

UWEX AmeriCorps VISTA Success Story

Jackson County

**By Cassie Olson,
Summer VISTA**

Mentoring Teen Results in Student Leadership Development

Situation:

The Ho-Chunk Nation provides a Youth Work Experience program that allows teens in the Ho-Chunk Nation community to gain job skills training and on-the-job work experience. These students are placed in businesses and organizations that are related to their interest areas.

Response:

This year, one 14-year-old student of the Ho-Chunk Nation was placed at the UW-Extension Jackson County office. As an AmeriCorps VISTA this summer, I was able to mentor and directly work with this teen while providing weekly STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematic) education to students ages 5-7 at the Black River Child Care Center. Together we discussed potential programs and the objectives we hoped to meet while providing our weekly lessons.

Results:

The summer began with an introductory program in which we did name games and ice breakers. Before going to the daycare, I mentioned to the intern that she was more than welcome to take the lead on any activity she felt comfortable with. She was incredibly hesitant, and openly admitted that it was not something she thought she would be able to do. Throughout the summer, we slowly integrated her ideas and strengths into our programs. As the intern noticed that her small successes had a large impact on the overall success of the presentations, she became increasingly comfortable with leading activities and presenting in front of a group. I noticed her self-confidence improve when she talked of how proud she was of particular responses to her activities.

Evidence:

The largest source of evidence came from our last trip to the daycare. In our planning for that week's activity, I asked her what she wanted the topic to be on. The daycare had

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a theme for the week, which was “Under the Sea”, and from that, the intern decided she wanted the program to be about jelly fish. She found a pair of activities she felt were applicable to the theme and could provide some science concepts. I told her that I would lead one of the activities, but asked if she was comfortable with leading one on her own that time. To my surprise, she was more than willing to take on the project. She gathered her own materials for the program, and made her own agenda for presenting the information. I was incredibly impressed with the results. On our final visit, the intern not only presented the information she had planned for, but took questions on her own as well. Her boost in self-confidence, personal leadership, and communication skills tell me that our teamwork and mentorship throughout the summer had an impact on her experience while interning with the UW-Extension office in Jackson County.

