

Program offers new opportunities for those with special needs

UW-Extension, 4-H members offer Together We Can

By Talia Gottlieb
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OZAUKEE COUNTY — Youths who participate in 4-H are taught about good citizenship, leadership and life skills through a variety of hands-on activities. The program prides itself on its initiative to inspire creativity — each youth creates a project throughout the year, meeting with the rest of the group or a project mentor bi-weekly or monthly to eventually produce a final product they will then present at the Ozaukee County Fair in the summer.

In an effort to become more aware of the challenges that disabilities create, high school-aged 4-H members have started a new program to serve those ages 5 and older with special needs.

Together We Can engages participants in games and activities to boost the individual's self



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Lydia Hentzen and Ryan Gventer high five during a game they're playing at a Together We Can event.

confidence and social skills.

Created by Tammy Natale, Together We Can is not to be confused with the 4-H program. While the 4-H program indeed sponsors Together We Can, the program has slightly different goals and operations. While local 4-H clubs are only open to only youths, Together We Can allows membership to all ages.

The main goal and emphasis of Together We Can is working with special needs kids from every walk of life to provide a sense of comfort and support.

"The program can be for kids too old for 4-H wanting to continue in this type of environment, or kids who are not able to or do not want to commit to the 4-H program." Natale said.

with a committee of 4 H youths, planned and organized a Halloween program for the members, with bowling, goodie bag decorating, a cookie walk and a lights-on preview of The Haunt, the club's haunted house in Cedarburg.

Dallas Teufel is an active participant in the Together We Can program.

"I'm having a lot of fun so far," he said. "My favorite programs were decorating my bag and going in the haunted house, but mostly bowling. I'm definitely going to bring my friend Tim to the next program."

Teufel's mother, Kathy, reiterated how helpful and beneficial programs like these truly are to the community.

"He loves coming here and always has so much

give kids with all types of disabilities another opportunity to be a part of the community and create new friendships," Lee said.

Yet another active participant in these workshops is 10-year-old Anthony Smith.

"Bowling is my favorite activity so far. I really like Together We Can because I always feel happy when I'm here and have so much fun," Smith said.

Denver Smith, Anthony's grandmother, joined him at the Halloween program. "He (Anthony) doesn't have any siblings," Smith said, "and as a grandparent, I see how little social interaction he gets because of it. This gives him an outlet to meet other kids; it's always a good time for him, and offers diversity into his life."

Robin Lange is another mother involved in the program through her son, Shawn.

"It's programs like these

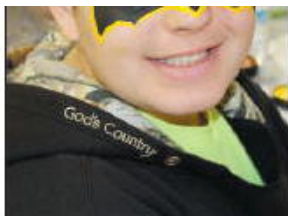
that make the world a better place. They take us one step closer to stopping the horrible bullying that's been going on since even before my day," Lange said.

She is grateful there are people, especially high schoolers, who are dedicated to putting an end to the vicious cycle of harassment of children and teens with disabilities. It also gives her son an opportunity to get out the house and participate in fun activities guided toward his interests, she said.

Together We Can hosts free or low-cost monthly events. Natale is hoping to spread the word of her new program through Best Buddies (which pairs special needs students with mainstream students), families within the school district and other outreach programs in the community.

For more information about Together We Can, contact Tammy Natale at 376-9812 or stutammy@wi.rr.com.





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Quinn Natale is the masked

program, Natale said. However, they still have the same end goal as 4-H: to help people reach their full potential, working and learning in partnerships with caring mentors who inspire each participant in the program to create an original project to present at the Ozaukee County Fair. Together We Can hosted its second program Oct. 17

and always has so much fun. It warms my heart when high school students get involved to better the lives of kids like Dallas," she said. "Dallas was bullied in high school; people told him to kill himself. He had to work with a counselor just to prove to himself that he was worth something. It's inspirational to see how the times



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Pictured at the Together We Can October event are, from left, Quinn Natale, Tammy Natale, Grace Toebes and Grace Gventer.