



Weighted Blankets

Community Service-Learning Activity
Mt. Moriah 4-H Club

INVESTIGATE

- Investigate the issue or cause this project addresses
- Understand why weighted blankets are needed, and who needs them.
 - People with extreme anxiety caused by autism, sensory processing disorder and other conditions can be difficult to soothe and calm. Research has found that deep pressure touch stimulation releases serotonin, a chemical in the brain that works as a neurotransmitter in the regulation of mood, sleep and sensory perception. Weighted blankets mimic deep pressure touch stimulation and thus have a calming and soothing effect.
 - These blankets can be costly and many families have a difficult time affording them.
 - For information on weighted blankets visit:
<http://www.myweightedblanket.com/what-is-a-weighted-blanket-.html>
- To go deeper, scan media, perform interviews, conduct a survey, make observations, or share a personal experience.

PREPARE & PLAN

- Get to know 4-H group members and their interests, skills, and talents (see Adult Leader Guidesheet on Teambuilding).
- What equipment, materials, know-how, and steps are needed for your project?
- Create a plan for how you will get things done – what role each group member will play, timeline, community partners (see Adult Leader Guidesheet on Action Planning).
- Set a SMART goal for your project (see Adult Leader Guidesheet on SMART goal setting)

ACT

Weights Work Wonders is a service-learning project created by the Mt. Moriah 4-H Club Clothing Project Group from Jasper County, Missouri. The project provides inexpensive weighted blankets and vests for children affected by autism. When a child affected by autism becomes agitated or upset, lying under a weighted blanket or wearing a weighted vest helps the child calm down and regain control.

The 4-H Clothing Project Group created the program in response to a request from the Joplin Regional Center. Many of their client families were unable to afford the \$250 to \$350 cost of commercially made weighted vests and blankets. The 4-H project members secured funding through grants and individual donations, sewed the blankets and vests, and donated them free of charge to the Regional Center to be distributed to their clients. Funders include the Missouri 4-H Foundation, MetLife Foundation (National 4-H Community Service Grant Program), and Children's Miracle Network. In addition, individuals have donated fabric and equipment to the project.

Over four years, the 4-Hers made over 300 weighted blankets and 100 weighted vests and produced an instructional video. In addition, they presented community programs encouraging other groups to begin similar projects. At the Carl Junction Health Fair and the Developmental Disabilities Awareness Fair held at Northpark Mall in Joplin, the 4-Hers set up displays about the project, sewed and stuffed blankets and vests, and explained the project to community members who stopped by the booth. The members also partnered with the members of Les Femmes Family and Community Service Club to present educational programs to a number of Southwest Missouri civic groups. This youth-adult collaboration was funded by a Human Environmental Sciences Extension Development Fund (HEED) grant.

As a result of the Mt. Moriah 4-Hers presentations at local, regional and state and national 4-H events, a number of other 4-H clubs in Missouri have established similar projects. The Master Clothing program in Ohio adopted this project as their community service project, with people from across the United States calling for information, construction instructions, and videos.

While this project is a blessing for many families affected by autism, the 4-H members also benefitted from the project. They learned about developmental disabilities, organizational, leadership, and public speaking skills, and the satisfaction that comes from helping others. In their words, this project is lots of fun!

See the video news story about the Weights Work Wonders project at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5NvJLubsYY>

REFLECT

- Explore your group's thought and feelings about the project (see Adult Leader Guidesheets on Reflection and Continuing Support).
- What did you learn about yourself, your club, the issue, and the people you served?
- What do you plan to do next?
- How might you use some of the skills you learned in other areas of your life?
- What skills did you learn from this experience which can you can also use in college and/or your career?

COMMUNICATE & CELEBRATE

- How can you share what you did and learned with others?
- In what way would your group like to celebrate finishing your project?