

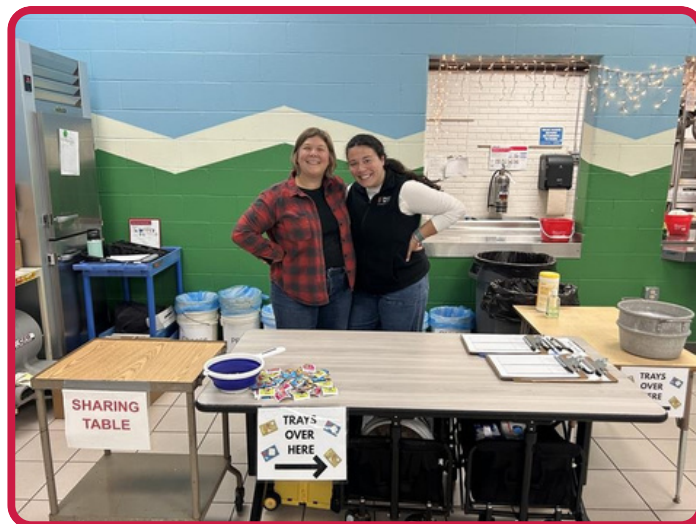


SWAG Success: Students Shaping a Healthier Future

by Hannah Wendels Scott, FoodWise Nutrition Educator

Our FoodWise Nutrition Education team partnered with Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools to help their Food Service Department secure a DPI grant. The funds support changes that encourage students to eat school meals. One exciting outcome was the creation of SWAG - the Student Wellness Advisory Group - at Grove Elementary School!

After meeting with the principal and students, we learned kids were eager to help make their school healthier! With support from the principal, Food Service Director, and Hannah (FoodWise Nutrition Educator), interested 5th graders wrote about what health means to them and why they wanted to join. In total, we have 10 students in SWAG!



The first project the students helped lead was the food waste audit in September. The food waste audit revealed what and why foods were wasted. Through this audit, we gathered data to create solutions such as menu changes for the future and implemented a share cart! All of these solutions will help reduce waste, save money, and teach students about sustainability.

SWAG students had an eye-opening experience during the food waste audits, discovering just how much—and what kinds—of food go uneaten at school. They even surveyed classmates to learn why certain items weren't finished. Thanks to this grant, we were able to host two audits and purchase a share cart for the Grove cafeteria!

The share cart is a simple but powerful tool: students can leave unopened items like milk, fruit, or packaged snacks for others to take. This not only reduces food waste but also helps fight hunger by giving students extra options when they need them.

SWAG students have been champions for the share cart, encouraging their peers to use it during breakfast and lunch. And they're just getting started! Coming up, SWAG will launch a winter wellness scavenger hunt and host fruit and veggie taste tests this spring to keep healthy habits fun and exciting.



Partnering for Healthy Waters:

Nepco Lake District Collaboration

by Anna Mitchell, Natural Resources Educator

Over the past several months, Anna Mitchell and Jen McNelly have had the privilege of working closely with the Nepco Lake District (NLD) on efforts that strengthen both local water quality and community engagement. This partnership began with a facilitated conversation among key stakeholders in the Fourmile Creek Watershed – a critical area in the Central Sands Region that has experienced erosion and sedimentation challenges. The discussion brought together six organizations from across sectors to share research, identify gaps, and explore innovative, cost-effective strategies for improving watershed health.

As a result of this initial conversation, NLD recognized the need to first create an internal strategic plan before engaging in broader watershed planning. To kick off this process, Anna helped the district design and implement a stakeholder engagement survey to gather community feedback. The survey targeted residents, recreational users, business owners, and farmers, and generated 69 responses that reflect local priorities and concerns. These insights are now guiding NLD's strategic planning, ensuring decisions are informed by the voices of those who live, work, and play in the watershed.

The survey process was more than data collection – it was an opportunity to build trust and transparency. By reviewing results collaboratively during a facilitated meeting, NLD members learned how to incorporate community perspectives into their planning efforts. This inclusive approach lays the foundation for a strategic plan that aligns organizational goals with community values and watershed health.

Looking ahead, Anna and Jen will continue working with NLD through a series of strategic planning sessions. Together, they'll help NLD define long-term goals for their organization, water quality, and watershed health, and create a roadmap to achieve them. This partnership not only builds local capacity for informed decision-making but also sets the stage for a healthier watershed and stronger community connections.

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400 Market Street - Wisconsin Rapids



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