

# The opportunity to be active in government, community ignites youth confidence



Wisconsin Youth Leadership Council member Alexis Luedtke speaks at the Upham Woods 75th Anniversary celebration.

Youth who get the opportunity to have their voices heard develop a sense of personal value that reverberates throughout their communities as leadership and energy.

Youth who get the chance to give their input and insight on community projects thrive. These young volunteers learn to work with adults and communicate in settings where their perspective is respected, creating a host of benefits to harness youth energy and innovation. Both youth and communities benefit. Read on for highlights of how Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Programs are creating a platform for young leaders to move into roles that benefit their communities.

## Youth in Governance

- Ten youth were selected to fill youth seats on the Racine County Board with the goal of increasing civic engagement among young people. The county's six supervisors served as mentors to the youth. The youth developed knowledge of county government and a stronger connection to the county, along with the feeling that their voices matter.
- Youth from Kewaunee and Door Counties took part in the state Legislative Day, speaking with local and state lawmakers. Many of the youth delegates were from the 4-H Teen Association, which creates a place for young people to use their voices and skills to make a difference in their community. Afterwards, youth

said they felt more confident speaking with legislators and that their voices matter.

**Participants in Wisconsin 4-H programs related to youth voice learn how to effectively present their views. As a result, youth increase their confidence, communication skills and ability to contribute to their communities.**

## Community Development

- Youth in a Madison-based food security program increased their knowledge of the factors and systems that affect food security. After conducting research, they planned and implemented action projects to address food security in their community. As a result, their engagement with and understanding of the issues grew, as did their confidence in articulating their thoughts and ideas.
- The 121 Wisconsin youth who took part in the 4-H Citizen Washington Focus in the nation's capitol reported they learned what it meant to be a citizen; strengthened communication, leadership, and other citizenship skills on a national level; and exchanged ideas, practiced respect, and



formed friendships with youth from diverse backgrounds during the experience. Nearly a quarter of the youth said they had an interest in pursuing a different career or a career in government because of the experience.

- Dodge County youth participated in a Speak Out for Ag pilot that later was shared with youth from around Wisconsin at multiple educational events. The program teaches young people to tell the stories of farms and where people's food originates. Youth participants reported that they gained a better understanding of agriculture advocacy and they came away better equipped to confidently tell their story in public.
- A group of students from Milwaukee's Westside Academy SySTEMatics group attended UW-Extension Day at the Wisconsin State Capitol. The students had visited neither the Capitol nor Madison before. They learned that they have a voice and that it is legislators' duty to listen to them.

**Youth who participate in 4-H Youth Development programs use the communication and leadership skills they learn in real-life situations. Their increased ability to add their voices to typically adult conversations enhances their communities in a many ways.**

- Teen 4-H members in Kewaunee County advocated for healthier options in the 4-H food stand menu during the county fair. The menu included yogurt and fruit



Pepin County 4-H Teen Leaders communicate the value of 4-H and how 4-H has impacted their lives to a staffer in Rep. Warren Petryk's office during UW-Extension Capitol Day in Madison.

parfaits, frozen yogurt and fruit sandwich bars, fresh veggies and dip, whole fruit, locally-sourced fresh cheese curds and more. The 4-H food stand proudly declared itself "The Un-fried Food Stand." Healthy options were appreciated by fair visitors — in the first year, business was strong and some items completely sold out.

- Senior members of the Teen Court in Buffalo and Pepin Counties interviewed and evaluated new member candidates. This senior leadership experience initiates mentoring. Veteran members coach newcomers and develop relationships that help them become more comfortable with Teen Court hearings. The community institution strengthens youth-adult partnerships and allows panel members to build a truly collaborative program between members and coordinators.
- After selling a property for \$30,000, youth and adults in a Washington County 4-H Club developed a 5-year plan to manage the funds, including building a teaching shelter

at Upham Woods Outdoor Education Center. Youth voice was strongly represented in the funding plan.

- Youth leaders who returned from a service learning experience originating in Buffalo County educated the community about learning through service, as well as gaining perspective from their own privileged assumptions. Their applied communication skills resulted in \$40,000 in donations. Hundreds of volunteer service hours were performed during the experience and in the county, leading to a vast increase in awareness about history, culture, food security and poverty in both locations.

### Wisconsin 4-H By the Numbers

- 150,000+ youth members ages 5-19
- 4,000 youth volunteers and
- 13,000 adult volunteers
- 72 counties
- 6 Native American nations
- 1 million+ volunteer hours
- \$24 million value of volunteer time