

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

Building a brighter future for Madison County and its youth

Making Madison County a “Community of Promise” is the goal of Madison County Extension and the 15 other members of the Madison County SAFE Coalition. By focusing on the healthy development of youth today, the coalition hopes to create a community where these young people want to return to as adults.

Two years ago, coalition members realized that duplicative programs were diluting their individual ability to address needs. And youth and families were falling through the gaps. The coalition identified community issues that needed attention and the organizational strengths of each member to meet those needs. More structured opportunities for youth during the summer and after school were two areas the group addressed because many youth spent those times unsupervised. Research shows that when left alone, kids often make poor decisions and juvenile crime increases.



In response, Madison County Extension offered day camps in four communities last summer. The camps attracted almost 300 youth – including four who were at one park alone. The unsupervised youth saw the campers and asked to participate. “Situations like that are not safe and can lead to negative consequences. Because we were there, they kept busy and spent their time learning,” says Matt Deppe, Madison County Extension Education Director.

Winterset’s First Presbyterian Church addressed the afterschool issue last fall with its program, The Underground, giving 120 kids too old for daycare a safe, productive place to go. Sara Lamb, director of youth ministries, says the collaboration allows each organization to be more specific in its mission to reach kids. “Because we’re maximizing our individual strengths, we are collectively having a greater impact. It is a good feeling to know that as a group we are addressing a wide variety of needs,” she adds.

The coalition has received more than \$81,000 in state Decategorization funds for its programs. Members believe the efforts will provide lasting benefits to the youth – and to the county. “When these kids reach their potential to create change, we want their strong community bond to bring them back to Madison County,” Deppe says.

“The long-term benefit to our community is educated,
responsible citizens and workers . . .”

- *Chris Nolte, Public Relations and Development Director,
Madison County Health Care System*

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