

Abstract

Background: The Lafayette 4-H Build It Camp is a hands-on program designed to teach teens fundamental carpentry skills while constructing a tiny house. This initiative addresses the need for practical skills in rural communities, where opportunities for youth engagement and job training are limited. The program also promotes teamwork, safety, and problem-solving while fostering an interest in construction careers. **Objective:** The primary goal of the camp is to provide teens with real-world carpentry experience and life skills. Secondary objectives include increasing youth participation in 4-H, enhancing technical competencies, and promoting community involvement. **Methods:** The program incorporates both qualitative and quantitative evaluation measures, including participant feedback, observation of engagement, and hands-on assessments of technical skills such as the proper use of power tools. A variety of community partners, including skilled carpenters and local businesses, provide mentorship and materials. **Results:** In 2024, twelve participants gained marketable skills, with 92% proficient in using a circular saw and drill. Notably, 45% of participants were new to 4-H, and 87% expressed interest in continuing their involvement. Parent feedback highlighted increased interest in carpentry and home repairs among participants. **Conclusions:** The Lafayette 4-H Build It Camp has made a significant impact by teaching valuable life and career skills, fostering community collaboration, and engaging youth in meaningful, hands-on learning. With strong community support and a sustainable funding model, the program is poised to continue empowering youth and equipping them with skills for future success.

Goals and Objectives

The Lafayette 4-H Build It Camp program is specifically designed to provide teens and older youth with hands-on experiences that foster the development of fundamental carpentry skills through the use of a variety of power tools. The primary goal of the program is to guide participants in constructing a small, tiny house from the ground up, offering them a unique opportunity to cultivate a sense of pride and accomplishment upon completion of the project. In addition to mastering core construction techniques, the program's objectives include enhancing problem-solving abilities, promoting teamwork, and ensuring a thorough understanding of safety protocols when utilizing power tools. Furthermore, the program seeks to underscore Lafayette 4-H's steadfast commitment to delivering high-quality, experiential learning opportunities that not only impart valuable life skills but also equip participants with competencies that may serve as a foundation for future careers in skilled trades or construction. Through this extensive undertaking, teens will acquire a diverse set of transferable skills that can be applied in both personal and professional contexts, reinforcing the program's enduring impact.

Documentation of Community Need

There are several reasons why the Lafayette 4-H Build It Camp program is invaluable to our community. First, in rural areas like Lafayette County, there are limited opportunities for older youth to gain hands-on experience, develop practical skills, or engage in meaningful activities. This lack of opportunity is compounded by the scarcity of jobs for teens, which not only limits their income potential but also prevents them from learning important life skills such as responsibility, teamwork, and work ethic. Many teens in our community spend significant amounts of time home alone after school and during the summer, which can lead to disengagement and a lack of direction. Furthermore, recent hurricanes have underscored the need for basic home repair skills, making the ability to address simple repairs a crucial asset for youth in this area. Finally, prior to the creation of the Build It Camp, Lafayette 4-H faced challenges in attracting teens to participate in its programming. This innovative camp not only addresses a pressing need in the community but also successfully engages youth in meaningful, hands-on learning, fostering a sense of purpose and achievement that is vital for their personal growth and the betterment of the community.

Program Evaluation Process

The evaluation process for the Lafayette 4-H Build It Camp program included both qualitative and quantitative measures to assess the effectiveness of the program and the engagement of the participants. One key aspect of the evaluation was measuring the enthusiasm level of the youth, as well as their willingness to actively participate in each stage of the project. This was tracked through participant feedback, observation of involvement, and the overall energy during the camp activities. Additionally, a critical component of the evaluation involved assessing the technical skills acquired by each participant. To ensure they had gained the necessary competencies, each participant was required to demonstrate their ability to safely and effectively use a variety of essential carpentry tools, including a tape measure, speed square, level, drill, circular saw, and reciprocating saw. This hands-on assessment helped determine the participants' proficiency in using these tools, as well as their understanding of safety protocols. By combining these measures, the program evaluation provided valuable insights into the success of the camp in terms of skill development, participant engagement, and overall program impact.

Impact of Program

In 2024, twelve youth between the ages of 13 and 18 participated in the Lafayette 4-H Build It Camp, bringing the total number of participants to 31 over the program's four years of existence. The impact of the camp was significant, as 100% (n=12) of the 2024 participants gained knowledge that can be applied as marketable skills. Additionally, 92% (n=12) learned to properly use a circular saw, and 92% (n=12) learned to properly use a drill. This hands-on experience provided valuable, real-world skills that participants can leverage in future endeavors. An important broader impact of the program is its ability to engage new participants in Lafayette 4-H. Of the 31 total participants over the four years, 45% (n=14) were first-time participants in county 4-H programming, which shows the Build It Camp's effectiveness in attracting youth to the larger 4-H community. Furthermore, 87% (n=27) of participants expressed interest in continuing their involvement in future 4-H programs. Finally, feedback from parents revealed that all parents of participating youth noted an increased interest in carpentry and house repairs among their children following the camp, highlighting the program's lasting impact on both skill development and personal growth.

Sustainability of Program

The 4-H Build It Camp program is well on its way to becoming a sustainable and integral part of Lafayette 4-H, due to its continued success over the years. One of the main challenges the program has faced is the expense associated with materials and resources needed to build the tiny house. However, this challenge has been effectively addressed through an annual raffle of the tiny house, which not only helps fund the program but also engages the community in supporting the youth. A significant highlight of the program's success is the growing interest from adults who have participated in the camp. After completing the program, many of these adults have expressed a desire to return and help deliver the program to future youth participants. This ongoing involvement is a testament to the lasting impact of the camp and its ability to inspire leadership and mentorship within the community, ensuring the program's continued growth and sustainability for years to come.

Collaboration

Collaboration with community partners has been a crucial factor in the success of the 4-H Build It Camp program. The 4-H agent has actively sought the expertise of skilled carpenters to mentor and assist the youth in the construction of the tiny houses, ensuring that participants receive valuable guidance and hands-on learning from professionals. Additionally, local community partners have played a pivotal role in supporting the program financially. These partners have generously donated materials such as metal roofing and offered lumber at cost, significantly reducing the program's expenses and making it more accessible. The Lafayette 4-H Association has also been instrumental in overseeing the raffle of the tiny house, which helps fund the program each year. Moreover, the Association works closely with the teen 4-H youth to teach them vital skills in budgeting and financial planning for future projects, further enhancing the educational experience. This strong network of community involvement ensures the ongoing sustainability of the Build It Camp, while fostering a sense of collaboration and support between the youth, local professionals, and community organizations.

Teen Build-It-Camp Supply List

(Price to nearest dollar)

#	length	Item	Unit Price	Cost	Notes
30	8ft	2x4	3.00	90.00	Studs/framing
7	8ft	2x6 PT	8.00	56.00	Floor joist
2		1inch 4x8 PT	36.00	72.00	Flooring
10		Joist brackets	2.50	25.00	Floor joist hangers
20	8ft	1x4	5.00	100	Corner, window trim
10	12ft	1x4 PT	7.00	84.00	Roofing lads
5	6ft	10/12 pitch truss	25.00	125.00	Discounted price
5 lb		3-inch wood screws	40.00	40.00	
5 lb		2-inch wood screws	40.00	40.00	
8	4ft	Galvanized			Roofing metal donated
2lb		1 1/2			Roofing screws donated
10		Hurricane Bracket	2.50	25.00	
2	2x3	aluminum windows	120.00	240.00	Size can be flexible
1		36 inch exterior door	250.00		Out swing
3		Exterior paint	40.00	120.00	2024 barn red
2		Trim paint	40.00	80.00	2024 white
1		Keyed doorknob		35.00	
8		Variety paint brushes		40.00	
4		Paint roller/pan pack		36.00	
			Total	1,208.00	cost minus discounts and donations



Supporting documentation Search for Excellence in Teen Programing
Constructing Skills and Confidence: Lafayette 4-H Build It Camp for Teens

Michael S. Jackson, Emily Beach





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Teen Build-It Camp Evaluation Form

Skill Mastered	Yes	No
Can use a tape measure to find specific lengths	_____	_____
Can use a speed square to make straight lines	_____	_____
Successfully used a reciprocal saw	_____	_____
Successfully used a circular saw	_____	_____
Successfully used a drill	_____	_____

After completing this camp:

I am more confident I can make a home repair	_____	_____
I would consider a career related to construction	_____	_____
I believe teamwork is important in construction	_____	_____
I would definitely participate in this camp again	_____	_____
I would like to know about more 4-H programs	_____	_____



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