



# Annual Report

2020

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# Words from our Executive Director

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*“There are years that ask questions and years that answer.”*

My high school English Literature teacher loved this quote from Zora Neale Hurston’s, “Their Eyes Were Watching God” and it is a quote that has come to mind a lot lately.

Many of us would put 2020 in the category of a year that asked questions -- Why do we have to live in a time of a global pandemic? Why are some people struggling to eat while others are making more money than ever? The list goes on.

I, however, believe that 2020 was a year that gave us answers. It highlighted for us, like no other year, just where our societal shortcomings are. What we *don't want* has led our nation and our community to demand an advancement towards what we *do want*. WYN, like so many others, used 2020's struggles as a catalyst for creating solutions.

As you'll see on the pages that follow, our staff transitioned overnight into those who helped deliver food and basic household supplies; then into those who wrote letters to our children and made driveway visits to limit loneliness; then into the tech savvy people who learned Zoom and Google Classroom for conducting meetings and programming.

Our work evolved but never stopped.



I'm proud to say that part of that evolution included expansion. You'll read about our new programming in Ashe County and you'll see that the depth of relationships with our existing students grew stronger than ever.

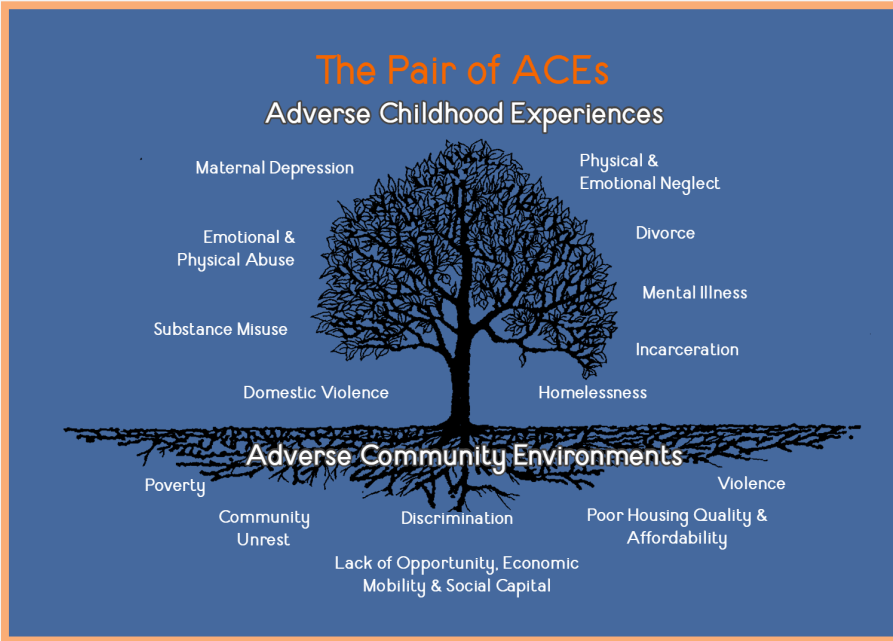
2020 was also a year of tremendous support from you. Your generosity has allowed us to do all of these things. We have gone from fearing cuts early in the pandemic to thriving and growing one year later, and it's all because you invested in our work.

If there are years that give answers, I believe 2020 showed us that WYN's work is an integral part of the social fabric needed to create the thriving and equitable community we seek.

Fondly,  
*Jennifer Warren*

Jennifer Warren  
Executive Director

# Theory of Change



Surgeon General of California and former pediatrician, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris has identified 7 strategies for trauma mitigation in the infographic below.




By intervening as early as possible with these strategies, we can ensure, in Dr. Burke Harris' words, that "early adversity does not have to be deterministic."

WYN utilizes 5 of the 7 below-listed strategies in our work.

WYN is committed to delivering evidence-based interventions and strategies to produce the most effective outcomes.

While the "Pair of ACEs" tree above outlines the issues, the tree to the right displays WYN's interventions on both an individual and a community level. This two-pronged approach increases resilience for children who have experienced ACEs and works to stop ACEs from happening.



-   
**HIGH-QUALITY, SUFFICIENT SLEEP**
-   
**BALANCED NUTRITION**
-   
**REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**
-   
**MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION**
-   
**SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS**
-   
**ACCESS TO NATURE**
-   
**MENTAL HEALTHCARE**

## WESTERN YOUTH NETWORK

## MENTORING



Tyler has been a WYN student for years. Though he has had multiple mentors, they haven't been quite the perfect fit until now.

Enter Ken. Ken has a passion for helping people who have faced big challenges, and has also been skateboarding for years. It just so happens that one of Tyler's favorite activities is skateboarding, and he loves to challenge himself to nail down new tricks. This is how it came to be that our mentoring team made a perfect match!

Ken recognized that Tyler needed an outlet, so he helped Tyler with skating techniques, helped him build a ramp, and even took Tyler to skate parks all around Western NC. They also went snowboarding for the first time this winter.

Through a mutual passion in skateboarding, Tyler and Ken have bonded, and have been able to have meaningful conversations around other important topics about growing up. Ken is doing an amazing job at building trust and helping Tyler grow into an incredible young man.

**150**

individuals served in Watauga & Avery Counties

**3,160**

reported mentoring hours in Watauga & Avery Counties

**71%**

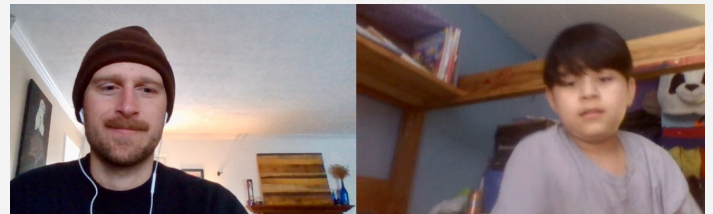
of community-based matches lasted more than one year.

Matches that extend beyond one year typically experience enhanced effects of mentoring.

**90%**

of the matches ended successfully, meaning both parties felt good about the relationship closure.

Most mentoring programs strive for 85%.



*The "Brady Bunch Squares," as some call Zoom, became a common view for mentees and mentors in 2020, as they were often forced to have virtual meetings rather than in-person hang outs.*

*Though it was less than ideal, it was still a way to connect, combat loneliness, provide tutoring and even learn cool new things like coding, as in the photo with Chris and Jose.*

# COVID-19 Response

## WATAUGA & AVERY CO.

### MARCH - APRIL (FIRST 30-60 DAYS)

Staff spent 300+ hours troubleshooting challenges that arose from COVID-19 and offering emotional support

- Provided 1 bike to an isolated child
- Arranged storage for a family who lost their home
- Sent 30 gratitude/birthday cards to mentors
- Provided mentors with 25+ ways to mentor from afar
- Partnered with Watauga County Schools to distribute food and supplies to families

### MAY-JUNE (60-90 DAYS)

- Applied for relief grants and began distribution of supplies
- Began matching mentors using only virtual tools
- Received grant to provide \$4,000 in professional counseling on retainer as needed for kids & families
- Distributed 75 art therapy kits to mentored youth to help them cope with anxiety surrounding the pandemic.
  - In addition, our partner mentoring program in Benin, West Africa educated 20 youth and mentors on the effects of anxiety and how to cope with it using the same art therapy lessons

### JULY-AUGUST (90-120 DAYS)

- Helped organize Back 2 School Festival - served 1,400 students -- a 30% increase from the previous year

### SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER (120-150 DAYS)

- A partnership with Watauga County Schools enabled 25 school-based mentors to meet with youth virtually

### NOVEMBER-DECEMBER (150-180 DAYS)

- Distributed 30 Thanksgiving Meals to families
- Supplied angel tree gifts to 100 children
- Designed and printed new Mentoring rack cards to further promote our programming



## Celebrating Avery Growth

- With support from Lees-McRae, WYN was able to create Avery specific WYN merchandise to spread the word about programming.
- Community Foundation of Western NC provided grant funding to get weighted blankets and stuffed animals for mentees.
- In partnership with High Country Charitable Foundation, funding was available to cover two high profile digital billboards to bring awareness about our program, as well as new signage for the "Be A Mentor" campaign to distribute around the area.



Thanks to a grant from a local organization, Grow Watauga, WYN was able to introduce a new project with our After School students:

*Lil' Sprouts Club.*

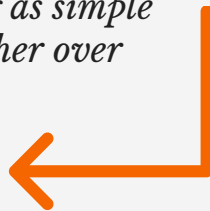
To help bring some life into such a trying time, each student was given an amaryllis bulb to grow and nurture at home. Students proudly showed off their plants to one another during Google Hangouts.

This project helped teach students responsibility in caring for something and provided something small for them to be excited about as they watched the plant transform from bulb to leaves to bloom in a short period of time.



*Despite the challenges that this year brought, our after school staff was thrilled by the deepened relationships with after school students.*

*Hanging out virtually from students' homes created a newfound vulnerability and connection between staff and students. They bonded through new experiences, even something as simple as making breakfast together over Google Classroom.*



- 25** plants provided to students for the Lil' Sprouts Club
- 29** students referred to WYN by other community organizations
- 34** students served in Watauga County
- 2,225** hours of tutoring provided by staff to students.
- 6,378** contact hours between staff and students in Watauga Co





WYN welcomed an expansion opportunity that has been in our strategic plan -- extending our services to neighboring counties.

Personnel from Ashe County Schools reached out to us in early 2020 about the possibility of starting an after school program there in the Fall. When planning a program expansion in a pandemic, there are many changed plans, but WYN was finally able to hire staff and establish the program in November.

Currently, instead of afterschool programming, we are providing care for students on their remote learning days from 7:30-3pm, during which time students receive homework help, social and resilience skills, and positive social interaction. 45 students are now enrolled.

## COVID-19 Response

### MARCH - APRIL (FIRST 30-60 DAYS)

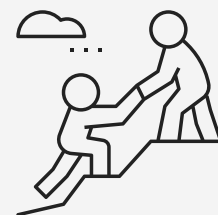
- Connected with students daily on Instagram Live (this was the only mode of contact with students initially)
- Sent 100+ handwritten letters to students along with a stamped/addressed envelope so they were able to write us back
- Provided 16 families with cleaning supplies, toilet paper, and laundry detergent (with the help of Rumble Memorial Presbyterian Church and Quiet Givers)
- WYN staff delivered food to 14 families throughout COVID (donated by Hunger and Health Coalition)
- Worked with school system to get school email addresses to be able to contact students safely on their school computers, and started having daily after school on Google Classroom

### MAY-AUGUST (60-120 DAYS)

- Planned and hosted a modified summer camp
- Warmer months allowed small groups of students to come to WYN for a range of outdoor activities including gardening

### SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER (120-180 DAYS)

- Resumed virtual after school on Google Classroom
- Provided additional times each day called "office hours" when staff were available to help with homework or chat one-on-one with students
- Lil' Sprouts Gardening program was introduced as an ongoing activity for after school students



In the months leading up to Summer, WYN's direct service staff spent their days planning creatively, troubleshooting problems, and fine-tuning a summer camp experience that would be safe for everyone. It became a program that would be one of the most cherished in all of WYN's history!

It looked a bit like this:

- a pod of four students per day attended once a week for six weeks.
- Seven hours were spent outside each day with many masks, and even more hand sanitizer.
- Each pod was given the opportunity to work together to decide what their big adventure activity for the summer would be. Students chose: High Gravity's high ropes course, kayaking, tubing down the New River, horseback riding, and fishing at Price Lake (while in a canoe!).
- Other activities included hiking, swimming at Watauga Lake, scavenger hunts, and playing in the Watauga River.



Some pods chose to utilize their best teamwork skills and commit to a group project, which resulted in a sturdy skate rail and a beautiful vegetable garden!

All of the students were very happy to comply with the new rules and were patient while we all adjusted to WYN's new normal. To show our gratitude, each pod got to choose one restaurant from which to order take out on the last day of camp. Staff members had a blast pretending to be waiters and waitresses for the students while they enjoyed their meals at the WYN picnic table.

Although this summer looked much different than previous summers, it was filled with relationship building, belly laughs, hours spent on the river, and a reminder that we will get through this together.

**13** students referred to WYN by other community organizations

**16** students served in Watauga County

**22** hours spent on the water (kayaking, tubing, swimming, fishing)

**69** plants planted to teach students responsibility and how to grow and nurture their own food

**546** hours of staff and student contact and relationship building

Our High School Success program, like many others, took some twists and turns this past year. This shift included new leadership and a transition to virtual programming. WYN placed a large focus on forming deeper connections with previously enrolled WYN students to help them with transitions that happen throughout high school. Our staff work with the school counselors in order to provide well-rounded support for students.



13

students served in Watauga County

103

hours of virtual connection with students in Watauga County

92%

current graduation rate at Watauga High School

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, utilizing the "Freshman On Track" toolkit emphasizes supporting student success in the first year of high school. They also highlight four key ideas that WYN acknowledges and integrates:

- The transition to high school is the most critical time for high school graduation
- Course grades in the first year of high school can accurately predict who will graduate
- The primary driver of course failure is course absence, not weak skills
- Monitoring and support from adults can prevent failure

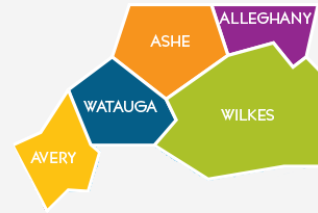
### Program Goals

*We strive to ensure that WYN high school students continue to have a safe space with caring adults, academic support, assistance with vocational opportunities, resilience skills and a smooth transition from 8th grade to high school. We want students to know that the WYN community and does not disappear once they go to high school.*

## Framework

Following recent expansion of community-based prevention work in Alleghany, Ashe and Avery counties (to add to the work already being done in those counties), WYN was able to increase our capacity to build community resilience and advocate for equity, all while continuing to collaboratively prevent youth substance use by supporting caregivers and families, and promoting youth advocacy.

The pandemic tested assumptions, norms and the accepted way of work, yet WYN's Community Health Team quickly mobilized, leaning into the core of how we operate - the Strategic Prevention Framework (represented below).



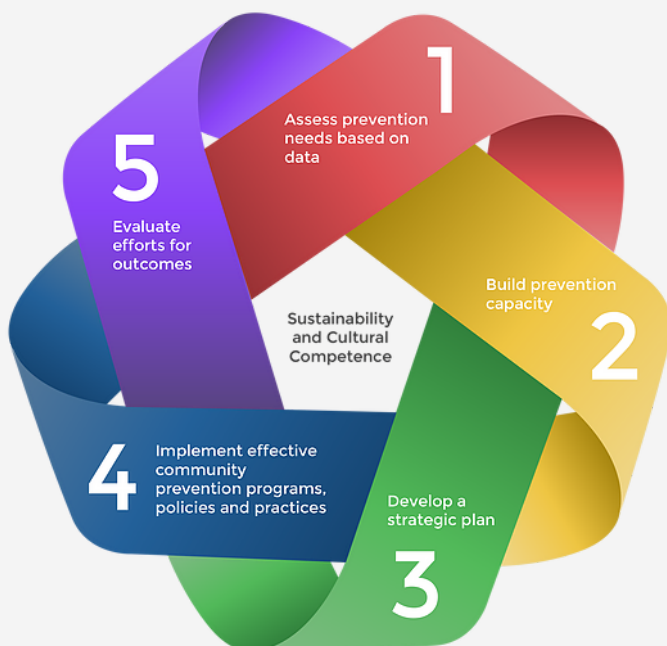
*5 County Service Region*

## Assessment

As assessing need was of utmost importance, team members first looked to one another: What did our team need? From there, work moved outward, asking what our partners needed, and then what the community needed. The staff ensured they were listening to marginalized communities as well as other partners, colleagues and peers.

Quickly the needs became clear:

- The pandemic was a community trauma
- There was an increased *risk* of use, as well as increased *use* of substances
- Isolation (used as a protective factor for physical health) created a risk factor for mental and emotional health
- Approaching community needs with equity in mind became more essential than ever



## Response

- Prioritized researching and creating family friendly, trauma informed practices and policies within WYN and partner agencies.
- Created virtual opportunities for completing the work - social media education, virtual Prime for Life classes for alcohol-related violations, and virtual coalition meetings and workgroups
- Reached out to alcohol/tobacco vendors to offer support with ensuring no access to underage groups, asked about their needs and adjusted policies
- Offered equity training for staff, partnered with Black Lives Matter (BLM) groups & local LGBTQ+ communities



## Growth

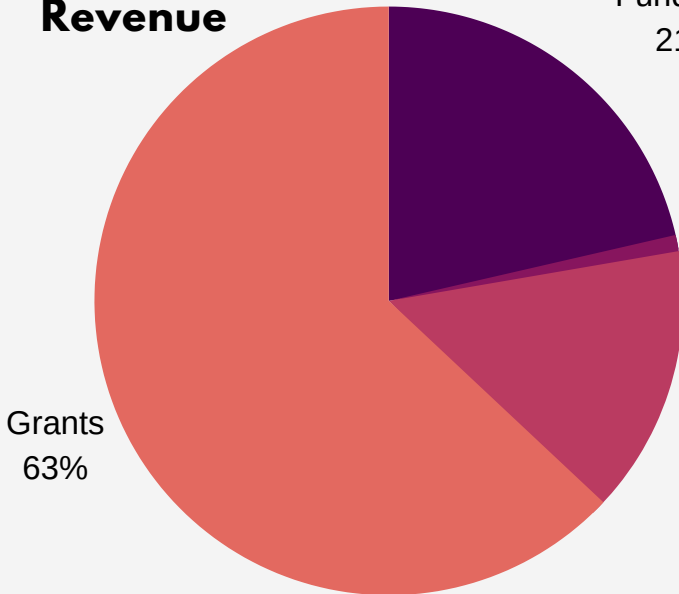
Throughout this process, Community Health found new ways to grow.

- Formation of the Avery Youth Prevention Coalition with strong community support.
- Formation of the Watauga Youth Council (WYC)
  - The Watauga Substance Action & Prevention (WSAP) coalition supported WYN Youth Advocate & Watauga High School student, Ella Carroll in her leadership & advocacy efforts aimed at raising the voices of youth in to promote healthy choices that include preventing substance use. Boone Town Council agreed to include the WYC in their policy discussions that impact youth.
- Established a thriving social media presence with interagency engagement & youth discussion

## REACH

<b>51,010</b>	Via Communication Campaigns
<b>21,938</b>	Via Social Media
<b>88,000</b>	Via WSAP Billboards
<b>1,500</b>	Prevention resources received by youth in Ashe & Alleghany counties
<b>114</b>	Total Prime for Life participants
<b>281</b>	Medication Lock Boxes distributed
<b>16</b>	Community substance use prevention coalition meetings facilitated

### WYN's 2020 Revenue



Fundraisers  
21.4%

Investment Income and Fees  
0.9%

Donations  
14.7%



### Strategic Successes in 2020

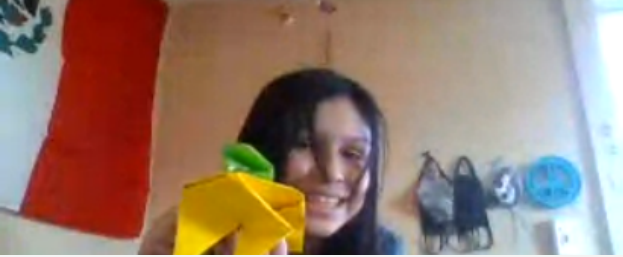
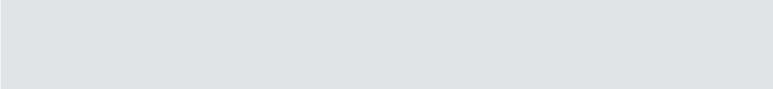
- Expansion of After School programming to Ashe County
- Maintained staff and programming with no cuts during the pandemic
- Ongoing improvement of metrics and data and evaluation mechanisms



### Opportunities for Growth in 2021

- Extend our afterschool program to elementary school students in Watauga County
- Acquire a facility that would enable WYN to serve more children
- Begin operating WYN's after school program in Alleghany County.

**WESTERN YOUTH NETWORK**






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 Western Youth Network

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Find us online  
[www.westernyouthnetwork.org](http://www.westernyouthnetwork.org)

## Dedicated Staff

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Kiersten Kleene         Amber Dixon  
Olivia Farmer            Brittany Duncan  
Sammi Silar                Tiffany Moon  
                                      Tiffany Williams

## Get Involved Today!

It takes a community to raise a community.  
*Your* talents and resources could make a  
difference in a child's life.

Make a **donation**  
Apply to be a **mentor**  
Sign up to **tutor**  
Host a fundraiser event

