

### Getting Kids Involved in Activities Makes a Difference

The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Fox Valley is steadfast on giving every child that walks through their doors an optimal experience where they have a voice and choice in what they participate in at the Club. They know that kids who have an optimal Club experience will be more connected to school, have a better outlook, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. And those working in children's mental health know that kids who participate in extracurricular activities are less likely to report depression and anxiety as well as be more likely to feel they belong.

#### Youth voice, choice, and empowerment

"It's more than just providing activities for our kids to engage in when they are at our Clubs," said Rachel Schroeder, Senior Director of Youth Development Services – Boys & Girls Club of the Fox Valley. "We believe firmly that the youth should be empowered to choose what they want to be involved in. We live out the belief – nothing about me without me."

Towards that end, the Club offers a range of age appropriate activities. Program options balance being evidence-based with social emotional recreational play. Relationships between staff and the kids are important, and staff use those relationship to help kids get to the right programs.

#### Reaching kids

The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Fox Valley has 15 locations and serve 850 kids each day. Their school-based locations offer before and after school time programming which aligns with the school day and school priorities. The Club's branch locations provide positive youth development opportunities, offering a safe place for kids to be with their friends and adults. Branch locations are open when schools aren't (including school snow days) and provide breakfast, lunch, and a snack.

When kids arrive at the Club after school, they start in a homeroom space where they can decompress, eat a snack, and get help with homework. Then there is a Club meeting that incorporates trauma-informed practices where the kids

learn the day's schedule and what activities they can choose from. Then they move to their activities. The Club closes at 7 pm for kids ages 6–12 and at 8 pm for kids ages 13–18.

#### What Club staff are seeing post-pandemic

The Club served kids through the pandemic and has noted some post pandemic observations. They've seen a sharp decline in how kids are feeling about themselves. To address this, the Club provides greater behavioral staff supports – things like breathing exercises, access to fidgets, making sure kids aren't hungry, and that their facilities are calm spaces.

“ Kids are struggling with feeling connected to their peers and presenting higher mental health needs, Schroeder said. To support this for kids, we prioritize trauma-informed practices like equipping all staff with skills that are universal – small things like staff smiling and using a child's name go a long way. ”

– Rachel Schroeder



Boys & Girls Clubs of the Fox Valley staff and kids at their Menasha location.