

Wisconsin 4-H Afterschool Programs



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Situation

Many young people find themselves without supervision on weekdays between the hours of 3 and 6 p.m. In 2009, the Afterschool Alliance conducted a national survey to learn how many children in kindergarten through 12th grade are in afterschool programs and how many spend their time unsupervised. In Wisconsin, one third of children are responsible for themselves after school, and they spend an average of seven after-school hours per week unsupervised. The study also found only 11 percent of Wisconsin children attend an afterschool program, and 31 percent of the children not in an afterschool program would be likely to attend if one were available.

Even in areas where afterschool opportunities are plentiful, many are still challenged to find quality programs for children to participate in. According to a research brief from Child Trends, spending afterschool hours in medium and low-quality programs provides no more bene-

fits for youth than doing nothing after school. High-quality afterschool programs provide safe physical and emotional environments, support positive relationships with adults, promote youth voice in decision-making and encourage learning.

Wisconsin 4-H brings university research and a positive youth focus to afterschool programs with enrichment-oriented curricula and projects. In Wisconsin, most afterschool programs are provided by public schools, followed by the YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, and private schools. 4-H works with providers to improve the quality of existing programs through trainings, consultation and on-going professional development. Increasing 4-H afterschool capacity can also help county programs reach audiences who may be underserved in 4-H's traditional community club structure. The challenge has been to bring high-quality programming to youth, either in a 4-H setting or by providing 4-H lessons and leadership for other afterschool programs.

Response

Wisconsin 4-H strives to provide quality out-of-school educational programs for youth with curricula focused on youth-adult partnerships, experiential learning and youth voice. In 2010, more than 15 counties increased capacity for afterschool programs by training more staff and volunteers and developing partnerships with other community groups.

In 2010, more than 360 volunteers and staff around the state were trained in afterschool programming, such as increasing opportunities



for youth voice in decision-making, incorporating physical activity and supporting science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs. This number includes nearly 60 teen volunteers.

- Milwaukee County 4-H established partnerships with Milwaukee Public Schools. UW-Extension offered support in training parents and teen volunteers, provided academic support to create an opportunity for children to improve reading skills and implemented peer mentoring and one-on-one work with youth.
- In Fond du Lac County, 4-H works as a supporting partner with the afterschool program run by the school district and the Boys & Girls Club. Their program, 4-H Fridays, brought 4-H curriculum to new youth and presented an opportunity for some of the older youth to volunteer, helping teach the younger kids on Fridays.

Outcomes

Afterschool programs supported by positive youth development-focused 4-H curricula and training served more than 40,000 youth in 2010. While the afterschool programs benefitted youth educationally, they also helped county programs reach out to some of Wisconsin 4-H's underserved audiences.

- Waushara and Marathon counties both formed summer afterschool programs aimed at increasing Latino involvement in 4-H. In Waushara County, nearly 80 percent of the young people who participated reported that the program helped

them become more accepting of diversity and that they made new friends.

- In Milwaukee County, the 4-H partnerships with the public schools and 21st Century Community Learning Centers showed strong educational results. Data collected after the program showed that 75 percent of students in the 4-H afterschool program increased their reading proficiency. Teachers also reported an 80 percent increase in students who turned in their homework, and that many students were more motivated to participate in class discussions.
- Milwaukee County was also able to create and staff a summer enrichment camp with Milwaukee Public Schools. First and 2nd-grade youth used theme-based curricula about recycling, diversity and healthy living while 3rd through 6th graders focused on science, technology, engineering and math skills. At the end of the camp, over 80 percent of 1st and 2nd-grade youth reported that 4-H activities helped them make friends with kids who were different than they were, and that diversity made activities more fun.
- More than 50 adults and 115 youth attended Lights On Afterschool in Fond du Lac, where participants learned about quality afterschool resources and activities in the area.

Throughout Wisconsin, 4-H afterschool programs reached young people from underserved audiences in numbers proportionate to state ethnic demographics. Expanding 4-H afterschool opportunities and especially 4-H collaborations with other afterschool providers means more youth will be able to participate in programs that value enrichment-focused activities and promote positive youth development, improving their afterschool experience as well as their perception of Wisconsin 4-H.

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