



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

4-H Youth Development Programs

Revised August 2003

Young people have a lot to offer their communities. 4-H Youth Development programs in Wisconsin strive to bring youth “to the table” to participate in decision-making roles in government and in local organizations. Research into youth development at the University of Wisconsin and at other universities shows that youth, adults and organizations all benefit when young people take on decision-making and leadership roles.

- Youth gain competence, confidence and experience as active citizens and become more engaged in their communities.
- Adults gain a better understanding of youth as important contributors and become more committed and energetic themselves.
- Youth bring perspectives, knowledge and relationships that lead to better decisions and more productive action.

4-H Youth Development Promotes youth civic engagement and leadership:

Youth on Government and Nonprofit Boards -- Across Wisconsin, from Waukesha to Superior, 4-H Youth Development trains and supports young people who serve as advisors to and voting members of city councils, county commissions, school boards, chambers of commerce, fair boards, 4-H Leader Boards, and other governance boards.

4-H Centennial Conversations on Youth Development in the 21st Century -- More than 2,000 youth and adults got together in every Wisconsin county to talk about ways to make this state a better place for young people. These local conversations culminated in a state level conversation with 300 youth and adults. Wisconsin’s recommendations to state government focused on the need to involve youth in civic engagement and leadership. In response, 4-H is implementing a Youth in Governance initiative.

Peer Court -- In a number of Wisconsin communities, youth charged with first time, nonviolent offenses come before a panel of peer jurists who determine sentencing sanctions. Youths who went before peer courts had a much lower than average rate of repeat offenses (10 percent).

Youth Philanthropy – In several communities, youth charitable boards with an allotment of grant funds solicit proposals from youth and give grants for community service projects.

Youth as Partners in Civic Leadership - Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development helped to convene a group of statewide organizations that have agreed to coordinate and promote efforts to expand youth voice in communities and government.

Leadership within 4-H Clubs – 4-H is led by youth and adults working in partnership. In clubs, youth serve as officers and leaders with the support of adults. At the county and state level, youth and adult volunteers guide the program. This structure provides youth with experience in group leadership, decision-making, and planning.

Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence. In this new initiative, young people and staff form teams to work together to conduct self-assessments of their own programs using tools based in research on positive youth development and youth leadership. The teams survey program

participants, then analyze and interpret the data and write short reports. The program participants and staff then create an action plan to build on the strengths of their programs and to address the weaknesses.

Citizenship Washington Focus – In the summer of 2003, 220 Wisconsin high school students traveled to Washington, D. C., for a week’s immersion in the democratic process. They assumed the roles of legislators, identified an issue, wrote a bill on that issue, debated it and followed it through the entire legislative process. They also met with Wisconsin state senators and representatives.

Public Adventures – This 4-H project curriculum gives youth leaders a road map for creating a public service or civic engagement activity. Using the materials a group of young people identify something they would like to do for their own communities and develop a plan for making it happen.

The Power of Youth Campaign – As part of the centennial celebration, Wisconsin youth made good on pledges to perform 330,000 hours of volunteer service to their communities.



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