

2008 Summer Americorps*VISTA Reading and Experiential Learning Program

Situation: Wisconsin demographics from the 2000 Census reveal a poverty rate in Sawyer County of nearly 15 % compared to 8.6% in the state. Limited income and unemployment adversely impacts our youth and families. Within Sawyer County lies the Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Ojibwe Reservation. Summer reading enrichment programs for younger youth do not exist. Positive learning experiences help youth experience positive relationships with adults and encourage youth to read. That's where UW-Extension came in.

Response: To address the issue, 4-H Youth Development Educator Lori Laberee met with the LCO library director. Next, Laberee applied for two summer Americorps* VISTA workers to provide a youth reading program and create a positive and safe environment for youth. Working together, they created a plan to utilize 4-H curriculum and the WI state library summer reading program "Catch the Reading Bug" to provide twenty-five youth reading and experiential learning opportunity during an eight week program on the LCO Reservation.

Results: Twenty-five youth were introduced to 8 experiential lessons. The lessons provided an introduction to 4-H curricula, experiential learning and positive involvement with caring adults. Parents stated they welcomed the opportunity for their youth. Youth and parents were interested to know if other programs would be offered. A community volunteer expressed interest in assisting with other programs.

Evidence: A reflection activity guide was provided for each youth participant. After each session, youth were able to create pictures, diagrams or poems about their experience. Pictures were posted in the library for others to view. During each session, facilitators engaged in conversations with participants to determine effectiveness of each lesson. Modifications were made in lessons as needed prior to the next session. Testimonials from parents/guardians indicated youth participants were positively impacted by their experience.