

UW-Stout: Students give back through involvement at new Boys & Girls Clubs middle school program

Posted on Monday, Nov 21, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Menomonie, Wis. — Three students from University of Wisconsin-Stout are helping the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Greater Chippewa Valley take its services to the next level and serve more children in the Menomonie area.

Lyam Steele, of Eau Claire, Jazmine Williams, of Roscoe, Ill., and Pa Chie Vang, of Menomonie, are part-time employees with the new Menomonie Middle School after-school program. In mid-November, a ribbon-cutting was held to celebrate the additional program, which joins the elementary program at River Heights.

“I really enjoy making an impact in these kids’ lives,” Steele said. “The smiles I see from the kids when they enter the room is great. They always bring a different story or attitude each day. This really helps me love the work.”

Williams said she is enjoying “being a part of the growing youth in our community and helping them develop into the new generation.”

“The club’s programs are important because they really do provide kids with an environment that is safe and inclusive,” Vang said.

The ribbon-cutting and kick-off of the program on Nov. 14 culminated several years of planning and fundraising for the Eau Claire-based nonprofit, which has clubs in five area cities.

Community support, including from board members such as UW-Stout Chancellor Katherine Frank, donors and the student workers, helped make the expansion possible, said CEO Ann Kaiser.

“The Menomonie community is very supportive of the Boys & Girls Clubs. They see the need for club youth development programs, they understand the value of providing enriching experiences during out-of-school time and they know how it adds to the quality of life,” Kaiser said.

Mentor relationships formed at the club, such as with the UW-Stout student employees, “help kids feel confident, build their self-esteem and help them to build perseverance and resiliency as adults,” she added.

“We’re incredibly grateful for the many individuals and businesses whose support made the club’s opening possible. The need for community support is ongoing, and the return on investment truly is priceless when you think about how these opportunities can change the trajectory of a life. Whether it’s financial support or volunteerism, we need even more involvement to keep up with the demand for participation,” Kaiser said.

Learn more about the capital campaign [here](#).

Steele is a [criminal justice and rehabilitation](#) major. As a youth development specialist at the club, he sees the work as a way to gain practical experience in his career field and help children.

“The experience is great to have as I will most likely be working with kids in my future job as a police officer or sheriff’s deputy. This is also a great way to give back. As a kid I went to the Boys & Girls Club.”

His duties include helping students with homework, facilitating and supporting program activities and supervising children.

“I also role-model kind, caring and respectful behavior and ensure that kids are using materials and equipment in a safe and positive manner,” he said, with a goal of “making the club a fun place to be.”

Steele and Williams each work between 15 and 20 hours a week. The middle school is about a mile from UW-Stout’s central campus.

Williams, who is majoring in [arts administration and entrepreneurship](#), is a teen specialist at the club.

“I was looking for an engaging, hands-on job that gave me the opportunity to plan

and be a part of the community,” she said. Along with helping plan programs and supervise children, Williams supports efforts to create an equitable, diverse and inclusive environment at the club.

“I think the program is important because it gives parents more time to work and do outside activities yet engages their youth in doing activities that grow and shape them into who they will one day become,” she said.

Vang is majoring in [human development and family studies](#).

Working 10 to 15 hours a week as a youth development specialist, she enjoys building positive relationships with the children and helping nurture their development.

“It has given me an opportunity to implement what I’ve learned through my courses about development in children — the emerging adulthood phases. It has been so important to meet them all where they are at in their development and help them either build new skills or enhance their already learned skills so that they can find different ways to problem-solve or try new things,” Vang said.

As a parent, Vang realizes that “it can be difficult to navigate big feelings and changing emotions from little bodies, and this experience has given me an opportunity to assess how I navigate these challenges with my own children.”

Along with the three part-time student workers at the middle school, a UW-Stout [school counseling](#) graduate student, [Tana Prokosch](#), is a full-time program coordinator for the clubs. Including Menomonie, the Boys & Girls Clubs of the [Greater Chippewa Valley](#) has programs in Eau Claire, Altoona, Chippewa Falls and Black River Falls.

Menomonie is the fastest- growing of the five locations. The middle school program has received a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant, renewable for up to five years.

As a result, membership and program fees are waived for children.

UW-Stout is Wisconsin’s [Polytechnic University](#), with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the FOCUS2030 strategic plan.