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# youth matters

a newsletter of alternatives for youth

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## Dear Alexa,

At Alternatives for Youth, we are enjoying the warmer spring weather and promise of more and more beautiful days ahead. The weather change reminds us that the school year is progressing, and with the help of our programs, many students are also seeing new progress in their school work.

This month, we bring you highlights from our work in 2009, a "Spotlight" on a ski trip some of our youth took, program updates, and useful information about self-harm in our "No 'Kid'ding" article. We are pleased to have the opportunity to share our progress with you.

Happy spring from all of us at AFY!

## what an amazing year!

### AFY's 2009 Annual Report

We recently completed our 2009 Annual Report and had the opportunity to look back at the year's accomplishments and challenges. We want to share some of the highlights with you. You can view the full report on website's "Publications" page by [clicking here](#).



- In 2009, we served over 1,700 youth and parents. An increase of 700 individuals from 2008!
- Celebrando la Familia expanded Homework Club at Spangler Elementary School from two to four days; served more than 120 regularly attending youth in Homework Clubs at five schools; participated with the Niwot Timberline Symphony Orchestra for a Folklorico Dance Group performance; and continued to support the St. Vrain Valley Latino Parent Involvement Collaboration.
- Celebrando la Familia staff continued to support and volunteer for community events, including Cinco de Mayo, Dieciseis de Septiembre, and Día de Los Muertos, to participate on community and civic boards, and to partner with the St. Vrain Valley Gang Task Force, Longmont's Children and Youth Resources, and Longmont's Gang Response and Intervention Program (G.R.I.P.).
- Attendance Advocates worked with 452 students and 147 parents in two middle schools and four high schools (an expansion from four schools in 2008). 85% of students improved their attendance, and 67% of parents showed improvement in involvement with their students.
- NorthStar served 72 youth and 82 parents with 95% of students and parents completing the program and 89% of students avoiding suspension or expulsion.
- In 2009, evaluation of NorthStar was improved with the addition of pre- and post-testing on two assessments for students, Life Effectiveness and Colorado School Bonding. The first assessments showed that NorthStar is a successful program and that NorthStar is having above average success with students compared to other programs. Specifically, students improved most in the categories of healthy risk taking, perceived relevance of schoolwork, and enjoyment of school.
- In the 2008-2009 school year, 96% of Clearview Educational Center students increased by at least one grade in language arts, 84% of students increased by at least one grade in math, and 83% of students increased by at least one grade in reading.
- 74% of Clearview students returned to school or adult education program, entered treatment, or remained at Clearview, and 100%

## quick links

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## spotlight: winter park ski trip



**Who:** On March 3, nine students from Skyline who participate in the Attendance Advocate program were rewarded for the incredible progress they have made with a special field trip - a ski trip to Winter Park!

The trip was made possible through AFY, Skyline, and a Skyline teacher who is a ski patroller and was able to donate ski tickets and ski rentals for all the students and staff.

**What the Students Said:** The students had a great time skiing, and for many of them, it was their first time skiing. The students expressed excitement and exhilaration after the trip.

Students said:

"I had so much fun on Mary Jane hill. It was a good way to motivate me to go to my classes."

"This [ski trip] was like me and my classes, to always try. Even though it looks hard, you will learn to do it. When I was skiing, I would fall down so many times. But I would always get up and keep on trying."

"I never in my life have been skiing before. I was scared. That day came and went, and I went and I was there and I learned a lot about how to ski. My fear went away. I liked it a lot."

"All in all the field trip was a very nice and appreciated experience that I am very happy to have attended."

Thank to all who made this trip possible and to the brave Attendance Advocate, Paula Fredman (also her first ski trip), and Heritage staff who chaperoned!

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of students who returned to school remained in school through the end of the school year.

- Clearview students also took pre- and post-tests on Life Effectiveness and Colorado School Bonding. The results for students show that Clearview is having above average success with students compared to other programs. Specifically, students improved most in the categories of effort in school and confidence and perseverance.

Beyond the numbers, at AFY, we always say that our greatest accomplishment is seeing individual youth succeed. In 2009, we saw our youth succeed as they returned to school after an expulsion and completed at least two semesters, improved attendance, graduated high school, graduated college, completed homework every day for a semester, and improved behavior at school.

Again, we thank all of the supporters - those who gave time and financial support - to make our work possible in changing lives!

### afy: fyi



### Program Updates

Spring is a lively time of year for our programs as we continue to engage youth and parents through the middle of the spring school semester! Following are updates about our core programs:

#### Celebrando la Familia's

Homework Clubs continue to provide bilingual tutoring and assistance with organization after school to approximately 100 students at Heritage Middle School and Columbine, Spangler and Rocky Mountain Elementary Schools. Staff provide students with a safe place to go after school with caring adults to help them with their homework and getting organized for school.

Latino Parent Involvement in Education meetings, held in collaboration with other area organizations, in February and March provided information on the topics of "Financial Fitness" and "Healthy Relationships." Upcoming meetings include the topics "Family Fun" on March 24 and "Life Long Learning" on April 14. Meetings this semester are being held at [Longs Peak Middle School](#). All meetings are free, open to all interested parents, and include childcare, light dinner and Spanish translation. Meeting dates and topics are also available on our [Calendar of Events](#).

With May not far away, Celebrando la Familia's Program Director, Mary Vigil, is working with the Longmont Celebrates Cinco de Mayo on this fun, family-friendly celebration on May 1. More information will be coming as we get closer to the event.

**NorthStar's** Program Director, Emanuel Barr, recently completed a quarter-long class with seventh grade boys at Heritage Middle School and began class with a new group of seventh grade boys. He is also continuing to meet with boys at Erie High School after school. The classes follow [The Council for Boys and Men](#) curriculum, a strengths-based group approach to promote boys' and young men's safe, strong and healthy passage through pre-teen and adolescent years.

NorthStar evening classes, which focus on anger management, conflict resolution and communication within a family, began on March 15 and will again be offered beginning April 12. Evening classes are offered to all interested families at no charge. Additional information can be found on our [NorthStar web page](#).

**Attendance Advocates**, a partnership program with the St. Vrain Valley School District, are continuing work this semester at five schools, Heritage and Longs Peak Middle Schools and Frederick, Longmont, Silver Creak High Schools. Attendance Advocates are currently working with approximately 310 students and their parents to uncover the underlying reasons students are not attending school and to connect students to needed resources to address any needs. Attendance Advocates are then able to help students improve attendance, avoid diversion, and improve academically.

School Resource  
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Board Member  
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Student Achievement,  
St. Vrain Valley School  
District

What has been exciting for Attendance Advocates this semester is seeing progress with hard to reach students and changes in student self-motivation, students getting the support they need for a variety of issues, parents learning about attendance laws and how to use Infinite Campus, and schools supporting Attendance Advocates.

On March 3, a group of nine students involved in Skyline's Attendance Advocate program had a truly special treat - a ski trip to Winter Park! For many of these students, the trip was their first ski trip and great motivation to continue the progress they have made. Read more about it in this month's "Spotlight."

**Clearview Educational Center** is taking spring at its best as a time for change and new things! Clearview staff and students welcomed Dave Saidman, the awesome new Social Studies teacher who joined the team this month. Students are having a blast getting to know Dave as well as being motivated and engaged in his Social Studies classes and enjoying basketball with him during P.E.

With two days of CSAP testing to go, students are looking forward to resuming their regular class routine. The weekly workout sessions at the YMCA have been a welcome break and just got extra challenging as students began taking turns designing and leading classes. This week, they are all looking forward to a rowdy game of capture the flag!

Clearview began a new collaboration with [CU Boulder's ArtsBridge program](#), a program designed to close the gap in public school arts education by sending qualified university arts students into schools to teach art. The students started their first project, a comic book collaboration with ArtsBridge teacher, Mr. Anthony. Mr. Anthony introduced students to the multi-dimensional world of comic book storytelling, showed them a variety of samples, explained the history of the art form, and taught them how to draw in panel format. The ultimate goal for students is to "create interest through dialogue that compliments the illustrations."

Clearview's latest equine therapy session at Joder Arabian Horse Ranch focused on the aspects of good leadership. Students gained experience attempting different leadership styles and learned how to effectively collaborate with the horses to gain their trust. Many students were faced with the challenge of trying to manage the ranch's most stubborn horses! It was a rewarding learning experience for all.

In the weeks ahead, students will enjoy a restorative spring break week; take a trip to the local library to learn more about conducting research and locating books; high school students will kick off a speech and debate unit; middle school students will begin a journalism unit; and all students will visit the Denver Museum of Nature & Science to see its [Body Worlds 2 Exhibition](#) in April.

*The update from Clearview was contributed by Rhea Maze, Clearview's English teacher.*

## no "kid"ding...

### Did You Know?

In AFY's programs, we continue to see both girls and boys who inflict self-injuries. Also referred to as self-harm or "cutting," self-injury is a scary and upsetting behavior for parents, friends and others who care for self-injurers. As with other risky behaviors, helping someone who cuts or getting help for cutting begins with information. Did you know:



- Self-harm can be defined as the deliberate, direct injury of one's own body that causes tissue damage or leaves marks for more than a few minutes and that is done in order to deal with an overwhelming or distressing situation.

- Approximately 1% of the population has, at one time or another, used self-inflicted physical injury. Self-harm cuts across all cultural and socioeconomic levels, but more adolescent females engage in this

behavior than males and it usually starts in young teens.

- Cutting is used as quick relief from emotional stress, strong emotions, intense pressure, or upsetting relationship problems. For kids with emotional problems, self-injury has an effect similar to cocaine and other drugs that release endorphins to create a feel-good feeling.

- Teens who cut may not know better ways to get relief from emotional pain or pressure and may cut to express strong feelings of rage, sorrow, rejection, desperation, longing, or emptiness.

- Symptoms of cutting include:

- Unexplained cuts, scratches, or burn marks on arms, legs, and abdomens, particularly when they appear regularly. Be suspicious of comments like "the cat did it."
- A teen regularly removing bodily hairs.
- Mood changes like depression or anxiety, out-of-control behavior, changes in relationships, communication, and school performance.
- Finding knives, razor blades, box cutters, and other sharp objects hidden in the teen's bedroom.
- Regularly locking herself or himself up in the bedroom or bathroom following a bad day at school, negative encounters with peers, and family conflicts for lengthy periods of time.
- The teen's peers cut or burn themselves.
- Reports from a sibling indicating that he or she found blood encrusted razors or caught the teen in the act of self-injuring.

- Most people who cut aren't attempting suicide. Cutting is usually a person's attempt at feeling better, not ending it all. Although some people who cut do attempt suicide, it's usually because of the emotional problems and pain that lie behind their desire to self-harm, not the cutting itself.

- People don't usually intend to hurt themselves permanently when they cut, and they don't usually mean to keep cutting once they start. But both can happen. It's possible to misjudge the depth of a cut, making it so deep that it requires stitches or, in extreme cases, hospitalization. Cuts can become infected if a person uses non-sterile or dirty cutting instruments - razors, scissors, pins, or even the sharp edge of the tab on a can of soda.

- Cutting can become a compulsive behavior such that the more a person does it, the more he or she feels the need to do it. The brain starts to connect the false sense of relief from bad feelings to the act of cutting, and it craves this relief the next time tension builds. When cutting becomes a compulsive behavior, it can seem impossible to stop and seem almost like an addiction.

- Self-harm is not a problem that teens simply outgrow, and parents need to intervene. Steps for parents include:

- Opening the door to communication in a loving, non-punishing way. Let the child know that you are aware of the self-harming and if they don't come to you, to go to someone else.
- Being direct with your child, and don't act out of anger or let yourself become hysterical. You can say, for instance, "We're going to get help for you."
- Knowing that the girl or boy must be ready for treatment.
- Seeking therapeutic treatment for teen (see How to Find a Therapist for more informational tips).
- Parents can help by providing emotional support, helping identify early warning signs, helping kids distract themselves, lowering the child's stress level, and providing supervision at critical times.
- When kids just can't break the cycle through therapy, an inpatient program can help.

- The bottom line: "When kids decide they don't want to cut any more -- and they get stressed again -- they have to be able to manage stress as it arises," David Rosen, MD, MPH, professor of pediatrics at the University of Michigan says. "They can't succumb to cutting. People who can figure out some alternative way to manage stress will eventually quit it."

You can find more information about self-harm at the following websites:

