

ANNUAL REPORT

2022



WYN's superpower is meeting children where they are and providing interventions that change lives.

This Says It All

A message we received recently from a parent captures, in part, the impact WYN had on our community in 2022, and it provides the "why" behind our bold visions for expansion to reach more families in 2023 and beyond.

This parent writes, "So many people are quick to reach out when something is wrong. However, rarely do we get to hear the good. I just wanted to write and share my experience at WYN's afterschool program in Ashe. Since [my child] enrolled on day one he has begged daily to continue to go to this program. At first I thought it was just because his friends also attended, however I soon learned it was so much more. He receives assistance on his homework in areas he truly has struggled, he gets to explore new talents...that he would never get if he was simply with a sitter after school. As a single parent this program is vital for me to be able to continue to work... I simply wanted to say thank you. You all are truly the best."

Happy children. Less stressed parents. Meeting community needs. This is what WYN is all about.

Over the years, your support has propelled us to this place of current growth (WYN's Ashe afterschool program has only been operating for three years), and we know it will also launch our next phases of explosive growth.

From a new facility on the horizon to expanded programming in the works, WYN's future is exciting, and the WYN children, parents and I thank you!

Jennifer Warren, Executive Director



"As a single parent, this program is vital for me to be able to continue to work."

2022 in Review

WYN serves a critical population of youth in the High Country. Through a combination of prevention and intervention programs, **our main focus is supporting children who may be overcoming adversity.** We provide relationships and resources for resilience. Our staff and services not only change lives – we strengthen communities. Our work is in high demand, and we are striving to grow into the **significant unmet need in our community.**

Each year for the past 3 years, the demand for WYN's services increased by

100%

100% of the children WYN serves have experienced some degree of adversity, with many having 4 or more ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences)



- 240** children in need of elementary level afterschool services
- 40** children in need of middle school level afterschool services
- 60** children in need of high school level afterschool services
- 93** children on the waiting list for a mentor in 2022

If left unaddressed, trauma can lead to long-term physical and mental health challenges including anxiety, depression, suicidality, substance misuse, heart disease, cancer and stroke to name a few.

Annual Cost of Trauma in North America:

\$748 billion (3.6% GDP)

\$168 billion drug use

\$73 billion alcohol use

\$82 billion anxiety and depression¹

"Preventing ACEs is of urgent importance, as is mitigating the negative impact of ACEs currently...and the cost to society."

1



2022 Stats

158

youth served in all counties in afterschool

94%

increase in self-esteem

88%

increase in hopefulness

10,004

academic tutoring hours

95

youth served in summer '22

54

summer field trips



Afterschool & Summer Camp

At WYN's **Watauga** site, students had a year of new and exciting opportunities, thanks to your support.



Students in Walking Club visited King Street, browsed local shops

Students typically enjoy the structure of our afterschool program which allows for plenty of free time alongside structured activities. A fan favorite is Club Day on Fridays in which students participate in different weekly clubs of their own creation. A few favorites included cooking club, gaming club, walking club, and arts and crafts club. Clubs are one of the many ways in which students are able to explore and develop a variety of interests while at WYN.



Spring break trips are a special treat for students

In the spring of 2022 staff took a group of students on a Spring Break trip to Oak Island. Every day they took a trip to the beach and they even visited the NC Aquarium. Aside from fun, another feature of the trip was to show the kids how to take care of a house and cook food for everyone. They enjoyed making a list of meals, grocery shopping, meal prep, and keeping the house clean every day. Everyone loved Spring Break, and students continue to talk about the memories they made during that time.



Summer days allow plenty of time for friendship & adventure

Watauga's site hosted Summer Camp for a much larger group of students last year. One fieldtrip was to Upper Creek Falls, a popular nature spot in Newland, North Carolina. The kids had so much fun hiking and swimming for the day!



Afterschool & Summer Camp

In 2022, thanks to the ever expanding creativity and imagination of our WYNers, **Ashe County's** "Camp Pickle" welcomed a new addition to the character squad: **Matthew** (the very silly, sleuthy sloth). **Matthew** put his own spin on afterschool shenanigans and even took over the summer program, guiding the kids through a magical adventure lovingly known as **Matthew's Makeover**.



Ashe County's summer program was transformative

During **Matthew's Makeover**, the kids journeyed alongside pirates at the Barter Theater, splashed their way through seven different swimming destinations, practiced their Picaso-ian art techniques at Mad Splatter and jumped to the skies at a local trampoline park. Throughout the summer, kids got the opportunity to be musicians, scientists, gem miners and animal whisperers, just to name a few!



Afterschool is a time to have new and creative experiences

As the third year of Ashe afterschool programming began in the fall of 2022, the staff rolled out lots of diverse enrichment activities including LARPing, resin art experimentation, birding and a partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library as well as Kaboose Kids, which brought art to the community.



An exciting new program launches

One of the Ashe team's favorite memories of 2022 was receiving a visit from a former afterschool participant who had graduated. This student was thrilled to reconnect with staff and former friends and thought back fondly on their experiences with WYN. The student expressed a desire to rekindle their connection to the WYN family and inquired about ways they might be able to utilize the skills they gained from WYN to mentor the current youth in the program. Ashe staff brainstormed ways to bring this student's dream to fruition and created the PPIT, Pickle Pilot in Training program. As with most Counselor in Training programs, this student had to interview for the position. They knocked it out of the park, and are ready for take-off with their very first Spring Break Extravaganza to Camp Don Lee in April 2023!



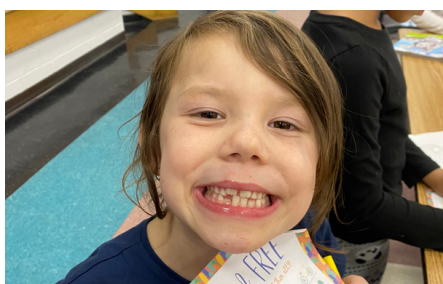
Afterschool & Summer Camp

Our **Sparta** afterschool program, although still very new, has grown into a community of children and staff that continue to learn, teach, inspire, and build relationships that transcend the school experience.



This feels like home

Year two of Sparta's afterschool program has given the kids (most of whom have been there from the beginning) not only a stable afterschool program but a second home. It's unique to find a place where children are not only given the opportunity to view the world from others' perspectives but are encouraged to form a nuanced perspective about their own role in the ever-changing world. Through the use of life skills lessons and interactive learning experiences that focus on positive decision making, the team has watched so many of the kids blossom into role models and leaders within their school.



Hard things happen, but we're here

Although kids in the program have had to deal with adversity and hard things this past year, having a team of consistent dedicated staff has helped them work through these difficult times, as has the help of their peers. The kids know that no matter what is going on in their lives, as a team, we can handle most things.



Room to grow

As WYN continues to grow the Sparta location, our staff looks forward to cementing WYN's place in the Allegheny County community by providing the highest level of care to all of our children.



Afterschool & Summer Camp

Our afterschool program at **Piney Creek** School is quickly growing — now at 17 strong — which is double last year's enrollment!

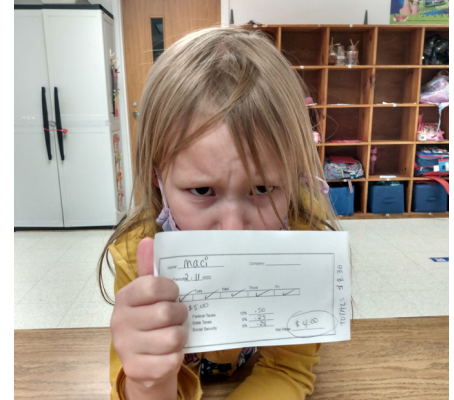


"Last year there weren't a ton of people and I could have almost had the tree to myself and it was a little bit lonely, but now there is a ton of people and I can share the tree." — Maci



Tyson and Clint planting their seeds for Earth Day

Each month, the program has themes, and in the spring, we discussed our responsibility to take care of the earth. This went along with other daily discussions about responsibility and consequences. The kids loved planting their own seeds before spring break and returning to see them finally starting to sprout. Once the plants grew to full size, the group made terrariums for Mother's Day.



"But I don't want to pay taxes!" — several kids when seeing their "paycheck" during Financial Literacy

The Financial Literacy Program through Junior Achievement was a big hit. Students earned fake money to go along with their lessons. With that money they would set some aside for taxes, bills, savings and donations before they could spend any of it. Parents seemed to like that the kids were starting to realize how hard it was to earn money, how little they got to take home, the value of saving, and how donating made them feel. To celebrate the end of the school year, the Piney Creek crew enjoyed a bounce house obstacle course. The kids used the money that they had saved to rent it out for the day so that the whole school could enjoy it along with them.



Mentoring

In 2022, the Surgeon General's public health advisory prompted immediate action to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people. Loneliness and isolation continue to be a problem, and we know that connecting with a positive adult can be a powerful tool. Mentoring ignites a sense of hopefulness and brings us together. It also helps combat the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) so that children can thrive. WYN's mentors build confidence in young people, helping them make better choices. The more connected youth are, the more likely they are to learn more, earn more, and live healthier lives, which has lasting results in our neighborhoods.



Seth and Will have been matched for 10 years, and in that time, they have grown, changed and deepened their friendship. Seth, the mentee, tells us that having a non-family friend who is neutral is so helpful for him to get the perspective on life that he needs. Will, Seth's mentor, has always projected a feeling of positive regard and care that helps Seth find his path and work towards his goals. Will is a dear friend who is always there to listen. When big personal things are going on with Seth, Will offers stability and support. Will also provides an escape from daily life, helping Seth take a break from some of the hard stuff going on and allowing him to have some fun.



100% percent of WYN mentees report that time spent with their mentors makes them feel hopeful about their future.



Cindy and Barbara started their relationship by eating school lunch together for seven months. They really enjoyed their time together and both wanted to be able to see each other more, so they transitioned from a school-based match to a community-based match and have had so many fun adventures in their five months together so far. Both agree that Cindy's (the mentee) social skills have improved and she feels more confident speaking up in class and in social situations like being at a restaurant. Barbara is also very happy to have someone other than family to talk to and have fun adventures with. Barbara feels that this is one of the best things she has ever done in the community.

2022 Stats

4,759

hours of
mentoring

136

youth served
in Watauga &
Avery

98%

of youth who
wrapped up
reported
wanting
another
mentor

84%

of matches
stayed
together
more than 12
months

100%

of youth
reported that
their mentor
makes them
feel confident

"It is surprising, even to me, how much only 30 minutes a week does matter to a child. As my friend said today, 'just showing up matters!' "
—Current Mentor



Our mentoring staff is committed to being community connectors. Not only are they supporting each of the matches, but they are also a link between local families and many other resources in the community like the Back to School Fest pictured above.

Outreach Opportunities for WYN Families

- Angel Tree holiday support in Watauga and Avery counties ensured 117 children had holiday gifts.
- WYN has been involved with Watauga's Back to School Fest for 10 years.
- The mentoring team connected families to resources such as cell phones, mattresses, heating support, tutoring, updated technology, food resources, and mental health resources
- Following up with students as they grow and become adults is a vital part of mentoring. With donor support, we have been able to help with needs that have arisen for our young college students (meal cards, gas cards, book rental, laptop repairs) even though they have phased out of having a mentor.



"Mentoring has been one of the most positive things I have done out in the community."
—Current Mentor



Community Health

WYN's Community Health team operates in the realm of policy and systems-level change. The Social Determinants of Health – which define the conditions in which we live, work, and play – have guided their work and have positively influenced our communities. In order to improve individual outcomes, community needs must be addressed, and as that community becomes healthier, those individuals' opportunities and priorities expand and grow. This cycle of prevention can take years to witness, and often data can be difficult to capture, yet we know the work is critical and worthwhile.



In 2022 WYN's Community Health team began to see the full spectrum of this cycle and witness the real life impacts of systems work on the individuals that make up our communities.

One of the most impactful things the Community Health team experienced was a Youth 2 Youth (Y2Y) International training, hosted by the Avery Youth Coalition. Staff learned how to support a youth-led coalition and the possibilities that exist in prevention work when youth lead the way.

The trainers began with several high energy empathy building activities that had the group moving and laughing together. The day ended with staff moving through a mock “youth meeting” to allow everyone an immersive experience. Everyone who attended walked away energized and excited with so many ideas for our future work.

“The lessons learned from our Y2Y International in-person training was my 2022 highlight. Seeing what is possible was incredible!”
— Tiffany Moon



Seeing the full spectrum of prevention work also played out as the Community Health team celebrated the 10th year of Drug Free Communities (DFC) funding and the 13th year of the Watauga Substance & Action Prevention Coalition. Started in 2009 as a group of local agencies and service providers that saw a need in preventing underage drinking, this coalition began by using local court data to assess community conditions. They formed strong partnerships with law enforcement to support safety-based initiatives and worked closely with Appalachian State to broaden their data collection. In 2012, the coalition was able to receive the Federal DFC grant and the coalition's efforts gained even more traction and broadened to include tobacco/nicotine use prevention and prescription medicine misuse prevention.

2022 Reach

7,693

individuals reached via social media

663

individuals reached via Lock Your Meds campaign

540

medication lockboxes distributed

38

Prime for Life participants

41

community prevention meetings facilitated by staff

25

Vape Detectors Purchased for Ashe & Alleghany Schools

13

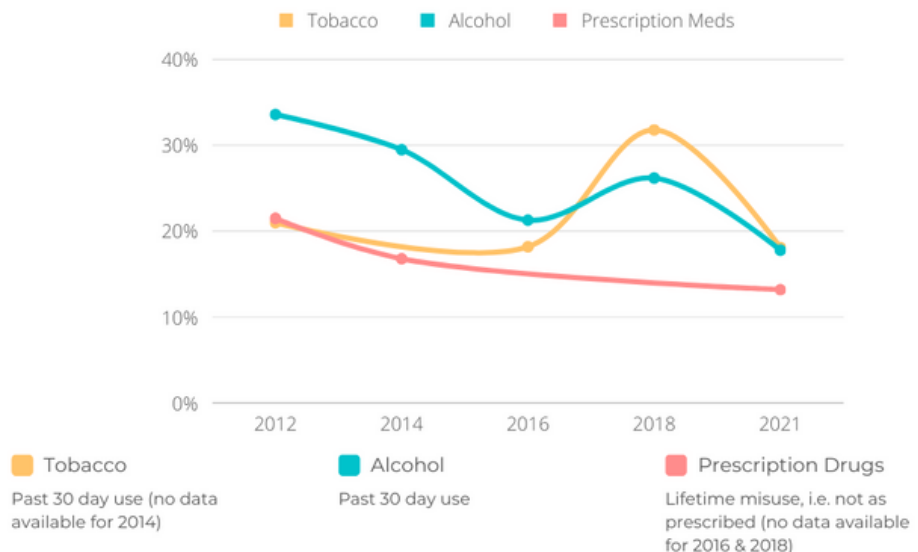
youth coalition meetings

Over the next 10 years the coalition created initiatives that affected the community from a myriad of angles such as:

- creating relationships with merchants to address youth access to retail alcohol and providing local business with educational opportunities;
- collaborating with drugstores and law enforcement to install permanent medication drop box locations for unused and unwanted medications;
- creating policies with the district attorney to offer a diversion program, Prime For Life, for first time underage alcohol use charges;
- offering Safe Prescriber trainings to medical providers;
- instituting permanent primary prevention in school-based curriculum

Through these and many other initiatives, the coalition steadily lowered the rate of Watauga youths' use and misuse of substances (see chart below) and created a change in the community's perception of harm of underage substance use. With this broad community involvement, the coalition is now witnessing the youth themselves deciding to become leaders for their peers by forming their own coalition.

Watauga High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)



In Avery High School, students participated in focus groups through the Avery Youth Coalition as they "road mapped" a plan for their own youth-led coalition set to start early in 2023. During the fall of 2022, staff worked closely with a high school intern to create culturally relevant recruiting materials and build the foundation of another youth-led alliance. WYN staff member, Tiffany Moon, was also able to fully implement the Catch My Breath vaping prevention curriculum in Avery Middle Schools.

Community Health

In 2022, we were able to witness the budding leadership of several youth when they met with WYN staff and began the Watauga Youth Alliance in the spring of 2022. They were trained in the Strategic Prevention Framework and then chose priorities that addressed teen mental health needs and building healthy coping skills for themselves and their peers. In the summer, WYN staff traveled with youth members to the National CADCA (Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America) Conference in Orlando, FL. The staff and youth learned how to successfully run a youth council and how to positively influence issues they see in their school or community. They worked on addressing which substances are most used and where, as well as common access points. At the beginning of the '22-'23 school year, the youth took the initiative to apply to have their Alliance recognized as a club on Watauga High School's campus!



"The highlight of my year was taking youth to CADCA, and realizing that [the upcoming generation] is where our work lies!"

— Tiffany Williams

The community health team has big dreams as we excitedly watch the next generation begin to take the lead in their own communities!

I am excited about the Watauga Youth Alliance!
— Annalyn Hall

I want our afterschool kids to become our youth leaders!
— Jessica Howard

I want to use my strengths to advocate for mental health supports (capacity building, more funding, new policies) in our schools
— Tiffany Williams

I want to build and rework systems so that they center and empower our youth
— Amber Dixon

I want to get prevention counselors in Avery schools who understand root causes.
— Tiffany Moon





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Program Service Regions

Mentoring	Avery & Watauga Counties
After School & Summer Camp	Watauga, Ashe, & Alleghany Counties
High School Success	Watauga in partnership with Mountain Alliance
Community Health	Watauga, Avery, Ashe, Alleghany & Wilkes Counties

GET INVOLVED TODAY!

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



 @wynstagram_1

 Western Youth Network

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