

Creative Connections 4-H Afterschool in **Oconto County** is a partnership between the Oconto Unified School District and the University of Wisconsin-Extension. In the Creative Connections 4-H Afterschool Program, first through fourth graders meet weekly for five or six sessions during the year. Each session lasts four weeks. The 4-H curriculum we use emphasizes art, theatre, literature and other specific project areas (like entomology, woodworking, or aerospace). It is led by a school staff person and community volunteers often assisted by youth. Extension staff is responsible for supplying curriculum, monitoring the educational quality of the program, and, depending on the status of volunteers, teaching sessions.



On a typical day at Creative Connections, the youth meet in the cafeteria for a snack, recite the 4-H pledge, and play in the gymnasium. After that they, are off to



their sessions which last about 45 minutes to an hour. There is a maximum of eight youth per session with one adult volunteer, plus a youth helper (if available).

Our 4-H Afterschool program is not directly connected with our Community Club program, although one of the volunteers at Creative Connections is a long-time community club project leader. Our program is in the city of Oconto and primarily reaches children who are not bussed home. There is not a community club presence in Oconto, so there aren't project leaders or other volunteers to call on to help with the program.

One of our greatest challenges has been funding. We started out as a completely volunteer program. The school district found funding for us through grant monies, and we were able to pay teachers stipends for two years. At that point, the school district put us directly in their budget. Last year, due to budget cuts, funding was no longer available and the district's input was reduced to weekly hours by a staff person. The challenge has been to recover our volunteer base after paying stipends.

Our greatest sense of accomplishment comes from the comments we get from



the kids and their parents. One child told us how she looked forward to Thursdays (her best day of the week!) because of Creative Connections. One parent summed up Creative Connections as "fun, rewarding and educational". Another said that the program "makes them (the children) feel good about themselves".