Volunteer partnerships build capacity in communities to meet citizen needs

Volunteers help address and solve issues by building and engaging in partnerships at community, regional and state levels. Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development volunteers, both youth and adults, become assets to their communities and the recipients of the services provided. This, in effect, strengthens the community as a whole and improves the health and well-being of its citizens.

Nutrition and Food Security
- 4-H Youth Development and other Columbia County Extension staff lead a partnership to secure two summer food sites that served a total of 1,826 meals and provided nutrition education to more than 300 youth throughout the summer. The local library, churches, police, health and human services, schools, and parks and recreation united for the cause.
- Nearly 5,000 pounds of food was collected for the Stuff the Bus food drive in Green Lake County, due to organization by a 4-H Youth Development VISTA volunteer. The volunteer organized partners, including health and human services, UW-Extension, and six schools, as well as volunteers for the effort.
- Through the the Eat 4-Health Grant, three counties — La Crosse, Crawford and Trempealeau — partnered to deliver nutrition lessons using teens as teachers. The grant, secured by state-level 4-H staff, worked with La Crosse County staff to build partnerships with special events coordinators, schools and others to implement the teen teaching model. There, 134 youth and 12 adults benefited from nutrition lessons.

Health
- Waukesha County 4-H staff assembled an Alcohol Compliance Committee made up of law enforcement, business owners, elected officials and health professionals. The committee established Responsible Alcohol Beverage Server Training. As a result, the number of establishments that sold alcohol to minors dropped from 23% in 2014 to 10% in 2015.

A UW-Eau Claire college mentor works with elementary school students on the National 4-H Youth Science Day project “Motion Commotion” during an afterschool program.
• The Taking Care of You (TCY): Body Mind Spirit program for adults, established through a partnership between Jackson County 4-H staff and health and human services, the Ho-Chunk Nation and a local coalition, recognized that youth who spend time with adults practicing healthy coping skills develop strong positive coping skills too. The partners formed a nine-person facilitation team of volunteers who offered three 8-week sessions in its first year.

Financial Literacy
• The Calumet County 4-H staff partnered with school teachers and counselors to offer an adaptation of the Rent Smart curriculum to high school juniors and seniors who were in need of financial literacy information and resources. The curriculum may be offered by school staff in future years, building community capacity.

Partnerships centered around providing safe places for young people after school extend educational enrichment to youth, and create outreach to underrepresented and underserved populations.

As a result, these partnerships build on communities’ capacity to meet the needs of young people and their families.

In a pre-college program, college student mentors were trained by La Crosse County 4-H staff in partnership with the director of the UW-La Crosse Multicultural Student Services. Through their pre-college program, the mentors led STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) activities with youth and helped them learn and grow in their understanding of STEM and broader life skills.

• An afterschool program was established at the only school in Sawyer County without such opportunities for youth. With grant funding obtained by county 4-H staff, and in partnership with the Tribal AmeriCorps program and multiple Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) agencies (school, social services, Extension, and coalitions), the LCO school’s afterschool program was established and uses culturally-based curriculum to teach nutrition concepts to youth.

• The Young Dreamers program, developed by 4-H staff in partnership with Holy Family Catholic Church and UW-Fond du Lac, primarily serving the growing Latino population. In the afterschool program, youth participants, many of them bilingual learners, created and gave 20-minute presentations on the topic of their choice, working with college-age mentors and learning communication skills in the process.

Communities build capacity through multifaceted approaches and work to address key community issues.

As a result of this array of approaches, a broader scope of community members are reached by educational programs, which improves health and well-being across generations.

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Youth and adults translate the skills learned through 4-H programs into their communities and workplaces.

The result: stronger communities with willing, able volunteers.

Involvement in Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development programs gives youth, volunteers and adult staff opportunities to practice, master and apply life skills in a wide spectrum of settings. 4-H program participants are more likely to use those skills in their communities, workplaces and future careers, as well as to give generously of their time and talents. Read on for highlights of how Wisconsin 4-H volunteers are bettering their communities.

Service/Civic Engagement

- Youth leaders involved in Columbia County’s Future Leaders Active in Government (FLAG) program participate in teams that design, plan and implement capstone projects. Examples of these projects include teaching other students about government, writing a press release or letter to the editor for local news media, and organizing a live panel of local officials.

Workforce Training

- The 4-H SySTEMatics program in Milwaukee County partners with UW-Waukesha to teach STEM skills to nearly 150 students from seven Milwaukee schools. After the program, students who hadn’t considered attending college now say they want to and have asked to go on campus visits.

- Dane County’s Grow Academy offers young males in the corrections system evidence-based, agricultural education as an alternative to juvenile incarceration. Teen participants learn practical skills, such as gardening, animal care and natural resource management, as well as life skills, like teamwork and effective communication.

Camp Counselors

- 4-H youth in Dane County participate in a six-week workshop series with topics including community- and team-building, diversity, program planning, self-awareness, temperament styles, equity, job expectations, behavior management, child development and financial management. Each youth who successfully completes the series is placed as a paid summer camp counselor in the community.

- Counselors are trained and assigned to teams of youth who needed extra physical, emotional or learning assistance, which creates a supportive and inclusive environment.
Program Planning

• 4-H participants in the Youth as Partners in Civic Leadership Conference took part in a committee that planned the next year’s conference. Youth had a voice in the project and experience in planning a program that impacts them.

4-H Youth Development program participants build life skills and use them to support their communities. The result is stronger community connections and more skilled, caring adults and youth volunteers.

• Youth participants in a holiday service project — collecting donations for families in need and shopping for their holiday supper — reported feeling more connected to helping others. The Bayfield County 4-H’ers recognized how a small amount of money or organizing can have a significant impact in the community. The program increased youth awareness of food security and poverty in their community.

• Members in the Ashland County CANSKI Club, a partnership between 4-H clubs and local schools to teach skiing, reported an increased sense of belonging, independence, mastery and generosity. Annual member surveys show 68% of members taught cross-country skiing and 91% said the experience improved their leadership skills. CANSKI continues to work with community schools and organizations, both receiving support and giving back.

• In Marathon County, a group of youth leaders called LEADS (Lead. Empower. Advance. Develop. Serve) integrates risk management and sharing leadership knowledge into their activity planning. They seek leadership positions and spread their passion and knowledge into areas beyond their 4-H lives.

• With Digital Outdoor Technology Skills kits developed at Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Center, adults learn to lead programs, creating opportunities for students. Students learn and apply skills in environmental stewardship, critical thinking and a better understanding of technology and the environment.

• High school-age 4-H youth and adults served on a planning team and/or served as counselors and volunteers at a Zombie Survival Day Camp for middle school age youth in Washington County. Volunteers were trained to offer a high-quality day camp opportunity for middle school youth to learn about disaster preparedness, emergency management and health and safety.

Youth who participate in 4-H programs feel valued and are more likely to contribute to their communities within and beyond 4-H programs.

Adult 4-H staff and volunteers gain empowering competencies that help them coach youth to learn and apply those same life skills. As a result, youth and adults engage civically, making long-term service commitments to their communities.

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Volunteers of all ages take home valuable skills and integrate them into their daily lives. Youth volunteers mature with stronger skillsets. Youth and adult volunteers carry what they’ve learned into many other settings.

Outreach
- 4-H youth participants in an Ozaukee County program called Together We Can! plan, advertise and offer monthly activities for people of any age with special needs. The youth learn how to interact with people who have special needs and to use “people-first language,” increasing their levels of compassion and gaining better understanding of the challenges that people with special needs face.

Mentorship
- The Healthy Corner Store Initiative and MOVE Crew programs in Milwaukee County involved youth in growing fruits and vegetables, providing those foods to convenience stores, and leading food demonstrations for shoppers. Youth participants also became peer mentors, teaching younger youth about health risk prevention.

Youth Leaders Teaching Life Skills
- Teens Active in Government (TAG) participants in Oneida County represent young people at county board meetings. TAG members also give presentation called “County Government and You,” developed with local 4-H educators, in social studies classrooms. Student engagement in the presentation has increased as more students are motivated to participate in the teen-led presentation program.
- In many county-based programs, youth volunteers lead activities in out-of-school formats, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers (Adams County), Summer Youth Program (Green Lake County) and Family Dinners (Jefferson County). Youth volunteers build life skills such as organizing, planning, evaluation and time management. They also learn about child development as
they’re delivering lessons, leading activities, and providing support for other programs in age- and skill level-appropriate leadership roles.

- Staff at Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Center developed Digital Observation Technology Skills (DOTS) Kits and a program to train other educators to be able to use the components of the kits. Youth across the state and beyond now have access to the ability to make enhanced scientific observations about their environments through the DOTS kits. Educators have increased ability to teach with the kits in a positive youth development environment.

Nutrition Programs
- Two teen members of Crawford County 4-H facilitated six sessions with younger children about what they drink, eating more fruits and vegetables, eating whole grains, healthier fast foods, reading nutrition labels, and eating a balanced breakfast.

STEM Programs
- After participating in the WHY NOT Youth Inquiry Leadership Conference, four Iowa County 4-H youth developed a lesson using inquiry and presented it to a youth audience. Likewise, after the conference, four Walworth County youth planned the “Wild About Science” workshop series to engage younger children in inquiry-based learning.

- Twenty-two Ag Innovators — youth leaders organized and trained at the state level — were selected to lead a program to teach youth to think creatively about solutions to the issue of providing food long-term for the growing world population. The program increased communication, organizational and leadership skills among the youth teachers. Awareness of food insecurity issues grew among participants.

- STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, and Math) Discovery Days were held in Buffalo County with courses taught by teams of youth and adult volunteers trained by 4-H staff. The program reached 171 youth and resulted in new STEM knowledge among participants, as well as increased retention of school-based learning during the summer months.

Summer Camp Leadership Development
- Volunteer leaders redesigned the 4-H camp program in Ozaukee County, including funding, programming, staff training and recruitment. Youth and adult staff training increased, which improved the youth-adult partnership components of staff teamwork. Volunteers reported having learned leadership, public speaking, patience, responsibility, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, cooperation, flexibility and understanding.

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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 in 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.

**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 national 4-H Citizen Washington Focus in the national’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.

- 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 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.

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 many ways.

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