



Sharing Experiences and Lifting Voices at Wisconsin's CHW Gathering

by Ka Zoua Thao, Bilingual Community Health Worker

Presenting at Wisconsin's 3rd Annual Community Health Worker (CHW) Gathering in June was an inspiring and energizing experience for me. As a Bilingual Community Health Worker, I felt proud to share the work I'm passionate about and to connect with so many CHWs and allies who are committed to strengthening community health across the state.

One of the highlights of the event was presenting on the Hmong Planning Ahead curriculum. I was grateful for the opportunity to talk about how culturally grounded resources can support Hmong families as they navigate planning, communication, and health decisions. This curriculum reflects the values, traditions, and lived experiences of our community, and sharing it with others felt deeply meaningful.

I also co-presented CHW Voices in Wisconsin as part of a team that included a researcher and two other CHWs. Together, we highlighted the importance of elevating CHW perspectives, documenting our experiences, and ensuring that frontline voices shape statewide health initiatives. Collaborating with my team made the presentation even more powerful—we each brought unique insights from our work, and our shared message resonated strongly with the audience.

Beyond presenting, I participated in two panel discussions: the Chronic Disease Prevention Panel and the Justice-Impacted and Re-entry Panel. On both panels, I shared stories from my work with community members, especially those who face cultural, linguistic, or systemic barriers. It was meaningful to contribute to conversations that directly impact the people we serve and to learn from the experiences of other panelists.

What I enjoyed most throughout the Gathering was connecting with CHWs and CHW allies from all over Wisconsin. I loved exchanging ideas, sharing challenges and successes, and learning from the incredible work happening in different communities.

Every conversation reminded me why this work matters—because CHWs meet people where they are, honor their stories, and help them navigate systems that aren't always easy to access.



4-H Summer Travels

by Laura Huber, 4-H Program Educator

Young people love to travel, and 4-H offers special opportunities just for them. This summer Wood County 4-H joined forces with Marathon and Langlade counties to offer two great experiences. These experiences incorporate the best type of education where the lessons are so wrapped up in fun that young people don't realize at the time just how much they are learning. Each of these experiences includes lessons in history, economics, geography, sociology, science, and so much more. They also include conversations on life goals and options after high school graduation for accomplishing those goals.

As 4-H Program Educators, my planning partners and I set high expectations for youth travelers. Travelers and an adult guardian attend an orientation to learn about the trip and what to expect. We build a foundation of trust so that both parents and youth feel comfortable sharing their concerns with us and allow us to create a space where every youth succeeds. The youth who travel with us come from a variety of backgrounds: some have never been out of the state, some have never stayed in a hotel, and some have never spent a night away from home. Some youth deal with ADHD, Autism spectrum disorder, anxiety, depression, or other conditions. We all work together to ensure that every person on the trip finds a place where they belong, feel good, build friendships, and are safe to learn new things.

Discover Wisconsin – La Crosse

In July, 30 youth hopped on a motor coach to make new friends, explore new places, and get a taste of life on a college campus. The goals of this 3-day, 2-night trip were to:

- Build knowledge about Wisconsin's history and cultures
- Develop and practice teamwork and social skills
- Grow independence and self-confidence

Our crew included youth who just finished grades 6-8, three 4-H educators, an AmeriCorps member, and two volunteers.

Our first stop was the reported favorite: Volk Field. We toured the Air National Guard Base with a fantastic guide and learned so much! It was cool to watch pilots practice taking off and landing fighter jets and tanker aircraft from the air traffic control tower! We learned a lot about military careers and education options.

We stayed in a UW-La Crosse dormitory and ate some meals in the dining hall. We even got to learn about archaeology in a campus classroom and museum. Other stops included a river boat ride on the Mississippi, an auto museum, a community aquatic center, the National Eagle Center, and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Pepin.

A grant from Alliant Energy helped to keep this trip affordable for families.



4-H Summer Travels *Continued*

Wisconsin Discovers – St. Louis

In response to overwhelming demand from youth who had graduated out of the Discover Wisconsin program, we introduced a new trip for high schoolers this summer. The new experience, called Wisconsin Discovers, leaves the state for a 4-day, 3-night experience. This year was amazing and has set the stage for Wisconsin Discovers every year to come.

Goals of the Wisconsin Discovers trip include all of those we have for Discover Wisconsin with the added expectation of youth leadership and communication. During Wisconsin Discovers, travelers help lead activities for the whole group and work on a communication plan to share what they did and learned on the experience.

Here are some of the stops during Wisconsin Discovers:

- Caterpillar Visitors Center, Peoria
- Union Station, including the St. Louis Aquarium
- Grants Farm
- Ulysses S Grant National Historic Site
- The MUNY – backstage tour and live performance of Newsies
- The Gateway Arch National Park
- City Museum
- St. Louis Zoo
- Six Flags
- Lincoln's Tomb, Lincoln Home National Historic Site, and the Old State Capitol, Springfield

Twenty-seven youth, three 4-H educators, two AmeriCorps members, and three volunteers made up our travel team this year. Evaluations were overwhelmingly positive. Our entire crew looks forward to taking Wisconsin Discovers to a new location next summer, and we have a long list of suggestions from youth who joined us this year!

Many thanks to Connexus Association for the generous grant to support this program!

