Investing in Wisconsin’s Youth
4H Youth Development

In 2004, County government in Wisconsin invested about $3.5 million in 4-H Youth Development staff and support. What did counties get for that investment?

Answer: Between $18 and $39 million

$3.7 million to $25 million for delinquency prevention

Research on community safety indicates that actions that encourage the social development of children, youth and families reduce delinquent behavior with returns ranging from $1.06 to $7.16 for every dollar spent (Sansfacon and Welch, 1999). This suggests a potential return of $3.7 million to $25 million in delinquency reduction from 4-H.

$2 million for volunteer work on behalf of communities

The 4-H community has pledged 330,000 hours of community volunteer service for 2004. At $6 per hour, this is equal to $2 million to local communities.

$4.6 million in state and federal funds

State and federal fund allocated to county-based 4-H Youth development personnel in 2004 totaled $4.6 million.

$7.8 million for volunteer work for Extension programs

Volunteers supplement the work of Extension professionals. The typical 4-H volunteer gives 7.9 hours a month, according to a 1999 survey of 4-H volunteers in Minnesota. In 2001, Wisconsin had 13,600 4-H volunteers. At a wage of $6 per hour for 7.9 hours per month, that voluntary service was worth $7.8 million.

The value of 4-H is not just economic, however. 4-H teaches lessons, habits, attitudes and skills that last a lifetime and continue to benefit local communities throughout Wisconsin.
Citizen Involvement

4-H programs provide young people with opportunities for civic involvement. While membership in adult civic clubs is declining, 4-H clubs are promoting community pride and community involvement among youth members. 4-H community efforts provide a contribution of public work in areas such as support for the elderly, community improvement, helping younger children, the disadvantaged and the environment. These activities help youth develop a greater appreciation for their community and make positive connections to other residents. Ultimately these activities can build social trust among the participants and the recipients of the service.

Wisconsin 4-H clubs conduct an average of 5 community service projects per year per club. That equals 10,000 community service projects done by 2,000 4-H clubs annually.

4-H groups through the Adopt-a-Highway program maintain 530 miles of roadside.

Citizenship Skills

4-H gives youth direct experience with democratic practices and electoral processes. Every year, 8,000 youth win offices in local 4-H clubs. As club leaders, they gain experience conducting meeting and leading group decision-making processes. They learn that accountability comes with elected office. In 4-H, youth begin developing some of the skills they will need to be future community leaders.

Job Skills

4-H teaches important skill and attitudes that employers look for. Teamwork, problem solving, and communications skills are a part of the 4-H experience. Being on time, working hard and respecting others are values youth learn in 4-H.

University Resources

4-H youth development faculty and staff provide direct link to University of Wisconsin expertise and research. Because of this university affiliation, counties have access to community assessment tools, program evaluation expertise, a statewide network of youth development professionals, a source of professional development and program development, and a gateway for youth to access UW programs.

In many places, the county 4-H youth development agent is the only non-school based youth professional in the county. He or she is an important resource for community groups and an active participant in youth-focused coalitions and alliances. The 4-H youth development
agent brings professionalism, knowledge, skills and university connections to local planning and implementation of community youth programs.

**Statements from youth development researchers**

“A lot of research is now showing that social/emotional development and caring adults are the most important variables in a child’s learning, whatever the content or context of the program.”

“The question that the policy-makers often want to have answered is whether reading and math scores have improved. They are not asking whether the children in these programs are going to be good citizens or whether they are learning about how to get along with each other in a democracy. Those, I think, are also very critical questions of substantial national concern.”

*Michelle Seligson*, founder the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)

**Statements from UW Administration**

“We are proud that the University of Wisconsin-Extension has worked with our county partners to sponsor 4-H programs for the past 100 years. 4-H was a good idea when it was born, and it's still a good idea. If we didn't already have a 4-H program to help youth face the challenges of the 21st century, we would want to invent it now.”

*Katherine C. Lyall*, President, University of Wisconsin  
*Kevin Reilly*, Chancellor, University of Wisconsin -Extension