

April 2026 Program Report



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
DANE COUNTY

Dane County Welcomes a New Extension Director

Shelly Shaw comes to Extension with a broad background in public health from working as an infectious disease epidemiologist to implementing community-based interventions to keep kids healthy and active. Shelly graduated from North Central College with a BA in Biology and the University of Minnesota, School of Public Health with an MPH in Epidemiology. Her most recent role was the Director of the Office of Community Health at UW Madison, Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. Underlying her varied public health experience is a passion for prevention, community engagement, and seeking out the voices that



we often miss in our everyday decision making.

As Shelly transitions into this role with Dane County Extension she also finds herself with an unfamiliar amount of time at home with one kid off to college this year and another not far behind.

To learn more, [contact Shelly](#).

This summary report highlights just a few of the programs and projects Dane County Extension Educators facilitated or taught this past month. If you would like more information on any of our programs, please contact me or visit our website.

- Shelly Shaw
Director



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Strengthening Fundraising Skills for Nonprofits

Extension is developing and updating a five-session online course focused on fundraising and donor relationships for nonprofit leaders. Led by our Community Development Educator, Noah Reif, the program helps organizations build stronger financial foundations so they can better meet community needs and create positive change.

Nonprofits are facing rising operating costs and limited

funding, and local assessments show these challenges are also affecting organizations in Wisconsin. In response, Extension is updating existing training materials using feedback from past participants to better reflect current needs.

A team of Extension educators is refining the curriculum and providing practical tools to help participants assess fundraising efforts, strengthen donor

relationships, and build clear strategies to support their mission. The course will be offered online in five 90-minute sessions, and once finalized, it can be used by Extension educators statewide to support local nonprofit organizations.

To learn more, [contact Noah](#).

Youth Leading Climate Action in Dane County

In honor of Earth Month, PBS Wisconsin highlighted local efforts led by Positive Youth Development Educator Taylor Seale through [Field Notes on Climate](#), a resource designed to help teachers bring climate education into their classrooms.

Featured in the Civic and Community Engagement section, the episode [Planting Seeds of Change: Youth Changemakers for Environmental Justice](#) spotlights the [By Youth For Youth](#) and Youth Climate Action Fund programs. Through these efforts, Dane County high school students awarded \$150,000 to youth-led climate solutions aligned with the City of Madison's sustainability and climate goals.



By Youth For Youth is a collaboration between Extension Dane County, the City of Madison, United Way of Dane County, and the Dane County Youth Commission. The program highlights the power of young people to lead meaningful environmental change.

To learn more, [contact Taylor](#).

Growing Food Sustainably Through Vegetable Gardening Education

Extension offered an online class, Vegetable Garden Crops and Special Techniques, as part of the Green Thumb Gardening series. Led by our Horticulture Educator, Lisa Johnson, the class helps participants learn practical, sustainable ways to grow food while reducing the use of water, fertilizers, and pesticides.

Many home gardeners want to grow food sustainably but may not know where to start. In response, Extension created this series to provide clear, research-based guidance on planning, growing, and maintaining

productive gardens while protecting the environment.

This session focused on crop rotation, tips for growing different vegetables, and gardening methods such as raised beds, no-till gardening, and straw bale gardening, helping participants choose what works best for their space.

Participants reported increased knowledge and confidence, with many planning to change their practices. One shared, "I learned more about using cover crops for my vegetable gardens."

To learn more, contact [Lisa](#).

Upcoming Extension Programs



Money Matters LIVE 2026

**Tues, May 5 | 10am-7:30pm
Zoom**

Free virtual financial education workshops offered on a variety of topics held monthly.



Focus on Fathers

**Tue, May 12 | 1-2pm
Zoom**

The class is designed especially for dads and to anyone interested in the series.



Master Gardener Plant Sale

**Sun, May 17 | 11am-2pm
5201 Fen Oak Drive**

This sale will include hundreds of perennials for shade or sun, vegetable, herbs, annual flowers, and more!



Early Childcare Provider Workshop

**Sat, May 16 | 9am-3pm
Northwood Technical College**

Professional development workshop for Early Childcare providers.



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Impact Report: Supporting Incarcerated Parents and Caregivers

By Kula Yang, Family and Finance Educator



In Wisconsin, conservative estimates suggest that nearly 90,000 children have experienced the incarceration of a parent with whom they live. Parental incarceration is associated with increased risk of negative outcomes for children, including impacts on behavior, academic success, and health. To date,

few strategies exist to support relationship maintenance among incarcerated parents and their children.

Kula Yang is the Family and Finance Educator with Dane County Extension. One of her special programs is called The Literacy Link. She teaches the class at the Dane County Jail 3–4 times a month and has reached nearly 100 incarcerated parents and over 250 children. This class is special for families involved in the justice system because parents in jail can bond with their children by video recording themselves reading a storybook, which is then shared with their children at home. The goal is to reduce the trauma of separation, strengthen family relationships, and increase children’s exposure to books and reading.

As a result, most parents who participate enjoy creating the videos and say they feel closer to their children. Many report increased confidence in reading to their children and value having something that keeps them focused on their families during incarceration. Caregivers who receive the videos report that they help children stay connected to the parent in jail or prison, with many children showing positive emotional responses and excitement about receiving the book. About half of caregivers even report reading more often with their children after receiving the video and book. The impact of The Literacy Link program is meaningful, as it supports communication and connection between parent and child during incarceration and helps mitigate the effects of separation on families.