesity remains a significant health disparity, disproportionately affecting youth and adults with limited financial resources. In fact, 10.7% of Idaho's population lives in poverty with 67% of children qualifying for federal nutrition programs. Regular physical activity and a nutritious diet are known to reduce the risk of obesity and related diseases.

To address these issues, the family and consumer sciences Extension educator in Kootenai County, who has longstanding ties with the local soccer community, sought to introduce a new obesity prevention program to the area. Soccer for Success, a youth development program created by the U.S. Soccer Foundation, uses soccer to encourage health, fitness and positive life skills among children, with a focus on underserved communities. The program combines physical activity with education on nutrition and healthy lifestyles to help prevent childhood obesity and foster personal growth.



Collegiate athlete and lead coach/mentor Charley Hegstad helps her Soccer for Success youth scrimmage.

Our Response

In 2022, University of Idaho Extension in Kootenai County secured three funding sources — 4-H Ignite Your Spark, 4-H Healthy Habits and Eat Smart Idaho — to support the Soccer for Success program in collaboration with the U.S. Soccer Foundation. This funding allowed for the hiring of two lead coach/mentors and nine teen support coach/mentors, enabling the program to reach over 100 at-risk youth in the Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls School Districts. Program sites included the Cda4Kids program (serving McKinney Vento youth), both Boys and Girls Club locations in Kootenai County and the Summer Meal Site at Borah Elementary. Each participant received eight nutrition lessons through Eat Smart Idaho, along with an hour

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of daily soccer training led by teen mentors. Coaches stayed onsite after each session to join youth for lunch at local summer meal sites and promote healthy habits. Participants received soccer jerseys, soccer balls, shin guards and water bottles from the U.S. Soccer Foundation to encourage their new health routines at home.

In 2024, the program continued with support from Eat Smart Idaho, 4-H Healthy Habits and internal UI Extension funds. This year, two lead coach/mentor interns and two support coach/mentors provided training and participants received take-home equipment. Participants also received six nutrition education lessons through Eat Smart Idaho. Ramsey Elementary School in the Coeur d'Alene School District was selected as the program site as it also served as the summer meal location for Cda4Kids and hosted two Summer Plus programs for elementary-aged students.

Program Outcomes

In 2022, 134 youth participated in Soccer for Success. Survey data was gathered from 86 of these participants to assess their nutrition knowledge, behavior changes and physical activity levels.

Results showed that 82% of participants reported paying attention to their daily activity levels, with 93% planning to stay active after completing the program. While 81% monitored their water intake, 98% intended to meet daily water recommendations after the program and 90% planned to reduce sugary beverage consumption. Fifty-seven percent reported being mindful of their fruit intake, and 53% of their vegetable intake; after the program, 96% planned to consume

the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the program emphasized family impact, with 93% learning about healthy food choices, 75% sharing healthy snack or meal ideas with their families and 88% planning to prepare a healthy snack or meal at home.

In 2024, 140 youth joined Soccer for Success, yielding the following survey results:

Among youth in third to fifth grade, 84% reported choosing foods that align with federal dietary recommendations, 42% practiced safe food handling more frequently and 53% improved their physical activity habits.

Site managers at partnering Soccer for Success locations were quoted as saying “thank you for coming this summer and giving so much to our kids, your time and your amazing coaches were phenomenal. And all the take home equipment... sometimes our kids are just forgotten about and this summer they really felt like they were a part of something important.”

The Future

Family and consumer sciences UI Extension educator for Kootenai County has secured 2025 funding through innovative project funds and will focus on Soccer for Success with the influence of role models.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Eat Smart Idaho administrative team: Joey Peutz, Siew Guan Lee, Cammie Jayo, Becky Woodhouse and Christina Roe.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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