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UWEX AmeriCorps*VISTA Success Story

By Cassie Olson, VISTA Member

Weekly STEM Program Helps Prevent Summer Learning Loss

Situation: The Black River Child Care

Center in Black River Falls, Wisconsin provides summer programming to children ages 1-12 in the surrounding area. These children participate in daily programs that aim to retain knowledge that would otherwise be lost throughout the summer months. Center administrators identified a need for additional assistance in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education.

Response: For several years, the UW-Extension in Jackson County has provided weekly 4-H programming for school age youth attending the Black River Child Care Center. As an AmeriCorps VISTA this summer, I was able to provide a weekly, one-hour 4-H program focused on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematic) education to fourteen students ages 5-7. I reviewed the programs offered at the daycare, and noticed a significant lack in science programming. I responded by focusing my programs on scientific concepts that were appropriate for the age group. I noticed the group truly enjoyed hands-on, discovery activities, so I began to develop activities that would encourage self-discovery and personal development.

Results: One activity I led allowed the students to explore chemical reactions. Students put baking soda in a balloon and vinegar in a plastic bottle. They quickly discovered the reaction caused by mixing the ingredients would inflate the balloons, and proceeded to test their hypotheses. The students exhibited pride and confidence in their discoveries, which carried through the remainder of my weekly programs. I was able to see this as I returned every week, and the students utilized their knowledge from previous weeks' lessons in what I was currently presenting. Students were able to draw conclusions to develop their own hypotheses within activities. From their discoveries, they were able to learn the concepts and meet the objectives of my programs. The pride they gained

through their discoveries aided in their classroom confidence, leading to a willingness not only to learn, but to share their learning with their peers.

Evidence: There was evidence of this in one student's willingness to lead an activity during one of my final visits to the daycare. I was leading a lesson on motion and energy utilizing parachutes. During one of my demonstrations, a student offered to lead the group in an activity he had participated in in the past. I let him describe and demonstrate his activity before the group participated, and was very proud of his leadership within the classroom. The success of my programming at the Black River Child Care Center can be evaluated by the personal development that was exhibited by the students I worked with. Their enthusiasm and the deductive reasoning they used throughout my programs tell me that the students retained their knowledge through my STEM programming that they otherwise would have lost.