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## **UWEX AmeriCorps\*VISTA Success Story**

**By Sally Reisem, VISTA Member**

Situation: This is the second year of partnership between Rock County 4-H Program and the Edison Middle School Afterschool Program. Last year it was a learning experience for the 4-H staff, AmeriCorps Vista, Afterschool Staff and the students on how academics and 4-H were going to fit into the time limits. Last year there was limited success working in small groups on life skills projects, but one of the key component of 4-H was missing and that was "Belonging". There were positive relationships with adults, but the students even though were in the same school were not relating to each other unless they were part of their social circle. My goal this year is to mix up the group and allow the students to discover new relationships. Response: Mrs. Squire, the afterschool coordinator, and I decided that instead of the group dividing up into smaller groups at the end of the day, should come together and work on the same projects and activities. To start the year, it was decided to work on the Citizenship and having the students work on a service learning project. At the beginning of the Citizenship project the students were allowed to discuss and share their ideas of what makes a good citizen. They also drew diagrams about the building blocks of citizenship. This prepared them to part of a service learning project. The students decided with the guidance of Mrs. Squire that their service project will be raising awareness on the importance of healthy eating. At the present time they have separated into different committees, one to write public service announcements, another to organize the publicity, and the third to organize the material and theme for the posters that they will be making. Results: So far one can sense of "Belonging" much better than last year. The students are learning life skills such as compromising, communications, and problem solving in these committees. The group is more cohesive and willing to work in groups. The staff is very engage in this service learning project and is guiding the student through the process. Evidence: By the interaction that I have with the students they are eager and excited about promoting a healthy life style. They have a good basic education about food facts and the importance. The students are happy to see me, and they don't think it is boring. In fact one student told me, that this activity is his

favorite part of the day. He knows he is learning, but this learning is fun. The completion of this activity is two weeks away, but already it is a big success and a great way to start the new school year.