

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2025



**wyn**  
western youth  
network  
*raising a community*

# Intro to WYN's Way

afterschool • community health • mentoring • summer camp

Western Youth Network is an extraordinary place. We know that you already feel that, but we want to be sure that you can also begin to see just how special it is in the same way that we do.

When we look at some of the things that make WYN one-of-a-kind, it's in the ways that we keep **expanding** as an agency; it's the unique opportunities we give our students for **exploration** of new things; it's the **resilience** that we cultivate in our students and it's the intentional ways that we go about our work and fill gaps in our community — **WYN's Way**, if you will.

We have decided to break down our 2025 impact within these four categories, since we feel that's the best way to truly convey WYN's unique impact in the NC High Country.

You are the driving force behind what WYN is able to accomplish, and we are honored that you have made the choice to support the children and mission of WYN.



## Program Reach

	Alleghany	Ashe	Avery	Watauga
Mentoring		✓	✓	✓
Afterschool	✓	✓	✓ <sup>^</sup>	✓
Summer Camp	✓	✓	✓ <sup>^</sup>	✓
Community Health	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*WYN serves Wilkes County through partnerships with local coalitions/organizations and by conducting compliance checks with local retailers in an effort to reduce underage access to harmful substances; <sup>^</sup>established 2026

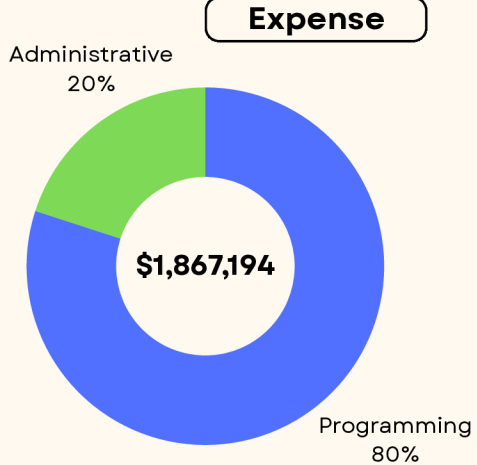
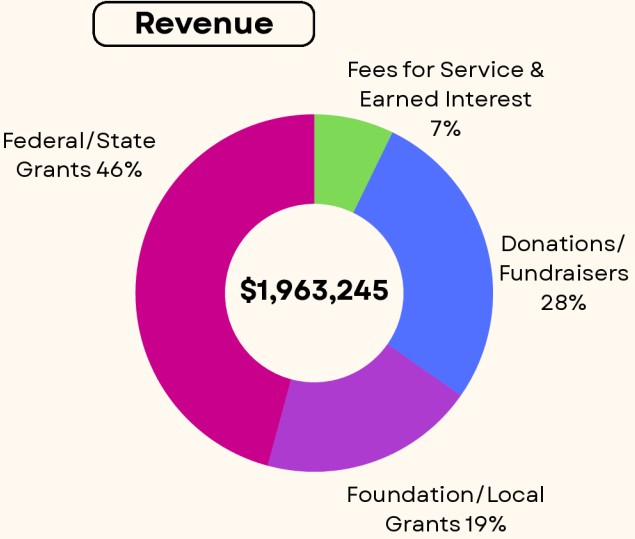
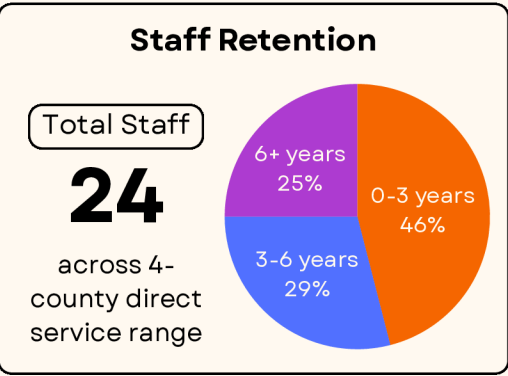


**92%** of all 2025 expenses were spent in the High Country  
**\$1,731,299**

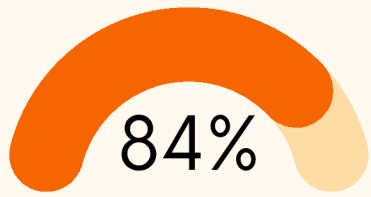


Program	# of employees
Admin	3
Mentoring	4
Afterschool	14
Community Health	3

**WYN creates pathways for a more positive trajectory for children in our community.**  
 – WYN Donor

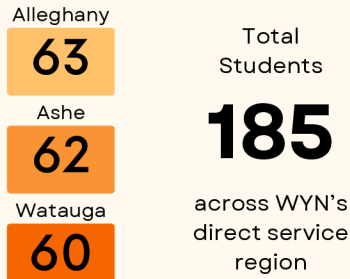


**Capital Campaign Fundraising Progress**





### Afterschool Students Served

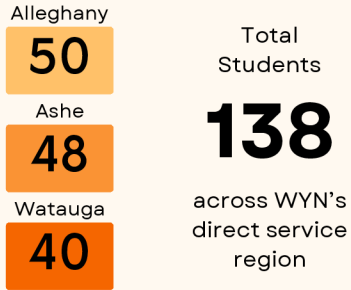


# AFTER SCHOOL

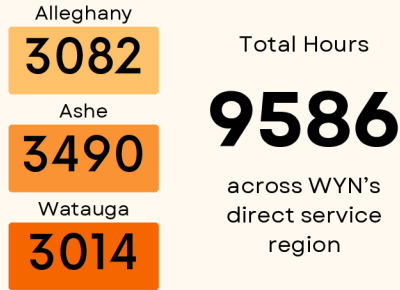
total \$ spent on snacks  
**\$9449**



### Summer Camp Students Served



### Academic Tutoring Hours Offered



### total repeat students

**113**

VS.

total new students

**72**

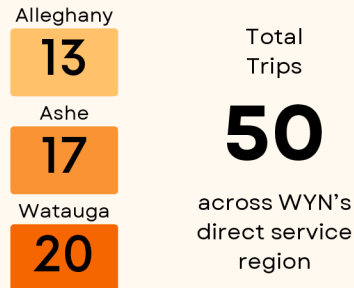
**WYN provides hope and a safe space where our children are heard, respected and nurtured. Connections with others are essential, and WYN provides the opportunity for kiddos, their families, and the volunteers who touch their lives to be emotionally connected and empowered.**  
– WYN Donor

### Program

# of employees

Ashe	4
Alleghany Sparta	3
Alleghany Glade Creek	2
Watauga	4

### Afterschool Field Trips



### Students who felt

**more hopeful**

at the end of the school year

**93%**

Students who had increased self-esteem

at the end of the school year

**96.7%**

Student to Staff Ratio **10:1**





# MENTORING

## # of Mentoring Matches

Ashe

6

Avery

15

Watauga

73

Total  
Students

94

across WYN's  
direct service  
region

total # of matches  
that attended the  
Thanksgiving Feast\* **29**

\*Annual appreciation event hosted by our mentoring team for volunteer mentors and their mentees to attend



# of students  
served by  
Angel Tree

167

total #  
volunteer  
hours

3,920

## Longevity of Mentoring Matches

Watauga

1-2 years

22.9%

3-4 years

20%

5+ years

11.4%

Avery

1+ years

30%

Ashe

One match (that began before funding made the Ashe program official) has lasted 5+ years.



volunteers  
trained in  
Youth  
Mental  
Health First  
Aid

13

# Expansion

new initiatives • innovative approaches • gaps filled

At the beginning of 2026, WYN opened a middle school **afterschool** site in **Avery** County in partnership with the YMCA. This was a result of years of behind-the-scenes work led by WYN's Community Health team to assess community gaps and to identify funding to fill these gaps. What started as a way to meet **Avery Youth Coalition's** goals of reducing youth substance use and increasing mental health resiliency evolved into a safe space with positive activities for middle school youth every day.

With one official year of the **Ashe mentoring** program under our belts, we've already noticed increased visibility, more partnerships with local businesses and churches in Ashe County, and an impressive number of mentoring matches.

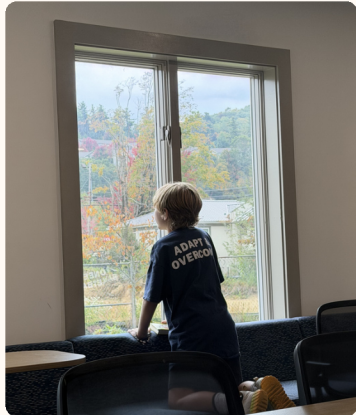
**Ashe Mentoring**, in collaboration with Carolina Across 100's Care4Youth initiative, formed Care4Ashe. This group is providing a space for all youth in our program, even those on our waiting list, to meet other students and to participate in activities related to mental health.



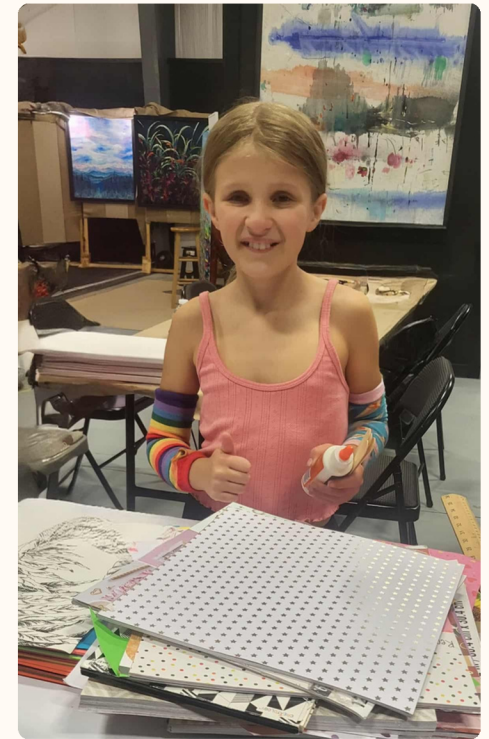
Along with the **Community Health team**, our **Alleghany Afterschool** team participated in the first annual summer kick-off Health and Fitness Fair presented by the Alleghany Wellness Coalition.

All **Alleghany** Elementary schools received **110 resource bins** that included food, hygiene items and basic needs, courtesy of our **Community Health** team.

Thanks to a grant from the WNC Bridge Foundation, our **Avery Mentoring** program was able to offer stipends to recruit more mentors, removing common barriers to volunteering while supporting the finances of our residents.



In **Watauga** County, we celebrated breaking ground on WYN's highly anticipated youth center.



One of the unique things about our **Watauga afterschool** site has been the students watching their new facility being literally built from the ground up. Students were invited to attend the groundbreaking ceremony in May 2025 and since then they have been fascinated by all the activity next door.

Their absolute favorite part? When we unexpectedly hit the water table and the foundation filled with water! All summer long they begged staff to allow them to swim in "the pit" and asked if we could keep it that way. Of course, now that the foundation has dried and the walls have started going up, excitement for the facility to be finished has increased. Older students in particular check in to determine when it will be completed compared to the year of high school they will be in. Students want to know they will be able to come back to WYN! Staff are looking forward to the day that the end of students' 8th grade summers is not a "goodbye," but a "see you next school year."



# Exploration

new perspectives • new experiences • pushing comfort zones

One question asked by the staff at the **Alleghany Sparta** program last holiday season was, *"How would you react to meeting The Grinch, as a kid like you, before he became known as a Grinch?"* Some responses were kind and compassionate, while others were apprehensive, as they were unsure how they would feel about being around someone who looks so different. One of the students shared that someone in their class might feel like the Grinch did because they look different than others in their class.



During last summer's **Alleghany camp**, nine children learned to swim with a lot of support from friends. They were able to pass WYN's swim test so that they could brave the high diving board.



## **Alleghany Summer** Field Trips:

New River at Elk Shoals

Fort Hamby lake access in Wilkesboro

Public pool and splash pads in Sparta & Dobson

Tiger World

Mount Airy Skating Rink

Kaleideum children's museum in Winston-Salem

Often we don't think about little joys that many of our WYN participants may have never experienced. One **Ashe mentee** had their very first milkshake ever! Some other memorable firsts for our students: dropping off job applications around town, seeing Santa Claus, feeding a donkey, looking at pottery, walking a dog in the park, playing disc golf, volunteering with Wine to Water and visiting numerous new restaurants in town.



# Exploration

new perspectives • new experiences • pushing comfort zones

**Avery Mentoring** partnered with *It's All About the Art* studio to offer a mosaic art class for our mentoring matches. The class was very well attended. The studio provided all supplies and instructors as well as snacks and drinks. After the class, participants were able to explore the gallery. *It's All About the Art* wants to offer this opportunity again soon and we're grateful for this wonderful partnership.



One of the most loved trips for **Watauga** students and staff alike during **Summer Camp** was our day at the Catawba Science Center. This was a first for our students and it was a hit! They started the day by learning about the Northern Lights at the planetarium before exploring everything the center had to offer.

The top moments were meeting the resident bearded dragon and tortoises along with the aquatic animals in the touch tank. Our students also enjoyed the exhibit on outer space and even got to try an astronaut's version of an ice cream sandwich (which was met with varying degrees of excitement). Other favorites included the butterfly garden, the kinetic energy exhibit and the sugar gliders. It was a joy to see the kids take on the day with heaps of curiosity and excitement. They loved finding the next cool thing and having staff and peers join them in experiencing the exhibit. It was a very special day!



**Watauga afterschool** students got a completely new experience on this year's spring break trip – getting to take a three-hour ride through the sound on a commercial fishing boat in Atlantic Beach. The students were able to see a sea turtle that swam alongside the boat, a dolphin jumping beside the craft, and the beloved wild horses on our Carolina coastal islands. What was even more special to staff was watching one student fall completely in love with boat life as she stood at the helm of the ship waving to every passerby she could. This student was particularly quiet throughout the school year but absolutely flourished on our spring break trip.



During a summer trip to a pool in Virginia, one of our **Ashe Summer** kindergarten students braved the high dive, which is around 15 feet high! She showed no fear as she confidently climbed up the ladder and jumped off with little hesitation.



Our **Alleghany summer camp** took weekly trips to Elk Shoals (part of New River State Park) and enjoyed the educational aspects of the trips. An associate ranger showed us how to find and identify macro invertebrates, an indication of a healthy river ecosystem.



In the Fall, **Alleghany's Glade Creek afterschool** students made daily visits to a garden orb-weaver spider in its web on the playground. At first, the kids were afraid and wanted to harm it, but after some discussions about keeping nature safe, their fascination grew. They looked forward to checking on the spider's work each afternoon. They developed a sense of curiosity and connection to nature which led to bug hunting becoming a regular afterschool activity.

One of the most exciting breakthroughs for **Ashe afterschool** staff members recently was 3 students learning how to tie their shoes. This allowed for more confidence and independence on a day-to-day basis.

# Resilience

supportive environments • relationships • adaptability

**Ashe Afterschool** staff members have started Wellness Wednesday, a weekly individual check-in with students who might be having a tough time. As a result of these check-ins, and because our team works hard to affirm students' feelings and not shut them down, staff members have noticed students feeling comfortable sharing emotions more often.

One week, the behavior of one of our students was off. She was picking on the younger students, making fun of her friends, and not engaging with staff. A staff member checked in with her and found out that she felt a lot of pressure to perform around friends and family. She didn't feel as though she could "mess up." She talked through ways she could feel more comfortable at WYN and made a plan for how to approach similar situations in the future. This plan not only made her afterschool experience better, but also helped her in other aspects of life.

**Glade Creek afterschool's** small group size allows staff to form close, trusting relationships with each child, creating a space in which they feel comfortable and valued.

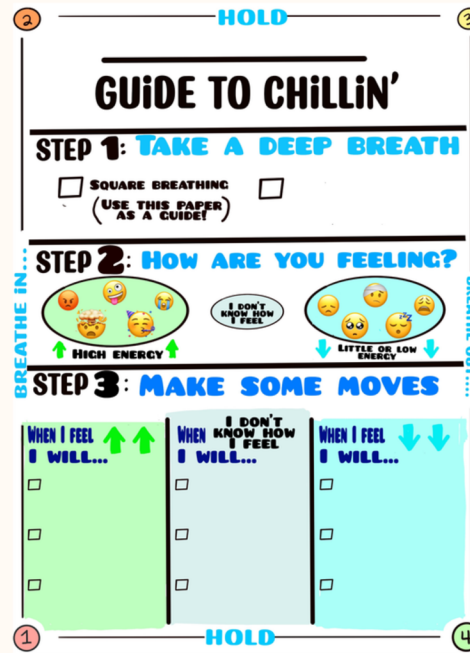


Creating a sense of safety and security at our afterschool locations is essential to building resilience. Our **Glade afterschool** team is excited to now operate out of their own dedicated space within Glade Creek Elementary School, making the transition from the school day to the afterschool program smooth and familiar. The increased accessibility and visibility are great, as is having a permanent classroom that truly feels like a "home away from home."



**Ashe afterschool staff members** have reported noticing an increase in their *own* resilience as well as that of their students as a result of spending so much time navigating difficult situations and working to deepen staff/student relationships.

In addition to Wellness Wednesdays, **Ashe afterschool** also implemented the “Guide to Chillin” cards (pictured right), which each student fills out regularly. It’s a quick way for each student to assess where their emotions are that day and what they need to do in response. Self-awareness can be half the battle at times, and having a list of actions for each emotion can be very empowering. Our youngest students are still very new to managing their emotions and learning to process them safely (and with an adult if needed), so this is a great way to kick-start this important skill.



Two years ago, one of our **Avery County** mentees was referred to our program after witnessing a traumatic death inside her home. She was withdrawn and struggling academically. After being matched with a dedicated and compassionate mentor, her confidence began to grow. Today, she is thriving in middle school, earning A’s and B’s, and has even made the cheerleading squad. Her mother credits this transformation directly to the consistent support of her mentor, who encouraged her through cheerleading tryouts and continues to show up at every game.



**Ashe Community Health** hosted the youth portion of the 2nd annual Walk Out of Darkness suicide prevention walk which was held at the new Paddy Mountain Park. Over 50 people registered and the WYN team collaborated with Ashe Early College and Ashe High School to recruit 9 youth volunteers.



**Catch My Breath** is an evidence-based youth vaping prevention program taught to elementary and middle school students in Ashe, Avery, and Watauga counties. Our team was able to deliver this program to **over 275 students!**

The **Mentoring Program in Ashe** works very closely with WYN’s Community Health team, playing a key role in projects and events led by the Ashe Mental Health Forum, School Health Advisory Council, Ashe Health Alliance and Ashe Youth Task Force.

# Resilience

supportive environments • relationships • adaptability

Historically our older **Allegheny students** have helped younger students with reading and homework. This year, without being asked, they also encouraged each other through games, activities, and daily problem solving.



WYN's **Community Health** team provided an Alternative To Suspension (ATS) program to **Avery** County high school students that have been found using nicotine and THC products on campus. WYN received funding for this program through the Avery County Opioid Settlement Fund. WYN understands that students who are facing the challenge of substance use dependency need a dedicated space to discuss their use and reasons for using, along with the opportunity to contemplate what it would be like to abstain from using and how to quit. WYN's ATS class has allowed students to receive appropriate consequences while keeping students in school and avoiding time out of instruction. Meeting these students with curiosity and support has allowed them to have honest conversations about their use and to be vulnerable regarding their desire to quit and the fears associated with that.



**Ashe Community Health staff** attended a Community Resiliency Model training to obtain a certification for delivering this model within their community. The model prioritizes an evidence- and skills-based approach to creating a shared understanding of the impact trauma has on the human nervous system.



**# of students served by ATS in Avery**

**28**



One of our **Avery County** mentees needed some practice with reading skills and her mentor found a creative way to accomplish just that. Together, they began visiting the local animal shelter where the mentee participates in a program that encourages children to read to shelter kittens as they prepare for their forever homes. While initially hesitant about this, the mentee now picks up a book on her own and eagerly reads aloud to the cats. This experience has strengthened her reading skills while also creating a love of volunteerism. Now she knows that giving back can make a difference for both herself and others.



In early June, **Community Health staff** traveled to Raleigh to join the North Carolina Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network press conference to speak on behalf of Rural Appalachia and to advocate for continued hurricane recovery funding and support.



Mentees are 78% more likely than their non-mentored peers to volunteer in their community.  
Source: **Youth.gov**



One **Avery mentoring** student demonstrated significant growth over the course of the year. Early in the mentoring relationship, the student displayed defiant behaviors during outings with their mentor. As trust developed between the two, however, the mentor later shared a meaningful update with us – the mentee had begun to feel safe enough to open up about missing her mother, from whom she had been separated the previous year. After expressing these emotions, the mentee showed noticeable improvements in behavior and emotional regulation. The child lives with her grandmother, who had hoped mentoring would provide a safe space for her granddaughter to process these feelings, something she had been hesitant to do at home. In addition to emotional growth, the mentee gained confidence through creative expression. She has a strong love for art, and with encouragement from her mentor, she explored her talents and ultimately won the school-wide Christmas card contest for her grade. This achievement provided a meaningful boost to her self-esteem and reinforced the positive impact of the mentoring relationship as well.

# Resilience

supportive environments • relationships • adaptability

**Watauga afterschool** staff members have observed an increase in older students taking care of new and younger students, particularly in the post-hurricane transition from the former programmatic building to the current makeshift programmatic space in the Boone admin building. Older students explain routines and expectations and hold their peers accountable. They help new students get used to the “new WYN” as compared to when we were in the previous space. It is a huge step in recovery to see students not only feeling comfortable with the new surroundings and rhythms but also teaching this to others.

“**[The WYN staff] are just really sweet. They are like a second family.**”  
-Watauga Parent



One **Sparta afterschool** student, in their second year with WYN, found themselves often having silent lunch, lunch detention, or in-school suspension. During their first year with WYN, school issues carried over into challenging behaviors at afterschool nearly every day. The student would get into arguments, take things from other students, attempt to exclude others from games, and even show aggression and disrespect towards adults. Since we weren't sure they would ever trust us, we tried trusting *them*. They began to enjoy the privileges and responsibilities of being one of the older kids. As a result, they have become a natural leader by reading to small groups, helping with homework, and leading games. For a class assignment they had to write about what they were thankful for, and they wrote about WYN afterschool.

# WYN's Way

what makes us unique • compassionate care • community partnerships



Our **Sparta students** invested time and care into making Valentine's Day cards for the residents of a local group home.

**Afterschool** staff consistently rely on Love and Logic paired with Motivational Interviewing and Reconnect for Resilience principles to uphold expectations, help students feel understood, and maintain accountability.

At the end of the **Watauga Summer program**, one of our students was struggling at home.

Due to a complex combination of circumstances, his care team was worried that he may not be able to make it at home for the remaining weeks of summer before school started back. Afterschool staff tirelessly looked into alternative options for summer camps that extended into August and even explored trips off the mountain for the student to attend, but few options were available.

The Watauga team decided to make their own "camp" for this student and brought him to WYN every day between the end of WYN summer camp and the start of school. This student was a huge help to staff in getting the facility, equipment, and vehicles ready for the afterschool year. It was an exceptional way to give this student extra support during an intense time, and the time staff got to spend with this student was even more special!



**Watauga School Counselors** are meeting monthly in WYN's Boone admin office. This is an incredible new connection that brings Watauga County Schools and WYN closer together.

**The afterschool program at Glade Creek School provides structure and learning interactions that my children would not receive if this program were not accessible to families at Glade Creek. Their grades and behavior in their classrooms have improved, and I know it is because of the staff and attention to detail that they provide the children. My children look forward to the planned activities, and when I ask them how their day was at school, they usually report on activities they did in afterschool before the activities they did in the classroom. Thank you for all you do to support our children!**

-Glade Parent

**Avery Back to School Bash**, with leadership from the WYN team, brought in additional partners to their annual event that included Resources for Resilience (who led a Resilient Family Adventure for Pre-K through 5th Grade) and the Healthy Blue Bus (on which clinicians conducted mental health screenings utilizing the mobile clinic for privacy). The Avery Youth Coalition's focus was on involving teens in the Back to School Bash, allowing them to learn more about the harmful effects of substances through interactive stations and providing them alternative ways to cope with stress.

**We have had such a sense of relief knowing our kids now have a wonderful routine they absolutely LOVE and look forward to. When we pick them up in the evenings after school, they always want to stay later, which really exemplifies how amazing this program is.**

-Glade Parent



Jessica Howard (**WYN Community Health**) engaged the Ashe County afterschool students in designing resource bins in support of their communities. Julia Hollingsworth (**Ashe Mentoring**) distributed the bins to various places in the county to sustain the Ashe Youth Task Force's resource bin initiative in all the schools. Students have been utilizing these bins every single day and this project has become a core initiative for the task force.

**Ashe afterschool** staff members have noticed an increased sense of community and belonging as a result of WYN staff investing time in supporting students' interests outside of standard WYN programming.

Staff members attended sporting events, community theater performances and art showcases, contributing to students feeling seen, cared for, and celebrated.

We occasionally ask the students what they think **Alleghany County** needs. Most of their answers include the need for fun and safe spaces for youth, events, and resources. We are happy to be providing safe, trusted adults and engaging activities as often as possible, and we are always looking for ways to expand to meet our community's needs. A youth center in Alleghany is one of our future dreams.





**Ashe afterschool** found creative ways to welcome and engage WYN alumni who have technically aged out of the program, yet continue to seek connection with the program.

**“I think [the WYN staff] are really, really supportive and they try to be there for you. It’s not just a staff, they’re actually there for you as family...”**

-Watauga Parent



Each of our afterschool sites have their own versions of clubs and free time, which is a student favorite. Pictured left are a couple of Watauga students jamming during free time.



One thing our **Watauga afterschool site** does well is cultivate a sense of family. We cheer each other on and express interest in what everyone has going on in their lives and outside of WYN. One thing that has been imperative to building this environment is having a few days a week that staff members ask students, “Does anyone have anything important they’d like to share?” Students know that whatever they bring to this time will be heard and accepted. It is a time for them to be heard and seen. Students have shared a range of information during this time, from the loss of family members and pets to silly remarks and questions. Allowing them this time to share has empowered everyone to feel validated in showing up just as they are each and every day.



With **Avery County** school counselors spread thin across multiple schools and with limited access to school-based therapy, there is a significant need for additional support for students. WYN’s **mentoring program** is able to step in and help fill these gaps, providing consistency, guidance and resources that make a real difference in the lives of youth.

## It takes a community to raise a community.

Use your talents and resources to make a difference in a child's life today.

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