



Michigan 4-H Youth Mentoring

WAYNE CO. 4-H TECH WIZARDS: MR. WELLS, JIMMY, BRANDON & RONELL

On the eastside of the city of Detroit, families face many economic and educational challenges. African American students in this area graduate at a rate of only 67 percent, compared to the statewide average of 77 percent, and 40.1 percent of Detroit children are living in poverty. With so many barriers to success, Blackwell Institute Middle School partnered with Michigan State University (MSU) Extension to bring Michigan 4-H Tech Wizards to the school.

A small-group mentoring program, 4-H Tech Wizards pairs 3-4 youth with an adult mentor who explores STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) activities with the youth as a means of building a positive relationship with a caring adult role model who will help youth succeed.



THE MATCH

In 2013, Ronald Wells joined 4-H Tech Wizards as a mentor to sixth and seventh grade brothers Jimmy and Brandon. Previously a mentor with MSU Extension's Wayne County one-on-one mentoring program, supporting the development of young people was nothing new for the retired Detroit Public Schools principal. The following year, Brandon's friend Ronell joined the match and since then, the four have continued to meet for two hours each week as they explore STEAM programming, attend field trips and have fun.

Over the course of the match, the boys have blossomed. When they first started meeting with Mr. Wells, they were very reserved and wanted to focus solely on the STEAM projects without much personal interaction. But since that time, the personal relationship has taken center stage as the boys look to Mr. Wells for advice on their personal lives and futures. With only two other members of their family having obtained high school diplomas, Mr. Well's insight is invaluable to Brandon and Jimmy as they prepare to graduate high school. In fact, the impact Mr. Well's has had on each of the boys has been so great that they have elected to follow in his footsteps: in 2016 Jimmy (15), Brandon (14) and Ronell (14) each decided to become mentors themselves to younger students at their middle school.

"4-H Tech Wizards is not just a group," said Ronell. "We are a family."



ADDITIONAL KEY POINTS ABOUT THE MATCH

- Mr. Wells maintains positive relationships with the mothers of all of the boys.
- The match has attended 4-H Mentoring Weekend every year since 2013. This three-day event offers youth a camp-like experience as they participate in recreational and educational activities that help mentees and mentors strengthen their mentoring relationship. During their first 4-H Mentoring Weekend, the boys were uneasy being outside their comfort zone. As the oldest of the youth, Mr. Wells challenged Jimmy to keep an open mind and set a positive example for Brandon and Ronell by trying new things. Program Coordinator Anetria Rhodes notes: "I noticed a change in Jimmy after Mr. Wells spent some time talking to him at lunch. He began to take more initiative and try more things and his influence guided Brandon to try canoeing."
- The trio of young men routinely take part in community service activities in their area.



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“Mr. Wells has introduced Jimmy, Brandon and Ronell to a variety of new experiences. He knows how to help the boys get beyond their initial hesitations and find the fun in different activities.”

Anetria Rhodes

ABOUT MICHIGAN 4-H
YOUTH MENTORING

All young people need a caring adult in their life that can provide guidance, lend a listening ear and support their goals and aspirations. While many youth find these individuals on their own, not all are so lucky. To help fill the void for those without a nurturing adult in their lives, MSU Extension offers formal youth mentoring programs in 10 Michigan counties.

Through these programs, and the time committed by nearly 85 caring mentors, 270 Michigan youth were matched with an encouraging adult who served as a personal coach, cheerleader and friend in their everyday life. As a result of these MSU Extension mentoring programs and positive adult relationships:

- 97 percent of surveyed mentees felt they had a mentor that cared about them and 90 percent said their mentor made them feel special.
- 79 percent of surveyed mentees felt their mentor helped them make better decisions and 60 percent were doing better in school, thanks to their mentor’s help.