



COVID-19 RESPONSE



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Positive Youth Development

The Positive Youth Development Institute prepares the youth of today to become effective, empathetic leaders of tomorrow. Our research-based programs give young people the hands-on experiences they need to develop an understanding of themselves and the world. From teens advising local government to Wisconsin 4-H clubs, we offer diverse educational opportunities that put youth on the path to success in Wisconsin and beyond. Extension faculty, researchers, staff, and educators with a Positive Youth Development focus responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in a variety of ways to continue our mission to build strong social support networks for youth, provide opportunities for youth to explore careers and post-secondary pathways, and offer multiple opportunities for youth leadership and youth voice across Wisconsin communities.

Maintaining missions through virtual connection

Local governments, nonprofits, professional organizations, volunteers, and youth leaders have struggled with technical barriers, online facilitation capacity, and limited access to timely information to maintain their work without in-person communication. The Positive Youth Development Institute (PYD) supports 4-H programs and many other community programs important for learning, mutual support, and contribution to the overall community. PYD quickly adapted modes of program delivery, training materials, and communication strategies to support the volunteers and partners who lead youth programs and offered resources for youth to learn and lead from home.

How Extension responded

Supporting Youth Leadership

Youth play important leadership roles in many community settings, where they take actions that benefit communities and their own positive development. COVID-19 disrupted these settings, and Extension worked to provide alternative methods to engage and support Wisconsin's youth. These methods helped youth respond to unforeseen community needs related to the current crisis in new ways providing opportunities for personal growth and enrichment.

Examples of this include:

- A community service project for many 4-H clubs

where they make and donate cloth face coverings to the community to help raise awareness of the importance of face coverings and reducing the stigma of masks.

- A series of online training programs for 4-H and FFA youth project members in which they prepared presentations and practiced online training best practices to confidently educate other youth with project area information using online meetings.
- Zoom meetings for Teen Court panel members in which youth planned recruiting strategies for new panelists during a time of school closures due to COVID-19 to produce a recruiting plan and generate applications.

Preparing Volunteers

Annually, Extension-supported volunteers provide 700,000 hours of service to communities across Wisconsin. To ensure volunteers receive the training and support they need to continue their valuable work, Extension educators created support resources and facilitated online trainings. Additionally, Extension staff supported partners by providing technical and facilitation assistance. This resulted in stronger connections and efficient work in service of communities.

Examples of this include:

- In partnership with Centro Hispano Youth Programs, staff created a series of videos and live

digital events for Latinx youth to prepare them for the transition to digital school and the changes in education for the upcoming school year.

- Virtual meetings for 4-H education committees to learn Zoom application features to hold more efficient virtual meetings in the future.
- An online event was held to provide a platform for volunteers to practice facilitating effective, high-quality 4-H scholarship interviews online.

Addressing emotional and social effects of isolation

Youth have been disconnected from important spaces such as school, work, and youth organizations where they rely on and maintain social relationships with both peers and adults, receive support, and learn and grow. The effects of this disconnection may interact with family environments, mental health circumstances, and the capacity of those supportive organizations to provide connections during physical distancing.

How Extension responded

Building Supportive Relationships

PYD addressed social isolation and provided programming designed to meet youth needs for connection, foster supportive peer and youth-adult relationships, and support volunteers to reach youth.

Examples of this include:

- A series of 4-H youth Zoom performances for the elderly/shut-ins/nursing homes where youth performed vocal/instrumental/readings to provide an opportunity to share their Arts Fest entries.
- A pen pal project for youth in K-3rd grade where young people practice reading and writing skills to create and build new relationships during this time of physical distancing.
- An online Lego Club where youth of all ages meet to learn building techniques, get challenges, and share their builds to ensure youth feel connected to others in a safe and caring environment during this time of physical distancing.
- An online club where youth of all ages meet to share their artwork, both incomplete and completed projects, to share ideas, and offer social connection to others in a safe and caring environment during this time of physical distancing.

IN-DEPTH

Conversations for youth around race, equity and diversity



Wisconsin 4-H International Programs host students from around the world. The global pandemic brought a need to respond to the increased discrimination and prejudice faced by Asians and Asian Americans. UW–Madison Division of Extension staff hosted a remote Zoom workshop, “Social Impacts of COVID-19 Conversations” for select groups of 4-H youth leaders and adult volunteers. The conversations provided a safe space for participants from across the state to learn about this discrimination together, and to encourage them to talk about what they learned with friends and family to increase awareness. According to participant evaluations, most felt they had a greater understanding of how the terms stigma, xenophobia and racist nativism are connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most participants also stated they are now very or somewhat more comfortable discussing discrimination and xenophobia with members of their community.

“The platform of 4-H allows for young leaders to speak up about their feelings on the issues happening in the drastically changing world and hear the opinions and feelings of other youth leaders around the state.”

- Wisconsin 4-H member

One result of the COVID-19 Conversations, is that a group of staff have come together to plan and prepare for additional conversations for youth around race, equity and diversity.

Learners have limited access to safe and engaging learning resources and activities

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning in schools and forced teachers, caregivers, and youth group leaders to switch their education to online means. During this challenging and uncertain time, families worked to provide education to children at home and may not have had the tools or resources to keep them engaged in learning.

How Extension responded

Adapting Learning Resources

There was an increased need for science-based and educationally sound teaching materials and safe outdoor activities that students, adults, and Extension staff created across the state.

Examples of this include:

- Wisconsin 4-H posted home activities online. More than 5,000 users viewed these materials. Users have accessed Wisconsin 4-H sewing curriculum for making cloth face coverings more than 1,000 times and it's featured on a national 4-H website.

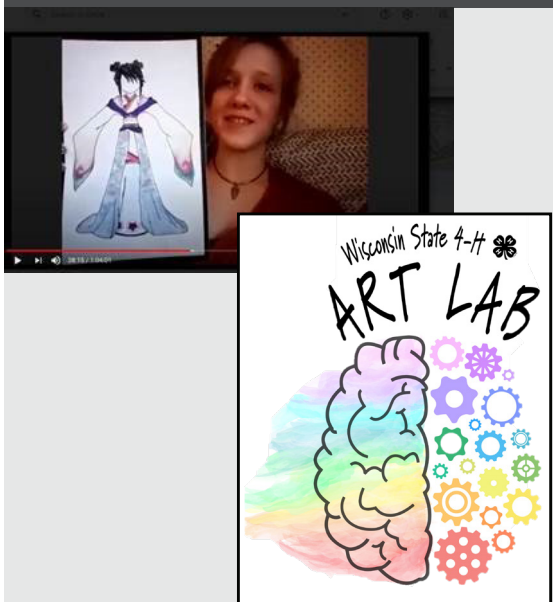
- Extension staff provided at-home educational kits for families with children that guide them through activities related to STEM, creativity, problem solving and community service, to support families with quality learning and reducing stress while staying at home.
- An Extension specialist in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences coordinated virtual farm tours of the UW–Madison research farms focusing on science and care of animals, lessons on growing and sustaining plants for animals, and career exploration of post-secondary opportunities in these areas. Between the live tours and recorded YouTube videos, they have been viewed more than 3,000 times. Social media posts had a reach of more than 42,000.

Helping youth navigate disruption to life transitions

Youth graduating from high school and post-secondary institutions this spring are entering an uncertain and difficult economy. The lack of opportunities facing youth—those young adults not engaged in full time work or school—have been significant for many years and they will confront new barriers to finding their way to productive pathways.

IN-DEPTH

Continuing a tradition of art in times of physical distancing



“Art Lab Extended” builds on a January in-person learning experience and provides an opportunity for high-school aged youth across Wisconsin to be involved in conversations about art, community, and future careers through virtual video conferences. More than 75 youth have participated in sessions including “Careers in Art + Sharing Art from Home,” a fun and educational hour of interactive art activities and discussions with professionals about their careers in the arts. “Art In Isolation” was hosted by the Wisconsin 4-H Art Team to “explore ways to do art at home, lead an activity to create community art together, and guide us to inspire each other with art we have created during this time of physical distancing.”

How Extension responded

Post-Secondary Pathways

Extension staff moved programming online to help youth explore options, make new connections, and prepare for post-secondary education and career pathways.

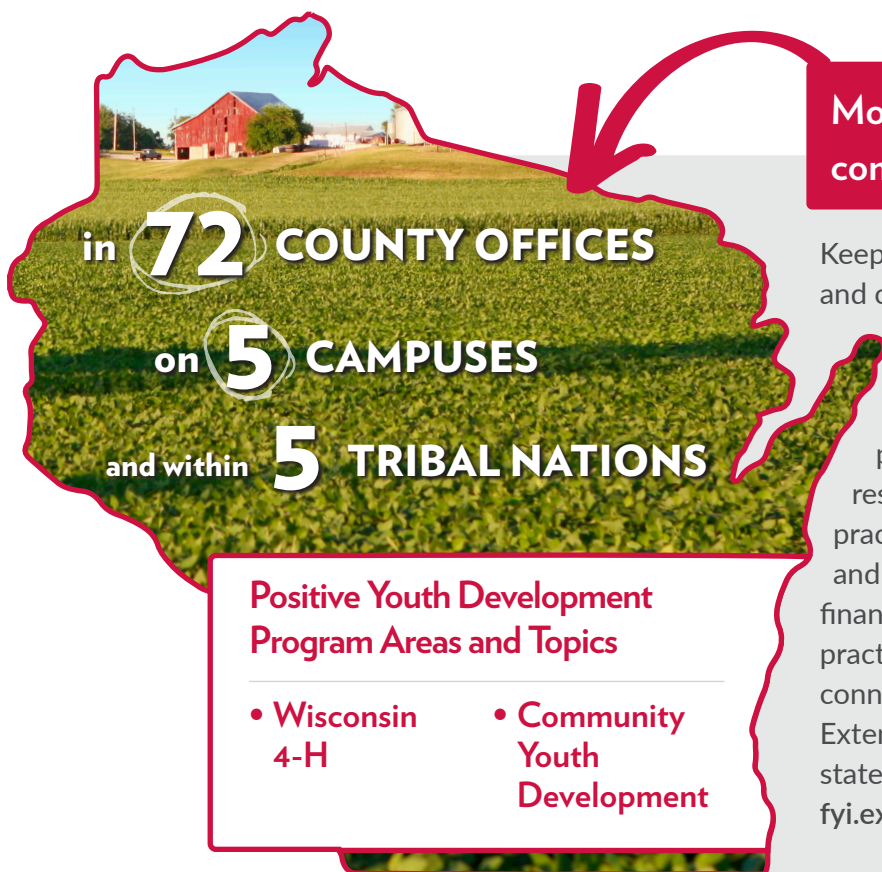
Examples of this include:

- An “after school” class was created to help youth in grades 2-5 explore post-secondary careers in the food industry and prepare healthy items.
- A multi-week online educational series, where high school students can meet and interact with numerous real world scientists, designed to expand youths’ breadth of understanding about and interest in diverse science career options.
- An evening of interviews for 4-H seniors, where Extension staff facilitated Zoom interviews for scholarship applicants and the Trust Fund Scholarship committee to provide older youth with an opportunity to experience a virtual interview and the scholarship committee with an opportunity to interview this year’s applicants.

IN-DEPTH

Recognizing graduating 4-H club members

PYD programs build lifelong connections between youth and adult community members. Sharing and celebrating youth accomplishments is important to us. To recognize graduating 4-H club members and Teen Court Panelists in Buffalo and Pepin counties, PYD educators developed senior profiles and shared them individually on social media. The posts reached hundreds of stakeholders, communicating the value of individual 4-H experiences for young people in our community. The survey used to develop the profiles also served as an evaluation tool illustrating the impact 4-H had on long-standing members.



More ways we're helping businesses, communities, youth, and families

Keeping a focus on our values to transform lives and communities, UW-Madison Extension is leading businesses, communities, youth, and families in the response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We are uniquely positioned across the state to link university research to those in need of guidance and practical resources. Extension staff in counties and tribal nations are making connections to financial aid and instruction, providing best practices for emerging needs, and reinforcing connections for healthy communities. To see how Extension responded to COVID-19 across the state and across program areas, visit fyi.extension.wisc.edu/covid19/impacts.