



## **WESTERN YOUTH NETWORK (WYN) PARENT/YOUTH HANDBOOK**

Welcome to the Western Youth Network!

Raising a Community

Welcome to Western Youth Network (WYN). We are so happy that you have decided to become part of our family! WYN was established in 1985 to address the gaps in service for youth and families in Watauga County. WYN primarily serves middle school youth in the High Country with an array of programs and services, with additional services for youth ages 6-18 in our Mentoring Program.

# Table of Contents

Philosophy	3
After School	4
Mentoring	4
Community Health	4
Summer Program	4
Activities	5
STANDARDS FOR GETTING ALONG	5
Program Scheduling	6
CHILD/YOUTH RIGHTS	6
Client Grievance	7
MEDICATION POLICY	8
ANTI-BULLYING	8
SEARCH AND SEIZURE POLICY	9
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES	9
Safety and Emergency Action Plan	9
No-Show Policy	10
INFORMED CONSENT	10
TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES	10
DRESS CODE	10
CONFIDENTIALITY	10
Client Records	11
CONTACT INFORMATION	12

## Philosophy

**Mission:** To build youth of character & confidence so that every young person in the High Country reaches their full potential.

**Vision:** To create a community in which every child, regardless of their circumstance, thrives.

**WYN Pillars:** Growing up is hard; harder for some than others. WYN works tirelessly to give young people the following: The safety of a caring environment, the support of positive role models, the skills needed to learn and grow.

WYN embraces a relationship-driven model of working with children and families. We strive to meet people where they are, always working with each individual to encourage growth and opportunities. WYN is a place for every child to belong. We support self-exploration and awareness, creativity, and acceptance of others' values in working with youth during these pivotal years.

Western Youth Network's After School Program is a multifaceted program that seeks to provide students with academic, physical, and social opportunities. Our academic portion includes homework help, enrichment learning activities, fostering communication between teachers and parents, and parent engagement activities. Students enrolled in our program are provided with individual academic help by qualified ASU tutors. Another advantage of the program is our enrichment learning activities, which gives students the chance to apply learned skills to real life situations. WYN staff remains in contact with teachers, guidance counselors, parents, etc. in order to enhance the academic success of the students involved in our programs.

WYN utilizes the six dimensions of wellness to encourage academic and life success. Reaching back to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we see that certain needs must be met before a student can begin to succeed academically. The six dimensions of wellness include physical, social, emotional, intellectual, occupational/financial, and spiritual wellness.

Physical activity is one of the most important but overlooked aspects of a student's day. At WYN we sandwich homework hour between physical activities. During the first thirty minutes of our program, the students have social/recreational/physical fitness time, and the last thirty minutes is a structured enrichment activity. This activity may be led by students, WYN staff, tutors, or other guest community members.

At WYN we strive to create a safe and uplifting environment. All staff members are trained in Love and Logic, which is a behavioral management curriculum that combines empathy with logical consequences. At our site, there is no tolerance for bullying. The staff model appropriate behavior and teach social skills through interactions and interventions. The staff at WYN works hard to use trauma informed techniques when dealing with youth. All of our staff are trained in toxic stress research and have an understanding of the Adverse Childhood Experiences research. This helps our staff to respond to emotional outbursts or issues in the most effective way possible. Once a week, we divide our students into groups and have gender-focused discussions dealing with specific teenage issues, especially emotional issues. We also have music and art therapy groups that help the students to explore their emotional self through these mediums.

WYN wants to see each of our students to succeed not only in the near future, but when they are adults. We offer our students career exploration days in hopes that they will begin to see how their future dreams can be fulfilled. Another important component is teaching rudimentary financial skills. We provide financial simulations to encourage our students to think about how money is best used, budgeting, debt, etc.

Lastly, we want to spend some time encouraging spiritual wellness. This can be a tricky subject because our focus is on no particular religion but instead on the inner wellness of our students. We utilize a Mindfulness curriculum to teach our students calming techniques.

**WYN's office hours are from 9:00 am –5:00 pm Monday through Friday.** Activities on and off site are also scheduled for evening and weekend hours. Contact numbers will always be made available to parents and/or guardians for activities that occur outside of the normal business hours of WYN and/or off site and can be found on the last page of this handbook.

Please never hesitate to contact us for any reason!

*WYN can provide transportation for youth who would not otherwise be able to attend WYN programs. Please talk to a WYN staff member about this service.*

### ***After School***

WYN provides the only community-based After School Program for middle school students in Watauga County. Highly skilled staff and trained volunteers provide homework assistance, skill building, recreation and community service opportunities in a safe, supportive environment. WYN focuses on fun and accountability during the critical after school hours. Involvement in WYN's After School Program has been shown to improve behaviors, self-esteem, academic success, and interpersonal relationships. WYN After School operates Monday – Friday from 2:30 – 6 pm. at 155 WYN Way, WYN's Main Office.

WYN After School will not operate on days that Watauga County Schools do not operate, or when schools release early due to inclement weather. **WYN After School may operate on scheduled early release days, but not all of them.**

### ***Mentoring***

WYN's mentoring initiative matches 6 – 17 year old youth with compassionate adults who serve as positive role models. To participate in this program, family members, teachers, the court system, law enforcement, and others may refer youth. Activities can include one-on-one relationship building, trips to baseball games together, bowling, having lunch with youth at school, sports, shopping, group monthly activities, and just hanging out. All of our mentors must be a minimum of 18 years old and attend training before they can be matched with a child. All mentors must pass criminal background checks.

Please contact Angela McMann, Mentoring Director, for more information or to refer a child to this program.

### ***Community Health***

The goals of WYN's Community Health programming are to build strong personal commitments, improve school performance, decrease drug involvement and decrease emotional distress. WYN Community Health Specialists partner with community sectors, utilizing evidence-based approaches to prevent and reduce youth substance abuse through awareness, advocacy, and action. Through formal partnerships with law enforcement, mental health practitioners, schools, universities, community colleges, hospitals, health departments, and various other agencies, WYN aids communities in the selection, implementation, and evaluation of effective, culturally appropriate, and sustainable prevention activities. Together, community sectors implement interventions that reduce access and availability of alcohol and drugs, change community norms around alcohol and drug use, and reinforce the importance of policies and practices to prevent high risk alcohol and drug behaviors. These data-driven strategies are part of a comprehensive plan that targets youth and adults, while also positively impacting the shared community environment in which we live. We aim to create strategies that empower youth to make healthy decisions; as well as create family, school and community environments that promote and support healthy decision making by youth within the 5 county service region of Ashe, Avery, Alleghany, Watauga, and Wilkes. Please contact Gretchen Summerville for more information or to refer a child to this program.

### ***Summer Program***

WYN provides a full six week Summer Program for youth in rising 6th-rising 9th grades. We use outdoor adventure, experiential education, and team building to strengthen self-awareness, leadership, and social skills. Through the Project Venture Program, WYN is also able to push students out of their comfort zones and offer adventure trips during the summer time.

## Activities

At WYN we have always found that learning should happen through various means (not just the purely academic). With this in mind, we have designed our programs to have an enrichment activity daily. We believe that these activities not only help to bolster the six dimensions of wellness but also a student's academic abilities. Some of these activities have been outlined below. Additionally, we are always willing to partner with a university group/class and we are open to new enrichment ideas and activities as they come to us.

**Homework help-** For one hour daily, Monday-Thursday, students are paired with a tutor to provide help with their homework. Tutors will work step-by-step with the students on their homework, check their work, and note any difficulties that will be worked on more closely during reading/math focus time. We spend an hour of each day, Monday-Thursday, on homework not only because it is the way they receive grades in class, because it is an opportunity to practice skills that will be necessary on EOGs/EOCs. WYN understands the importance of reading literature. Each student is required to read for 10 minutes when they are done with their homework. If a student does not bring homework to WYN, or completed it at school, that student will be asked to read for 20 minutes.

**Art therapy-** "Art therapy is a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by the art therapist, use art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem...Art therapy is an effective treatment for people experiencing developmental, medical, educational, and social or psychological impairment" (American Art Therapy Association 2013 [htt artthera .or u load whatisarthera df](http://www.artthera.or_u_load_whatisarthera_df)) Students participate in art therapy every other week at The Turchin Center on ASU's campus. The facilitator is a trained art therapist who has worked with WYN groups for over three years.

**Music therapy-** "Music Therapy is an established health profession in which music is used within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals" (<http://www.musictherapy.org/about/quotes/> ) Students choose to participate in music therapy weekly. These therapy sessions are facilitated by masters students in the Music Therapy program at ASU and take place at the Hayes Music building on ASU's campus.

**Snack-** We provide our students with a healthy snack daily since healthy eating has been linked to academic success. We offer an option of a fruit or vegetable daily if the student does not like the particular snack choice. On some days, we offer heartier meals as well as cooking classes.

## STANDARDS FOR GETTING ALONG

WYN embraces and invites diversity. WYN encourages its staff and youth to appropriately express and celebrate all types of people in an attempt to foster a community of acceptance and support. In accordance with this value, the following behaviors and/or personal conduct are expected from the youth we serve:

- Contribute to an environment that is comfortable and safe for everyone
- Be respectful
- Follow WCS dress code
- No vulgar or profane language
- No physical or verbal aggressiveness towards self or others
- No weapons, tobacco products, alcohol, or any other illegal substances.

## Program Scheduling

After school will be offered on the Public School calendar **but may not operate on all early release days and may begin the week after Public School starts**, Monday-Friday, 2:30-6, The after school program operates at the WYN office building on 155 WYN Way and serves grades 5-8th.

Saturdays (Throughout the school year there will be one Saturday a month, excluding the winter months, where we will take the students on a field trip)

Spring Break (Staff will take the students on a trip to Carolina Beach State Park for a week of camping, learning about the coastal ecosystems, social skills training, and trip planning, budgeting, etc )

Summer (Operates 6 weeks through June and July, Monday-Thursday, 8-5:30, Students who are rising 6th — 9th graders are eligible to participate)

Parents, volunteers, schools, and referral sources will be notified of schedule changes through flyers (at least a week before the schedule change) and through phone calls/texts a week before and the day of the schedule change.

## CHILD/YOUTH RIGHTS

It is the policy of WYN to actively promote respect for all individuals and families to whom services are being provided. Employees will protect youth from harm, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. WYN will maintain legal mandate to report abuse and neglect. WYN will only release youth to parent or approved adult who is operating under their full faculties.

Physical or manual restraint, mechanical restraint, or seclusion **will never be used**.

Staff shall use only the degree of force necessary to repel or secure a violent child/youth. Degree of force depends upon individual characteristics such as age, size, physical and mental health, and the degree of aggressiveness displayed by the child/youth.

### **A. Our behavior management plan is derived from a relationship-driven model.**

To manage behaviors with positive interventions we will embrace the Love and Logic philosophy. Positive interventions include, but are not limited to:

1. Helping de-escalate situations by meeting kids where they are; 2. Redirection and/or distraction;
2. WYN may change a child's environment or peers to improve a situation;
3. WYN builds a strong sense of community by allowing for positive peer role models, counseling, reflection, modeling, suggestion, etc.
4. One-on-one time between child/youth and staff is allowed so that strong relationships can be built;
5. Creative approaches to behavior challenges will be instilled whenever possible. Assignments are not punitive and have a logical correlation to the behavior that is in question.
6. Time may be offered separate from the group for an escalated child/youth to regroup and calm down and prepare to return to the group in a positive and effective manner.

**Further, WYN children/youth have the right to:**

1. Expect that, as human beings, they will be treated respectfully, fairly, courteously, consistently, and with dignity and without prejudice, bias or discrimination based on their race, age, religion, national origin, color, creed, gender, ancestry, sexual orientation or disability.
2. Freedom from punishment by other youth.
3. Enjoy freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
4. Freedom of speech when discussing their opinions as long as they are not verbally abusive.
5. Have opinions heard and be included, to the greatest extent possible, when any decisions are being made affecting their life and service they are to receive.
6. Freedom to submit and discuss grievances without fear of reprisal.
7. Access and receive appropriate and reasonable adult guidance, support, and supervision on a regular and emergency basis.

**B. Other interventions that are prohibited by WYN staff & volunteers include:**

1. Any disrespectful, intolerant, or harmful interactions between adults and child that would otherwise be determined as verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse;
2. Punishments that are degrading and break down self-confidence;
3. Forced physical activity solely for the purpose of extinguishing a negative behavior;
4. Painful body contact;
5. Substances administered to cause painful bodily reaction;
6. Feeding a child unpleasant food;
7. Contingent exposure to noxious stimuli such as but not limited to: noise, adverse smells, splashing with water;
8. Any potentially painful procedure or stimuli that is administered to the child/youth for the purpose of reducing the frequency or intensity of a behavior, excluding prescribed injections;
9. Abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation of a child/youth;
10. Any intervention which would be considered corporal punishment under G.S. 122C-59;
11. Any withholding nutrition, hydration or other basic necessities.

**(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.13)**

## **FILING A GRIEVANCE**

There may be a time during your involvement with WYN that you or your child have a serious disagreement with the staff, you think you are being treated unfairly or you may have the idea that no one will listen to you. We hope that this does not happen, but if it does, what do you do?

The first thing to do is talk to the staff member that you are having a problem with and/or their supervisor. Almost every problem you will encounter can be resolved by talking to the person. The staff member will work with youth and/or parents/legal guardians to resolve the issue in a timely manner. However, if they are unable to resolve the issue, you may choose to file a grievance. A grievance should be submitted in writing to ensure accuracy and efficiency in responding and documenting. A staff member will respond to the grievance within 48 hours of it being submitted.

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome, the Executive Director will meet with you within 10 days of the initial written complaint. All efforts will be made to come to a resolution.

Jennifer Warren  
Executive Director  
Western Youth Network, Inc.  
Boone, NC 28607  
828-264-5174  
warrenj@westernyouthnetwork.org

You also reserve the right to contact the Governor's Advocacy Council for Persons with Disabilities if they feel their rights have been violated.

Governor's Advocacy Council  
1314 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1314  
Phone: (919) 733-9250/ Fax: (919) 733-9173

## **MEDICATION POLICY**

The staff of WYN may not dispense over-the-counter or prescribed medications. However, a WYN staff member may safely store and *witness the self-administering* of medications by youth with prior written consent from the child/youth's parent or guardian. Please talk to a WYN staff member if your child must take medication while involved with a WYN program. **YOUTH MAY NOT HAVE OVER-THE-COUNTER OR PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS ON THEIR PERSON AT ANY TIME** (special accommodations may be arranged for certain conditions, i.e. diabetics, anaphylactic reactions, etc.). *Any youth that are seen with medication in their possession may be subject to search by WYN staff.*

All WYN staff are certified in First Aid and CPR. There are first aid kits located at each WYN site and/or with a staff member while away from main sites. If a child/youth has a medical emergency while participating in a WYN activity, WYN staff will notify parents/guardian immediately if the emergency warrants advanced medical attention. **(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.15)**

## **ANTI-BULLYING**

Western Youth Network defines bullying as "the intimidation of others by real or threatened infliction of pain, verbal, written, electronically transmitted, or emotional abuse, or attacks on the property of another. It may include, but is not limited to, actions such as verbal taunts, name-calling and put downs, including verbal put downs that are based upon a person's gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. It also includes the extortion of money or possessions.

**WYN has ZERO TOLERANCE for bullying and it will be reprimanded on the first offense. If a student uses physical violence or language that attacks a person's identity they will be required to be picked up immediately. If a student cannot be picked up immediately staff and families will meet to determine if WYN's After School Program is a good fit for the student.**

WYN promotes a high staff to student ratio with intensive supervision and continuing education for staff and volunteers to prevent bullying or harassment during WYN programs.

**(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.22)**



## SEARCH AND SEIZURE POLICY

WYN strives to maintain and support the privacy of the people we serve at all times. Searches may be conducted only when there is a reasonable suspicion that there is possession of the following:

- Alcohol, tobacco, illegal substances, e-cigarettes, potentially harmful chemicals or contraband
- Weapons such as knives, guns, heavy blunt or sharp objects
- Stolen property
- Medications
- Dangerous articles or substances not otherwise noted

**A history of or reputation for engaging in such behaviors does not warrant a search without reasonable suspicion attached to a specific occurrence.**

WYN employees will notify youth if there is a need for a search of his or her person or his or her personal property and explain why it is necessary *prior to conducting the search (unless such case involved suspicion of a weapon or other potentially dangerous items)*. WYN staff will provide the youth with the opportunity to participate in the search by requesting them to empty pockets, surrender item(s) in question, etc. The Sheriff's Department of the county in which the search took place will dispose of any illicit non-prescription drugs and stolen property. Other articles will be turned over to the youth's parent or guardian by WYN staff.

Youth can help us avoid searches by never bringing in something that doesn't belong and by letting a staff member know when someone has something that they shouldn't. Remember, it is always better to have nothing to hide. **(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.12)**

## COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

In the case of severe contagious illness or disease, strict adherence to safety measures is required. WYN will work to maintain a balance between the individual rights of students, employees, and volunteers and the control of communicable disease. No staff or consumer with a communicable disease shall be denied access to WYN services on the basis of an opinion of a single individual.

### Consumers

WYN administration shall notify WYN consumers, staff and volunteers when a certified health official verifies that a communicable disease or illness represents a threat to other WYN consumers. These may include chicken pox, measles, whooping cough, meningitis, or other serious reportable diseases.

### Prevention & Control

Whenever consumers vomit, have diarrhea, have fevers over 100°, and/or have rashes of unknown origin, they shall be isolated from the rest of the consumer population. Their parents and/or emergency contacts shall be notified and asked to pick up their child. Consumers should not return to WYN until these symptoms have subsided.

**(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.8).**

## Safety and Emergency Action Plan

ASP staff have a specific emergency action plan that they are each trained on. ASP staff have weekly Wilderness First Aid Refreshers and entire staff and youth fire drills will be done twice a semester. Each

room is equipped with a fire alarm and fire extinguishers are located in the main office hall, beside the boys bathroom, and across from the back kitchen.

### **No-Show Policy**

A youth who accumulates four or more unexcused absences, displays violent or inappropriate behavior despite attempts to address the behaviors, or refuses to work towards agreed-upon goals may earn an unsuccessful termination from ASP. A Noncompliant termination from ASP will be defined as the youth not following program expectations.

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

Informed consent of the consumer/client or the consumer's legally responsible person will be obtained prior to the initiation of services in a language/manner that the person can understand.

(WYN Policies & Procedures 3.7)

Each voluntary consumer or legally responsible person will be informed of:

- a) the alleged benefits, potential risks, and possible alternative methods of service.
- b) the length of time for which consent is valid, and the procedures that are to be followed if the consumer or legally responsible person wishes to withdraw consent.

Western Youth Network, Inc. will not provide services to involuntary consumers/clients (meaning a consumer who after being informed of their rights chooses not to consent to services).

### **TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES**

There may be an occasion when a student is experiencing behavioral episodes that may endanger him/herself or others if transported in a vehicle. Anytime an employee is concerned about transporting a consumer who is acting out, the employee will pull over for up to 30 minutes, or until the student has calmed down.

If the student continues to have behavioral problems, the staff members will call the student's parents to pick them up from wherever the vehicle has pulled over.

(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.14)

### **DRESS CODE**

WYN respects the individuality and creativity of all people. In order to provide a safe and supportive atmosphere for all kids, we ask that you not wear clothing that may be offensive to others. We require all staff, volunteers, and youth to adhere to the dress code of Watauga County Schools while participating in WYN programs. Attire may be regulated on a case-by-case basis by WYN staff. A copy of Watauga County Schools Dress Code Policy is available upon request.

WYN sometimes has extra clothing on hand for youth and their families. Please talk to a staff member for assistance.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information that Western Youth Network collects about youth and/or families is protected. Staff, volunteers, and interns receive confidentiality training upon employment.

Sometimes we may need to work with other professionals outside of WYN in order to provide you with the best possible service. We encourage and support collaboration with other youth serving agencies such as

the school system and other local mental health providers such as, Blue Mountain Center for the Healing Arts, Mentor Behavioral Health Services, McKinney and Associates, Children's Council, Juvenile Court, Mountain Alliance, Department of Social Services, Daymark Recovery Services, and others.

Your written consent will be requested before information is shared outside of our agency. In the event of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a person, confidentiality will be broken.

**(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.6)**

## **Social Media Policy**

Parental consent will be documented before a client will be able to participate and/or have their image used in association with WYN's programs. If a client's image is to be used then permission from the parent/legal guardian is required each time. If a client is used in social media posts then the client and their guardian must be informed of which platform the post will be to, purpose of the post, how confidentiality will be upheld, and disclaimer as to how posts on the internet can be accessed now and in the future.

Staff members and volunteers will refrain from 'following' or 'friending' students that are currently in their WYN program. WYN has an organization instagram, twitter, and facebook that students can 'follow' or 'friend' and can communicate appropriately with staff through this channel.

**(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.3)**

## **CONSUMER RECORDS**

The Western Youth Network shall maintain a consumer record for each individual admitted to any organization program. This record shall contain, but is not limited to:

- Name (first, middle, last, maiden)
- Date of Birth
- Race, gender, and marital status
- Admission date
- Discharge date

Emergency information for each consumer shall include the name, address, and telephone number of the person to be contacted in case of sudden illness or accident. The name, address, and telephone number of the consumer's preferred physician will be kept as needed.

Documentation of services will be kept on various WYN forms.

These forms include, but are not limited to:

- Collateral Contact Log
- Medical Info. form
- Transportation form
- Scholarship form
- Client notes (to be kept by WYN staff)
- Enrollment/Referral form
- Photo/Information release
- Permission forms
- Pre & Post surveys
- Confidentiality form(s)
- Incident Reports 📄

IEPs or 504s **(WYN Policies and Procedures 3.16)**

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### Western Youth Network Contact Information

**Address:**

155 WYN Way  
Boone, NC  
28607

**Phone:** 828-264-5174

**Fax:** 828-264-0838

Emergencies regarding After School Students contact  
**Heather Canipe @ 828-364-5174**

Emergencies regarding Mentoring contact  
**Angela McMann @ 828-773-3721**

[www.westernyouthnetwork.org](http://www.westernyouthnetwork.org)

After School Staff cell phones 828.406.0961 or 828.773.2566

Western Youth Network Parent/ Student Handbook  
© Western Youth Network, Inc. 2020