

## UWEX AmeriCorps\*VISTA Success Story

### ☘ L.E.A.F.

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**MERCER L.E.A.F.**

The 4-H L.E.A.F. program was created to offer summer enrichment activities for the youth of Iron County. The 4-H L.E.A.F. (leadership, experience, adventure, and friendship) program had sessions in Mercer and Saxon, Wisconsin, which provided experiences in science projects, arts and crafts, and recreational games.



**SAXON L.E.A.F.**

In Mercer, we introduced a 4-H program to an area that did not have one previously. In the Saxon and Gurney area, we started a new 4-H group to add to their already strong 4-H programs. A typical day began with the 4-H pledge. The students would then play an inside game before starting on an arts and crafts project. When finished, the students had snack or lunch, depending on which program they attended. A science project and outdoor games occupied the remainder of the day.

We had a group of about ten continual members in each area, along with occasional added day participants. These youth enjoyed the projects we introduced and enthusiastically participated throughout the day. All of the projects involved one or more of the four core elements we promoted at L.E.A.F. A huge favorite was the pop-bottle-rockets. We split the members into groups, pairing older participants with younger members. This allowed the older youth to practice their leadership skills and the younger youth to have greater input in a group comprised of their peers. Each group built, decorated, and named their rocket. When finished, the students were taken outside and assisted us in launching their rockets.

4-H L.E.A.F. participants also had many opportunities to be creative with arts and crafts. At the end of our session, the students were able to enter their creations in the local fair. Many students took advantage of this opportunity and fared very well, receiving numerous first place ribbons and community recognition for their projects.

Our program participants also enjoyed playing many games, which promoted exercise, teamwork, and leadership. Of all our outdoor games, tag seemed to be the favorite.

“I think the game ‘blob tag’ helped with working with other people,” reflected a youth from Mercer in her evaluation of the program.

Promoting leadership was one of our focuses and an area in which we noticed great improvement throughout the program. 4-H L.E.A.F. members were given opportunities to lead games and songs, talk in front of their group, and help those who were falling behind in a project. One of our younger participants in particular showed great improvement in leadership. At the beginning of our program, she was rather quiet, keeping to herself and the few she had previously known. Over time, she began to blossom into a leader, the transformation especially evident on the last day of our program. When our method of creating bubbles with homemade

wands was not as successful as we had expected, our little leader came to the rescue. In her interest and enthusiasm, she figured out an alternate method and proceeded to show the entire group how it was done.

Our daily observations and the responses we collected at our program's conclusion lead us to believe that this year's participants will return for another summer session, if the opportunity is presented. All our 4-H L.E.A.F. members seemed to enjoy the experience and gained useful skills they can apply to school and life in general. We are pleased to have been a part of their summer and an influence in their lives.