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## UWEX AmeriCorps\*VISTA Success Story

### TrailBlazers

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“It was fun and I learned a lot of new things.”  
-TrailBlazer

The 4-H TrailBlazers program had a great summer full of fun activities and interactive lessons with area youth. TrailBlazers enjoyed their time in the program so much that they are already asking about next summer’s program. TrailBlazers is a 4-H group that takes kids on bike rides to various locations around Iron County to promote healthy lifestyles and encourage them to explore the area they live in. During our seven sessions, which spanned six weeks, the kids gained new skills and knowledge that will help them to live healthier, more active lifestyles. Our goals throughout the program were to encourage the kids to be more active, make healthier eating choices, expose them to more reading and math in the summer, and teach them about other healthy habits.

Each TrailBlazers session began at the Iron County Courthouse, where the Iron County UW-Extension office is located, at 9am, and we returned around 3pm. We started each session by stretching, and explained to the kids why it is important to do so. On one occasion, we had almost forgotten to go through our stretching routine, until the TrailBlazers reminded us. This showed us that they were taking our lessons seriously, and were committed to their new healthy habits. After stretching we would begin our bike ride, which ranged from 6-14 miles. Once we reached our destination for the day, the kids would remain active through swimming, hiking, frisbee, playing on playgrounds, and games like capture the flag.

We also taught the TrailBlazers about healthy eating habits. We did this through lessons on the topic that included games, displays, and MyPlate handouts. To teach the kids about nutrition labels and how to use them to make smart eating choices, we played a variation of the

card game “war” using nutrition labels instead of cards. One TrailBlazer wrote in her journal that the game was her favorite part of the day. In our program evaluation, 86% of the TrailBlazers said that they had a better understanding of nutrition labels, and knew how to use them to make healthy choices because of the program. Drinking enough water is a big part of a healthy diet, so that is something we also tried to encourage the TrailBlazers to do. Over 50% wrote in their journals that one of their personal goals was to drink more water. They also learned about choosing water over sugary drinks. We explained that 4 grams of sugar was equal to 1 teaspoon, and showed them the sugar content of some popular drinks, such as Coca-Cola and Monster. Our last nutritional goal was to teach the kids about MyPlate so that they could use the information to make healthier choices. In the program evaluations, over 50% of TrailBlazers said that they had a better understanding of the food groups, and could now pack healthier lunches.

To help prevent summer learning loss, each TrailBlazer filled out a journal at the end of each session. They answered questions about what they learned, what their goal for next time was, how they planned to achieve that goal, and what their favorite part of the day was. This kept them reading and writing regularly throughout the summer. Two other questions in the journals were their total miles for the day and their total miles for the summer in TrailBlazers. Making these calculations, along with others during games and lessons, kept them practicing their math skills.

While staying active, making healthy food choices, and preventing summer learning loss were our main goals with the TrailBlazers program, we also took the time to address other topics we felt were important. These things included water safety, sun safety, biking safety, and tree identification. As a certified lifeguard, Adrienne was able to teach the kids about staying safe in the water before we first took them swimming. After a brief lesson on sun safety, two TrailBlazers wrote in their journals that they had learned that there are two types of rays (UVA and UVB), one wrote that they learned that sunscreen can expire, and another wrote that she learned about the UV index and its range. As a biking group, we felt it was necessary to teach the kids about staying safe while biking and proper bike maintenance. We had a local man who works at a bike shop come to one of the sessions to talk to the kids about things like changing a tire, greasing a chain, and checking breaks. He demonstrated each of these things as well, so that the kids could understand them better. We also taught the kids how to identify various trees in our area, which three TrailBlazers wrote about in their journals.

We feel that the TrailBlazers program was a success, as it had proven, positive impacts on the kids involved. The skills and information that they learned this summer will help them to live healthy, active lifestyles long after our program. We could see the TrailBlazers growing and improving in each of our goal areas, while having fun at the same time. Some of the final comments from the TrailBlazers on the program evaluation included, “I learned how much water to drink, and to wear sunscreen and eat healthy snacks,” and, “It was fun and good exercise.” These comments helped show us that our goals had been achieved.



“I liked learning through hands on games like jeopardy, rather than a lecture.”-TrailBlazer

Here is a link to an article in our local paper, The Daily Globe, about TrailBlazers before the start of the program:

<http://www.yourdailyglobe.com/story/2013/06/24/news/local-youth-lend-helping-hands-in-ironcounty/785.html>