
Youth on Boards Initiative

Waupaca

◆ Community Development ◆ Education ◆

Waupaca Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth Coalition (HCHY) has worked since 1999 to transform the city into a leader in infusing youth into the civic life of the community. Search Institute data revealed that the youth in the community felt that they were not valued. The community responded by giving them a voice. The city passed an ordinance in 2003 that required each city committee to add a youth member. The Library, Parks and Recreation, Airport, Wellhead Protection, Cable TV, and Historic Preservation committees now have voting youth members.

Youth members of city committees and their allies among the youth and adults in the city have built a new youth center, broken ground on an expansion of the young adult library, and created a community foundation with two youth members of the board. UW-Extension has provided support and training to the process; Mayor Brian Smith and city manager Henry Veleker have nurtured the youth and adult board members into collaborative working relationships; and city departments, including the library and recreation departments, have given youth significant roles in planning, staffing, and overseeing operations.

Ownership and pride in the engagement of youth is broadly shared among members of the community. Youth feel ownership of public projects such as the library and recreation center and spend time raising money and improving programs in public institutions. Elected officials and department heads are justifiably proud of their work to involve youth. UW-Extension has built capacity for youth-adult partnerships in community decision-making through training and regular support.

Community members have described the impact of Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth. One young woman who has been involved was asked how it made her feel about Waupaca:

"I put some effort into it and now I want to come back and see it. I want to raise a family here."

An adult observed that HCHY engages youth outside their age group:

"Three to four generations working on an activity breaks down fear, builds comfort level between generations. The community sees the success, the bond between generations all the time. It strengthens community when youth and adults are talking in the streets."

Waupaca has created a sustainable model for recruiting youth, conducting evaluation, and providing training each time a new youth committee member is seated. County Extension offices across the state have similar training materials available. The ordinance adding a youth member to city government committees can be adapted by other cities. Cities, towns, counties, and community-based organizations can benefit from the Waupaca model for youth engagement.

Contact: Connie Abert
101 Main Street
Waupaca, WI 54981
Phone: 715-258-6230
E-Mail: Connie.Abert@ces.uwex.edu

