

# **BAYFIELD COUNTY YOUTH BOARD**

By Nancy Franz  
Associate Professor  
Department of Youth Development  
University of Wisconsin-Extension

## **Situation**

The youth of Bayfield County, Wisconsin did not have an opportunity for a voice in county-wide decisions that affect them outside of the traditional 4-H Junior Leaders Association. A County Youth Board, patterned after the adult County Board of Supervisors and the UW-Extension Rural Leadership Program, was envisioned as solid models for developing youth voices and leadership skills. High school youth were targeted and the 4-H Youth Agent served as the catalyst and advisor for the Youth Board. The Bayfield County Youth Board, started in 1997, has directly involved 25 youth and 10 adults in its first two years through programs such as teen court, Youth for Youth grants, Superior Days and Public Adventures.

## **Objectives**

1. Youth will take action on the county-wide needs of youth.
2. Youth will advise adults on decisions that affect youth.
3. Youth will learn and practice leadership and citizenship action skills.
4. Youth will earn school credit for participation in the Youth Board.

These objectives were evaluated internally through focus group interviews and informal discussions, as well as externally through case studies and interviews.

## **Methods**

The following methods were important for the establishment of the Bayfield County Youth Board:

- Establish local program support with school student councils and their advisors. The agent met one-on-one with the student council advisors and/or guidance counselors or principals to discuss a one page project proposal. This was followed by the agent bringing the proposal to each student council for approval and support. The agent also reported ongoing progress and gained support from co-workers and key County Board members.
- Work with each school to conduct elections or appointments of their Board members. The agent encouraged the schools to make the process student centered.
- Support monthly Board meetings held in the county board room or at a hosting school. Meetings included leadership training in public speaking, writing letters to public officials, developing mission statements, goal setting, writing plans of action, grant writing and political effectiveness.

- Provide leadership and citizenship training opportunities on a monthly basis. This included attending the Wisconsin Prevention Conference, lobbying at Superior Days, developing a county teen court, initiating a Youth for Youth grant program and presenting at the state-wide all faculty and staff UW-Extension conference.
- The agent served as an advisor and resource to the Youth Board including researching resources for leadership development and funding and facilitator of communication between the Board, school officials and the County Board. The agent also facilitated all the educational sessions except those related to Superior Days. As youth took on more voice these roles became less of the agent's responsibility.

## **Results**

Since the Bayfield County Youth Board's inception in 1997 until June 1999, the following results have occurred:

- All four Bayfield County school systems have participated.
- 25 youth and 10 adults have been direct participants with the Youth Board.
- 20 cases have been tried in Teen Court.
- One Youth Board member is pursuing political science in college as a result of her involvement with the Board.
- The Board president and vice president stated clearly to a UW-Extension video producer the value of UW-Extension in youth development in Bayfield County.
- The Youth Board representatives from the Bayfield school system were chosen by their principal to introduce and escort Senator Herbert Kohl at an all-school assembly.
- A peer tutoring program, designed by the Youth Board in their work with the Public Adventures curriculum, will begin with the next school year.
- Five youth have lobbied with state legislators two years in a row on youth issues at Superior Days in Madison, Wisconsin.
- Representative Gary Sherman attended a follow-up Youth Board meeting to discuss the graduated driver's license bill with the Board members.
- Youth Board members are on the County Board agenda once each year.
- The advising agent has provided letters of recommendation for Board members for college scholarships.
- Two visits by the Otto Bremer grant staff have resulted in increased funding.
- The Bayfield County Youth Board was featured in the UW-Extension 1998 Annual Report and as

one of five case studies at the 1999 All-Faculty and Staff Conference. The Board president and vice-president and two other Youth Board members participated in conference leadership roles.

- Ten 4-H Youth Development agents have requested information on the Youth Board and its work.

### **Implications**

The following potential implications are envisioned for the Bayfield County Youth Board:

- Youth who participate in the Youth Board are better prepared and will often be called upon for leadership roles.
- Agents who establish and work with Youth Boards will expand the youth development expertise and reputation. They will also be challenged by youth scheduling conflicts and finance issues. Agents may also need to be aware of 4-H clientele being curious about their work with the Youth Board and how that differs from working with 4-H junior leaders.
- Youth Board work builds UW-Extension relations with schools and county government.
- Youth Boards build the leadership and political capacity of youth.
- Teen court can lower the rate of youth crime.
- Meaningful adult and youth relationships are built through Board work.
- Agents who wish to initiate a Youth Board should be prepared to spend important time on the front end getting youth up to speed and connected to run their own program.