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UWEX AmeriCorps*VISTA Success Story

By Garrett Aleckson, VISTA Member

Outreach Increases 4-H Awareness and Healthy Habits

Situation: The UW-Extension Office and Boys and Girls Club teamed up to lead 4-H programs and garner interest in 4-H from the Boys and Girls Club youth members. Many youth in Jackson County are not aware of 4-H opportunities, and many others have misconceptions about what 4-H is about.

Also, prior to the start of my service, I became aware of a week that had a "Get Fit Week" theme. In order to be better prepared for this specific week, I found a couple of situational statistics from the 2013 County Health Rankings:

- Jackson County has a significantly higher rate of limited access to healthy foods than the state or national rates (14% vs. 5% and 1% respectively).
- 25% of Jackson County residents are considered physically inactive (as compared with 23% at the state level and 21% at the national level).

These statistics would help give perspective as I planned activities for the "Get Fit Week."

Response: To address this concern, I was hired as part of a plan to increase awareness of 4-H to the youth that attend The Boys and Girls Club, stationed at Black River Falls. The Boys and Girls Club has weekly themes for the Staff to plan related programs for the youth members. I planned to incorporate lessons the youth will use not only in school, but also in their daily life. I planned and led 4-H programs three times per week in order to address the concerns by focusing on STEM and healthy choices related to the weekly themes.

Results: The 4-H Outreach program had shown an impact right away. The youth began showing analytical and critical thinking skills without them even being aware of it. All of

the kids were able to prove that they had remembered and applied what they learned in the programs. They applied healthy habits and exercise habits to their home-life. They also applied good exercise habits to what they did at the Boys and Girls Club. During recess and after lunch, they came and told me that they had been running around more and doing physical activities to get keep them healthy. Since they did this during times when I wasn't leading 4-H programs, this was a significant result from the *Get Fit* themed week at Boys and Girls Club. At the end of each week, I would ask for them to tell me one way that they applied something to their life from what they learned in the 4-H programs, and they all were able to do that.

Evidence: I used different methods to evaluate if the youth had correctly applied the lessons they had learned to their every-day life. The kids have repeated a simple message about 4-H that I had told them. The message was that, "4-H is for everybody." Simple as that! Along with debunking popular myths about 4-H, the kids have applied science to activities they are involved in at Boys and Girls Club. The youth showed the ability to construct something, and then make improvements if needed. I had them make a paper airplane using any style to build them, and then had them fly it, and make improvements if needed. The kids learned to analyze what they constructed, and they learned how to make the necessary adjustments to improve the end product.