

January 2026 Program Report

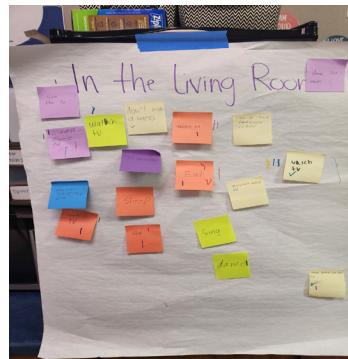
Preparing Elementary Students to Be Home

Kula Yang, Extension Family Engagement and Relationships Educator, partnered with Westside Elementary School in Sun Prairie to deliver a 1.5-hour Home Alone workshop that helps elementary students build skills and confidence for staying home alone safely, especially during school breaks.

After seeing the positive impact of the workshop through another school, Community Schools Site Coordinator Cindy Kimbrel collaborated with Extension to bring the program to Westside's afterschool setting. Students participated in hands-on activities, discussions, and planning exercises, and received take-home worksheets to continue learning with their caregivers.

This effort reached 50 elementary students and is part of a program that has served more than 100 students overall. The workshop supports a diverse and vulnerable audience, strengthens relationships within the afterschool program, and deepens Extension's partnership with the Sun Prairie School District.

To learn more about this workshop contact Kula Yang at Yang.Kula@dan-county.gov



Preparing Gardens for Winter

Lisa Johnson, our Horticulture Educator, reached 53 community members through an online class focused on winter-proofing gardens, lawns, and landscapes. Lisa Johnson, our Horticulture Educator, helped participants learn how to protect trees and shrubs, prepare vegetable gardens, and preserve overwintering habitat for beneficial insects to improve plant survival and support environmental stewardship. The program emphasized cost-saving practices such as preventing winterburn and wildlife damage to woody plants, as well as reducing pests and disease in the following growing season.

Participant feedback highlighted practical takeaways including leaving leaves for insect habitat, better preparing shrubs for winter, and properly winterizing vegetable gardens, with several participants planning to share what they learned with others.

One participant said, *"I have a neighborhood cleanup coming up next weekend that I plan to bring some of this knowledge to!"*

To learn more about this winter course contact Lisa Johnson at Johnson.Lisa@danecounty.gov



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.

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Building Financial Stability Through Coaching

Extension's financial coaching program supports individuals and families in creating financial goals and building money management skills during times of income change or unexpected hardship. Clare Dahl, our Financial Educator, provides personalized, one-on-one coaching that helps participants feel confident and in control of their finances.

Across Wisconsin, many residents face financial strain, with a significant number living in poverty or within the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold and reporting challenges with budgeting, debt, and savings. Extension's coaching helps participants create spending plans, reduce debt, and save for emergencies using a flexible approach.

Science-Based Conservation in the Upper Sugar River

Extension provided ongoing guidance to the Farmers for the Upper Sugar River producer-led watershed group, supporting planning meetings and educational efforts that advance conservation practices grounded in research. Will Fulwider, our Regional Crops Educator, and Wade Moder, our Natural Resources Educator, worked together to advise the group, reaching 90 contacts and engaging 15 farmers who meet regularly throughout the year.

In 2024, 94% of participants identified clear financial goals, 81% felt empowered to handle financial challenges independently, and 80% reported increased hope and confidence. Clients paid off \$43,560 in debt and saved \$35,850, benefiting an additional 449 family members.

One participant shared, *"I planned ahead, tracked my spending, and felt less overwhelmed by saving versus spending. The month was a success, and I feel more accountable and confident about my financial future."*

To learn more about coaching contact Clare Dahl at Dahl.Clare@danecounty.gov

Youth Voice in the Dane County Youth Assessment

Youth played a central role in evaluating and shaping improvements to the Dane County Youth Assessment Survey, offering recommendations to strengthen survey design, administration, and outreach. Their insights focused on increasing engagement and ensuring the data collected more accurately reflects youth experiences to better inform program, policy, and systems change efforts.

Taylor Seale, our Community Youth Development Educator, supported this youth-led work and collaborated with Dane County Youth Assessment partners to elevate youth engagement for future survey cycles. As a result of youth-informed changes, the 2024 survey achieved its highest participation to date, strengthening both data quality and youth awareness of how survey results influence decisions across Dane County.

Contact Taylor Seale at Seale.Taylor@danecounty.gov to learn more.

Upcoming Extension Programs



Money Matters

Feb 3rd | 10-11am OR 6:30-7:30pm | Zoom

A free virtual financial education workshop.



Raising Wisconsin's Children Conference

Feb 4th | 9:00a - 4:30p | Zoom

A free conference to promote children's well-being.



Retirement Planning Today

Feb 26th | 6:30p - 9:30p | 5201 Fen Oak Drive, Madison

A two-part series to support retirement outcomes.



Green Thumb Gardening Winter

Jan 15th - Mar 26th | 5:30p - 7:30p | Zoom

A 10-session gardening series offering in-depth information.