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Monroe County 4-H Program Adds Clubs in City Recreation Centers

Earth Explorers 4-H Clubs Promote Positive Youth Development in Rochester

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Monroe County's 4-H Positive Youth Development Program has established a unique series of afterschool clubs that work with three – soon to be seven – recreation centers in the city of Rochester. City youth who currently participate after school at the Thomas P. Ryan, Adams Street, and Frederick Douglass Recreation Centers are learning life skills through 4-H curricula and activities.

The Earth Explorers 4-H clubs were kick-started by Stephanie Benway, Environmental Program Coordinator with Department of Recreation of the City of Rochester in March 2019. Using her previous experience with a local organization focused on local, healthy food, dignified housing and educational opportunities, Ms. Benway sought to connect with a like-minded program to help youth learn gardening skills. Partnering with the Monroe County 4-H Program offered the structure and support her clubs would need.

The Earth Explorers 4-H club welcomed AmeriCorps VISTA & 4-H volunteer Theresa Lippa to the Thomas P. Ryan Recreation Center on an unusually cold day in late May.

"Stephanie has already proven to be a natural leader," says Ms. Lippa, who notes that Ms. Benway is both popular with the youth, and responsive to their needs. After the 4-H pledge was said and before the club headed outside, she made sure the youth were prepared for the cold weather, even giving up her own coat to a girl who did not have one.

Outside, the group worked on the raised beds that have already been planted by the club. While going over the existing plants with the youth, Ms. Benway asked the youth to make observations about the colors of the stems, and the differences in the foliage of the plants in order to identify them. They identified beets, carrots, radishes, lettuce, celery, kale, and onion.

On this day, some youth were planting tomatoes, eggplant, peppers and marigolds, while others weeded a new plant bed. They made their tasks fun by naming the earthworms they found, and competing to see who could plant the most and who had the dirtiest hands.

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When a new girl stopped by to see what was being done, one of the new 4-H'ers welcomed her into the group and taught her how to plant!

The Monroe County 4-H team is looking forward to watching the new Earth Explorers 4-H clubs, and their gardens, grow.

The Monroe County 4-H Program is offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension to the youth of Monroe County. 4-H is a worldwide youth development program open to all youth aged 5-to-19, who want to have fun, learn new skills, and explore the world. In return, youth who participate in 4-H find a supportive environment and opportunities for hands-on or "experiential" learning about things that interest them.

Learn more at <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/4-h-youth-development>.



Earth Explorers gardening. Photos by Theresa Lippa.

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