

# 4-H Grows Leaders: Putting Life Skills into Practice

## 2016 Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Impact Report

This impact report addresses how Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development creates opportunities for young people to develop the skills and habits to thrive. This achieves the National 4-H Council's Power of Youth goal: "Youth, through 4-H involvement, develop their potential and are leaders in their communities."

The Power of Youth – the first of five goals included in the National 4-H Council's Strategic Plan<sup>1</sup> – is the convergence of **adult** staff and volunteers creating opportunities where **youth** may learn and apply life skills in the **community**<sup>2</sup> through:

- Specialized teen groups (e.g. 4-H Youth Ambassadors, Junior Leaders)
- Community clubs
- Schools and afterschool programs
- Project- or topic-specific training opportunities
- Civic engagement opportunities (e.g. Youth in Governance, Teen Court)
- Educational travel opportunities

Obtaining life skills is but one piece of the puzzle. To complete the picture, youth must also be given opportunities to practice and further develop those skills in safe, real-life situations. This impact report focuses on the contexts in which youth applied the skills they had learned in 6 categories<sup>3</sup>:

1. Teaching: planning, adapting, facilitating, questioning, providing and receiving feedback
2. Mentoring: welcoming others, responsibility, contribution, listening, protecting youth
3. Planning: decision-making, considering options, managing, facilitating, assessing
4. Promoting: public speaking, using technology to share information, professionalism
5. Advocating: researching, analyzing data, building consensus, identifying resources
6. Advising: contributing and inviting ideas/opinions/recommendations, understanding group dynamics



### 2016 4-H Youth Development Statistics

Youth participants in 4-H  
and other Cooperative Extension programs: **134,420**

*Members/Cloverbuds by participation category:*

4-H clubs: **1,137** • 4-H community clubs: **30,106**

4-H in-school clubs: **43** • 4-H after-school clubs: **351**

4-H special interest: **88,440** • 4-H camping: **7,017**

4-H school enrichment: **5,880**

4-H independent study/mentoring: **353**

School-aged child care education: **2,104**

# TEACHING

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4-H staff and volunteers prepare and partner with older youth to teach younger children about STEM, literacy, nutrition and other topics.

The most frequent venues for teens teaching are after school programs, camp and community events like county fairs.

## Teaching about food

- Youth leaders promote 4-H and educate the public about agriculture through the Commodity Carnival booth at county fairs across the state. At the booth, older youth and adults facilitate a hands-on activity that engages them in the process and economics of raising a pig from birth to market. More than 100 youth leaders learned and applied communication, teaching, and decision-making skills as they educated an estimated 2500 youth and adult participants about where their food comes from.
- Teen leaders in the statewide FoodSmart Families Program – funded through a grant from UnitedHealth – received detailed training in how to lead six two-hour nutrition lessons about food preparation, physical fitness, and nutrition to younger participants, ages 5-12. The Teen Leaders from Crawford and Pierce Counties learned these practical nutrition skills, and also reported learning and applying skills in leadership and service. Through the experience, they gained confidence, increased their ability to form bonds with younger youth and increased their teaching and mentoring skills.



## Teaching in out-of-school settings

- Adams County 4-H Youth Leaders planned and offered a once monthly educational program to approximately 125 kindergarden through 5th grade students at the local Community Learning Centers program. The youth participants, who came from varying economic backgrounds,

Green County 4-H Ambassadors developed and taught a program on recycling to eight classrooms and 150 kindergardeners in local schools. First, ambassadors read the book “Michael Recycle” about a young superhero who has the power to teach people about recycling. The group then demonstrated what can and cannot be recycled. They topped off the experiential learning activity with a game that allowed kindergardeners to test their recycling knowledge.

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learned through hands-on activities in 4-H project areas. The 4-H Youth Leaders, engaged in giving back to their community, learned and applied communication, decision-making, and teamwork skills as they taught and mentored the younger children.

- In Buffalo County, teams of youth and adults received training to teach STEM content and skills – focusing on science, engineering, art and design, and teamwork – to younger students in both afterschool and summer programs. Of the 121 participants who completed an evaluation following the program, 94% reported that during the activities, they thought critically and used problem solving skills. The youth leaders improved these skills as well as growing in their abilities to teach, communicate with others, and work as a team.
- Teens, alongside adult volunteers, in Washington County read books to younger children and facilitated writing and public speaking skills in a cross-cultural environment at Casa Guadalupe Education Center, Inc. Through mentoring and teaching hands-on learning opportunities, they facilitated improved literacy and conversational skills in Spanish and English, while building positive cross-cultural relationships.

### Leadership at camp

- Crawford County 4-H partnered with the juvenile justice coordinator and offered summer week-long day camps

to “at-risk” youth. These day camps were led in part by older youth counselors. These counselors took part in a half-day training program where they gained life skills including teamwork, decision making, working with people from different backgrounds and responsibility. Counselors reported that the training was effective in preparing them leadership. Day camp staff observed that counselors were prepared to handle situations that they had not been in prior to the camp.

- A four-day outpost camp experience prepared Pepin County youth camp counselors in facilitating and advising a hands-on science experiment - how to construct marshmallow catapults - for younger participants. With the counselors’ instruction, campers designed and build catapults, then held a competition on shooting marshmallows. During the building process, a camper stated: “This seemed like a hard task to start with but once we started trying different ways of putting it together it made sense in the end.” This quote signifies that camp counselors both learned and taught skills in problem solving, critical thinking and resiliency.
- Many counties conduct promotional events that go by various names such as Clover College, Super Saturday, Discovery Day or other names. Often, youth leaders have the opportunity to help in planning and teaching during the day camps with younger members. For example:

- Supported by staff and adult volunteers, youth leaders played two important roles during Shawano County’s Super Saturday event. They worked at the registration table - applying skills in planning and organization, communication, and professionalism. They also taught seminars for younger members, increasing their self-efficacy as they shared their knowledge of projects and other activities.
- In Pierce County, youth leaders learned skills in lesson planning as they prepared to teach activities in 4-H projects like leathercraft, robotics, poultry, and craft skills. Youth leaders also extended the learning with tips on how to wisely use Pinterest for project planning and provided new families with an orientation to 4-H programs.

### FOODSMART FAMILIES

**77** teens from

**12** counties,

**1** tribal nation and

groups of **military families**

were trained and

**taught** an additional

**988** youth, impacting

**1,556** families in the state.



A participant in the Wisconsin 4-H Bad River Food Sovereignty project works at a table at the Bad River Casino in Ashland that offers free seeds, tea, hazelnuts and children's activities. The program works with youth on the reservation to build understanding of Ojibwe Foodways and encourage healthy lifestyles. Older youth have the opportunity to mentor younger youth.

## MENTORING

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Some 4-H Youth Development programs, including teen courts and camps, are designed to create mentoring opportunities for youth working with peers and younger children. Other programs build skills so youth can act as natural mentors in their communities.

### Mentorship beyond school

- Youth from the Bad River Reservation in northern Wisconsin have been building understanding of Ojibwe foodways and providing examples of healthy lifestyles with both Native American and non-Native youth. They developed a tea project, using both traditionally harvested and garden-produced plants, to provide an alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages at community centers on the Bad River Reservation. They have also been teaching and playing lacrosse in both afterschool and summer programs. Each of these mentoring experiences provided them with opportunities to learn and apply skills in welcoming others, taking responsibility, contributing to their communities, listening, and creating safe spaces for youth.
- To help reduce the incidence of suicide among both youth and community members, Jackson County has just completed its sixth year of conducting Question-Persuade-Refer suicide intervention skills training to teens and adults. Because approximately 50% of teens report on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey that they are more likely to tell one another if they are having a problem, teens needed to learn the skills to help in a crisis. Through the training, 177 additional teens (joining more than 1000 in the previous five years) learned skills in paying atten-

tion to others' experiences, listening to one another, and providing support to a friend or family member who may be experiencing a crisis. As a result of this and other suicide prevention efforts, teen trends in making a plan for, attempting and completing a suicide in Jackson County have improved in the past six years.

- Educators from Adams, Marquette, Green Lake and Waushara Counties collaborated to train 4-H Camp Counselors, who were in 9th grade or older. Counselors learned skills specific to creating a welcoming and nurturing atmosphere at camp and resolving conflicts when they arise. Results from the participants (n=17) on a five point scale indicate an increase of .47 (from 4.23-4.76) in how to provide a safe and welcoming environment for others. They applied the mentoring skills at camp, and there were no incidents of negative behavior or bullying at the 2016 camp.



Buffalo/Pepin County Teen Court panelists work in restorative justice for young people ages 10-16 who commit first time offenses for minor violations. Experienced Teen Court panelists serve as coaches for new panelists during their first hearing.

the mock trial experience, the middle school students learn lessons related to drinking and restorative justice, while the high school Teen Court members act as role models for teen-led action.

## Mentorship in School

- High school students from Buffalo and Pepin Counties learn and apply skills in decision-making, advising, advocating and mentoring through their participation in the Teen Court model. They apply those skills in new ways by acting as panelists in a mock trial conducted to educate middle school youth about the consequences of juvenile alcohol use. Through



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# PLANNING

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Older 4-H youth partner with staff and adult volunteers to provide input into most program opportunities. Youth then often implement the educational experiences they help to plan.

## Planning for camp and travel

- In many counties, youth camp counselors are involved in planning aspects of both day camps and overnight camps in which they are involved. In one example, the Chippewa County 4-H Youth Development educator used camp counselors' input to adapt selection and training techniques for the next year's camp counselors. The application and interview process was changed to teach potential counselors stronger 21st century job skills. Those who were selected then participated in a more intensive overnight training process that built a stronger team, enhanced planning skills, and did community service as a counseling team. The counselors planned the camp in partnership with adult members of the Camp Committee. As a result of the changes made, the counselors had a strong bond, understood the purpose of camp and took the camp counselor role very seriously.
- To engage and retain older youth in St. Croix County 4-H, the educator formed a youth-adult partnership to plan an annual event called the Wisconsin Tour. Together, youth and adults planned a historical and cultural tour of the state for youth in grades 5-8, with teens in counselor roles. Youth who helped with planning learned and applied skills in decision-making, considering options and managing plans. Counselors learned and applied skills in teaching and mentoring as well as facilitating and assessing programs.

*"One of my favorite memories in 4-H happened just this last summer during the Wisconsin Tour trip. There was a young girl who was afraid to go down the zip-line. As she faced her fears, everyone met her with congratulatory hugs; I saw a group of teenagers become true 4-Hers and the greatest of friends.*

*It was at this moment when I realized I was watching 4-H change lives the same way it changed mine. I will forever be grateful for that experience and all that 4-H provided. I now have a dream to pursue, a best friend, and a confident self. 4-H really has been my life."*

— A WI Tour Counselor



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Above: an Ozaukee County 4-H member works with an attendee at an activity station as part of the monthly Together We Can! program meeting as an adult volunteer looks on. Youth members helped design and promote the program.

## PROMOTING

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Youth leaders play a role in bringing new youth and families into programs. They often provide experiential opportunities so new and potential members can learn about programs.

### Welcoming families into 4-H

- The Sauk County Junior Leader Council Connections Committee identified a need for a New Family Event to welcome and orient new families to the program. The Junior Leaders Council members created 15 hands-on project experiences. Youth participants received a passport, which was stamped as they completed each project station. Adult family members took part in a new family orientation offered by 4-H Youth Development staff members. In their efforts to reach the 15 new youth members and their families, youth leaders increased their self efficacy in planning, promoting, and teaching, and their involvement resulted in increased event participation by families.

### Outreach and service through 4-H

- Older youth volunteers in Ozaukee County planned, designed, sponsored and implemented a training for youth and adults with special needs through a program called Together We Can! At monthly meetings, youth lead free or affordable activities with youth and adults ages 5-105 years. In 2016, participants exhibited items they created at Together We Can! In the Ozaukee County Fair. Youth learned and applied skills in planning, communication, empathy, and promotions to create a positive and welcoming learning environment for youth and adults with special needs.

# ADVISING

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Youth leaders provide input to 4-H Youth Development programs by serving on committees, gathering and providing evaluation information, and participating in goal-setting for 4-H clubs and other programs.

- The Rock County Junior Council is a county level organization with a social, educational and supportive role for young people who provide leadership in their local 4-H clubs. They collaborate with adult leaders of the Senior Council as well. To address communication challenges and non-inclusion in the Rock County Junior Leaders Council, the educator provided additional leadership training to the youth officer team. Training focused on the purpose and parts of a meeting as well as strategies for keeping a meeting running smoothly. As observed by parents and other adult participants in later meetings, youth leaders conducted themselves with greater professionalism, increased collaborative problem solving regarding challenges in their clubs, and increased engagement in committee work and community service. These skills led them to greater effectiveness in supporting youth leaders in the county's clubs.
- Several county 4-H programs strengthened youth roles on committees, creating opportunities for youth input and leadership. A few examples include:
  - Youth and adults working together in the Ozaukee County Livestock Association increased emphasis on educational activities in addition to competition as a result of their shared learning.
  - Sheboygan 4-H youth helped clubs set SMART goals; for example, one club proposed including two youth in each county-wide program planning group.
  - Eau Claire 4-H youth contributed to increased engagement with elected officials and brought their committee leadership experience on the Fair Committee back to other 4-H groups by encouraging other youth to take more leadership.
  - The Building Welcoming 4-H Clubs project was designed to help 4-H community clubs in Washington County strengthen their inclusive, welcoming environments. Participating clubs involved youth and adult volunteers as researchers who visited two club meetings during the year. These youth-adult partners gave feedback about each club, focusing on how they promoted a welcoming environment, a key component in 4-H member retention and recruitment. Through this experience, youth learned vital mentoring skills, including creating a welcoming atmosphere and listening to others. When they applied those skills as researchers, they further developed additional life skills in contributing their ideas, welcoming others ideas and understanding group dynamics. After advising the clubs they visited, the researchers made recommendations about county-level youth leadership development opportunities as well as suggesting effective ways for the county 4-H program to support a more inclusive atmosphere.





# LEADERSHIP & SERVICE

- Wisconsin 4-H is preparing the next generation of leaders through experiences in decision-making and citizenship activities. Youth in 4-H youth development programs become actively involved and engaged in local groups, clubs and communities. 4-H Youth are 3.4 times more likely to contribute to their communities compared to youth in other out-of-school programs. 4-H youth learn to address local issues and need and participate actively in discussions and programs that benefit others<sup>4</sup>.
- 4-H youth participate in service projects and leadership roles where they develop public speaking, leadership, and decision-making skills.

These professional skills help them positively contribute to communities as responsible citizens and active public servants<sup>4</sup>.

## Workforce Preparation

- 4-H youth learn the importance of teamwork, communication and critical thinking through involvement in clubs, groups and decision-making activities. The Secretary of Commerce Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS report) identifies the importance of developing a generation of youth with these workforce competencies to prepare for our economic future.

## 4-H Positive Youth Development

- When youth develop important life skills through positive and sustained relationships with caring adults, good things happen. Youth develop competence, confidence and character. They become connected to their communities and learn to care about others. These outcomes result in reduced risky behaviors of youth and a positive contributions to their families and communities and a civil society<sup>4</sup>.

# APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROCESS

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## Overview

This report is the product of a multi-day analysis session, called a “Data Dive,” during which evaluation specialists collaborated on analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data from Recording Results. The first part of this two-part session took place in February and the second in March. Analysis was conducted between sessions and after both were over. Some educators were contacted to provide additional information beyond what was included in Recording Results.

The 4-H Youth Development analysis team for the Data Dive consisted of Matt Calvert, Karen Nelson, Monica Lobenstein, and Maria Habib.

Analysis was done using the qualitative analysis software, MAXQDA. Using lexical searches and the auto-coding function, they created manageable subsets of data to hand code. Identical processes were used for coding both the Results Narratives and the Impact Statements.

The selection of the Impact Statements and Results Narratives was based on whether or not they answered the research questions. These questions were developed by members of the Foundational Topics Team and were based on the Foundational Topics Outcomes. It must be noted that through this process, they did not find enough data to answer all three of their questions, so the group decided to concentrate on the questions related to youth.

## Research Questions

Initial Questions were provided by the members of the Foundational Topics team, of which Karen, Matt and Monica are members. The outcomes are in the areas of Youth Development, Adult Development and Community Development. As the analysis team members worked with the data, questions were modified somewhat.

The initial questions were:

### Youth

How are youth applying what they’ve learned in terms of life skills? And/or what opportunities are being provided in which they can apply life skills in “real world” situations?

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## Adult

What capacity has been built in volunteers for PYD (Essential Elements, Life skills, Y/AP...)? How are volunteers applying what they've learned?

## Community

What are the outcomes of youth engaging with adults in planning and leadership roles, working in youth/adult partnerships? In particular, to respond to two teams (Living Healthy and Engaging Young People in Sustaining Communities):

- How has youth action contributed to wellness, especially policy and environmental changes?
- How have youth contributed to the community (e.g. planning and decision-making, building sense of place etc.)?

Final questions were:

## Youth

- What are the contexts in which youth apply life skills?
- What do they do that matters for others?

## Framing the Story

The team wanted to learn more about:

- The contexts provided to youth in order for them to apply the life skills they had acquired. By contexts we mean setting: 4-H community club program, afterschool program, etc.
- Who provided these opportunities to youth within these contexts: staff, volunteers or both.
- The roles youth undertook during the application of life skills (mentor, teacher, planner etc.) and their audience (i.e. internal to 4-H or external)
- The impact of youth work, both on their audience and the community, e.g. what the members of an After-school program learned from older 4-H members and the difference this volunteer work of the teens made on the community.

# APPENDIX B: MEASURING THE WAY TO THE 2025 VISION

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Implications of this initial data dive focusing on the “Power of Youth,” which lies at the heart of the National 4-H Council’s Strategic Plan, have helped us to create the beginnings of a roadmap for how Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development will work to achieve the 2025 vision. Below we have outlined next steps discovered as a result of this data dive and questions related that must be answered to achieve those next steps. We have tied them directly to the five goals of the national Strategic Plan.

## Power of Youth

**Goal:** Youth, through 4-H involvement, develop their potential and are leaders in their communities.

4-H Youth Development staff create opportunities for youth to learn life skills. We have collectively seen evidence that when those same youth are inserted into adult-driven spaces (board meetings, adult-led committees, etc.) to complete adult-driven tasks, it is challenging for them to transfer their learned leadership skills and apply them in that new setting. However, we are also observing (and seeing some data) that shows that individually, these youth are able to apply the learned life skills in other settings of their own choice.

- We have evidence of individual-level change for particular youth in roles, but no data on a larger scale. At what scale do we begin to see youth applying leadership and other life skills as transformational?

## Access, Equity, and Opportunity

**Goal:** All youth engage in programs and opportunities.

The framing questions in the search for data focused on application of life skills among youth and adult volunteers, rather than learning of life skills. As a result, many stories of learning life skills when no evidence of later application of life skills were excluded. This means many stories of outreach to diverse audiences were not included, because the focus tended to be on gaining skills. This does not necessarily mean that they didn’t apply those skills later, merely that it wasn’t evaluated and/or reported on. The implications are twofold:

- How do we begin to change our focus with diverse audiences from learning alone to one of practice and application, if it’s not already there?

- If the focus is truly already on application of skills, what needs to change in evaluation and reporting so we are better able to capture that story?

## Exceptional People, Innovative Practices

**Goal:** Youth are surrounded with competent, prepared staff and volunteers.

Most often, the environments in which youth can learn and apply leadership skills are created and/or supported by adults. They may be internal to 4-H or externally focusing on the community. Adults are names as partners with youth in reporting, but few details are provided on the the roles of adults in building those spaces. Some questions to consider in future reporting include:

- What is the staff capacity to create/support youth development spaces directly vs. the capacity to support youth and adult volunteers in creating/supporting those spaces?
- What are the inputs from staff and volunteers that produce the greatest outcomes and larger community impacts?

One important role in 4-H Youth Development work is supporting the volunteers who take on leadership roles in projects and programs. Current reporting processes focus on staff efforts, and this role of supporting the volunteers in doing the “real work” of youth development is rarely reported. Because of that, as a state, we miss a great deal of the larger 4-H story.

- How can we begin to capture the work that volunteers are doing, as well as how staff are supporting that larger work in educational ways?

## Extraordinary Opportunities to Learn

**Goal:** Youth engage in high quality, diverse, and relevant learning opportunities.

Reporting takes place annually. Often our work takes place over a longer period of time, usually many years, with our level of time and energy commitment evolving during those years. Some of our greatest successes are when we no longer be our focus - the “issues” have been “solved” and the volunteers have a new way of operating. How do we encourage colleagues to evaluate and report on their long-term work when it may no longer be the focus of their day-to-day efforts?

As stated earlier, this is an early roadmap, incomplete in how we will achieve the vision. By tackling these initial questions, we will pave the way for additional steps that dig deeper into the other four areas of the 2025 Vision.

## Endnotes

1. National 4-H Council (2017). Strategic Plan: 4-H Youth Development A 2025 Vision. Retrieved from: <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resources/National%204-H%20Strategic%20Plan%202017.pdf>
2. For the purposes of this report “community” is defined as club, local community/county, country or world.
3. Defined by University of Illinois-Extension (2015) in their document, Teen Leadership Competencies: Guide for Advancing Teen Leadership.
4. 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development

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