



Positive Youth Development Programming: January-March 2026



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Needs Assessment

- Youth have an opportunity to explore their spark(s)
- Mentorship programs where older youth (ages 15-24) can mentor or volunteer for younger generations.
- Youth engagement increases in county level programming

Updates from the Community Needs Forum

- Introduced the concept of *sparks* during the **Hometown Today livestream** as part of ongoing education for families, volunteers, and community members. The livestream explained what sparks are, why they matter for youth thriving, and how adults can support youth in exploring their interests.
- Shared information about the **Spark Your Sparks** lesson plan, an upcoming curriculum designed for 4-H club meetings and other youth programs.
- Raised community awareness of the importance of sparks, helping families understand how sparks contribute to youth resilience, mental health, and motivation.

Sparks Research and Teaching

Developed and pilot of the Spark Your Sparks Lesson Plan, a one-hour, in-person program designed to help youth in grades 3–5 (with adaptations for older youth) identify their personal sparks, share them with peers, and name supportive adults.

Lesson structure includes:

Name Your Sparks: Youth answer reflection prompts and write or draw their sparks.

Share Your Sparks & Whose Spark Is It?: Youth share their sparks with peers and identify caring adults who can support their interests.

Materials created: handouts, posters, educator guides, and reflection prompts.

Research from the Search Institute and 4-H Thriving Model continues to guide implementation, emphasizing that youth thrive when they can identify and explore sparks.

Program Highlights

Witzel facilitated the **2026 4-H Family Learning Day**, coordinating more than 30 hands-on workshops that strengthened youth learning in STEM, animal science, environmental education, and creative problem-solving.

- Families described the event as valuable, affordable, and well organized.
- Youth reported clear knowledge gains and increased enthusiasm for learning.
- Families identified new 4-H pathways such as American Spirit, Sparks programming, and 4-H Camp.
- Many participants identified emerging sparks as a result of their workshop experiences.

Dodge County Family Learning Day Sparks Session

- **11 youth participants**, all 4-H members, completed the Spark Your Sparks workshop.
- Participants identified personal sparks, shared them with peers, and named adults who could support those sparks.
- Sparks data showed strong interests in:
 - **STEM** – 27%
 - **Environmental/Outdoor Education** – 27%
 - **Agriculture & Animal Science** – 18%
 - **Expressive Arts** – 18%
 - **Leadership & Community** – 9%
- Youth shared sparks such as building, RC cars, Legos, ice fishing, 4-wheeling, farming, horses, music, and observing nature.

Current Projects:

- Member Experiences Application and Interviews
- Cloverbud Sparks Series
- Camp Preparations