

**Profile of the  
Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Program  
University of Wisconsin-Extension  
2002 Regents Teaching Excellence Award Recipient**

**In the Program's Own Words:**

- *Vision:* 4-H Youth Development serves as a catalyst for positive community youth development
- *Mission:* UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development integrates research, education, and community-based partnerships, enabling youth to learn and practice skills to be productive citizens.
- “In its centennial year 4-H is stronger and more relevant to Wisconsin’s youth and communities than ever. 4-H continues to reach out to youth to provide skill-building in communications, organization, and decision-making as well as leadership development for Wisconsin’s rural and urban youth. Hands-on activities range from the arts and computers to rocketry, environmental education, animal sciences, and volunteer involvement.”
  - Kevin Reilly, Chancellor, UW-Extension

**Program Facts, Activities, and Resources**

- 4-H Youth Development is one of four program areas in UW-Extension’s Cooperative Extension Division. 4-H YD has a dual focus: providing educational programs for youth, and youth development leadership for communities. This work is done to enrich the individual lives of participants and their families. It also benefits the public and society at large by fostering the development of productive citizens and their participation in democracy.
- *Personnel:*
  - 85 County faculty and staff provide leadership for county 4-H youth programs, and serve as catalysts, collaborators, and technical resources to mobilize support for Youth Development;
  - Campus faculty and staff include 11.5 professionals and 5.5 classified staff who provide curriculum and program development, manage state programs, and serve as resources in Youth Development and Volunteer Leadership;
  - The Upham Woods Environmental Education Center includes a total of 7.5 academic and classified staff and seasonal naturalists.
- *Youth Participation:*
  - There are 2,200 4-H clubs in Wisconsin with a total of 44,000 members;
  - Over 178,000 youth participate in special interest and school enrichment programs organized by 4-H;
  - Over 10,000 youth attend programs at Upham Woods Environmental Education Center.
- *Volunteer Leadership:*
  - 22,000 adults and 5,000 youth volunteer their support and time for 4-H.
- All told, Wisconsin 4-H involves about 215,000 youth and adults statewide, not including the thousands of people in Wisconsin communities whose lives are touched by 4-H projects, activities and public service contributions.

**Background**

The 4-H Youth Development Program in Wisconsin began in 1914 with a focus on rural youth and agricultural content. The goal of the program at that time was to broaden the use of new agricultural practices and improve the life of rural communities. Young people were seen as the vehicle for transmitting new knowledge to sometimes skeptical adults. University faculty and staff were the primary sources of this new knowledge; they traveled extensively teaching and demonstrating new techniques directly to youth and their families.

Following World War II, the focus began to shift from transmitting agricultural knowledge to formulating programs that promoted human development. Community volunteers played a larger role in shaping the 4-H program's direction and in implementing programs targeting local needs. University personnel gave primary attention to training volunteers, who then taught the youth members. By the 1970s, 4-H program offerings were expanding in an effort to attract non-farm youth and youth in Wisconsin's urban areas. Indeed, in the last 20 years, the 4-H program has become more responsive to the challenges encountered by young people growing up in today's culture, and to the increasing diversity of Wisconsin's population.

### **Teaching as a Public, Collaborative Activity**

- “Teaching,” as practiced by the Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Program could not be more public and more collaborative: all of the teaching is community-based, whether through the direct interaction of 4-H faculty with Wisconsin youth or through the myriad training programs conducted by 4-H personnel for community-based leaders and volunteers of 4-H activities.
- 4-H personnel have direct access to university specialists in youth development. Delivering this research-based knowledge to the community is fundamental to UW-Extension's institutional mission and practice.

### **Thoughtfully Constructed Programs**

- Two programs which reveal both the extent to which teaching is public and collaborative, and the thoughtfulness and rigor of 4-H programs are: 1) the *National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*; and 2) the *Power of Youth Pledge Campaign*.
  - *The National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* marked the 4-H centennial by creating national, statewide and local forums in which 4-H faculty and staff brought together youth, political leaders, educators, representatives of youth development organizations, volunteers, community leaders and parents. Conversations were held throughout the centennial year on the local, state, and national level. Wisconsin 4-H faculty, staff and youth participated at each of these levels.
  - *The Power of Youth Pledge Campaign* is another program designed to commemorate the 4-H centennial. 4-H youth and adults were asked to make pledges of their time to community service. In March 2002, Wisconsin led the nation with more than 330,000 hours of community service pledged for the year. At minimum wage, this contribution is valued at more than two million dollars.
- The Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Program assesses its programs through the PAAT, the Program and Activity Assessment Tool. This tool was developed by faculty to answer the question: “How do we know if these programs and activities are successful in assisting youth to develop into healthy and productive adults?” Assessment focuses on consensus-building on best practices, reflection on individual programs, activities and resources, and self-reflection on the part of participants regarding the contributions they have made.

### **A Positive Climate for Student Learning**

- 4-H teaches self-confidence, leadership skills, and develops young people into active, engaged citizens.
- 4-H reaches out to Wisconsin's increasingly diverse population, as evidenced by the following examples: Milwaukee's 4-H provides tutoring and a safe haven for urban youth; Winnebago and Outagamie Counties' 4-H help Hmong communities—youth and adults—learn about American culture.
- Studies show that compared to others, 4-H participants are more likely to succeed in school, become leaders in school, and help others in the community. The same research indicates that 4-

H youth are less likely than other youth to shoplift or steal, use illegal drugs, smoke cigarettes, vandalize property, or skip school.

- 4-H gives youth direct experience with democratic practices and electoral processes. Every year, 8,000 youth win offices in local 4-H clubs. As club leaders, they gain experience conducting meetings and leading groups in decision-making activities.
- 4-H teaches important skills and attitudes that employers look for: teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills.

### **In the Words of 4-H Participants**

- “I have been involved in 4-H for most of my life and I would be a very different person if I had not joined my first 4-H club. Four years ago I founded a web design company with two friends, one of them was also involved in 4-H. We began with \$150 total and now have downtown office space, another employee, and we own all of our equipment. I simply wouldn’t have the interpersonal and business skills necessary at such a young age without the schooling of monthly 4-H meetings, fair projects, and record books. 4-H has challenged me when my schooling has not been challenging. It has taught me to strive for my goals in spite of what others may think. 4-H helped me gain confidence to be able to accomplish my goals.

My most recent trip to Washington for the National Conversation on Youth Development was the best experience I’ve had in my life so far. I met several key government officials and made new friends. I learned that there is a lot more to the world than just Northwestern Wisconsin. But most of all I learned that I want and need to be a part of something bigger than myself. I think that is the best gift any youth development program can give to their community, their country, and their world.”

- Benjamin Damman, Spooner, WI

- “I have been involved with the 4-H Youth Development programs in Wisconsin since I was old enough to join 4-H—45 years ago. The 4-H Youth Development programs in Wisconsin have always inspired me and provided 4-H leaders like myself with the resources to successfully facilitate learning in a wide variety of projects and life skills for thousands of youth. It was always a source of pride to be involved with an organization that continually seeks to meet the ever-evolving needs of youth in today’s society. I was, however, never so proud to be affiliated with 4-H Youth Development in Wisconsin as I was during the Centennial Conversations on Youth Development.

As an adult participant in the Centennial Conversations, I was in a state of continual amazement. The conversations gave a voice to youth concerns, validated them, and encouraged youth to go forward and facilitate change. What an honor it was for me to be even a small part of that process. As participating adults, we were given insight into the endless possibilities our future will hold.”

- Diane Simon, Executive Director, United Way of Dunn County, Menomonie, WI