

Electric Cooperatives are greatly involved in their communities. They do their best to positively impact the people they serve. The word cooperative means owned by the people and therefore provides a common benefit for the people. The root of the word cooperation means working together for an agreed goal or purpose. Because of this cooperation and teamwork, cooperatives build the best environment for the greater good of the people and promote success.

I personally have had several quality learning experiences with our local cooperative. They are extensively involved with my school and actively participate in extracurricular groups and clubs that I participate in. In local schools, they help fund many enriching opportunities for students. During the COVID pandemic they gave free internet to struggling families so that students could stay connected to their classes. Other ways they enhance education are by providing school supplies, money for special projects, and donating their talents to promote learning. The electric cooperatives help communities by supporting youth programs. Oakdale Electric has sponsored many school sport teams and summer recreation programs, along with contributing to our school's new athletic complex. Through their generosity, many young people have been given opportunities for self-improvement and learned invaluable life skills.

Oakdale Electric generously supports an outdoor adventure program in my school called ChallengeScape. ChallengeScape promotes outdoor skill-building, problem-solving, and teamwork. This program started in 2008. Each summer youth spend one week outdoors learning about themselves, building life skills, and becoming a team with their peers. Eligibility begins in the 8th grade with a one-week outdoor adventure class. In high school, students participate in a week-long camp trip with more challenging outdoor activities traveling to various locations such as Pennsylvania, northern Wisconsin, Arkansas, and Upper Michigan. Because our electric cooperative financially supports this program, I have learned infinite life skills and developed self-confidence in conquering future challenges. It has greatly impacted my life for the better.

Electric cooperatives investment in our local towns is very important for many reasons. Their involvement builds a strong sense of community and increases life connections. Some examples of this include the yearly family picnic, the “giveaways” and rewards shared among members’ special events, and help support low socio-economic families in need. Cooperatives invest in teaching the next generation to become active, strong, wise, and aware individuals. This happens by sponsoring the Youth Leadership Conference and providing education and careers in the cooperative. They also encourage positive growth, learning, and the importance of teamwork along with many other skills. They do this through sponsoring local schools with supplies, educational programs about staying safe around electricity, and supporting local programs such as sport teams, youth groups, and ChallengeScape. In these ways, electric cooperatives demonstrate the importance of being involved in the community.

Electric cooperatives do many things for our community, however, there are also ways they could enhance their involvement. One way that they could increase their purpose is by organizing a club for the youth and elderly. This would be an opportunity to create a bonding relationship between generations and promote a respectful healthy enjoyable experience. This club could meet monthly and do various activities such as a picnic in the park, building care packages for incoming Afghans, gathering school supplies for low-income families, making blankets for the homeless, or having bingo and board game nights. This club would involve the youth and elderly, which could have a lasting effect on both parties. In this club, you could mix the two age groups. With the potential of COVID pandemic shutdowns perhaps creating pen pal relationships or virtual meetings would suit this club more appropriately. This would strengthen the relationships among the community. This could also lift spirits during these hard lonely times especially for the elderly. It would provide fun-filled bonding experiences for young people and the elderly alike.

In closing electric cooperatives influence the community greatly. Not only do they provide essential electricity and internet services to towns, but they also impact local people in

numerous ways. Many people don't realize the positive impact they provide in the community. Without their support families and businesses would be extremely limited. I am extremely grateful to be given this opportunity and be a part of something great. I deeply appreciate and value the electric cooperative in our community.