

4-H New Horizons Experience

New Horizons is an out-of-state community service leadership experience for Fond du Lac County 4-H youth in grades 8-12.

Learning Goals of New Horizons

1. *Leadership and Skill Development*
 - a. *Youth will gain independence through travel and new life experiences in another state.*
 - b. *Youth will develop leadership skills in planning and organizing, responsibility, cooperation, budgeting, decision-making and problem solving, communication, goal-setting, and reflectively evaluating their work.*
2. *Community Service Learning*
 - a. *Youth will participate in and assist in the leadership for at least one authentic service-learning experience in another state.*
 - b. *Youth will apply service learning principles to a project when they return home.*
3. *Understanding of others*
 - a. *Youth will increase awareness of a variety of cultural identities and exhibit understanding for individuals different from themselves. They will show concern for others and accept differences.*
4. *Fun*
 - a. *Youth will enjoy the experience through having the opportunity to take on a new challenge where they work together as a team, meet new people and address an identified need.*

Planning and Preparation

Youth apply for and are interviewed for this experience. Once selected they meet, along with adult advisors, to plan the destination to travel to, lodging, cultural activities and service projects. They also coordinate meeting with a youth group in the state traveled to, plan and carry out fundraising, and set the schedule.

At the planning meetings youth take turns drafting an agenda, facilitating the meeting, taking notes, preparing a get acquainted activity, and providing refreshments.

During the week of the experience youth serve as a leader of the day with specific daily duties and lead a daily topic of learning to help everyone be more familiar with the places to be visited.

Participants

Participants in New Horizons included 36 youth over 4 years (2013-2016); Six youth went twice; One youth went three times. Twenty-five different youth attended. Fourteen youth (56%) responded to a survey about the experience that was distributed via Qualtrics in November 2016.

Questions and Results

What Contributed to Their Learning?

Participants were asked to rate how various components of the New Horizons experience contributed to their learning using a scale of “a little, somewhat, a great deal, and NA/don’t remember”.

The components of the experience that had the highest responses for contributing a great deal to my learning were...

Traveling out of state - 14 responses (100% of participants)

Planning and carrying out fundraising - 14 (100% of participants)

Visiting cultural sights – 13 (93% of participants)

Doing service projects – 13 (93% of participants)

Establishing the program schedule – 13 (93% of participants)

Holding monthly planning meetings – 12 (86% of participants)

Preparing & leading get acquainted activity - 11 (79% of participants)

Leading a daily topic of learning - 11 (79% of participants)

Impact on Learning

Survey responders were then asked to choose one of these components that had the most impact on their learning and describe why it was important.

Of the 14 responses six youth focused on doing service projects. Here is one response:

I think doing the actual service projects had the most impact on my learning. I love helping others to begin with, but the best part was seeing the reactions of people we were serving. Watching their faces just light up as they get another meal or seeing them smile simply because you have a smile on your face. You don't know what they're going through, but knowing you played a role in helping them is truly powerful. It may seem insignificant to you, but it could mean the world to them. It's the greatest lesson to learn in my opinion. Serving others.

Three youth responses focused on establishing the program schedule. Here is one response:

Establishing the program schedule probably had the most impact on my learning. Finding activities and deciding times and cost, incorporating driving times and traffic possibilities were all a challenge. Putting together a full itinerary for the first time, even with a group of people, was definitely a difficult task. I learned a lot from doing this. It taught planning ahead skills (no procrastinating!), leadership in researching and finding information on one event, expression in sharing my ideas, organization and speaking skills in presenting my ideas, and especially communication.

Enhancing Knowledge and Skills

Participants were asked think carefully about their knowledge and skills. Then rate to what extent participation in New Horizons developed or enhanced those characteristics. The scale was not at all, a little, somewhat, and a great deal.

The knowledge and skills of the experience that had the highest responses for a great deal of development or enhancement were:

Communication – 13 (93% of participants)

Responsibility – 12 (86% of participants)

Planning and organizing - 11 (79% of participants)

Decision-making - 11 (79% of participants)

Valuing community service- 11 (79% of participants)

Skills they Improved

Participants were then asked to describe one of these skills they improved the most and explain how it was developed. Here are several replies:

- *I think valuing community service was my most improved skill from the trip. I enjoyed the community service projects that we did on this trip the most and will honestly never forget any of them. I have spoken about the community service from this trip several times. It was my favorite trip and being able to do new forms of community service in a completely different place and knowing that I made a huge difference in people's lives was the most enriching experience of my life. New Horizons community service will forever have an impact on my life and to this day I still think about going back the Dream Center and helping there again.*
- *My planning and organizing skills were developed because previous to this trip I was a great procrastinator. By learning the importance of good planning and organizing, I have since stopped procrastinating and been able to put together my own plans with a more reasonable amount of time before the 'due date.'*
- *Self-Confidence, When I joined 4-H I was the shy girl who would always sit in the back. I was scared at first to go on the trips but I found it in me to be able to do them. When I came back home I felt like a new person and there was a new side of me, someone who would speak up and someone who would do something for a living.*

Lasting Impact

Participants were asked, now that some time has passed since your participation in New Horizons describe how what you did and learned at that time has impacted other thoughts, learnings or behaviors in your life now.

Here are several replies:

- *I gained a lot of skills through the New Horizons trip and I use them in my everyday life. Some of those include leadership and communication.*
- *Since participating in New Horizons I have begun to set up my own community service projects and I am leading other people to do the same. New Horizons made me a more responsible and caring person. It also motivated me to get others to participate in community service projects.*
- *I think I learned to look at the big picture more. I learned about another place, and that helps me to see that there are other places in need in addition to our own community. Instead of just focusing on local news and events, I learned to look outside of my home base, so to speak, and see that the goings on in other places can affect me just as much.*

- I learned how to get along with people that I have never met before and not to judge people by their looks.

- What I did and what I learned go hand and hand because everything that I did I learned something new. Also all of this learning really impacted my thoughts about the past and how if we did one thing it could change another.

- I think the service part helped me look at people different. I went on a mission trip to Mexico a while back, and that changed my perspective a lot, but seeing that kind of poverty in your own country is another story. It hits home a little more. This trip showed me that, and my perspective will be forever different. Also, this trip has drastically helped in changing my communication skills. Having to make phone calls for fundraisers to people I didn't know, setting up arrangements to meet with other 4-H clubs, the interview aspect of it beforehand. All of those things don't scare me anymore, and this trip was a turning point for me in that communication area.

Conclusion

The 4-H New Horizons experience, from applying for it, planning, carrying it out, and reflecting on it has proven to be an opportunity for young people to develop life skills, attitudes and behaviors that impact them at the time of the experience as well as into their future.

For more information on this report or the 4-H New Horizons Experience contact Denise Retzleff, 4-H Youth Development Educator, UW-Extension Fond du Lac County, 920-929-3170, denise.retzleff@ces.uwex.edu



An AA/EEO employer, University of Wisconsin-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title VI, Title IX and ADA requirements