

Helping youth stay fit and active with Healthy Living Programs



“This program helped me become more active because they showed me fun exercises and helped me figure out how to have a healthy and balanced diet.”
—Healthy Living program participant

Situation

Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development offers a range of programming focused on positive youth development and helping young people fulfill the 4-H pledge: heads to clearer thinking, hearts to greater loyalty, hands to larger service and health to better living. In response to the growing concerns about childhood obesity, 4-H National Headquarters made healthy living a national priority, introducing program curricula on nutrition, physical activity and safety. In addition, Wisconsin youth have shown an interest in learning about healthy living activities—delegates at the 2009 Wisconsin State 4-H & Youth Conference voted to make healthy lifestyles a statewide priority, encouraging counties and clubs to include programming about health.

Response

In 2009, nine Wisconsin county 4-H programs implemented or increased healthy living program-

ming with the help of a \$50,000 grant from Wal-Mart. The programs addressed the importance of diet, exercise and safety on healthy youth development, and in some cases the lessons were incorporated into previously established programming. In many counties, healthy living activities created leadership opportunities for youth, with teens leading programs for younger 4-H members.

- Iron County emphasized physical activity in its healthy living programs. In June 2009, 33 youth enrolled in the 4-H TrailBlazer program. TrailBlazer activities continued through January 2010 and included biking, canoeing, swimming and snowshoeing.
- Walworth County worked with local Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program coordinators to plan nutrition lessons. The WNEP coordinator and Walworth County 4-H educator helped teen teachers with nutrition lesson plans on a bi-weekly basis, and the teens taught the lessons to other youth.
- Counties like Douglas, Fond du Lac, Iron, La Crosse, Rock and Walworth incorporated youth leadership opportunities with Teens as Teachers. The young people who participated were able to contribute programming ideas, teach lessons and guide other youth. The program in Lincoln County was coordinated by a teen member with support from 4-H staff.



Rock County activities included dancing and parachute exercises

Outcome

More than 1,000 Wisconsin youth participated in 4-H healthy living activities through the Wal-Mart healthy living grant. Youth, teen leaders and adults were asked what they learned about nutrition and exercise as a result of their participation in the programs, and how the lessons they learned changed their behavior. Each group reported that they learned new things about nutrition, healthy eating and exercise; many participants also changed their eating and exercise habits because of the program.

- Almost 90 percent of youth reported that they learned about the importance of daily exercise and learned new types of exercise. More than 80 percent of youth found a new exercise they enjoyed and increased the amount of time they spent exercising.
- More than 80 percent of young people reported learning about the elements of good nutrition and the importance of fruit and vegetables in a healthful diet.
- More than 87 percent of youth participants reported learning about the number of calories they need to eat in a day; more than three-quarters reported that after the program they tried to match their caloric intake with their daily needs.

Eighty-seven youth served as teen leaders, helping communicate nutrition and exercise information to other young people participating in the healthy living programs. While the majority of youth learned new

information about nutrition and exercise and changed their behavior because of it, teen leaders reported even more gains as a result of their participation in healthy living programs.

- More than 95 percent of teen leaders learned about the importance of a healthy diet, and 85 percent made more healthful food choices as a result.
- About 75 percent of teen leaders learned about new, enjoyable exercise and increased the amount of time they spent exercising.
- Teen leaders also learned about community action—more than 90 percent said they learned the importance of community involvement, and almost 80 percent reported they took action by teaching others about the importance of healthy living.

Participants in the Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development healthy living activities took away valuable lessons on nutrition and exercise as well as leadership. Counties were able to integrate healthy living lessons into camps, afterschool and other programs, and by doing so brought important health information to over 1,000 youth.

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“Teaching the other kids made me a healthier person. I exercise, eat healthier and do more activities. Helping children learn was the best part.”
—*Healthy Living program teen leader*



La Crosse County youth prepare a healthy snack