



Positive Youth Development Institute

IMPACT REPORT • 2025



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



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UW-MADISON EXTENSION

Supporting Youth to be 'Beyond Ready'

Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development is rooted in a simple but powerful belief: **when young people are supported, connected, and encouraged to discover what excites them (their sparks),** they thrive. Across Wisconsin, throughout our nation, and around the world, 4-H programs create places of belonging where relationships are built, sparks are ignited, and young people are seen for who they are and who they can become.

Yet, are we preparing today's youth not just to succeed – **but to flourish in adulthood?**

The answer is a resounding yes. Together with volunteers, community organizations, philanthropic partners, and many others, we are intentionally supporting youth to build the foundation of a life of **health, happiness, and productivity.** Together, young people in 4-H Youth Development programs are "Beyond Ready" for life after graduation.

Many of us – including me – carry our own 4-H stories, moments when a caring adult believed in us, when hands-on learning opened a door, or when we first caught a glimpse of what was possible.

Supporting youth along their life journey has always been central to this work. What has changed is the world they are stepping into. Today's youth face a future filled with complexity and uncertainty; over one-third of the careers they may one day pursue do not yet exist. Well-intended questions about "what comes next" can feel heavy and overwhelming. **What young people need most are opportunities to explore, to try, to fail, to learn** – and to discover both what excites them and what does not. They need adults who will stand alongside them, nurturing their spark and helping them imagine a future that feels both hopeful and attainable.

At the UW-Madison Extension Positive Youth Development Institute, we approach this work in three signature priority areas: Experiential Learning, Youth Empowerment, and Career and College Readiness. Together, these focus areas weave learning and growth across a young person's development – from elementary through high school – equipping them with purpose, voice, and direction.

In this 2025 Impact Report, we proudly lift up local and statewide efforts within each of these priorities. These stories remind us that **youth development is never the work of one program or one person.** It happens through volunteers who show up week after week, through community coalitions who open doors, and through local governments that recognize the power of investing in young people. This work takes all of us – building bridges, strengthening communities, and prioritizing the generation that will shape our shared future.

Thank you for believing in youth, for walking alongside them, and for being part of this collective effort.



JESSICA J. JENS

Assistant Dean • Positive Youth Development Institute Director • 4-H State Program Leader



WISCONSIN



1,141



4-H clubs and groups



5,716

enrolled adult
volunteer leaders



26,748 4-H CLUB

MEMBERS ACROSS WI

MEETING YOUTH WHERE THEY LIVE



51.4%
10k or less
population



29%
live on a farm



13.7%
10k-50k
population



5.9%
50k+ population

ART



PHOTOGRAPHY



TOP 5
PROJECT
AREAS

WOODWORKING



CLOVERBUD



FOODS & NUTRITION



PYD Institute Reach

The PYD Institute reaches youth throughout Wisconsin.

56k+

Wisconsin youth served in combination with our 4-H club membership program.



30k+

youth served through our community-based PYD programs.

We collaborate with

350+

organizations ranging from nonprofits to school districts and elected county boards.





EXPERIENTIAL

LEARNING



The **Experiential Learning** signature priority area works to foster and support educational sparks opportunities by providing spaces for young people to learn and grow in their interests while building life and leadership skills. Some of the ways we deliver experiential learning programs are through in-school and afterschool programs, project-based learning, camps, and distance learning.



Virtual Learning Programs in 2024-25

Science of the Chocolate Chip Cookie

Paper Circuits

Cloverbuds:
Sparks Book Read

Cloverbuds:
Dinosaurs and Unicorns

Nationally, about



of young people can name their spark.

The 2025 Thriving survey showed **77%** of youth felt that 4-H programs enabled them to explore their interests.



Science Night Tricks and Treats the Community

Dane County's Fifth Annual 4-H Science Fright Night ignited curiosity and creativity while showcasing a wide range of interactive 4-H projects. Youth and community members dug into STEM with help from the Madison West High Rocket Club, who showed participants how to launch their handmade air rockets into the night sky. The UW-Madison Astronomy Club showed attendees how to explore the cosmos. Many held a real brain with students from UW-Madison Neuroscience Program, played the Theramin – a touchless instrument – and learned the physics behind sound with the UW Physics Department. Participants were youth and adult volunteers, youth in grades K-12 and their family members.



The Youngest 4-H'ers Find Their Sparks and Talents

Cloverbuds in grades 5K-2 had an exciting introduction to sparks through a four-week hands-on learning program in Columbia, Sauk, Dodge, and Marquette Counties. Each week, youth met virtually for a different activity. First, an author read her book "Jax Finds His Talents" before Cloverbuds were guided through an activity that helped them identify their own talents. Next, they created ornaments with melted crayon shavings and learned about Ag & Animals Sciences by creating new animal species like Bunnicorn! Youth explored STEM by making magnet cars and rounded out the month by reflecting on their sparks and naming the adults who can help them grow in those areas.

Camp and Culture Bring Two Counties Together

Menominee and Milwaukee Counties 4-H teamed up to share camp and culture at Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Center. Menominee County youth and adults led a Menominee Hand Game tournament with live music. Milwaukee County youth and adults created an Explore Milwaukee relay race that included a photo booth, Sprecher soda tasting, and stations to learn about the Milwaukee Bucks, Native Milwaukee, and the Great Lakes, as well as to write poetry about their homeland. During a campfire talent night, youth shared powwow dancing, skits, and jokes. Youth also enjoyed camp activities like canoeing and archery together.





YOUTH

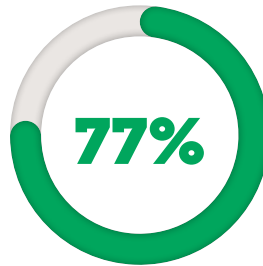


EMPOWERMENT

Wisconsin 4-H's **Youth Empowerment** signature priority area empowers young people to become leaders and use their voices as they partner with adults to positively impact their communities.



of young people believe they have the power to make a difference



of youth believe there are ways for them to be involved in their communities



Our programs centered youth voice in:

Youth leadership

Restorative justice

Civic engagement

Youth-adult partnerships

Placemaking

Service-learning

Community health

Philanthropy

1,400

youth participants

+

200+

nonprofit community organizations



Teens Design and Create Meaningful Community Murals

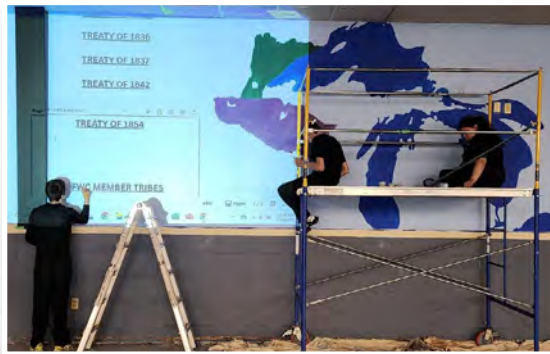
Three teens from the Lac du Flambeau Tribe created a monument to their culture in their community hall. The dedicated youth collaborated with tribal elders and departments to design and paint mural scenes that both celebrate their culture and educate about tribal sovereignty. They included bilingual signs in Ojibwe and English, a map of ceded territories, and images of tribal history, including their Seven Grandfather Teachings. The empowering youth-adult partnership led to a presentation with Wisconsin’s governor and a dedication ceremony with the Lac du Flambeau tribal president, where he commissioned more murals by youth leaders.

Youth Lead a Sustainability Safari

The 2024–25 Dane County Youth Governance Program (YGP) cohort designed and led a Sustainability Safari at the Henry Vilas Zoo. Geared toward elementary-aged students and community members, YGP youth led hands-on stations and taught participants about food waste, composting, and everyday sustainability practices. Dane County public service departments were also on hand with exhibits. This entirely youth-led initiative created a fun and engaging learning experience that inspired young students and their families to take action toward environmental stewardship. At the same time, YGP youth gained meaningful leadership experience in research, event planning, facilitation, and public engagement.

Empowered at Restorative Justice Summit

In July 2025, 138 youth and adults who work with young people explored important issues in their communities at the sixth Wisconsin Restorative Justice Summit. With the theme of building bridges, participants of all ages learned together and built on their knowledge of restorative justice, which is a response to wrongdoing that prioritizes repairing harm and recognizes that maintaining positive relationships with others is a core human need. Eighty-three percent of the youth and adults who attended, including social workers and community educators, said the summit deepened their understanding of using a restorative justice lens when working with young people.





CAREER AND COLLEGE

READINESS



Wisconsin 4-H Positive Youth Development is all about helping young people become “Beyond Ready.” Our **Career and College Readiness (CCR)** programs support youth as they grow from adolescence into adulthood, giving them the skills, confidence, and mindsets they need to take on life’s opportunities and challenges. We make this happen in ways that click with young people – hands-on activities, real-world discovery, plenty of fun, and space for them to speak up and shape the experience.



4-H Summer Academy Teaches Youth to Look Into Their Futures

From June 16–19, 2025, 159 Wisconsin youth in grades 8–11 gathered on the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus to explore life and career pathways the 4-H way. Guided by experts and professionals in fields from agriculture and animal sciences to construction trades and visual arts, youth dug into topics that spark their interest and learned what it would be like to work in those fields after high school.



32% of youth report a lack of confidence in knowing the steps they need to take to transition into a career

24% of youth experience significant stress about finding a job after graduation

77% of employers say that there be a focus on more real-world skills

32% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet!

Nia Delivers Career and College Readiness Experiences to Regional Youth

Not all youth have access to career and college readiness (CCR) opportunities and resources to take part in them. That's why a 4-H Positive Youth Development program called "Nia" invites young people in five Wisconsin counties into a supportive environment where they can envision pathways and purpose for their futures.

Funded by a multi-state federal grant, Nia recently started its fifth year of programs that feature regular programming where youth take part in activities that feature CCR, leadership

development, life skills, cultural exploration, critical thinking, and social awareness.

Nia 4-H youth are encouraged to try out experiences related to different post-high school pathways so they can find the right fit for their futures. Through their participation in Nia, youth explore a variety of job, career, and college options through guest speakers, field trips, volunteer opportunities, and networking events. Youth also visited the UW-Madison campus and developed an understanding of student life.

To encourage success, youth create individualized action plans and follow up on their progress each month with staff. Adults lead skill-building activities like budgeting exercises and project planning to prepare young people for adulthood.

Participants in Nia 4-H said they felt more confident exploring future careers, using information to pursue opportunities to gain relevant experience, and taking advantage of internships and volunteer opportunities that align with their interests. They also noted the social and emotional support provided by the adults in the program as an important factor in achieving their future goals.





Youth Dig Into Communicating and Marketing 4-H Arts

Youth in the newly reimagined Wisconsin 4-H Communications and Marketing Team, a.k.a. COMM Team, gain hands-on experience as they connect families and community members to 4-H. In 2025, the small but mighty group of five high school-aged youth, two adult volunteers, and one 4-H educator tried their hands at different types of media, including video, audio, photography and communications strategies. COMM Team tells the story of their group and other 4-H Arts Ambassadors in Wisconsin. They also launched a Facebook page to reach a wider audience with 4-H arts opportunities and youth leadership experiences.



Kenosha 4-H Youth Build Relationships with Festival of Trees

Kenosha County 4-H youth and adults welcomed 400 community members with a Festival of Trees that gave youth of all ages a chance to work together and build relationships. Each club planned for the event by deciding how they wanted to contribute and dividing the tasks among themselves to accomplish their goals. Youth from each of the county's 20 projects decorated a tree to teach visitors about their area of interest. A club called the Salem pioneers decided to bring in an old-fashioned tree and lead a primitive crafts space to reflect their name. The youth created and led the festival's craft centers, cookies and cocoa table, games area, and even organized a visit from Santa!



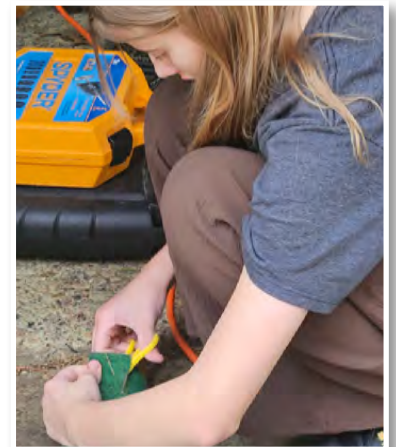
Learning a New Language Translates to Belonging for One 4-H Club

The Northwoods Explorers 4-H Club in Oneida County created a welcoming space for a member who can't hear by learning American Sign Language. A committee of youth and adults learned to introduce themselves, sign the 4-H pledge, and have conversations in ASL. The member who's deaf had the opportunity to share about her journey with cochlear implants and living in a rural community with limited access to people who understand deaf culture. Youth in the club say they are excited to connect with each other better. The experience gives members a blueprint for how to be inclusive in their club and in other places too.



4-H Youth Put Their Carpentry Interests to Work on Owl House Project

In June, a small group of 4-H youth from Vernon County used their woodworking skills to refurbish living quarters for an owl named Koda at Upham Woods Nature Center. Accompanied by an expert builder, the team added new walls, perches, and a hiding space for Koda. Beforehand, youth had practiced woodworking during a workshop. Cloverbuds had practiced their nailing skills on wooden animal figurines, mid-level youth built a candy dispenser, and advanced youth built illusion tension tables. The young people exhibited their workshop pieces at the county fair, and then worked on additional pieces using kits and plans.



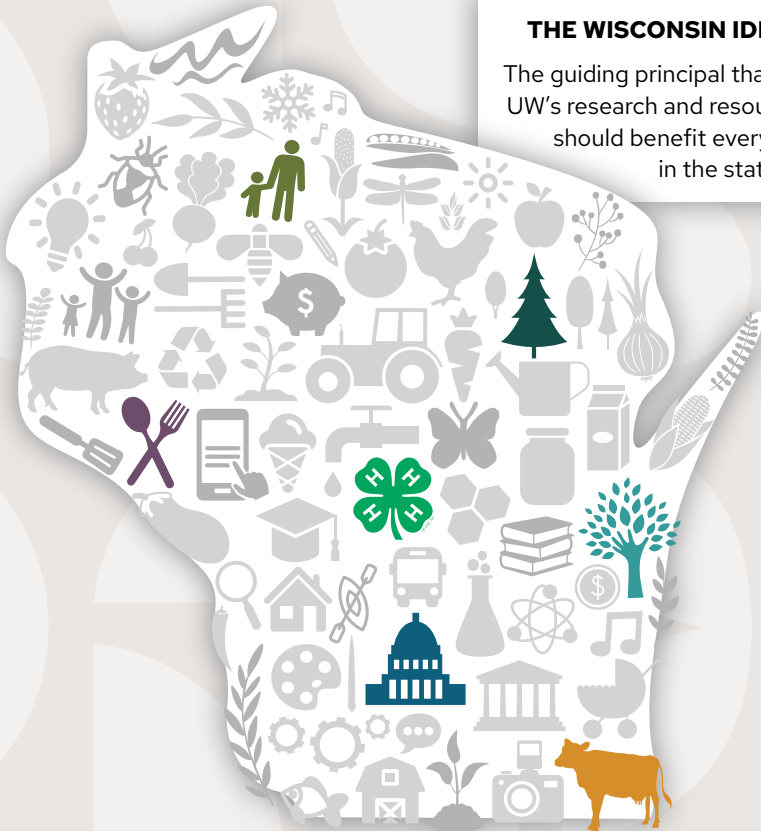
4-H PYD Spreads the Wisconsin Idea

Wisconsin 4-H Positive Youth Development (PYD) helps organizations and communities create welcoming and belonging spaces for all youth to connect with each other, trusted adults, and themselves. When Positive Youth Development staff offer programs for youth, they also teach adults how to build environments where youth are empowered so everyone can grow together.



THE WISCONSIN IDEA

The guiding principal that the UW's research and resources should benefit everyone in the state.



Staff and Youth at Fort McCoy Benefit from 4-H Leadership

At Wisconsin military base Fort McCoy, 4-H Positive Youth Development support has helped staff at the Child and Youth Services Center expand their capacity for serving young people.

In monthly meetings with small groups of youth in elementary through high school, 4-H values are modeled. Adult leadership encourages welcoming, belonging, and helping youth find the “sparks” that interest them. Staff at Fort McCoy have been introduced to free 4-H teaching guides for leading age-appropriate, hands-on projects like the ones 4-H has led there – including making pickles from scratch and wiring robots with electromagnetic circuits.

The nearly 45 youth in the Fort McCoy program have asked for projects on team-building, photography, outdoor activities, and the arts. Staff at Fort McCoy can find teaching guides on these and more topics in 4-H resources.

Military families may relocate frequently around the world. Monthly meetings based on one specific project help young people connect, learn, and carry those experiences and knowledge with them. Youth also build their personal capacity to learn, grow, and point their life in the direction of their interests.

The Army's 4-H Youth Development

Specialist recognized Wisconsin 4-H for:

“*Exceptional work and dedication for efforts directly translating into high-quality youth development experiences for military families, and commitment across the 4-H and Fort McCoy partnership through the School Age and Teen Programs at the Child and Youth Services Center.*”

Wisconsin 4-H and AmeriCorps Build Community Capacity through New Partnerships

In 2025, Wisconsin 4-H AmeriCorps members partnered with 134 community organizations to serve local youth with programs that make a long-term impact on young people. Since 2020, organizations that work with youth have had less capacity to provide youth services and programming.

Young people become healthy, productive, and engaged through experiential learning, youth empowerment, and career and college readiness. With these experiences, youth can be ready for life and ready for work. Wisconsin 4-H worked with 33 AmeriCorps members from September 2024 to August 2025 who helped community organizations build their capacity to foster positive youth development. 4-H AmeriCorps members reached new, more, and different young people, are able to offer new programs, and have increased the capacity of partner organizations to serve youth.



In **Washington County**, Wisconsin 4-H AmeriCorps members led youth in seven afterschool programs.



In **Dodge County**, Wisconsin 4-H AmeriCorps members taught youth about STEM topics as part of library programs.



In **Richland County**, Wisconsin 4-H AmeriCorps members helped youth plant and harvest vegetables throughout the summer. The produce was donated to the local food pantry.



33 AmeriCorps members across **29** Wisconsin counties started programs with **134** community organizations.



AmeriCorps members worked with **116** youth and adult volunteers and made **5,407** youth educational contacts.



Congratulations to Our Nationally Recognized Youth and Adults



National 4-H Hall of Fame Inductee

Sally Schoenike, a lifelong advocate of 4-H in Wisconsin, was inducted into the National 4-H Hall of Fame in October 2025!



National 4-H Conference, Washington, D.C. — Design Team

Emily Groth, Brown County



National 4-H Clover Content Crew

Laurel Loucks, Marathon County



Epsilon Sigma Phi National Award Winner

Barb and Norb Yogerst,
WI 4-H Volunteers



4-H Shooting Sports National Championships; Grand Island, NE

Eau Claire County
4-H Shooting Sports

Eric Andreo placed 3rd
in recurve archery.



National 4-H Livestock Judging Contest; Louisville, KY

Grant County Livestock
Judging Team

Luke Patterson placed 3rd in the
sheep/goat evaluation classes.



National 4-H Livestock Skillathon Contest; Louisville, KY

Jackson County Livestock
Skillathon Team

Jake Kling placed 3rd in
individual evaluation classes.



Campbell Booth placed 1st in overall individual and 1st in oral reasons individual.

National 4-H Dairy Judging Contest; Madison WI

2nd place overall,
1st place in oral reasons
Sheboygan County Livestock Judging Team: Campbell Booth, Allison Gartman, Natalie Mauk, Austin Kreisa

Coaches: Chris Booth, Sara Feldmann, Kelly Jens



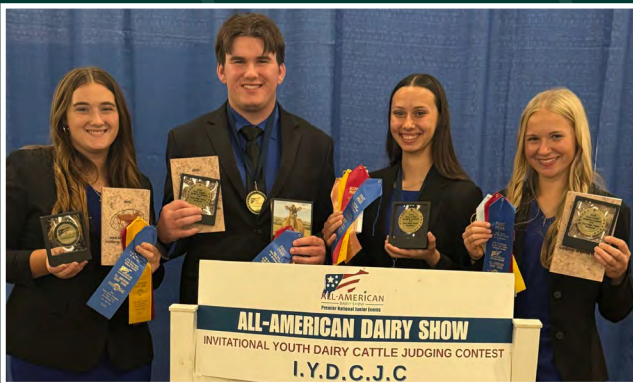
Dr. George Heersche Jr. NAILE Invitational Dairy Judging Contest; Louisville, KY

3rd place overall, 2nd place in oral reasons, 2nd place in the Holstein classes

WI All Star Judging Team: Laney Neuser and Noelle Vos, Manitowoc County; Hailey Fischer, Shawano County; Stella Kamm, St.Croix County

Noelle placed 1st in individual in the Brown Swiss classes. Laney placed 3rd in individual in the Holstein classes.

Coaches: Sarah and Jim Neuser



All-American Dairy Show Invitational Youth Dairy Cattle Judging Contest; Harrisburg, PA

2nd place in the Guernsey classes

Dodge County Dairy Judging Team: Ian Spoke, Marissa Spoke, Sevanna Fairbank, Mary Zwald

Mary placed 3rd in oral reasons individual and 3rd in individual in the Guernsey classes.

Coaches: Matthew Gunst, Brock Irwin



National 4-H Avian Quiz Bowl Contest; Louisville, KY

2nd place

Wisconsin 4-H Avian Quiz Bowl Team: Kennadi B., Colton S., Ciara W., Portage County; Weston S., Outagamie County

Coach: Michelle Waltenberg

Alumni Highlights



David Epstein

David Epstein is a 4-H alum who turned his 4-H sparks and experiences, like baking and cooking, into a horticulture supply company and an investment banking firm that helped food-related companies with mergers and acquisitions. During his 40-year career, Epstein kept his 4-H connections strong, from acting as president of the state leadership council to serving on the board of trustees for the National 4-H Council. "Through 4-H we have the skills to give back to the next generation," Epstein said.



Megan Faivre

Megan Faivre is a 4-H alum who went on to serve as a Wisconsin AmeriCorps member for the last two summers. She has gained priceless experience in both of those roles that helped her choose her path in life. "I realized that I wanted to be involved with youth, but not a full-time career like a teacher," said Faivre. Currently, she is studying psychology and plans to work with youth and families as a counselor.



John Zumbrunnen

John Zumbrunnen, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at UW-Madison, is a 4-H alum who has seen the benefits of positive youth development impact his career. "Because there are so many leadership opportunities in 4-H, you get used to the idea you might in fact be able to be a leader," said Zumbrunnen. "You might work with an adult volunteer project leader and then help lead a group of younger 4-H'ers through a project that you've already gone through yourself."



Molly Maciejewski

Molly Maciejewski, who started learning by doing with 4-H in Sheboygan County, is putting those skills and experiences to work as director of operations and executive chef at Madison Sourdough, a well-known capitol city bakery. Maciejewski's experience with 4-H projects like cooking, sewing, and photography helped her build skills for life. "It made me more interested in making things by hand, and gave me some confidence that I could create, build, craft, and be more self-sufficient," she said.

Lasting Legacies: Wisconsin 4-H Endowments

Wisconsin 4-H is grateful to the following scholarship and endowment funds, which award more than \$20,000 annually to outstanding Wisconsin 4-H members and alumni pursuing higher education.

- Betty Krueger Memorial 4-H Scholarship Fund
- Culver's 4-H Scholarship Fund
- Cynthia Hoehne Scholarship
- Elizabeth Salter-Eby 4-H Scholarship Endowment Fund
- Francis A. and Phyllis S. Conrad 4-H Scholarship Endowment Fund
- Gwen Wilson Memorial Scholarship Endowment Fund
- Harold and Irene Hendrickson Memorial Scholarship
- Luarta and Mike Soden Family Scholarship
- Oscar G. and Mary M. Woelfel 4-H Scholarship Endowment Fund
- T.L. Bewick Scholarship Fund



Wisconsin 4-H members and participants benefit from the generous support of the following funds and endowments. These contributions help youth participate in 4-H programs and experiences that create friendships, build skills, and prepare them for life and work as adults.

- Arnold and Gladys Treptow 4-H Endowment Fund
- Eldora E. Keske 4-H Endowment Fund
- Elizabeth C. Davies 4-H Endowment Fund
- Jean C. Evans Memorial 4-H Scholarship Endowment Fund
- John W. and Lenore L. Landry Endowment Fund
- VandeBerg Leadership Endowment Fund
- Mackey Fund
- Nellie McCannon 4-H Endowment Fund
- Dennis Buege Family Endowment
- Kathi Vos 4-H Learning Resource Endowment Fund
- Retired Agents' Endowment Fund
- Buell Gunderson Memorial 4-H Endowment Fund
- John, Cathy, Sarah, Becki, and Adam Brunnuell Family Endowment
- Merwin Family Endowment Fund
- Peter Talen 4-H Arts Endowment Fund
- Leonard and Agnes Bayer Livestock Endowment
- Verne V. and Dorothy M. Varney 4-H Endowment Fund
- Wisconsin 4-H Photography Endowment Fund
- Livestock Fund
- 4-H Volunteer Endowment Fund
- Agnes Hansen Fund
- WI 4-H Dairy Endowment Fund
- Jim Rutledge Professional Development Endowment Fund
- McKerrow Brown Family Endowment



For more information and to stay connected with 4-H philanthropy, visit go.wisc.edu/4hgiving.



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