

# UWEX AmeriCorps VISTA Success Story

## Jackson County

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Summer VISTA**

The Jackson County 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.

Prior to the start of my service, I became aware that part of my duties as this year's summer VISTA Associate would be to help bring a group of kids to the community garden once a week for one hour to participate in various activities planned by the Master Gardeners. To help prepare myself with this, I found a few statistics from the Jackson County Community Health Assessment of 2010.

- 34% of children had not eaten a green salad in the last 7 days
  - 30% responded saying they had eaten a green salad 1-3 times in the past 7 days
- 9.8% of children also said they had not eaten any fruit within the last 7 days
  - 36.8% of children had eaten fruit 1-3 times in the last 7 days

These statistics helped provide me with perspective as I tried to get kids excited to go to the community garden.

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. Along with planning 4-H activities related to the weekly theme at the club, I also needed to take a group of 10 kids to the community garden one day every week.

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The Community Garden program was a success right away. The youth began thinking about where the fruits and vegetables come from, and how they are harvested. The youth also enjoyed eating various vegetables straight out of the garden (green peas, beans, lettuce). Throughout the summer, the kids would be able to pick some plants from the garden to bring back to the club for snack time in the afternoon. The kids began coming up to me, and telling me that they had their parents get fruits or vegetables from the store, so they could have them more often at home. During the following week, I would ask the kids if they had been eating healthier foods like they pick out of their patch at the garden, and most kids told me that they had.

The community garden is just one program that they enjoyed doing, and learned a lot from. But I also feel that this program will help the kids make changes to positively affect their lives, as well as their families' lives. The kids have learned various important healthy habits that they will hopefully continue to learn, and carry with them as they grow up.