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UWEX AmeriCorps*VISTA Success Story

By Nicole Sackmaster, VISTA Member

My experience working with the 4-H youth as a VISTA was just amazing. I met so many people and made a lot of new friends. I went on many learning adventures and then taught what I learned. I worked with a lot of kids ranging in

age from five to eighteen. The kids in each age bracket taught me something.

One of the first things that really interested me was the "When Art Meets Science Day Camp". That was so much fun and there were so many hands on things that I was learning with the kids. They did everything from creating their own "Junk Sculpture", to creating leather crafts and making their own flower pounding picture. The kids were very excited about doing all of these activities. Some enjoyed it more than others. The kids also got to make bracelets out of stones that were from all over the world. The way each child used their imagination was incredible. Each child had a different outlook on what they could make with anything they did or how they did it. The kids learned a lot of life skills here. Even if one person thinks it's junk, you can use it to make a sculpture to last a life time.

The summer continued with Magic Camp. That was pretty amazing. I have not been camping in over twenty years and it was quite the experience. It had a lot of perks to it. There were many different activities that we did with the kids and each one was unique. We got to experiment with Dry Ice and make Amazing Bubbles with it. That was very cool. I learned with the kids on what could happen with it. The kids enjoyed all the activities also learning the dangers of the dry ice and doing different science experiments with it. We also included a Cloverbud Day Camp for youth in grades K-2. I was leading that. We did many more science experiments. The kids learned about geysers and learned about science and magic. We then took the kids on a nature hike to a creek that was near the camp sites and the kids looked for bugs and insects that were around us. We also had the kids perform all these experiments in front of their family members and friends. Some were pretty nervous about talking and doing their experiments, but they all did a great job.

I had volunteered at the Black River Falls Child Care Center. I went there five times during my term for an hour each time. Every week they had a new theme, from American Idol to the Solar System. During American Idol week, we learned about vibrations and how sound travels. They got to strum a guitar and make shaker instruments. The Solar System was a lot of fun, and we learned how the planets orbit around the sun. I also had the kids make up their own planets. They had a lot of fun with that. During one of the times I went there the kids learned how to make their own ice cream with stuff they have in the kitchen. We also talked about the different

things that can be made out of milk and how cows give us what we need. The kids have learned a lot and they will be able to take it on with them into school and beyond.

My term also included me being a major part of the Jackson County Fair Recycling Committee. I had to call and ask for volunteers to help sign up for shifts and go around the fair grounds and separate the aluminum from the other recyclables. It was a very dirty job but well worth it. It made money for the 4-H and it makes the Earth a better place to live in. We dug in the garbage containers and pulled out a lot of recyclables and sorted everything. All the volunteers seemed to enjoy the fact that we were doing the world a favor. I believe that everyone that was involved with the recycling felt great about doing what they did.

One of my favorite things that I got to do this summer was help with the Robots. The kids got to spend a whole day building and creating their own robot then programming them to do different courses and obstacles. It was fascinating. We then got three kids to come back and spend more time on the robots so they could demonstrate what they could do with the robots. I made different challenges for the kids. It's amazing to see what the kids can do when it comes to problem solving.

Overall my experience this summer was amazing. I have learned so much and feel so good about what I have done and learned. It is phenomenal! I learned more about myself and acquired more patience than I ever could have anywhere else. I couldn't say thank you enough for giving me this wonderful life experience. I will take it with me and cherish it. I believe I made an impact on a lot of people, from recycling, to junk sculptures, to building robots, to science experiments. Adults and kids learned it takes all kinds to make the world go round. Everyone is different. I hope that everyone continues to recycle and keep a positive outlook on life.

I worked with ninety-seven kids this summer.