

impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



Economic Development and Quality of Life for People and Communities

The Extension Connection—Life and Job Skills Training

Issue

There is a need in the Phoenix metropolitan area for “welfare-to-work” type programs. Extension Connection was developed when a local Cooperative Extension agent recognized a dire need for the addition of life management skills along with nutrition education in programs for families. The Extension Connection components added a special touch to an already existing program called Successful Training Resource Individual Development or otherwise known as Project S.T.R.I.D.E. at Keys Community Center. This program promotes workforce development in a South Phoenix high-crime, at-risk area.

What has been done?

The Extension Connection program enhances life skills and promotes workforce development of low-income families by providing a series of educational experiences that promote self-sufficiency. Families learn job development skills, nutrition, and

money management. The program uses a variety of Cooperative Extension programs such as Money Management, Life Skills and Nutrition and a series of educational experiences called Challenge to enhance the skills and abilities of families towards self-sufficiency.

Participants in the program have ranged from former gang members to newly arrived immigrants to the United States whose lack of English and American job skills caused significant barriers to employment. Ninety-five percent of the program graduates are members of racial or ethnic minorities, 40 percent have had less than a high school education; many have criminal records.

Impact

During the past three years 300 Evaluation and Results high-risk adults from a low-income community (85 percent of those enrolled) have graduated from the Extension

Connection program. More than 150 have been employed for over a year. Many participants have returned to the site to help as volunteers and mentors, and some are now employed at the site as staff. For some participants, this was the first time they were free of drugs, free of gang affiliations and showed up daily for classes. One early STRIDE/Extension Connection graduate went on to graduate with an Associates of Arts degree and received an academic scholarship to attend an Arizona State college for the fall for 2002. Regarding dietary changes, upon graduation, 74 percent of the participants in 2002 reported that they ate a more balanced and nutritious diet, including increased amounts of fruits and vegetables and fewer foods high in fat and sugar.

“The Extension Connection helped me to bridge the gap in society for me, to make the transition to a new life smoother.” –former prison inmate who wanted to improve his life with skills for living and get a decent job advisor

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Contact

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