



**ANNUAL REPORT 2018**

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## Dear Supporters,

Older and wiser. That is how I would describe Western Youth Network (WYN) as I reflect on 2018, our 33rd year of existence.

This year, we, along with other leaders and scientists in the youth development community, have discovered even more about how difficult experiences in childhood can cause life-long harm. Childhood toxic stress has been found to negatively impact the human body and even the brain itself, leading many to compare its effects to **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**.

Yet, even as we have learned more about the harmful consequences of childhood trauma, we have learned about **the power that relationships with stable, supportive and nurturing adults have to heal trauma**. We have discovered that nurturing adults and environments help youth heal from painful experiences while building resilience to regulate their emotions and bounce back in future tough situations.

With this incredible and empowering knowledge in mind, WYN turned to you, our dedicated supporters, and **asked for your help bringing WYN's trauma-informed care to more High Country youth**. Because of your generosity and commitment to a brighter future for all youth in our community, WYN was able to expand its professional services to younger and older populations last year. As you will see in the WYNning Moments of 2018 section of this report, WYN grew leaps and bounds to help vulnerable youth reach their full potential.

Throughout 2018, WYN also continued to tackle substance addiction, including the demon that is on everyone's mind--opioid addiction. We know that addiction's seeds are too often planted by childhood trauma. Using a powerful combination of education and policy change, **WYN is working to give our children a better chance in the fight against addiction**.

Though we are doing so much to heal and prevent childhood trauma and its consequences, *so much more must be done* to prepare and empower our children to achieve their dreams.

### **In the year to come, WYN hopes to further answer the needs of our youth by:**

1. Hiring a certified counselor who will cultivate resilience and healing in the students WYN serves
2. Expanding WYN's therapeutic after school program to Kindergarten through fifth graders to ensure a seamless continuum of care from the time a child enters school until the time they graduate. Early intervention is key to making lasting change.

If you are interested in helping to make these and other components of WYN's vision for 2019 a reality, please contact us. We look forward to dreaming with you!

In gratitude,

*Jennifer Warren*  
Jennifer Warren  
Executive Director



Jennifer has been Executive Director of Western Youth Network for 13 years. She holds a Masters in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and a certificate in Non-Profit Management from Duke University. Under her leadership, WYN has grown 59% in staff, 52% in budget, and 31% in children served.

# WYNning Moments of 2018

## Launching the Game Changers Society

Every child in our community deserves the chance to reach their full potential. With this deeply held belief in mind, WYN's dedicated Board of Directors and staff created a strategic plan to guide WYN to a future where it can meet the needs of every child in the High Country. No longer will the circumstances of one's birth determine the outcome of his or her life. WYN will be there to intervene with evidence-based and trauma-informed care that will change the trajectory of children's entire lives. WYN's vision is bold and expansive because our children may have no one else to fight for them; we must take action.

To make this dream for our children a reality, WYN is inviting our community members to join the movement by joining our vision society, the Game Changers. Launched in winter 2018, the Game Changers Vision Society will provide the critical funds necessary to enhance, expand and sustain WYN's life-changing programs. Our vision will be accomplished in stages. Phase 1 includes meeting the critical mental health needs of our current participants through the addition of a professional counselor. It also includes after school program expansion to K-5th grades, as earlier intervention has been shown to improve children's chances for success.

*Imagine a community in which every child thrives. Now let's make that community a reality here in the High Country! Become a life-changing member of the Game Changers Society today.*



## The WYNning Team: AppState Athletics & WYN



We are all stronger when we work together. In 2018, Appalachian State Athletics selected WYN to be one of their two non-profit community partners. WYN hopes that the partnership will create opportunities for meaningful learning experiences for our youth while introducing more community members to our programs and needs, particularly our need for mentors. In just one year, AppState Athletics has contributed to WYN's youth development in several major ways:

- promoting student-athlete mentor and volunteer engagement
- hosting 52 WYN youth and their mentors at an AppState home football game
- interviewing WYN's Executive Director on ESPN+ live football coverage
- teaching WYN after school students about college athletics through a student-athlete-led facilities tour

We want to thank the Mountaineers for all they have done for our youth. Together WYN and AppState Athletics are working to raise our High Country community. **We truly make a WYNning team!**

## WYN Launches High School Success Program

No longer will our WYN students go to Watauga High School without us. At the 2018 Wish Upon a Star Gala, our donors made it possible for WYN to create a new program at Watauga High. In September, WYN hired the magnetic Kimberly Kop to trailblaze a new way for WYN in partnership with the incredible teachers and student services staff working at the high school.

In her first semester, Kim grew the program to serve approximately 35 WYN alumni in her role that is now known as the High School Success Coach. She has four primary goals:




High School Success Coach, Kimberly Kop, connects with students in her office at Watauga High School.

1. to build upon the gains made in WYN's middle school programs through relationship and availability
2. to engage students in on-campus opportunities and to connect them to helpful community resources
3. to facilitate a pilot Vocational Mentoring program for students in need of positive role models and mentoring relationships in the context of meaningful work experiences
4. to assist WHS in becoming more trauma-informed in its culture, programming, and implementation

Being a teenager in a large school is difficult for everyone, even those who have the strongest support systems. It is nearly impossible for those trying to navigate alone. With this new program, our WYN students have a role model and supportive adult to guide them in the right direction, leading to greater graduation outcomes.

Want more uplifting WYN moments in your life? Follow WYN on social media to enjoy great stories and photos each week.

 Like us on Facebook! @WesternYouthNetwork

 Follow us on Instagram! @wynstagram\_1



# Mentoring

Through our community-based program and school-based program, affectionately called "Lunch Buddies," adult volunteers in the community are paired with a youth in need of a friend and role model. These mentors help guide and encourage their mentees through the highs and lows of growing up. WYN's mentoring program is active in both Watauga and Avery Counties.



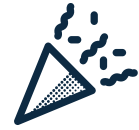
5,300 hours of mentoring



191 youth served



100% of youth report improved self-esteem



83% of matches lasted at least 12 months



78

youth currently on waiting list for a mentor

80%


of WYN mentees live in a non-traditional home, i.e. out-of-home placement, foster care, single parent home, grandparent home

86%

of WYN mentees qualify for free or reduced lunch

# After School

 **60**  
youth served

 **4,000+**  
hours of academic tutoring

 **21,300+**  
miles traveled in WYN vans

 **4,650**  
healthy snacks served

WYN provides the *only* after-school program for middle school youth in Watauga County. Programming focuses on social and behavioral development, academic improvement, physical and mental health, art education, as well as community engagement. Most youth are referred to WYN by school counselors and social workers. **Nearly 90%** of the youth enrolled in during 2018 attended at no cost to their families. Due to transportation constraints, 11 youth are currently on the program wait list.




During WYN's 6-week summer program, our campers built a strong and uplifting community. In an environment with appropriate challenges and **empowering support systems**, the youth developed **critical confidence and character** they can carry with them for the rest of their lives. Thanks in part to the Sonny Sweet Scholarship Fund, **68% of youth** attended WYN's summer camp on a full or partial scholarship.

# Summer Camp

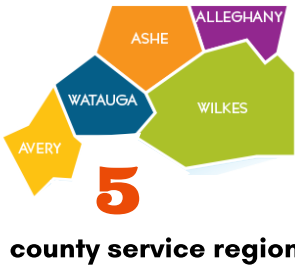
 **44**  
youth served

 **5,350+**  
miles traveled in WYN vans

 **745**  
healthy snacks served

 **4,500+**  
hours of physical activity

# Prevention



collaborated with  
**80**  
community organizations

**591,034**  
individuals served

**348**  
medication lock boxes distributed

**153**  
retailers educated  
about restricting youth access to tobacco/e-cigarette products

**178**  
students served  
through Prime for Life, an evidence-based underage drinking deferral program

**870**  
medication disposal kits distributed

conducted  
**72**  
alcohol purchase surveys

## Preventing Youth Substance Use through Partnerships

With the Drug Free Communities (DFC) Grant to prevent youth substance use in Watauga County, WYN has been instrumental in the creation and ongoing success of the Watauga Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition. The Coalition is a partnership of health professionals, educators, faith leaders, law enforcement officials, and more working together to create a healthier community. Since the Coalition began in 2009, Watauga County has seen *significant decreases* in youth substance use:



**48.8%** decrease in reported high school alcohol use

**37.3%** decrease in reported high school marijuana use



## E-cigarette Smoking Crisis

WYN collaborated with Appalachian State University and Watauga County Schools to educate the community about the dangers of e-cigarettes using such avenues as the YES! Adult Leader and the Catch My Breath best practice curricula. WYN also supported policies, handouts, school signage, and more in order to raise community awareness about this emerging public health crisis and to change the environment.

## Opioid Crisis

Dr. Don Teater facilitated a workshop titled "Treating Pain Safer: Fewer Opioids and Better Results - Controlled Substances Education for Prescribers" in order for participants to identify best practices in regards to the CDC prescribing guidelines. Between Ashe and Avery, Dr. Teater trained 22 healthcare professionals.

## New! 6 Medication Disposal Locations in Watauga County

permanent dropbox locations for safe disposal of expired/unused medications:

Appalachian State Police Department  
Boone Drug Deerfield  
Boone Drug New Market

Boone Police Department  
Blowing Rock Police Department  
Watauga County Sheriff's Office



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**DEDICATED STAFF**

Jennifer Warren	Heather Canipe
Julia Roberts	Kiersten Kleene
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Charlene Grasinger	Olivia Farmer
Sabena Maiden	Lindsay Stockman
Melanie Hollis	Gretchen Summerville
Kimberly Kop	Tommy Boyd
Tina Jones	Kasey Bates

**GET INVOLVED TODAY!**

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

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

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

 Like us on Facebook! @WesternYouthNetwork

 Follow us on Instagram! @wynstagram\_1

*Cover image captured by photographer Jan Todd. Special thanks to Jan for donating her services to WYN.*