



4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN WISCONSIN

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4-H Youth Development (4-H YD) programming in Wisconsin has a dual focus - providing educational programs for youth, and youth development leadership for communities. This work is not done simply to enrich the individual lives of participants and their families, but for the larger public purposes of developing productive citizens and sustaining our democracy.

Youth Programs

The 4-H community club is Extension's fundamental model for youth programming. This model has a rich tradition of giving young people direct experience with democracy by encouraging group decision-making and self-governance. The basic 4-H club and project model delivers the key elements that researchers prescribe for healthy youth development: a) skill development, b) sustained adult-youth relationships, and c) public youth contributions. As a public program, 4-H offers universal access and strict adherence to Federal and State nondiscrimination standards. Most 4-H programs feature volunteer-led experience-based learning, built upon curriculum that is developed and supported by university faculty. 4-H YD personnel are responsible for connecting the educational and civic mission of 4-H with community youth interests.

Other models of direct programming for youth beyond the classic 4-H club are also developed by 4-H YD personnel. These models may include after-school 4-H clubs, summer youth programs, community gardening programs, community youth leadership groups, and short-term programs taking place throughout the community. These programs vary widely based upon local circumstances and needs, but they are still intended to achieve one or more of the key elements of youth development mentioned above. They are often designed to meet the needs of a special audience or to feature a specialized focus.

Cooperation with and support for schools is important, and 4-H Youth Development programs can provide practical opportunities to reinforce the learning in the classroom. The 4-H program's principle niche however is in the community and outside of the classroom. Meeting the needs of youth in the non-school hours is frequently where 4-H finds its greatest value.

Community Leadership

In addition to developing and directing our own youth programs, 4-H Youth Development personnel play a significant role as community leaders in youth development. This community leadership role takes several forms, including catalyst/organizer and technical resource. The audience for this work is usually adults, including elected officials, community agency staff, parents, and citizens interested in youth development. Youth are assuming an expanding role in community decision-making as well, and 4-H YD personnel serve as advocates for this important youth contribution to community life.

As a community catalyst/organizer, 4-H YD personnel work with other community interests in addressing issues of youth development. Working with the "asset-building" approach to positive youth development, 4-H YD personnel most often organize people around strategies for improving community support for young people. Strong local relationships, recognized objectivity and credibility, and effective organizing skills are key strengths in our role as a catalyst/organizer. Communities are seeking citizen-based solutions to their problems, and 4-H YD personnel make an important contribution to this process.

Providing technical assistance in youth development is another community leadership function for 4-H YD personnel. As government devolution moves more programmatic responsibilities to the community level, this kind of knowledge becomes increasingly valuable. Local groups developing their own prevention programs typically need technical advice in Youth Development. With direct access to university specialists in Youth Development, 4-H YD personnel have a unique resource to offer. Delivering this research-based knowledge to the community is a fundamental Extension task.

4-H Youth Development programming depends on skilled Extension professionals and community residents working together for a sustained period of time. Social networks and public relationships must be established and maintained in order to effectively lead the 4-H program and provide community leadership in youth development. Both of these functions rely heavily upon citizen involvement as program volunteers and community activists.



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