

# Extension Impact: Education Makes a Difference

Spring 2025

## Planning AHEAD: Waupaca County Veterans Prepare for the Future

By Alicia Utke: UW- Madison Extension Human Development and Relationships Educator for Waupaca County



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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
WAUPACA COUNTY

This winter 23 veterans and two of their spouses gathered weekly at Fox Valley Technical College Waupaca to participate in *Planning AHEAD for Veterans*, a free 7-week educational program led by Extension Educator Alicia Utke. The series guided participants through end-of-life planning, helping to ease future burdens on their loved ones while empowering them to make informed decisions.

This was the first time the UW-Madison Extension Planning AHEAD program was adapted specifically for veterans. In partnership with the Waupaca County Veterans Service Office, the program included veteran-specific considerations and up-to-date resources.

Each session focused on a different topic—financial changes, advanced directives, estate planning, end-of-life care, final wishes, and grief. Local guest speakers, from ThedaCare, a funeral home, an elder law attorney, and other professionals brought expert insights to the group. Participants received a comprehensive workbook and were encouraged to take action throughout the program.

To support social connection and address the growing epidemic of loneliness, the program also created intentional space for participants to interact and build relationships. Each week, refreshments were provided, and time was set aside for conversation. This informal social time gave veterans a chance to share stories, offer support, and simply enjoy being together in community. “I have learned so much—I also learned what I thought I knew was wrong,” one veteran shared. “It took a lot of my stress away. Very worthwhile.”

“We thought we were well-prepared for estate planning but found better options because of this class,” another said. “Alicia is an excellent communicator and understands different learning styles.”



Photo Description: UW Extension Educator Alicia (left) and Elder Law Attorney Ali (right) walk participants through estate planning during a Planning AHEAD for Veterans session. Instead of our usual horseshoe setup, everyone faced forward to focus on this more complex topic and follow along with the presentation.

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Community  
Development

**Christi Gabrilka**  
FoodWise

**Alicia Utke**  
Human  
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**Hailee Paul**  
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**Dennis Wengelski**  
**Dick Rohan**  
**Larry Eisentraut**  
**Ken Jaeger**  
**Bernie Ritchie**

Participants actively completed end-of-life planning tasks each week, including updating wills, identifying health care directives, and communicating wishes with family.

“The workbook is invaluable—both as a prompt and as an organized documentation tool,” shared another attendee.

UW Extension Waupaca County is proud to support Waupaca County veterans through meaningful, accessible education that helps individuals plan ahead with clarity and confidence

Post-program evaluations showed:

- **86% strongly agreed and 14% agreed** that they became more knowledgeable about the seven core topics
- **88% strongly agreed and 12% agreed** that they felt more confident having conversations with loved ones and finding reliable planning resources

## FoodWise helps local Food Service Directors receive \$1000 grant to get students more interested in School Meals and Nutritious Food Choices

*By Christi Gabrilka, UW- Madison Extension FoodWise Coordinator for Calumet, Outagamie, Winnebago & Waupaca Counties  
Hailee Paul, UW- Madison Extension FoodWise Educator for Waupaca County*

FoodWise has been partnering with Manawa and Clintonville Elementary Schools for several years delivering a series of nutrition education to their Kindergarten and 2nd grade classrooms, with a focus on MyPlate and the five food groups, exposing students to new foods, and supporting students in making nutritious choices.

During the 2024-25 school year, FoodWise had an opportunity to partner with schools and team up with the WI Department of Public Instruction’s (DPI) Team Nutrition initiative to hold focus groups to get student’s opinions on eating school meals. Locally, FoodWise collaborated with students and staff at Manawa Elementary School. This effort aimed to help determine messaging and images that resonated with youth to be used on the *Wisconsin School Meals Rock!* social marketing campaign materials, which included messaging for students, parents, teachers, schools administrators, and other key stakeholders. FoodWise learned from these focus group discussions how to better tailor strategies to support school nutrition personnel and improve the appeal of school meals and increase the selection of nutritious food choices offered on the breakfast and lunch lines.



With information gathered in the final report DPI was able to provide a second round of funds as phase 2 of the school meal appeal effort. Waupaca County FoodWise partnered with both Manawa and Clintonville Elementary Schools Food Service Directors to encourage students to adopt healthy eating patterns. Phase 2 of this effort included nutrition education facilitated by FoodWise that promoted MyPlate in classrooms. DPI also provided training for school nutrition staff on Meal Appeal strategies and how to incorporate them into their meal service. By completing the training and assessments, the schools were eligible for a \$1000 reimbursement to their Food Service program to use Meal Appeal strategies which reinforce the education provided in the classrooms. Both Manawa and Clintonville Food Service Directors used their funds to purchase knife sets, posters, equipment for a seasoning bar, share tables and serving utensils to help support the meal appeal strategies they choose to implement.

## Strengthening Community Organizations Through Strategic Planning

By Amy Ebert: UW- Madison Extension Community Development Educator for Waupaca County

For community-serving organizations like nonprofits, local governments, and coalitions, having a clear mission, vision, and goals is key to their success. But when leadership changes, community needs shift, or resources evolve, organizations need a plan to stay on track. Strategic planning helps organizations set priorities, align resources, and ensure everyone is working toward the same goals.

In **November 2024**, I worked with the Waupaca Historical Society board to facilitate a board retreat, using it as a springboard for updating their strategic plan. I guided board members through a structured, yet flexible planning process tailored to their organization. This approach allowed them to refine their mission, vision, and goals while developing action plans to move the organization forward.

In **February 2025**, I facilitated a follow-up retreat with **eight board members**, leading to several outcomes:

- **Engaged participation**, with strong discussions on past accomplishments and future goals.
- **Mission, vision, and messaging improvements**, including reviewing the mission statement and refining an elevator speech.
- **A strategic plan and timeline** that the board supported for its clarity and flexibility.
- **Stronger community connections**, with an emphasis on stakeholder engagement and a proposed community survey.

### Strategic Planning Timeline: February–July

Goal: Update the WHS strategic plan to align with mission, grant requirements, and community needs.

Month	Objective	Activities
February	Clarify Mission & Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review mission and vision.</li> <li>• Check alignment with grant goals and organizational priorities.</li> <li>• If needed, assign a group to suggest changes.</li> </ul>
March	Conduct SWOC Analysis & Launch Community Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SWOC analysis.</li> <li>• Group the findings into main themes (e.g., staffing, funding, programs).</li> <li>• Finalize the survey content and how it will be shared (online, paper, focus groups).</li> </ul>
April	Review Early Survey Data & Refine Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review early survey results.</li> <li>• Compare the insights with SWOC findings.</li> <li>• Finalize 3–5 strategic goals.</li> </ul>
May	Conclude Community Engagement & Develop Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrap up the community engagement.</li> <li>• Review all feedback.</li> <li>• Create strategies for each goal.</li> </ul>
June	Create Timeline & Assign Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize strategies and action steps for each goal.</li> <li>• Set a timeline for each priority.</li> <li>• Assign roles to board members, committees, or staff.</li> </ul>
July	Review & Approve Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present final draft of the plan.</li> <li>• Review, edit, and approve.</li> </ul>
<b>Board's Role</b>		<b>Facilitator's Role</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively participate in discussions during monthly meetings.</li> <li>• Help distribute surveys and promote engagement.</li> <li>• Provide input on strategies and action steps.</li> <li>• Review and approve the final plan in July.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide the process during meetings.</li> <li>• Provide tools, templates, and guidance for community engagement.</li> <li>• Ensure discussions stay focused and productive.</li> </ul>

*Strategic planning timeline I created to guide the Waupaca Historical Society's next steps.*

This strategic planning process is ongoing, with a flexible six-month timeline to implement key actions. While the full impact will unfold over time, the process has already provided clear direction and reinforced planning as a tool for strengthening organizational capacity. By developing trust, shared understanding, and collective action, the board is now better positioned to serve the community and address local needs.

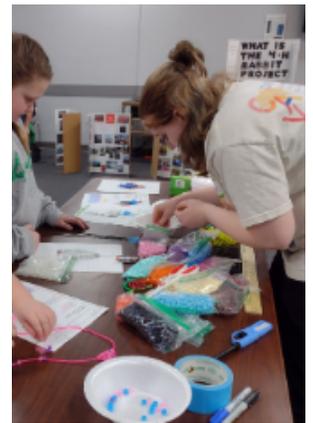
## Waupaca County 4-H Open House a Success

By Penny Tank: UW- Madison Extension 4-H Educator for Waupaca County

Showcasing the variety of opportunities in 4-H is a priority as many still think you have to live on a farm or have animals to be in 4-H. Having an open house where current members and leaders can show projects, answer questions, and lead different activities is a great way to do this.

In partnership with the Waupaca Area Public Library, a 4-H Open House was planned for two hours on a Saturday morning in January. Tank invited current 4-H members and leaders to volunteer, bring projects, lead some hands on projects, and talk to visitors about 4-H. Six youth and six adults manned stations where they showed some of their projects, taught participants how to finger knit, use a compass for a scavenger hunt, and do rabbit showmanship, along with craft projects. There was a table set up with a spinning wheel and 4-H trivia.

Trying a new time of the year for this open house proved to be a success with increased traffic at the library and we had not only families wanting to enroll, we also had newly enrolled families that took advantage of the chance to learn more. About 10 families received 4-H enrollment information and club leader contacts, which was an increase over last year. The Open House was also a good youth leadership experience for the members to interact with those not familiar with 4-H. One family even came from a neighboring county hoping to learn more general information about 4-H. This year also included more advertising with a Facebook event created with more details.



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