

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

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Dear Supporters,

Most of us can remember a teacher or a coach who made our lives better through their kindness. It's been 35 years, but I can still tell you the name of the assistant teacher I had in Kindergarten because the impact she had on my life was so significant. When I was a scared little 5-year-old who did not want to be away from my family, Mrs. Parker recognized my vulnerability and met me with love. Every year that I work in the youth-serving field, I reach greater depths of appreciation for Mrs. Parker's compassion. It is through compassionate and stable caregivers that children overcome adversity.



Some 38% of children in the United States today have experienced some form of childhood trauma. **Nearly 100% of the youth served by WYN have experienced it to some degree.** These kinds of experiences can be so damaging that they actually re-wire the individual's brain, often making them more impulsive and prone to risk-taking. This can have lifelong consequences.

The good news is that research shows that **safe, stable, and nurturing caregivers and environments can reverse the effects of childhood trauma and adversity.** That means that compassionate adults like Mrs. Parker can truly change lives.

This philosophy of compassionate support for youth is Western Youth Network's (WYN) way. At WYN, our highly-trained staff and volunteers work tirelessly to ensure that every child who comes through our doors feels safe and cared for. The simple act of someone caring can alter the course of a child's entire life and help them unlock their full potential. I'm proud to report that **WYN's mentoring program, our primary vehicle for introducing youth to caring adults, saw a 54% increase in matches in 2017.**

In addition to providing safe and nurturing caregivers for the youth we serve, WYN worked hard in 2017 to **integrate innovative and research-based strategies into its programming.** For example, in response to new research, WYN began to incorporate body-centered interventions like yoga and relaxation exercises into our after-school and summer program while our prevention program began tackling the opioid crisis.

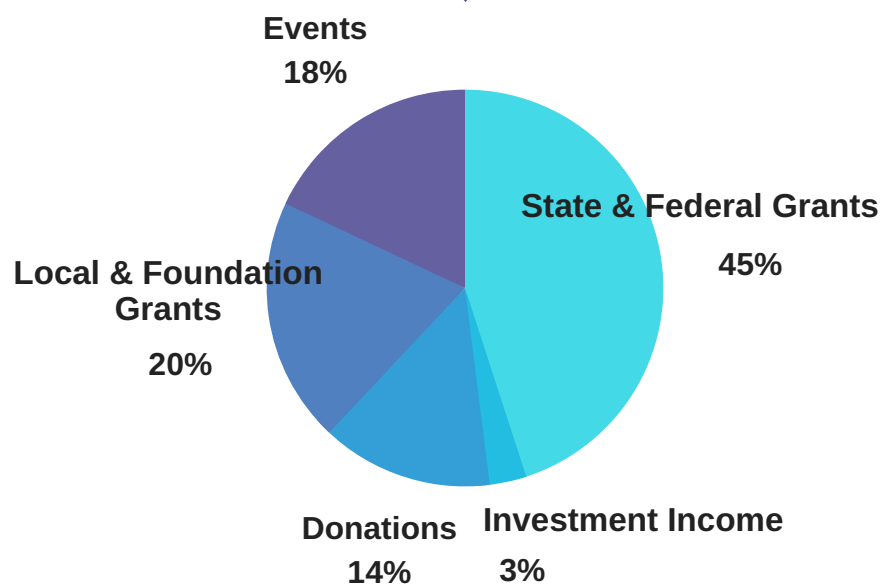
It is with your partnership that all of this is made possible. Please enjoy the pages that follow and appreciate the impact that you have had on the youth of the High Country.

In gratitude,

Jennifer Warren

Jennifer Warren
Executive Director

2017 Revenue Breakdown



Top Stories from 2017

3, 2, 1 Action!

Community partnerships have always been critical to WYN programming. The Summer 2017 partnership with Dr. Beth Davison's Appalachian State University (ASU) film class was no exception. For one week, our summer campers had the incredible opportunity to learn the basics of videography and digital art. Working alongside college students, our campers produced short documentary films about topics of interest. One WYN participant found the course so engaging he decided to start a YouTube channel for his own videos. In September, two WYN youth presented the lessons they learned from the experience to a group of WYN supporters in the lovely Creekside Electronics showroom. It was a picture-perfect learning opportunity for our WYNners.



Summer campers with film equipment ready to learn at ASU.

Calling All Men!

WYN's mentoring program has long struggled with a perennial problem: a lack of men. Even as participation in mentoring sky-rockets, WYN has nearly 50% more boys on the waiting list for mentors than girls. In 2017, a new grassroots initiative emerged to address this disparity: Men for WYN. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of community leaders including Hanes Boren, Dave Robertson and Jim Street, a campaign to engage men of the High Country in WYN's mentoring programs emerged. Two Men for WYN gatherings saw nearly 100 male role models gather to learn about WYN and the crisis of male mentorship facing our local youth. A tremendous success, Men for WYN is gearing up for more advocacy in 2018.

What's Cooking?

Our After School Cooking Club had the chance to visit Appalachia Cookie Company and go behind the scenes of the baking process. Dressed in aprons and gloves, our kids made the first batch of WYN's seasonal fundraiser, the WYNter Wonderland Cookie. At the day's end, each took home two of their own delicious cookies.



A WYN youth digs into Appalachia Cookie Company batter as our Cooking Club learns to bake cookies there.



After School



4,000

hours of
individualized
academic support



4,500

healthy snacks
provided



20,500

youth transportation
miles by WYN van



88

vulnerable youth felt the
support of caring adults
through After School

WYN provides the only after-school program for middle school youth in Watauga County. Youth are most often referred to WYN by school counselors and social workers. **More than 80%** of the youth enrolled in after-school during 2017 qualified for free enrollment. At the time of publication, 9 youth remained on WYN's after-school waiting list.

“ I want more kids to attend WYN so they have a place to feel safe and loved like I do at WYN. -WYN 8th Grader **”**

Summer Camp



4,300

hours of physical activity



720

healthy snacks provided



5,260

youth transportation miles



39

vulnerable youth felt the support of caring adults through Summer Camp

Over the course of the summer, 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.

From exploring the Blue Ridge Parkway trails to tubing down the New River, campers were engaged and active all summer long. With the help of the Sonny Sweet Scholarship Fund, our summer program opened up the possibility of summer camp to more low-income youth. **100%** of our 2017 participants received financial assistance. **85%** qualified for free enrollment.






Mentoring

Through our Community-Based and In-School, or "Lunch Buddies," mentoring programs, adult volunteers in the community are paired with a youth in need of a role model. These mentors help guide and encourage their mentees through the ups and downs of growing up.

 **177** youth served by mentoring in Avery and Watauga Counties

 **91%** of mentoring matches ended successfully

 **71%** of mentees live at home with only one biological parent

 **29%** of mentees are in an out-of-home placement including adoptive homes and foster care

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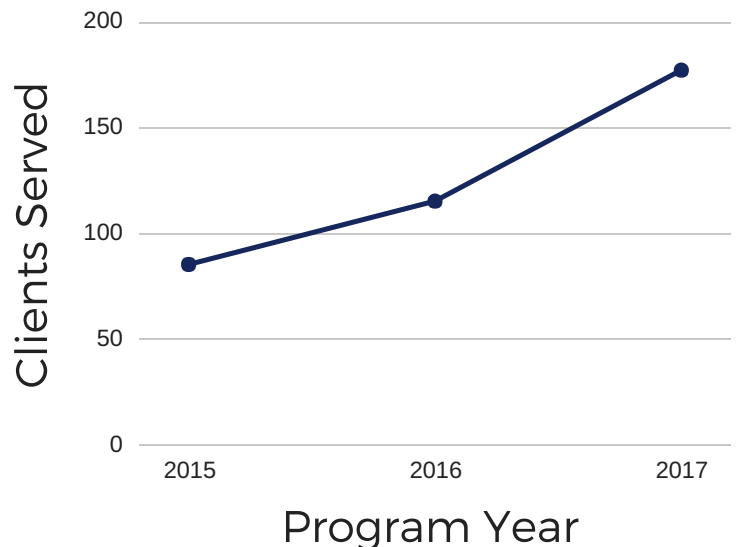
I never knew a true friend until I had a mentor.

- WYN 10th Grader

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Mentoring Program Growth Over Last 3 Years



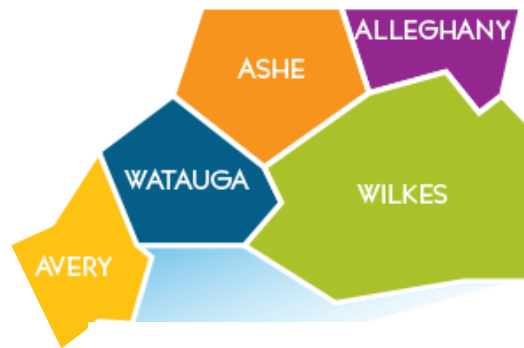
Prevention

174 prescription lockboxes delivered to High Country residents to reduce youth access to prescription drugs

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

135 alcohol purchase surveys conducted to encourage merchants to check IDs before selling alcohol

4 new locations for safe disposal of prescription medications: ASU Police, West Jefferson Police, Boone Drug Deerfield, and Boone Drug New Market



906,881

clients served across the 5-county service region through the six strategies of Prevention's substance use & mental health promotion campaigns

Drug Free Communities (DFC) Grant

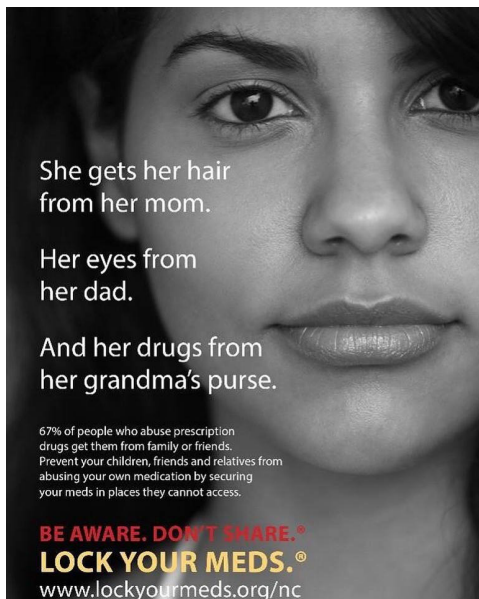
WYN was awarded a 5-year continuation of this 10-year grant to prevent youth substance use in Watauga County. With previous DFC funding, WYN has been instrumental in the creation and on-going success of the Watauga Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition. **Since the Coalition began in 2009, Watauga County 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*

NC Lock Your Meds Campaign

WYN has partnered with at least 72 community organizations in our 5-county service area to raise awareness about and change behaviors surrounding youth prescription drug access.



NC Disposal Initiative

Through a partnership with local pharmacies and stakeholders including Project Lazarus of Wilkes County, this project increased safe disposal options for prescription medications. WYN alone served **hundreds of Avery County families** in 2017 through this initiative.

MAPSCorps

WYN broke ground on this project to map public health and wellness resources for Watauga County. With the help of four interns from Appalachian State University, WYN will create an interactive online map that can be used by patients and health practitioners to increase health equity and access.

*Statistics are based on data gathered through the bi-annual Youth Risk Behaviors Survey at Watauga High School. Students were asked to report how often they had consumed alcohol or marijuana over the past 30 days.

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