

What happened?

➤ We were invited to join a statewide social connectedness effort.

...and of course, we were ALL in! Our youth programs already focus on building belonging and social connection through youth-adult partnerships and creating inclusive spaces for diverse communities to come together. With part-time staff willing to take on extra hours and additional funding provided, we saw it as the perfect opportunity to engage youth in a new way and launch a pilot passion project.

➤ We hit the ground running!

In November 2023, we learned about the opportunity, with funding starting in January 2024. With a tight timeline, we quickly launched a program to support youth-led events promoting social connectedness. PATCH Coordinator Kayla led the effort, supported by fellow PATCH Coordinators Jay and Paula.

➤ In true PATCH fashion, we went directly to the youth.

In February 2024, we asked youth in our programs, "How would YOU enhance social connectedness in your community?" Youth submitted event proposals, complete with timelines, budgets, and plans to bring them to life by May. We were blown away by the incredible (and diverse!) responses.

➤ And, THEY brought their ideas to life with support from staff!

We provided funding for their time, supplies, and resources to bring their youth-driven events to life, while PATCH staff supported them throughout the planning and execution process.



➤ We also prioritized social connection in other programming.

Even for those not directly involved, we made sure to weave social connectedness into the final part of our 2023-2024 program year. We engaged both youth and adult staff in discussions about what social connectedness is, why it matters, and how we can all help foster it.

What were the projects?

Here's a look at what they envisioned, organized, and brought to life:

NATURE ART

PIPER | WAUSAU, WI

A nature hike followed by an art project using materials collected from the walk

CLOTHING SWAP

MARISKA | SUPERIOR, WI

A community clothing swap with free food and live music to foster connection

REIMAGINING FOOD ACCESS

YASMEEN & JAMILLAH | RACINE, WI

A roundtable discussion with local leaders focused on finding solutions to food deserts

DIVE INTO DISCOVERY

FRANCESCA, SHANYCE & SUZANNAH | MADISON, WI

Using art as a tool to educate and engage the community about water protection

BRANCH & BRIDGE

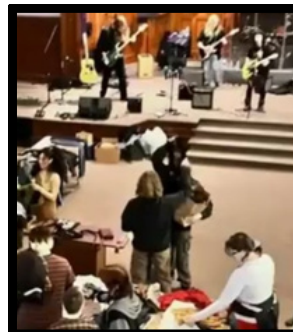
KRISHA | BROOKFIELD, WI

A free yoga session open to both teens and adults at the local high school, followed by a social hour to connect and relax

READING BUDDIES

ZION | MILWAUKEE, WI

High school students connected with elementary students for weekly reading sessions to encourage excitement around reading





OUR COUNTRY'S HEROES

ALLIE | KEWAUNEE, WI

A safe space for veterans to connect with horses and relieve stress

COMMUNITY MURAL

OLA | WAUSAU, WI

A mural created with community members and refugees to celebrate the diversity of Wausau

GROUP MURAL

ATLAS | LA CROSSE, WI

A gathering with students from the theatre and choir departments to create a mural

FEMININOMENON

NAOMI | MADISON, WI

A celebration of women and non-binary musicians, including performances, discussions, and a community music cypher

MENTAL HEALTH CHAT

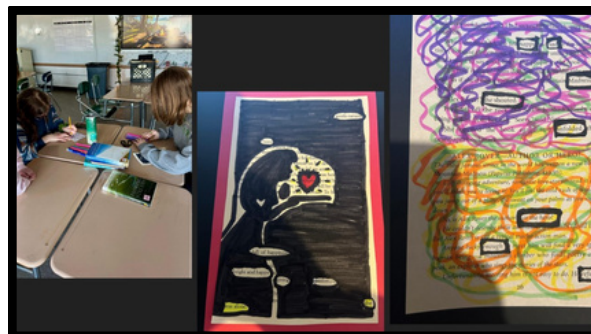
GENEVIEVE | WAUSAU, WI

A seminar focused on mental health, using book art to explore coping skills and PATCH principles

POTTERY PAINTING

OLIVIA | MENOMONEE FALLS, WI

A fun pottery painting session designed to encourage socializing and creativity



What did the youth have to say?

They celebrated their accomplishments and successes!

Through my event, many people made new friends, found a new hangout place, or got to finally feel relaxed after a long week. I believe my event opened up people to connect and communicate. I challenged each person to talk to at least two new people, mostly everyone completed the challenge and felt glad they did. Many people felt glad they were able to connect and participate in what they usually wouldn't do. I overheard many conversations at tables where no one knew each other, but they found what they had in common or something they both liked.

[My Coordinator] was absolutely wonderful throughout this entire process. The journey was anything but smooth, and her constant guidance and support was the only thing that made this possible. I had never budgeted for a grant, reserved a venue, or done many of the other tasks I was responsible for, but she walked me through every step. Whenever we hit rocky patches, she treated them as opportunities for growth and learning, and that made all the difference.

I got experience creating a community activity, even if it didn't work well. I learned what worked and what didn't. I did realize how many supportive adults I have in my life.

I actually had a lot of fun on the night of the event. It was great to see community members showing up and to make new connections. Even though I was focused on facilitating, I enjoyed talking with new people and having meaningful discussions about topics I was interested in. I also enjoyed having the opportunity to practice new skills and take on a different challenge.

I really appreciated this experience! PATCH has always helped to connect me to new opportunities and build new skills, and this was no different. I felt comfortable exploring this new type of challenge within the safety and support of PATCH, and I feel like I've learned and grown so much over the past few months.

I made a community of people who want to continue to meet and come together to support each other!

They also acknowledged the challenges.

We wished we had a larger turnout, but we still made a lot of connections and gained insight from those who came!

I personally felt like it was too easy to get lost in the deadlines and not stay up to date. That's partially my fault but also it might help if we were required to meet with our support person more regularly.

The night of the event, a broken printer made it difficult to print some of the last signs and worksheets...We also forgot drinks as part of the refreshments...There were also some technical difficulties with the slides not presenting... Whenever these small difficulties cropped up, we just tried to stay calm so that we could efficiently identify and pursue a solution and continue on with the night.

And, there were SO many lessons learned!

I learned that I need to give lots of time and more for things to NOT go according to plan. I did anticipate that it wouldn't be easy, but thinking about what setbacks I may face early on could've prevented a lot of stress when planning. I also think that this whole process taught me that success doesn't fit a strict definition and that I need to be less critical of myself and the outcomes I want.

I learned that no matter what, events can go well if you have activities and a good attitude. Next time I would probably reach out individually to a larger group of people, but that wasn't really possible due to time (and mental) constraints.

I learned most importantly about time management and planning. I definitely felt a little stressed at the end of the project but I was able to pull together and complete everything on time. This project taught me to think ahead about my schedule in the future and plan accordingly to make sure I will have time for everything.

What were the Key takeaways?!

➤ Youth gained a valuable hands-on experience!

From brainstorming creative project ideas to making them a reality, they were awarded funding to support their efforts. They developed skills in budgeting, time management, grant writing, leadership, and problem-solving. Along the way, they took ownership of their projects and adapted to challenges.

➤ Time proved to be the biggest challenge.

While PATCH prides itself on its ability to adapt and pivot quickly, this fast-paced project revealed just how much effort and coordination are needed to make things run smoothly. Youth were even surprised by how much goes into planning, preparing, and promoting their events.

➤ Strong youth-adult collaboration was key to success.

Collaborating with youth is a dynamic journey, where with the right support, guidance, and resources, their ideas can evolve into impactful projects. It takes time, thoughtful planning, and teamwork to bring those ideas to life successfully.

➤ There are countless ways to foster social connectedness.

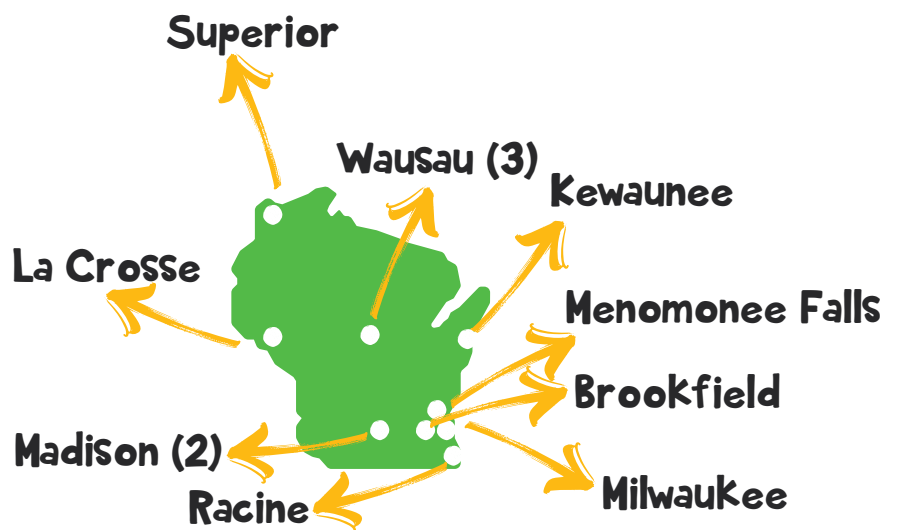
Social connectedness is important everywhere, but the ways to foster it can look really different depending on the community. Youth brought creative ideas that were unique to their own experiences and needs.

10 Individual Projects

2 Group Projects

3 Adult PATCH Staff

9 Wisconsin Communities



#BecauseTHEYaretheexperts