

The National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century

Summary of Reports from Local Conversations in Wisconsin

Wisconsin communities took part in the National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century, during October - December 2001. The University of Wisconsin - Extension convened these local conversations, as a part of the National Centennial of 4-H. Participants were asked to discuss the actions needed to create the future they wanted for youth in their community.

There were 1,300 of these local conversations held nationally, involving more than 33,000 people. Wisconsin Counties submitted reports from 83 local conversations. A total of 2,099 people took part, including 885 youth (42%) and 108 public officials. More than 400 separate recommendations were generated through the process.

All recommendations were grouped into categories based on their content. Each recommendation carried a point value based upon the ranking it received at the local conversation (1 - 5). Total points for each category were determined based upon the number of recommendations in the category and their individual scores. Based on those category scores, a listing of the most frequent categories was created.

Following are the top 10 categories, or "Recommendations," with examples of the statements from local conversations that were included in that grouping.

Special thanks to members of the State 4-H Youth Development staff for their work in creating this summary - Kathi Vos, Linda Kustka, Greg Matysik, and Trisha Day analyzed all the local reports and created the summary categories; Wayne Brabender edited the final document, and Jane Marquardt and Katie Wang provided support to the process. Kathi Vos organized the team and led the process.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

1. Create a culture in which youth are equal partners in decision making and governance.
2. Encourage youth community service and civic involvement.
3. Recognize the ideas and efforts of youth
4. Provide more opportunities for youth and adults to learn about and experience cultural diversity.
5. Establish innovative youth centers that actively engage youth.
6. Design innovative after school programs that provide a safe, healthy, and caring environment.
7. Maximize the effectiveness of existing programs to better support families.
8. Invest in people through mentoring.
9. Build and strengthen youth-focused community collaborations and partnerships.
10. Increase resources to support youth development.

RECOMMENDATION #1

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Create a culture in which youth are equal partners in decision making and governance.

— 41 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

The ideas, talents, and opinions of youth are frequently absent in the community, organizations, and government. These groups are making decisions that affect youths' lives. Youth-adult partnerships benefit everyone: government bodies and agencies, organizations, and the youth and adult participants.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Increase the formal and informal involvement of youth within community decision-making bodies." — Eau Claire County

"Provide greater opportunity for youth to have input and express their views regarding decisions that are made affecting them as members of county, community, school, youth groups, and families." — Forest County

"Develop policy that addresses youth involvement in community groups. . . . Educate youth and adults on working together and utilizing each group's talents." — Iowa County

"Involve youth in all aspects of our community from gathering information to making decisions." — Washington County

"Include youth in decision making for community and youth programs." — Dodge County

"Every vote is equal in decision making." — Waukesha County

"Promote youth involvement in governance boards." — Barron County

"Partner youth and adults together on boards (youth/adult teams)." — Jackson County

"Invite youth to participate on community projects, in meetings, and on boards." — Oneida County

"Encourage input from youth — listen and respect their voices, opinions, and wisdom." — Taylor County

"Create opportunities for youth to take leadership roles in local projects/events." — La Crosse County

"Have events and activities and allow youth and adults to work together." — Door County

"Offer a wide range of opportunities for youth to take leadership roles in the community and devise strategies to assist youth in those roles." — Green County

"Create Youth/Adult Advisory Councils. Set up activities that require input from both groups in order for it to be completed. Provide opportunities for youth task forces in every city." — Milwaukee County

RECOMMENDATION #2

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Encourage youth community service and civic involvement.

— 22 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

Foster a "volunteer ethic" through a wide variety of community service opportunities. Help youth engage and contribute to their community through active knowledge and participation in local community and government issues.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Provide an opportunity for every youth to experience leadership and community service." — Waushara County

"Organize 'Universal Service' campaign (all youth serve community/country for 1-2 years). Campaign led by youth." — Portage County

"Encourage students to observe, participate, and provide feedback in county and local politics and to take ownership and responsibility for the decisions that they helped make." — Washburn County

"Conduct FACTS (family and community town suppers) where youth and adults gather to discuss community issues and plan strategies." — St. Croix County

"Provide youth volunteer experiences at a very young age." — Jefferson County

"Encourage all middle and high school youth to give at least 100 hours of community service each year." — Dane County

"More family volunteering and community service." — Dodge County

"Role model: have adults talk to youth about their community involvement and encourage observation/participation." — La Crosse County

"Community: clean up road sides, more parks, environmental education, more community events. Use cultural ceremonies toward nature and help from elders. Help the less fortunate. Have less violence and more friends." — Menominee County/Nation

"Increase youth involvement in community service." — Ozaukee County

RECOMMENDATION #3

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Recognize the ideas and efforts of youth.

— 22 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

Youth are doing many positive things that aren't known or recognized by the community. Youth actions, opinions, and ideas are not frequently included in the media.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Acknowledge youth for doing good things/deeds." — Bayfield County

"Develop a plan to celebrate positive things youth are doing in our communities." — Price County

"It would help to have a place for youth to write opinions, ideas, or concerns." — Columbia County

"Acknowledge all youth's good deeds and focus on the positive about youth in the media." — Grant County

"Give all youth a voice by utilizing all types of media." — Iowa County

"Support our teens; listen to youth ideas; celebrate youth (i.e. notices in newspaper, Youth Day National Holiday)." — Waupaca County

"Communication. Youth radio." — Racine County

"News releases recognizing the good, positive things being done by and with youth." — St. Croix County

"Youth recognition for volunteer efforts." — Door County

"Provide public recognition for students who get good grades and do good deeds." — Oconto County

"Recognize those who accomplish these tasks whether it be in newspapers, awards programs, radio announcements, or school or community newsletters. Show what youth and adults can do together." — Clark County

"Create a page or feature section in local papers solely for teens to share their opinions, ideas, and other information important to them." — Green County

RECOMMENDATION #4

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Provide more opportunities for youth and adults to learn about and experience cultural diversity.

—17 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

In striving to provide an ethic of access and opportunity for all youth, educational programs must be developed to help raise awareness of diversity issues. Adult volunteers, parents, and community members as well as youth will benefit from programs and experiences designed to help them learn about, understand, and respect people whose ethnic and cultural backgrounds, socio-economic levels, and life experiences are different from their own.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Promote tolerance, acceptance, and awareness through workshops and exposure to cultural diversity." — Rusk County

"Explore diversity and different local cultures. Offer activities to 'blend' groups to learn more about tolerance and respect." — Shawano County

"Provide positive opportunities for under-served and under-represented youth in the community." — Richland County

"Create opportunities for increased understanding about people who are of different ability, background, culture, and beliefs." — Fond du Lac County

"Provide assistance and support to at-risk, dysfunctional families." — Marquette County

"Adults must demonstrate that accepting and including people that are different from them is important and of benefit to a community." — Green Lake County

"Encourage experiences that provide dialogue and problem-solving with other cultures. Celebrate cultural events in the community. Help adults and youth explore their own prejudices. Expose youth to a wide range of cultures." — Dunn County

"Provide our youth with more *world* information, especially news, culture, and education." — Trempealeau County

"Create opportunities for communities to honor Martin Luther King Day, Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, Kwanzaa, Tet, and other special days observed by various cultures." — Rusk County

"Work to remove labels that are placed on youth by accepting them for who they are rather than what we think they are." — Bayfield County

RECOMMENDATION #5

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Establish innovative youth centers that actively engage youth.

— 14 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

Positive educational experiences can change a child's life. Community-based youth centers can transform the ways that youth build confidence and master critical life skills.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"A gathering place for youth — create a youth center." — Lincoln County

"Advocate for a location or locations within the community for youth to gather and learn." — Juneau County

"Make available low cost activities for teens and/or a teen center." — Fond du Lac County

"Build a safe community-based recreation center for teens." — Wood County

"Create a safe place for youth to 'hang out.'" — Manitowoc County

"Create new places for youth to go to learn and have fun." — Calumet County

"Establish neighborhood-based youth centers premised on a heavy dose of youth control/decision-making." — Kenosha County

"Continue to develop a safe and healthy community for youth to grow-up in, including creating places to be kids (with supervision)." — Pierce County

"Finance youth activities/parties in a substance free, positive environment." — Portage County

"A place for youth to go when they have a need. Youth need a safe place to go and someone they can trust and turn to if they are stressed, have difficulties, or are in a bad situation." — Crawford County

"We would like to see a centrally located youth center. This youth center would have a board of directors made up of people from all the communities in Polk County, including police, parents, educators, health professionals, clergy, and definitely *youth*. This center would be drug and tobacco free. Youth would be a large part of the entire process — there would be a youth advisory committee — the adults would be mainly support and means for the youth ideas." — Polk County

RECOMMENDATION #6

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Design innovative after school programs that provide a safe, healthy, and caring environment.

—18 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

While parents are working, all children need a safe, healthy, caring, and enriching environment. Youth organizations, schools, childcare providers, and others in the community need to team up to increase the quality, availability, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability of school-age care and other out of school programs.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Find ways to sustain the level of after school and summer programs offered through the three-year 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant." — Iron County

"Provide more programs like 21st Century after-school activities for under-served youth populations, with a strong focus on the middle school aged youth." — Langlade County

"Participation in after school youth groups should be encouraged at the school level. Funding should be adequate for the after school groups." — Milwaukee County

"Construct more activities for kids to do after school, weekend, and summers. Have more pow-wows and cultural ceremonies. Have more outdoor programs, such as flower gardens, sports, and environmental programs." — Menominee County/Nation

"Create a program for children whose parents work at night and always have a babysitter." — Lafayette County

"Develop youth and adult volunteer teams to participate in and lead community activities, such as after school programs, educational tutoring, enrichment classes, community service, educational field trips, and other needed programs." — Douglas County

"Have day care and/or after school programs provided at no cost to the families." — Jefferson County

"Offer a fun, safe, educational, and social environment with experiences beyond academic learning." — Waushara County

RECOMMENDATION #7

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Maximize the effectiveness of existing programs to better support families.

— 24 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

Youth programs need to build on family strengths and provide a system that brings people together, instead of pulling them apart. Community programs can be designed to do just that.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Provide more countywide family activities." — Clark County

"Provide activities that the entire family can participate in and work around busy family schedules." — Pierce County

"Encourage family involvement, get ideas from the children on how to get families involved." — Brown County

"Spend time with family, especially grandparents." — Calumet County

"Strengthen 4-H through supporting current leaders, encouraging new leaders and new ideas, using mentors for new 4-H families, creating recreational/social activities for 4-H youth and families — bringing friends along, and do rural and urban youth exchanges." — Lafayette County

"Have a 'Community Day' where old and young get together to play cards, games, talk, theme hikes (adventure, historical, birds), and exchange experiences and talents (e.g., youth showing older people computer/Internet opportunities and the old informing youth on ways of the past)." — Crawford County

"Focus on families and support systems for families and make sure parents understand they are an essential part of their children's lives." — Winnebago County

"The business and corporate community need to become flexible to parent/youth needs. Provide options that would allow parent, grandparent, mentor, or other caring person to a youth such as experiencing a day at school with this youth. Businesses need to become more family friendly." — Monroe County

"Promote parental involvement in the lives of their children. Connect youth to the 'wisdom' of the elders. Create activities in which parents can interact with their children, not only when they can spend time together, but also get to know one another better. Promote intergenerational respect." — Bayfield County

"Develop resources for parenting education that are easy to access and that do not need to be attended on an ongoing basis (e.g., Parenting Hotline)." — Fond du Lac County

"We would like to see not only 'beginning parenting' classes, but also parenting classes for people with older youth, middle school, high school — adolescents! We would like to involve the youth in developing curriculum for these classes, as they know what their parents need to know about them." — Polk County

RECOMMENDATION #8

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Invest in people through mentoring.

— 19 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

Community youth development programs should provide opportunities for various types of mentoring. Both adults and youth can be involved in formal school and work relationships or informal community partnerships. These can include intergenerational, peer, kinship, and other mentoring experiences.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Work with employers to adopt policies that promote mentoring." — Outagamie County

"Develop a mentor program for new 4-H leaders, clubs, and youth." — Jefferson County

"Develop mentorship programs especially for those young people who do not have strong male or female role models in their lives." — Bayfield County

"Help adults provide guidance through coaching, feedback, and discussion. Find experts in this area to provide training to adults in the community." — Dunn County

"Provide opportunities for mentor availability and have a positive influence of adult role models." — Pierce County

"Establish employer-sponsored mentoring and service programs that provide minimal pay for community service." — Oneida County

RECOMMENDATION #9

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Build youth-focused community collaborations and partnerships.

— 16 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

Youth programs should encourage the development of partnerships and coalitions within communities, including schools, youth organizations, churches, agencies, and businesses. The development of key networks and partnerships will be an integral part of achieving our mission.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Coalition of all youth organizations to unite so that co-facilitation can occur, which will teach and serve on a broad community basis with more efficiency, versatility, and quality." - Monroe County

"Encourage partnerships with schools, businesses, and community programs to pool resources, building on the strengths of each." — Washburn County

"Develop collaborations with youth serving agencies to implement joint programs and community service projects." — Rock County

"Create a community council to generate awareness of youth activities." — Pierce County

"Interact with our local city, county and business programs to draw in more youth." — Vernon County

"Coordinate diversity between youth-focused groups and encourage collaborations." — Adams County

"Strive to get central leadership to bring together organizations, churches, agencies, businesses, and schools." — Kewaunee County

RECOMMENDATION #10

FROM COUNTY CONVERSATIONS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Increase resources to support youth development.

— 15 counties mentioned items related to this recommendation

Communities should identify youth development funding needs and resources, including potential partners and local foundations. They should recognize teen court and similar judicial system prevention programs as important community resources.

Sample Quotes from County Conversations

"Provide enough funding for 4-H, recreational programs, scouts, boys and girls clubs, and others." — Sheboygan County

"Create local foundations to assist with funding of youth development efforts and programs." — Adams County

"Encourage business and local leaders to promote youth programs by providing funding." - Rock County

"Change the criminal justice system so it recognizes future impacts on offenders and victims' families." — Jefferson County

"Increase resources to support youth development" — Marquette County

"Develop a Teen Court." — Calumet County

"Identify the need, determine the project, and look for appropriate and creative partners." — Waukesha County