



EXTENSION IMPACT

Wisconsin 4-H Supports Thriving Youth

Young people in every community need experiences where they are engaged in learning activities that are meaningful to them and where they find the support of caring adults and peers. Extension research shows that this provides the foundation to develop to their full potential and become active members of society in adulthood. High-quality youth development programs can mitigate the lack of other social and economic supports and are critical for a generation of youth experiencing mental health and other challenges.

In response, Extension provides opportunities for youth to develop and explore interests in a safe environment, develop supportive relationships with peers and caring adults, and to experience opportunities for leadership. Our 4-H program in Wisconsin reaches over 22,000 youth club members in addition to youth who participate through partnerships with other organizations. In 2021, the program operated statewide through over 900 community and school-based clubs in 71 Wisconsin counties; 7,093 adult 4-H volunteers joined young people in activities in 2021.

4-H programs are designed to put youth on a “thriving trajectory” defined by six outcomes:

- growth mindset;
- openness to challenge and discovery;
- hopeful purpose;
- pro-social orientation;
- positive emotionality; and
- goal management.

Youth on a “thriving trajectory” are more likely to achieve other developmental outcomes such as positive academic attitudes, social competence, personal standards and responsibilities, and connection with and contribution to others. Extension’s volunteer-led program achieves these outcomes by offering young people opportunities

to explore their interests—also known as “sparks”—through hands-on learning experiences with supportive peers and adults. The 4-H program model emphasizes youth-adult partnership, youth leadership, fostering a sense of belonging, and challenging youth to explore educational content that appeals to their individual interests.

Extension helps youth strengthen positive behaviors, resulting in stronger academic orientation, personal character, and community connections.

Wisconsin 4-H monitors and evaluates program quality and the program outcomes using an annual survey of 4-H members. The 2021 WI Youth Survey was completed by 25% of our 10,000 youth club members and it confirms that Extension’s 4-H program is offering high-quality experiences for youth that result in positive youth development outcomes for any youth who participates. Overall, 76% of the youth felt that 4-H gave them the opportunity to “explore something they really care about.” An additional 80% said that adults in 4-H “invest time in me,” and 87% say adults and youth in 4-H “expect me to do something positive with my future”. Our evaluation also showed that the 4-H experience had a strong impact on young people’s self-confidence and ability to build positive relationships: 92% of 4-H youth surveyed stated that “it is important for me to be a role model for others.” An additional 90% of youth said that through the program, they “feel connected to others in my community.” These connections are the building blocks of active citizenship and positive community contribution throughout a lifetime.

Wisconsin 4-H is part of Extension’s Positive Youth Development Institute. Learn more by visiting 4h.extension.wisc.edu.

in 2021



22,000+
youth enrolled in
Wisconsin 4-H clubs



13,000+
educational contacts
with 4-H volunteers



900+
community &
school-based clubs



Extension
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