

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14, October–November 2007 – Nan Baumgartner

Fond du Lac County Department of Social Services and UWEX partnered to bring the evidence based Strengthening Families Program to Fond du Lac County. The SFP curriculum includes three courses (Parent Skills Training, Children's Skills Training and Family Life Skills Training) taught in fourteen two-hour periods. In the first hour, parents and children participate in separate classes, each class led by two co-leaders. Parents learn to increase desired behaviors in children by using attention and rewards, clear communication, effective discipline, substance use education, problem solving, and limit setting. Children learn effective communication, understanding feelings, coping with anger and criticism, stress management, social skills, problem solving, resisting peer pressure, consequences of substance use, and compliance with parental rules. During the second hour families practice structured family activities, therapeutic child play, family meetings, communication skills, effective discipline, reinforcing positive behaviors in each other, and jointly planning family activities. Eight families completed the 6 week course. Pre and Post evaluations showed an increased use of skills taught. A comment from one parent clearly summarizes the positive impact of this program: The most valuable thing I learned during this program was “how to relate to a 12 year old, like how to talk to them, listen to them and understand them better.”

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Water Quality – Diana Hammer Tscheschlok

As you may be aware, the Town of Byron has found E.Coli contamination in several residential wells. UW-Extension has joined with WDNR and the Fond du Lac County Departments of Health, Code Enforcement, Planning, and Land Conservation to support Town of Byron officials in addressing the situation. On September 11th, this group of partners gave a short presentation to the town board and a group of about 40 citizens. The Town has invited the group back to do a more detailed presentation on Oct. 31st during which a panel of experts will answer citizens' questions and provide bottles for home water testing.

The Town of Byron is not alone in facing water quality issues. The geology of the region along the Niagara Escarpment is characterized by a layer of bedrock near the surface which is often weathered and marked with cracks and fissures. In this karst topography, which covers much of Fond du Lac County, both water and contaminants can easily flow down to the aquifer underneath.

Being mindful of the sensitive geology underneath, our area can help minimize the chances for repeat contamination events in the future. Contact UW-Extension if you would like more information on any of the following actions that can help protect groundwater.

For homeowners:

- Reduce the amount of fertilizers spread on lawns.
- Perform regular maintenance and pumping of your septic system.
- Never pour chemicals (gas, oil, paint, cleaning solvents, etc.) into the sewer, septic system, or on the ground.
- Test well water every year at different times of the year.
- Ensure that old, unused wells are properly closed and abandoned.

On a bigger scale, communities can:

- Organize a drinking water education program.
- Include water sources and water quality in municipal comprehensive planning efforts.
- Consider implementing a wellhead protection plan or ordinance.

Fall Master Gardener Program Focuses on Wisconsin Native Plant Communities – Mike Rankin

A four-week educational program focusing on Wisconsin's native plant communities was offered this fall to broaden the knowledge base of Fond du Lac County Master Gardeners and other individuals. Eight different speakers gave presentations dealing with the cultivation and ecology of native prairies, wetlands, and forests. There was also information presented on invasive species and landscape design using native plants. The 45 people who attended the program will now take the information they learned and apply it to their own home situations and/or put their new found knowledge to use in the community. Several examples of how participants indicated that they will use the information are presented below:

- “Will buy the Curtis book – The Vegetation of Wisconsin. Recognize the native plants in my own yard and add other natives that are compatible.”

- “We are going to redo landscape areas at my church and the intention is to create a natural area that would invite birds using trees (existing) and add shrubs and plants.”
- “I will encourage people to incorporate native plants into their landscapes even if they live in the city. Personally plant more native plants. Make gardeners more aware of invasive species and the dangers of planting them and/or not eradicating them!”
- “I definitely learned more ways to manage the prairie we have started on our property.”

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