

Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development leadership programs: Youth benefit



Today's employers are placing more and more importance on applied skills, according to the 2006 *"Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century Workforce"* study conducted by several business and workforce non-profit organizations. The study showed that companies value skills like teamwork and collaboration, oral communication and professionalism in new workers across all education levels.

The 4-H Experience

Participation in leadership activities can help youth strengthen their skills in areas like public speaking and communication, teamwork,

conflict resolution and more, skills that are increasingly important to employers. Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development and University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension youth programs offer many opportunities for youth to be involved in leadership activities. Within 4-H Youth Development, youth can become club officers, join county committees, serve as camp counselors and join state teams and more. There are many other leadership opportunities available to youth, including some within Cooperative Extension, like being on a community coalition, serving as a teen court panelist or acting as a local government representative.

In the fall of 2010, Wisconsin 4-H youth Development surveyed a random sample of

nearly 300 youth involved in 4-H and other Cooperative Extension youth activities. The youth were asked to define which (if any) leadership opportunities they took part in, how long they participated and how they felt the leadership activities impacted them.

Leadership Outcomes

The survey results indicated that 63 percent of respondents had participated in a leadership activity within 4-H Youth Development or Cooperative Extension youth programs, including serving as a 4-H club officer, 4-H county committee member, teen court panelist and local government representative. Many youth responded that they were involved in two or more leadership activities at one time.

Youth involved in leadership activities in Wisconsin 4-H and Cooperative Extension programs engaged in leadership practices more frequently because of their involvement. Most frequently, youth reported that they worked as a group or team and worked in cooperation or partnership with an adult; 69 percent said they worked as part of a group once a month or more, while 62 percent reported working in partnership with an adult once a month or more. Other activities that many surveyed youth reported doing once a month or more include engaging in service for the benefit of others, making decisions that affect a community or group and advising younger children or peers.

Survey respondents were also asked how their experiences in leadership activities – within 4-H and Cooperative Extension as well as other activities – contributed to their abilities across a range of behaviors: social competency, leadership efficacy and teamwork.

Leadership Lifeskills

The survey measured the impacts



A Year in the Life of a 4-H Youth Leader

In a typical year, a Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development youth leader will:

Plan or act to change something within the community or a program about 12 times.

Guide, train or advise younger children and peers more than six times.

Work in cooperation with an adult more than five times.

Lead meetings or project activities and work as part of a group three or four times.

Learn about and practice conflict resolution two or three times.

Learn and practice public speaking two times.

of leadership on youth social skills in areas of teamwork, inclusiveness, communication, organization and problem-solving. Sixty-four percent of youth said their experience in leadership activities had improved their teamwork abilities quite a bit or a great deal; 63 percent reported a similar impact on their inclusiveness and respect for people, thoughts and ideas different from their own.

- “One of the most important things I have learned through 4-H is how to not only be a great leader but a follower, too,” one youth said. “I think that people get caught up in always trying to lead, but it is also important to take time to listen to other people. You need to take time to benefit from other peoples’ experiences.”

Nearly 60 percent of youth responded that their leadership experiences had improved their skills in communication as well as in planning and organizing; nearly half reported increased skills in decision-making and problem-solving because of their participation in leadership programs.

- One surveyed youth said, “I am now able to confidently stand up in front of a group of people and talk to them and get my message across. 4-H has greatly improved my communication skills and public speaking skills.”

Leadership Confidence

In the area of leadership efficacy, an average of 67 percent of youth reported their leadership experience helped them take responsibility for doing a job, recognize their personal leadership strengths and improve their leadership skills a great deal.

Community Connectedness

The survey also measured how

leadership activities influenced community connectedness; 83 percent of youth reported feeling more connected to their community, and 77 percent said their leadership activity made them feel more important to the community.

- “I am more aware of community service needs and have the ability as a leader to work with the community now,” one respondent said.

Seventy-nine percent said their leadership practice motivated them to work with others to improve their communities.

- “The knowledge that I come away with from 4-H will allow me to continue to be an active participant within the community, whether this be in a leadership role or a sponsorship/mentoring role,” said another survey participant.

With more than 12,900 youth ages 11-19 involved in Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development and Cooperative Extension leadership activities, these youth programs continue to impact Wisconsin’s future leaders. Survey responses indicate that 82 percent of 11 to 19-year-old 4-H members in Wisconsin have taken a leadership role in their clubs and community. With nearly 13,000 4-H members enrolled in this age

range, this is a lot of kids who are developing skills for the present and future benefit of families, employers and communities.

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4-H YD Contributed a Great Deal or Somewhat

