



Here is Where Our Future Grows

“Changes implemented due to PartnerSHIP 4 Health has led to an increase in self-esteem and opportunities for learning skills that the youth can take away from the program.”

Stephen Larson, Director
West Central Regional Juvenile Center



Learn more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVc11pt-AEo>

Sometimes change results after opening your eyes to a new perspective, and other times it results after a little support from others. For West Central Regional Juvenile Center (WCRJC), it came through resources provided by PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H), local public health and community partners working to reduce obesity and tobacco use in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties.

The West Central Regional Juvenile Center (WCRJC), located in Moorhead, Minnesota, provides services for juveniles with behavioral, protection, dependency and delinquency issues. Individual treatment plans dictate length of stay, and youth reside at the center from 30 days to 12 months or more.

WCRJC initially identified concerns around their recreation programming which at the time consisted of competitive games. Youth with athletic ability and skills excelled during this time and those with lower skill levels struggled with participation and in some cases tried to “get out” so they would not have to participate. The solution was to develop a culture focused on youth involvement rather than competition. Now the activities are focused on exercise and skill building. These could help build confidence and can be lifelong activities.

PS4H offered WCRJC staff an opportunity to receive training from SchoolsAlive! Consultants. “There were limited activities that were offered for youth prior to PS4H,” states Stephen Larson, WCRJC Director. This training provided staff with new skills on how to engage youth in fitness and recreation. A “Wellness Committee” was formed, and it developed a comprehensive approach to enhance organizational wellness.

A culture shift has happened within WCRJC where recreational and leisure time is now considered physical activity time. The staff has seen an increase in self-esteem in

the youth. “With more of a focus on exercise in our recreation, we have seen residents want to set personal goals for themselves,” states Larson. Personal goals are related to weight management or increasing physical activity skills. These goals are incorporated into youth’s treatment plans, which allows for them to have regular conversations about how their goals are being met and helps to support youth to keep them on track.

Another area identified was the need to increase healthy eating opportunities. “One of the best things we did was developing a garden on site. The kids built the raised bed garden frames, planted, watered, maintained, and harvested the produce,” stated Troy Amundsen, WCRJC Supervisor. “They were taught how to use the garden produce in recipes such as salsa. They just love this project.”

Starting in the winter of 2013, youth began to germinate plants in milk cartons. They were responsible to take care of the seedlings. In the spring, the youth worked together with a staff member to build their therapeutic garden. The youth were responsible to plant the garden, water and pick weeds. The produce was used as a healthy snack alternative during the day. Many of them have not had the opportunity to be exposed to or prepare fresh produce. The youth took great pride in caring for the plants and building the garden area.

All of these changes in turn contribute to improved wellness and enhanced treatment plans. “Seeing the changes and mind-set change in staff is leading us to teach our youth additional life skills that will help them be successful when they complete their program and re-enter the community,” stated Stephen Larson, WCRJC Director. Collaborating with PS4H empowers WCRJC to better nurture and equip each youth in its program to have a quality tomorrow.

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