

# Mary Pardee

## Statement of Professional Contributions and Scholarship

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My UW-Extension experience began in 2000 with the UW-Extension Lakes Program located at UW-Stevens Point. As a Lakes Education Specialist, I worked with youth-focused water education programs in collaboration with UW-Extension county educators, DNR personnel, non-profit groups, and environmental educators from around the state.

When I became the Burnett County Youth Development Educator, I was asked to create youth development opportunities beyond the 4-H program as well as be the advisor to the 4-H organization and its volunteers. One of the biggest challenges was identifying and prioritizing community needs. I sought input from County Board Supervisors, volunteer 4-H leaders, 4-H youth, a Community Partners Advisory Group, the County Administrator, personnel of the Health and Human Services Department and school administrators and teachers in identifying and prioritizing youth development needs within the county.

Addressing the youth development needs of a county is an impossible task for one person. Networks developed in my past UW-Extension position were still relevant, but an entirely new network had to be developed. Collaborations with outside entities and agencies, as well as teamwork with UW-Extension colleagues and 4-H volunteers, can be found throughout my work, making it stronger. Through collaboration and teamwork, I am more proficient in my ability to deliver positive outcomes in youth development.

The most recent challenge has been a move to Barron County in January of 2010. While Barron has a much larger and more active 4-H club program and a larger population than Burnett County, I have been able to transfer my experiences to begin making an impact in Barron County's 4-H Youth Development program.

Over the years, I have worked to develop leadership skills in adults and youth, nurture environmental knowledge and stewardship skills, empower at-risk youth to better handle life's challenges, and equip volunteers with the ability to positively impact youth development in their communities. Recently, UW-Extension Cooperative Extension has adopted a Purpose to which we commit, a Vision of what we want to become, and Values we strive to live by. These values are evident throughout my 4-H Youth Development work, helping me to play a role in transforming lives and communities.

**Value: COMMUNITY. We believe community voices are critical to success...**

### **Bringing Youth Voices to Organizational Governance**

Through two different experiences, youth in Burnett County were able to actively engage with adult partners to improve their communities as they developed citizenship skills and increased their understanding of local issues. Adults valued youth participation in their organizations as they made decisions together.

In late 2008, on direct request of the County Board, I designed and implemented a plan to put youth representatives on the County Board. Research shows that youth are committed to organizational governance if they are respected, they feel a balance of power with adults, they feel important and they are able to contribute on their own terms (Zeldin 2004)<sup>1</sup>. I delivered a presentation to the County Board

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<sup>1</sup> Zeldin, Shepherd (2004). *Youth as agents of adult and community development: Mapping the processes and outcomes of youth engaged in organizational governance*. Applied Developmental Science. Vol. 8, No. 2, 75-90.

Supervisors highlighting demonstrated impacts on youth and adults, a plan for implementation and roles of adult board members. In response, the Board adopted a resolution to actively seek participation of youth in the governance of the county (Exhibit 1).

High school principals assisted me to recruit youth representatives. To increase youth understanding of local government and foster youth-adult relationships, I organized an orientation session which included the County Clerk, County Administrator and Board Chair as speakers. I met with the youth after their fourth board meeting to assess their initial experiences with the program. The focused conversation revealed that their relationships with a Supervisor mentor contributed to the youth representatives' positive experience (Exhibit 2). This relationship also impacted the mentors. As shown by the Supervisor Mentor Follow-up Questionnaire completed by two of the three mentors, they felt their listening skills improved as they worked with youth. Mentors were of the opinion that youth displayed growth in knowledge of issues and government processes, and that the County Board valued youth participation (Exhibit 3).

Youth representatives participated in the UW-Extension Youth Civic Engagement in Local Government Study through a pre- and post-survey. At the end of the first term, two youth completed the post-survey. Results indicated that after serving on the County Board, they were more likely to take political action such as contacting a community representative or signing a petition. Both reported gains in the citizenship skills of writing a letter to the editor and creating a plan to address a problem. One youth indicated he is now more likely to vote. The experience even helped one youth decide he was not interested in a political career, although he was more interested in listening to the political opinions of others.

The second opportunity for youth to engage in governance developed when I was asked to facilitate a planning process for an AODA (Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse) coalition being formed in Burnett County. This coalition was formed by adults to confront youth alcohol issues. I designed and facilitated processes which engaged 12-18 youth and 15-25 adults in crafting a vision, mission statement, and goals for the organization (Exhibit 4). After being involved in these processes, 18 youth signed Memorandums of Agreement to be active members of the Burnett County Adolescent AODA Prevention Coalition. The active engagement of youth at these meetings resulted in the goal to decrease prescription drug abuse. The chairperson of the Coalition indicated in an email dated December 14, 2009, that youth "added an important voice to our strategic planning sessions," noting that youth members helped adults "better understand the realities and problems of drugs and alcohol" in the county.

The issues identified through the planning process were used to successfully apply for a Strategic Prevention Framework-State Incentive Grant of \$77,000. As a member of the Coalition, I authored portions of the grant regarding youth development and the planning process.

With the intent to inform decision-makers about youth development, I highlighted contributions of youth in decision-making processes in a report to the county Administration Committee. I also shared this report with state elected officials. Wisconsin Senator Bob Jauch responded with a letter indicating his appreciation for UW-Extension and youth development programming that focuses on leadership and citizenship (Exhibit 5).

My leadership experiences with the coalition in Burnett County have transferred to Barron County, where I represent UW-Extension and 4-H Youth Development on the Safe and Stable Families (SSF) Coalition. I served on a grant writing team that wrote a successful application for \$750,000 over five years to increase physical activity and healthy eating. I worked with the team to ensure that youth will play an important role in meeting these objectives.

**Value: DISCOVERY. We encourage innovation in teaching, research and outreach...****Supporting Environmental Education and Service-Learning**

As a youth development educator with a graduate degree and work history in environmental education, I have fostered an interest in using the natural environment as a catalyst for positive youth development. Many studies have shown that direct experience and mentoring are key elements for youth to develop environmental sensitivity. Lifelong stewardship is one outcome to spending time outdoors with a mentor, but other benefits to youth development include increased creativity, physical competence, social skills, confidence and problem solving ability.<sup>2</sup>

2008 marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which designated federal protection of the St. Croix River and its largest tributary, the Namekagon River. Together, these two rivers form the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, managed by the National Park Service (NPS). The St. Croix River forms the border between Wisconsin and Minnesota, with Burnett being one of the border counties.

I collaborated with Riverway Park Rangers to plan, coordinate and evaluate an effort we called, *Take Me to the River* (TMTTR). My main roles in TMTTR were to develop educational materials to support other educators and coordinate youth service-learning projects throughout the watershed. I also organized an educational canoe trip on the St. Croix in Burnett County for elected officials to learn about the Riverway and youth development. My partners and I designed TMTTR so that youth gained knowledge of their watershed and identified their personal connections to it. I was gratified to confirm that through learning and completing meaningful projects, youth recognized their personal impact on the environment.

To carry out service-learning projects throughout the watershed, I involved UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development educators from Washburn, Bayfield, Douglas, Sawyer, and Polk Counties, as well as a Minnesota Extension Educator. I provided these educators with an initial informational brochure I created with NPS Rangers to introduce TMTTR and encourage youth and adult participation (Exhibit 6). In meetings with the county educators and NPS Rangers, it became clear that resources would be needed to meet the learning objectives of the service-learning projects. In response, I created TMTTR *Service-Learning Project Leader Materials* for adult leaders and *Service-Learning Watershed Champion Materials* for youth (Exhibit 7). These were available on a TMTTR website I published to distribute information, publicize events, and highlight youth involvement in improving the health of the watershed (Exhibit 8).

Youth in Burnett, St. Croix, Polk, Sawyer and Washington (MN) Counties completed service-learning projects ranging from storm drain stenciling to public education. I worked directly with over 70 youth in Burnett and St. Croix Counties. Using a content analysis technique on questionnaires completed by 23 high schoolers who took part in a project, I found they believed that they helped the environment by reducing pollutants going into the river and helped the community by providing education and information. One youth noted, "I felt like I was actually helping the community." Many described their personal connection to the St. Croix. One youth said, "It (the St. Croix River) is a part of my life even though I never realized it." All participants noted ways they would change their personal behaviors as a result of taking part in the project (Exhibit 9).

To expand the youth audience learning about the watershed, I made classroom visits with 526 youth in grades 2 through 8 in Burnett County schools. I shared environmental, cultural and historical knowledge about their watershed and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway through hands-on activities and a film. Each youth was provided with a modified version of the youth service-learning materials to take home and share with their families (Exhibit 10). The classroom instruction was followed by an interactive music, poetry and

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<sup>2</sup> Chawla, Louise (2006). *Learning to Love the Natural World Enough to Protect It*. *Barn* nr 2 2006:57-58.

image production by Lake Superior Big Top Chautauqua. Chautauqua producers modified their “Wild Woods and Waters” program to focus on the St. Croix Watershed. In partnership with the local Community Education program, the performance was also staged for the community at large. When I asked teachers to provide feedback on the experience, one teacher noted that the experience fit right into her classroom curriculum and she was able to use the TMTTR handout to study the local watershed.

Youth belonging to the Burnett County 4-H Junior Leaders arranged a 13 mile canoe trip on the Namekagon River to support TMTTR. They invited youth from the Washburn County Junior Leaders. I invited a National Park Service Ranger to set up an on-river macroinvertebrate study for the over 20 youth who participated from the two counties. Junior Leaders who served as summer camp counselors that year taught watershed concepts to campers and staged their own macroinvertebrate study at the campground’s lake.

I shared TMTTR results with the County Supervisors on the Ag/Extension Committee through a PowerPoint presentation (Exhibit 11). “This is exactly the type of programming we were looking for when we hired this position,” said one Supervisor after the presentation. I also gave a presentation at the Northern District All-Staff Meeting to share TMTTR plans at the beginning of the year and a poster at the Northern and Western District Day of Learning at the end of the year. I was accepted for a poster session at the 2009 Joint Conference of Extension Professionals. In addition, I had the pleasure of co-presenting the lunch keynote at the Protecting the St. Croix Conference at UW-River Falls along with my NPS partner, at the request of the UW-Extension St. Croix Basin Educator.

My work with TMTTR was valued by my project partners and UW-Extension colleagues. I was recommended for an award from the Superintendent of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. My work on TMTTR and other watershed education projects resulted in being honored by the Wisconsin Association of Environmental Education as the Non-Formal Environmental Educator of the Year in 2010. One UW-Extension colleague who organized service-learning projects in her county appreciated TMTTR because she had materials that engaged youth and community partners in learning about and helping the local water resources (Exhibit 12).

The success of the TMTTR service-learning projects helped me realize how many parts of my youth development Plans of Work weave together, especially service-learning and youth-adult partnerships. They also fit in well with the goals of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) Team that I have been a member of since its inception in 2007.

In 2008, the 4-H Program Director requested my assistance in writing a 4-H<sub>2</sub>O Replenish grant to involve Wisconsin youth in learning about water conservation and completing water conservation projects. So far with the \$30,000 funding, youth in 14 counties built 307 rain barrels and seven demonstration rain gardens. I engaged youth in both Burnett and Barron Counties in 4-H<sub>2</sub>O Replenish projects. In Burnett County, 4-H youth partnered with the Land & Water Conservation Department to create a rain garden. In Barron County, youth and community members worked with UW-Extension volunteer Master Gardeners to learn about water conservation and build rain barrels for home use.

To help county educators engage local youth in 4-H<sub>2</sub>O Replenish, I revised a Pennsylvania State University 4-H activity guide to produce *Water Conservation in the Home* (Exhibit 13). I adapted TMTTR materials to create *4-H<sub>2</sub>O Replenish: Conducting a Service-Learning Project* (Exhibit 14). To provide information and access to these tools, I produced a 4-H<sub>2</sub>O Replenish page on the Wisconsin 4-H STEM website (Exhibit 15). I shared these resources and funding information during a poster session at the 2010 JCEP conference.

Ian Meeker, Bayfield County 4-H Youth Development Educator, reported in an email to me dated November 8, 2010, that he supplied copies of *Water Conservation in the Home* to 15 4-H members. In discussions with 4-H members, he found the activities helped youth to “understand and reduce their families’ water

consumption.” Meeker also reported that 4-H members installed rain barrels at the county courthouse, the Washburn Middle School garden and the Bayfield High School greenhouse. The 4-H<sub>2</sub>O Replenish project, he wrote, “has definitely increased the 4-H program’s visibility in the community.” I compiled 14 county evaluations into a report provided to the STEM Team during a December 17, 2010 meeting (Exhibit 16).

As I have worked with service-learning projects over the past few years, I have intentionally incorporated the concepts of environmental sensitivity, sense of place and science inquiry, in the hope of creating environmental stewards of the future. These are concepts with which I have worked extensively in past jobs or currently with the 4-H STEM Team. I shared my thoughts and examples in a presentation at the 2010 CES Conference (Exhibit 17). Judy Kennedy and Donna Duerst, 4-H Youth Development colleagues, were both in attendance. In an email dated November 29, 2010, Kennedy said of the presentation, “I have not concentrated on environmental education, but your workshop started me thinking about ways to get youth outside, incorporate STEM, provide an exceptional learning opportunity, and develop a real partnership for service-learning.” Duerst, in an email dated November 30, 2010, wrote, “I’ve always been a huge advocate of the value of service learning, but your presentation really expanded my concept of that value in terms of environmental stewardship. Also as a result of your presentation, I am more aware of how science inquiry can be utilized as a tool in service-learning.” Both colleagues reported intentionally incorporating at least one of the three concepts in their planning for future service-learning projects.

I am also encouraging environmental learning through a pilot project to deliver volunteer development trainings through video. Using a series of ten videos covering risk management, canoeing basics and ways to teach canoeing skills to youth, the pilot project teaches 4-H leaders how to engage youth in canoeing (Exhibit 18). My role in this team effort of five 4-H Youth Development colleagues has been to take part in writing scripts, filming and acting, and gathering feedback on videos. This approach to train 4-H volunteers is in an evaluation stage. The videos are available on the internet, with accompanying factsheets to complete the resource currently in production.

**Value: INCLUSIVENESS. We recognize, appreciate and honor the contributions of all people...**

### **Appreciating the Contributions of At-Risk Youth**

Youth at risk can be defined as those who are exposed to factors that may increase their tendency to engage in problem or delinquent behaviors. Twenty to 25 at-risk youth attend the Burnett County Alternative Learning Center (ALC). These youth, for various reasons, are not successful in the regular high school setting. Their goal is to earn a high school diploma. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction data shows that in the 2007-2008 school year, the three high schools in the county had an average graduation rate of 89.0%. The overall Wisconsin rate was 89.6%, making Burnett County as a whole fall under average. Siren High School alone was a full five points under the state average. Youth who drop out of high school have lower lifetime earning levels, higher unemployment, and a greater likelihood for criminal involvement.<sup>3</sup>

The ALC Director requested youth development programming to help students with basic life skills. I created a lesson plan and materials for five sessions with the youth. Based on his observations of ALC students, the Director requested lessons focused on communication, motivation and conflict resolution (Exhibit 19).

Students were able to earn one high school credit for attending my life skills sessions. I used YouTube videos to turn their attention to various topics, and made the sessions as interactive as possible with role play, drawing, and active discussion. At the end of the sessions, I provided an online survey to get feedback from

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<sup>3</sup> McNeal, R. (1997). *High school dropouts: A closer examination of school effects*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 78,210-222.

them. Sixteen students provided feedback via the online tool. Seventy-five percent agreed that they think about their life goals more than before the classes, and 62% agreed that they learned something new about themselves. Youth indicated that they learned how to handle relationships better, understand their personal values more, and made changes in their lives because of what they learned in the life skills sessions (Exhibit 20).

Working with the students at the ALC was an unanticipated learning experience. Most of the youth were surprisingly open about their lives. I heard stories from teen mothers, youth whose parents were on drugs or on drugs themselves, homeless youth who “couch-surfed” at homes of friends and relatives, and boys who bragged about fighting. I also heard stories of what some of them wanted to do with their lives: own nice cars and houses, own their own businesses, and travel. Even though they had many difficulties to overcome, these youth were trying their best to earn a high school diploma rather than drop out of school. In my opinion, each one has the potential for positive contributions to society, and the life skills they learned at the ALC can help them succeed.

**Value: RELATIONSHIPS. We foster positive relationships through honesty and open communication...**

### **Revitalizing and Strengthening 4-H Through Volunteers**

When I started in Burnett County, I felt that the morale of the adult leaders was low due to a series of short-term agents in the position. One leader even told me within my first week that I would not be there long. While her attitude was discouraging, I knew that over time I could earn the trust of the dedicated people that led their 4-H program. I believe that trust began to develop when leaders saw that I worked to help them be more successful.

#### Tools

4-H leaders and families in Burnett County are better informed about their program opportunities, policies and procedures. I engaged a group of adult leaders in writing a *Family Handbook* and improving an *Award Guidelines* booklet (Exhibit 21). On a 2009 questionnaire regarding county 4-H publications, four out of five club leaders (100% response rate for clubs) indicated that in their opinion, Burnett County 4-H had adequate tools to assist members with county procedures, and that they as leaders had input into the development of those tools.

In Barron County, I find that many of the same tools have either fallen out of date or have never existed. General confusion about current policies and procedures creates conflicting information. I have collected feedback from club leaders regarding the 4-H Record Book and awards processes, to start, and provided the information to the Leaders Council and various committees (Exhibit 22). As was the case in Burnett County, my strategy is to include many leaders in decision-making processes in order to foster relationships not only between 4-H volunteers and the UW-Extension office, but between the volunteers themselves.

#### Junior Leaders Association

The Junior Leaders Association is a 4-H group for youth ages 12 and over, meant to provide members with opportunities for skill development beyond their 4-H club and among peers. Burnett County Junior Leaders had problems with membership and adult advisors. Frustration was evident in discussions I had with youth and adults about the group. The youth and their adult advisors decided to shorten meetings, form committees to accomplish tasks, and focus on promotion of 4-H opportunities for younger youth and having fun as a teen group.

These changes started when I facilitated a SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges) process with thirteen Junior Leaders in 2007 in an attempt to discover the issues that kept the organization from

becoming the opportunity for youth leadership that it was meant to be. While participants felt that they could experience leadership, community service and working together, they wanted more participation. They felt that that communication and scheduling conflicts were problems, as well as a lack of motivation and support from adults. Although youth decided to restrict parental involvement in meeting, continuing problems prompted me to put together recommendations for the future of the Junior Leaders (Exhibit 23). These recommendations were shared with two adult advisors who helped the Junior Leaders decide upon and implement changes.

I also encouraged the teens to become leaders on levels beyond the county 4-H program. This led to one youth serving on the state 4-H Press Team. In 2008, Junior Leaders successfully petitioned the Leaders Association to help them pay costs for attending the State Fair to work at the Activity Stations. This has since become an annual event for Burnett County teens.

### Summer Camp

In 2007, 4-H Summer Camp in Burnett County was slated to be discontinued due to ongoing problems with leadership. Today it is a thriving and successful camp experience. Teen counselors, who were not formally trained before 2007, now have a camp counselor handbook (Exhibit 24) and training sessions. In addition, they plan and conduct camp activities. The role of Camp Director has been filled by an adult volunteer since 2007, and an Assistant Director position has been created and filled by older youth.

Annual evaluations of Camp Counselor Training sessions show that the youth gained knowledge in the areas of expectations, responsibilities, safety, and problem-solving. Youth found the training sessions and Counselor Handbook to be valuable, and were able to reflect upon their skills and performance (Exhibit 25). I shared my counselor handbook with the Northern District 4-H Youth Development educators at inservices focusing on camping programs, and provided electronic copies to Washburn and Barron Counties upon request.

I recruited a volunteer who had previous camp leadership roles to serve as Camp Director, and worked with her to plan camp, train counselors, and work with other camp volunteers. While we were planning for the second year of camp in this format and discussing possible changes, the Camp Director communicated her positive feelings towards camp via email (Exhibit 26). In 2010, when UW-Extension Burnett County was without a 4-H Youth Development Agent, this volunteer planned camp and trained counselors on her own.

An annual *Camper Guide* for parents to take home when they left their children at camp promoted trust (Exhibit 27). After the first year's camp, I created and mailed a Parent Survey to parents of all the campers. Of the eleven parents that responded, nine found the *Camper Guide* to be useful to them. Comments included: "Made me feel comfortable with what they were going to do;" "I like seeing an organized schedule, it lets me know that activities are planned and rules are followed;" "Enjoyed knowing their daily schedule;" and "I thought it was informative, especially for those parents that have new campers."

Putting Summer Camp in the trained and therefore capable hands of volunteers resulted in a fun and educational experience for campers. Of the 59 participants over three years of summer camp (2007-2009) who completed post-camp surveys, 68% rated camp as "great," 29% rated camp as "ok," and only 3% said it was "not so good."

Working with the youth and adult volunteers in summer camp was an experience that helped me grow greatly as a youth development educator. This was an area that I could really observe the growth of confidence and use of knowledge by the people I educated and advised. I moved these experiences with me to Barron in 2010 to run a successful summer camp.

### Vision-To-Action

Vision-To-Action is a method of planning which engages an organization's members in a participatory process. I organized a Vision-To-Action workshop in Burnett County in January of 2009, in which 26 youth and adults discussed the present and future opportunities offered by their 4-H program. I opened the workshop by providing information on 4-H trends (Exhibit 28). The state 4-H Volunteer Specialist, our facilitator for the day, led us in writing goals and action plans. I provided written workshop proceedings to all of the participants and revisited it often at monthly Leaders Association meetings.

Adult and youth 4-H members formed two new committees after the Vision-to-Action workshop. The work of these committees resulted in at least 20 new 4-H members. Youth presented this success and their thoughts on how 4-H impacts their lives to County Board Supervisors at a County Board meeting. I asked participants of the Vision-to-Action process to evaluate their experiences a year after the initial workshop. One youth confirmed he felt he was a valued member of his committee, and stated that 4-H had improved over 2009 because he saw "many young new members" in his 4-H club. Adults participating in the survey reported involving youth more in working towards goals since the Vision-to-Action workshop. An adult leader wrote that youth strengthen the committee "with their enthusiasm."

By using two annual Leaders Association meetings in 2010 as a venue for volunteer development, I have attempted to keep issues found in Barron County's 2009 Vision-to-Action process and 2008 listening sessions in the forefront of planning for the future of the organization (Exhibit 29).

### **Value: RESPECT. We honor and value each other's time and talents...**

Educator, facilitator, advisor, mentor, revitalizer, partner, trainer, opportunity creator, cheerleader, capacity builder, catalyst for change, mediator... Over the past four years as a 4-H Youth Development Educator, I found myself wearing these many hats.

At my final 4-H Leaders Association meeting in Burnett County, the leaders gave me a framed document entitled, "Because of You..." One of the volunteers had asked others to finish that sentence, then compiled them. While some of them are fun and goofy, here is a sampling of those showing true impact:

"Because of You..."

- I am more confident and persistent in what I do.
- My overall 4-H experience has been enhanced.
- I have shown more leadership in my club.
- I have embraced 4-H opportunities.
- We have a vision (V2A).
- Burnett County is more knowledgeable about the St. Croix Watershed and how to keep it clean.
- Summer camp will never be the same again.
- We have a county 4-H organization we can be proud of.

When I read these, I am proud of my work in Burnett County. By respecting the knowledge and skills of the youth and volunteer 4-H Leaders, I was able to transform the 4-H community into a group with a vision for the future. I helped create the Adolescent AODA Prevention Coalition, which is continuing to make Burnett County a safer place for youth. At-risk youth examined and improved their communication, relationship and conflict management skills, which may help them in their quest to succeed in life. Adults now value youth voices for community growth and success, and hands-on experiences helped people see their connections to their natural environment. In Barron County, the 4-H program is moving forward as I apply my experiences and continue this exciting and challenging work.