



Gloria Fauerbach  
715-561-2695  
gloria.fauerbach@ces.uwex.edu



Linda Sunde  
CNS, WI State Director  
(414) 297-1118 x11  
lsunde@cns.gov

## UWEX AmeriCorps\*VISTA Success Story

### Trailblazers v. 2.0

by Mark Hagemann and Shawn Zani,  
VISTA Members  
[hagemannm@carleton.edu](mailto:hagemannm@carleton.edu)  
[zanix001@umn.edu](mailto:zanix001@umn.edu)



This year saw the continuation and expansion of the Iron County TrailBlazers healthy lifestyles program, which was initiated last year with the goal of bridging the gap in Iron County youth development programs for the middle-school age group. Much of last year's format remained unchanged: we held weekly six-hour sessions structured around a ten to sixteen mile bike ride, at three locations within the county. Throughout each session, we stressed and practiced bike safety, proper hydration, and stretching, while traveling to a scenic location. Deb Leonard, the Iron County UWEX nutrition educator, provided a weekly nutrition lesson and activity and accompanied us on several rides throughout the program. Each session was complemented with a geospatial lesson, ranging from map making and compass use to GPS exploration and geocaching. New this year was a hands-on education in bike maintenance and anatomy. As a remedy for the brutal summer heat, we tried to give the kids an opportunity each

day to swim in a local lake or river, supervised by certified lifeguard Shawn Zani. We ended each session with time set aside for reflection and journaling, allowing the TrailBlazers to track their progress through the weeks.

This year expanded on the successes of last year, with ten more youth enrolled in the program, for a total of thirty-two weekly TrailBlazers. The largest group was Mercer, with sixteen youth, and the smallest was Saxon, with seven. Additionally, we led two canoe trips on the Turtle River and one day of “treasure hunting” at Saxon Harbor on Lake Superior. The canoe trips were an enormous success, with twenty-six kids taking part in exploring the local waterways.

By the end of the fifth and final week of the program, it was clear that the TrailBlazers had developed a strong sense of belonging, and were reluctant to turn in their orange vests, the mark of a TrailBlazer. The youth shrugged off our reminders that only a few weeks ago, they had looked upon the vests with contempt, and had been reluctant to wear them at all.

A sense of teamwork was evident in our lessons in GPS, during which returning TrailBlazers worked side-by-side with newcomers, helping them develop their own technology skills. On the canoe trips, too, more experienced canoeists shared their knowledge with their peers. Over the course of the four-hour trip, we watched as inexperienced canoeists turned to competent paddlers, and we witnessed their resulting satisfaction at having learned a new skill.

Between thirty-two kids and two leaders we biked and canoed approximately 1500 miles over five weeks. The youth who participated came away with much more than mileage, however; they also gained valuable life experiences that will assist them in their future academic and career endeavors and in maintaining healthy lifelong habits.