



## Community Connections for Youth

c/o Ken West  
1275 Westwood Trail  
Woodstock, Illinois 60098  
815-338-2921  
westk2@comcast.net

---

### **Summary Report:** **CCY Initiated Woodstock Public Library Birding Program**

#### **Project Goal:**

The goal of this service project was to provide youth with an opportunity that would foster a sense of ownership in the Woodstock Public Library, while introducing them to a new field of study which could be enjoyed at the library and in their own homes. It was hoped that the youth would become empowered by the trust shown them by the library staff (and community) to design a layout and maintain bird feeders on the library grounds. With increased responsibility and a sense of belonging to the library community, we expected the number of incidents requiring intervention in the library to decrease. It was felt that this service project would also benefit all of the library patrons by providing a visit free of disruptive incidents, as well as the greater Woodstock community that walks/drives by the bird feeders. In addition to these benefits, it was our hope that this experience would help to instill a life-long appreciation of nature and our role as guardians of the natural places on our planet.

#### **Rational:**

Many of the youth in our community grow up in households where both parents work. A portion of these children come to the library directly from school because there is no adult at home. Our library serves between 15 and 20 youth in this capacity every day. In an attempt to better serve these youth, and to decrease the amount of negative behavior, that is disruptive to other library patrons, a Young Adult Assistant was hired approximately 3 years ago. The library has developed a number of after school youth programs. Programs have also been offered to parents of the children who utilize these programs. In addition to these programs, a Woodstock Police officer walks through the library approximately three times per week, and makes contact with the youth. With these programs in place, the library staff still reported at least one disruptive incident each day. These incidents ranged from loud talking, to altercations between individual youth, to gang "tagging." Since the Young Adult Assistant was first hired 3 years ago, the number of incidents has decreased. We had hoped to continue this trend with the help of this service project. The project was developed to foster a sense of ownership, trust, and empowerment in these youth. Youth who are so empowered (and trusted) tend to participate in fewer negative behaviors themselves, and expect similar behaviors of their peers.

#### **Project Description:**

In May of 2007, the targeted youth met with Brian Caldwell of the McHenry County Conservation District, Darlene Fiske of the McHenry County Audubon Society, and Doug Crane of the McHenry County Audubon Society. The children learned about native bird species, the habitat they require, and the type of seed that will attract them. The

WORKING TOGETHER TO GIVE YOUTH THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH IS A 501 (C)(3) ORGANIZATION.

library staff made appropriate reading material available to the youth by pulling relevant material from the general shelves and placing them in a designated area that was accessible to the youth. Following the initial instruction, the youth surveyed the grounds to determine the most appropriate locations for the bird feeders. With guidance from Doug Crane and Mary Thompson, the Young Adult Assistant at the Woodstock Public Library, the students designed the layout for bird feeders appropriate to our local. They also drew up a tentative maintenance schedule to assure that a sufficient level of seeds would be maintained in the bird feeders. At the conclusion of the last meeting, each student received a bird feeder and a bag of bird seed so that they could set up a feeder at their home.

**Additional Benefits:**

It is our hope that by completing this project, the youth demonstrated to themselves (and those around them) that they were capable of acquiring and integrating new academic material. In order to successfully carry out this service project, the youth had to develop an understanding of 1) birds and their feeding needs, 2) their own individual limitations, and 3) contingency plans. The process of maintaining the bird feeders will help to develop a sense of consistent effort which will be required in any work situation that these youth choose to pursue.

Many of the youth who are being targeted in this service project, do not feel that they are trusted or respected by the community at large. When an individual gains another's trust and respect, the need to maintain that trust and respect results in positive behavioral change. This service project offers those involved an opportunity to demonstrate to themselves and those in the community that they can successfully complete a project that benefits the community. This provides an opportunity to increase self-esteem and self-worth in every youth participating in the project.

**Project Funding:**

Initially, it was hoped that this project could be funded through a private foundation grant. The proposed total cost of the project (to serve 15-20 children) was \$1359.00. With expected in-kind donations of \$766.00, the grant application requested \$493.00 from the funding agency. When the grant was denied, Dorr Township graciously offered to fully fund the project with a donation of \$500.00. Even though we served 30-40 students (instead of the 15-20 we projected), we were able to complete the project under budget for a total cost of \$476.38. We would not have been able to accomplish this were it not for the generous support of Phil Bohn of Bohn's Ace Hardware in Woodstock, the unpaid services of Brian Caldwell, Darlene Fiske, and Doug Crane, and the significant in-kind donations of staff, meeting room, and food and drinks from the Woodstock Public Library. The remaining funds will be used to purchase additional bird seed and suet for the two feeders that were installed.