



Michigan 4-H Youth Mentoring

BAY COUNTY 4-H TECH WIZARDS: TOM AND TALON

Forty minutes north of Flint, the Bay City community faces many of the same economic challenges. With high rates of unemployment and poverty, numerous Bay County families struggle to make ends meet. At one of the city's elementary schools, Washington Elementary, more than 80 percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch, with many coming to school for free breakfast as well.

Looking to provide these children with caring adult role models, Washington Elementary teamed up with Michigan State University 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 relationship. In Bay County, these matches spend two hours together each week before school, enjoying breakfast before taking part in their various STEAM projects.



THE MATCH

In the spring of 2015, Bay County 4-H Tech Wizards matched fourth grader Talon with his mentor Tom. An avid animal-lover who enjoys fishing, hiking, boating, running and robotics, Tom was a perfect match for Talon who enjoys the same hobbies. In the year they have spent together, Tom and Talon have formed a perfect team with their other group mentees: Evan, Jake and Caden. Together, the group enjoys projects including robotics, rocketry, invasive species and rain barrels. The experience has been very rewarding for Tom, who decided to become a mentor as a way to connect with young people and help them to expand their creativity and ability to think outside the box.

Though the matches meet as a group, Talon and Tom took part in a unique activity in 2015 that brought them even closer together: 4-H Mentoring Weekend. A three-day event that offers youth a camp-like experience, 4-H Mentoring Weekend provides recreational and educational activities to mentees and mentors as a means of strengthening their mentoring relationship. Although the entire match was unable to go, Talon was still interested in attending Mentoring Weekend with Tom, despite it being his first trip away from his parents. Unfortunately, Tom had to drive separately to the event due to work commitments and during their separation, Talon's apprehension about leaving home continued to grow. By the time Tom arrived in the afternoon, Talon had begun to break down. However, once Tom arrived, he was able to work closely with Talon to ensure he felt secure and safe – making it successfully through his first weekend away from his parents and providing both Tom and Talon with a great experience.

"Wherever Talon goes, I will be there to support him," said Tom.



ADDITIONAL KEY POINTS ABOUT TOM & TALON'S MATCH

- This match (Tom with Talon, Evan, Jake and Caden) has a fabulous group dynamic. They have been together over a year and have learned to come together as a group to support each other through projects and challenges.
- Talon's parents (mom and stepfather, as well as his father) are very supportive of the mentoring relationship with his mother and stepfather attending all 4-H Tech Wizards family nights.
- Talon's 2015 4-H Mentoring Weekend experience was so positive that in 2016, Talon was one of the first youth to sign up for the event and continues to urge other youth to attend.



“Talon gets excited to see Tom. He watches the door every Tuesday morning and has a big smile when Tom walks in. He really looks up to him.”

- Jodi Wrzesinski, MSU Extension 4-H program coordinator

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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.