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a newsletter of alternatives for youth

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Dear Alexa,

May is an exciting month for us at Alternatives for Youth. Our school year programs are wrapping up and preparing the youth for the summer break while we also plan for our annual Summer Program and the fall. We have had a wonderful school year with our youth!

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This May we are especially excited as we prepare to launch a new program, iThrive Longmont, a treatment program for teens struggling with substance abuse and their families. This program has been in the planning stage for two years and, through the amazing work of the volunteer driven Longmont ASSET Coalition, will begin later this month. We are looking forward to providing this valuable and much needed service in the greater Longmont area and to helping teens and families.

As the school year wraps up, we at AFY wish all of the graduates a big congratulations on their academic achievements and best wishes for the road ahead.

spotlight: longmont ASSET coalition

What: The Longmont ASSET Coalition is a volunteer collaboration of non-profits and agencies working with youth in the St. Vrain Valley begun in 2009.

Member Agencies: The Longmont ASSET Coalition is comprised of

[Alternatives for Youth](#)

[City of Longmont Children & Youth Resources](#)

[Longmont Municipal Probation](#)

[Longmont Community Justice Partnership](#)

st. vrain valley's new treatment program

iThrive Longmont

After two years of work by a dedicated group of volunteers, a new program to help adolescents struggling with substance abuse and their families is ready to open! We are pleased to bring to the St. Vrain Valley community [iThrive Longmont](#).

iThrive Longmont began two years ago as AFY took a look at our services and service gaps in the community. A low-cost treatment program for adolescents not involved in the judicial or social services system was identified as a top issue. At the same time, other non-profits and agencies working with youth also began recognizing that our community lacked this service. Conversations between our community's non-profits and agencies developed into the Longmont ASSET Coalition, a volunteer-based collaboration dedicated to providing "comprehensive, coordinated and integrated substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment services continuum that assures all adolescents in St. Vrain Valley have access to appropriate care."

The Longmont ASSET Coalition, having completed the preliminary program design based on Hazeldon's Matrix Model, hiring of staff, and securing funding through the Education Taskforce of the Multicultural Action Committee for the City of Longmont, is now ready to open the pilot program of iThrive Longmont. In the beginning stage, iThrive



[Longmont Police Department](#)

The Rand Foundation

[St. Vrain Valley School District](#)

and concerned community members.

Mission: The Longmont ASSET Coalition's mission is "to have comprehensive, coordinated and integrated substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment services continuum that assures all adolescents in St. Vrain Valley have access to appropriate care."

Current Focus: Over the last year and a half, the Longmont ASSET Coalition has focused on opening a low-cost, evidence-based treatment program for adolescents in the St. Vrain Valley. The ASSET Coalition has met twice a month to discuss the need, program design and components, and funding and to take actions to open the program.

In May 2010, the Longmont ASSET Coalition's work will come to fruition with the opening of [iThrive Longmont](#), a low-cost, family focused, comprehensive substance abuse intervention and treatment program for teens in the St. Vrain Valley.

Longmont will provide services to high school students struggling with substance abuse and their families, including:

- A 16-week program with meetings held one evening a week for two hours from 6:00-8:00 p.m.
- Each evening will offer meetings for youth and their parents separately as well as a time to come together
- Dinner and childcare at each meeting
- Bilingual (Spanish and English) group meetings
- Options for prosocial activities with youth required to participate in at least one
- Two licensed, bilingual therapists with extensive experience working with youth and families

iThrive Longmont will be housed at AFY with continued assistance from the Longmont ASSET Coalition. The cost of the program is \$5 per family (regardless of the number who attend) per meeting. For more information about the program and how to register, visit the [iThrive Longmont website](#) or contact AFY at 303-776-8184.

afy: fyi



Program Updates

May is a busy time of year at Alternatives for Youth (AFY). Many of our programs are wrapping up for the school year, bringing classes and meetings to a close, celebrating the school year and youths' achievements, and finishing program assessments. We are also busy finishing plans for the annual Summer Program. Following are updates about our core programs:

In the next two weeks, **Celebrando la Familia's** Homework Clubs will finish up providing bilingual tutoring and assistance with organization to approximately 100 students at Heritage Middle School and Columbine, Spangler and Rocky Mountain Elementary Schools.

Plans for the Summer Program are being completed with a calendar of activities, reservations for activities, and hiring of staff and teen assistants. At the Summer Program Kick-Off on May 27, approximately 60 elementary and middle school students will come together for a family barbecue and program registration. Activities begin the first week of June.

NorthStar's Program Director, Emanuel Barr, is wrapping up a quarter-long class with seventh grade boys at Heritage Middle School. One of Heritage's Assistant Principals recently reported that the NorthStar classes are "excellent" and have a big impact on the seventh grade boys. During the classes, the number of student discipline referrals decreased, and discipline referrals continue to stay lower after the class. The Assistant Principal identified that the class content addresses the two biggest issues for participating students, social responsibility and respect.

Attendance Advocates, a partnership program with the St. Vrain Valley School District, will finish up work with students at five schools, Heritage and Longs Peak Middle Schools and Frederick, Longmont, Skyline 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

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needed resources to address any needs. Throughout the school year, Attendance Advocates have seen many of their students improve in attendance and attitude towards school.

With summer vacation just around the corner, students and staff at **Clearview Educational Center** are busy putting finishing touches on the school year. Ms. Gretchen's Life Skill's classes just took the "Oprah's No Phone Zone Pledge," signing a contract promising not to talk or text while driving when they get their licenses. The students' parents will be signing it as well! Ms. Padma's Math classes are gearing up for a challenging comprehensive final exam on all of the concepts they have been practicing. Mr. Dave's Social Studies classes are also preparing for finals. The middle school group will be taking a unit test on U.S. History in the 1890's, and the high school group will be writing a term paper on selected U.S. History topics from the 40's, 50's, and 60's. Ms. Rhea's high school students are creating polished resumes and completing a poetry unit. Her middle school group just finished writing their own comic strip short stories and are working on editorials for their Journalism final.

In the last few days of school, middle and high school students will present the work they are most proud of in a "gallery walk," create a "This I Believe" statement, and write a letter to themselves to be sealed and opened in five years. In Art class, the middle school students completed a photo project collage to compliment the articles they wrote for English and the high school group continued to build upon a large, collaborative poster of illustrations.

Our final day of school is Wednesday, May 26th. Instead of holding regular classes, our last day together will be spent playing in an all-school basketball tournament at the YMCA before sitting down to a potluck lunch and graduation/awards ceremony. A few students will be graduating from Clearview next week, and each one will receive a handmade beaded key chain signifying the staff's well wishes for them as they head back to public school. Most of the students at Clearview will be returning in the fall and will hopefully serve as role models to the new students. As we prepare to turn students loose for the long days of summer, we must repeat our mantra to them on their way out the door, "Stay safe and make good choices!"

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

no "kid"ding...

Did You Know?

When Alternatives for Youth (AFY) began overseeing the St. Vrain Valley School District Attendance Advocate program, we learned a lot about truancy - the risks associated with truancy, truancy laws, the many reasons youth are truant, and how to help youth improve their attendance. Our experience in the Attendance Advocate program has been an amazing education in the importance of school attendance. Did you know:

- Truancy has shown to be a gateway offense to a number of problems, including early warning signs of students headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via



suspension, expulsion, or dropping out.

- Two studies have found that truant students have low self-esteem and experience greater feelings of rejection or criticism from their parents than non-truants.

- According to the St. Vrain Valley School District's Code of Conduct and Discipline, "One criteria of a student's success in school is regular and punctual attendance. Frequent absences may lead to poor academic work, lack of social development and possible academic failure. Regular attendance is of utmost importance for school interest, social adjustment and scholastic achievement, particularly for closing the achievement gap. . . . Students who have good attendance generally achieve higher grades, enjoy school more and are more employable after leaving school."

- Colorado's Compulsory School Attendance Law states, "every child who has attained the age of six years on or before August 1 of each year and is under the age of seventeen years, except as provided by this section, shall attend public school for at least the following number of hours during each school year: (I) 1056 hours if a secondary school pupil; (II) 968 hours if an elementary school pupil in a grade other than kindergarten; (III) 900 hours if a full-day kindergarten pupil; or (IV) 450 if a half-day kindergarten pupil."

- While it is the student's responsibility to attend school, according to state law, it is the responsibility of every parent or guardian to ensure that their child receives adequate education and training and, if of compulsory attendance age, attends school.

- District school boards set their own attendance policy based on Colorado law. In the St. Vrain Valley School District, the minimum number of unexcused absences before judicial proceedings may be initiated is four days in a month or ten days during any school year; and three unexcused tardies equals a half day unexcused absence.

- Our Attendance Advocates have found common misconceptions among the parents they work with, including:

- There are exceptions for students with good grades, and it's not as necessary that they be in school.
- All absences will be excused if they are called in.
- Missing one day here and there isn't too bad.
- No one is checking up on attendance.

The truth is:

- Attendance laws apply to everyone regardless of grades.
- Absences are not automatically excused if they're called in. Family vacations, for example, are excused at the discretion of the administration.
- Absences can add up fast. If a student misses the maximum number of excused days (12) they've missed over 2 weeks of school!
- Attendance is checked at all the schools.

- Attendance Advocates have found the following common reasons students miss school:

- Problems with other students at school (ie: being bullied, students spreading rumors).

- Falling behind in school work and feeling like they can't catch up.
- Needing to "take a day off".
- Problems with transportation (ie: car trouble, no way to get to school).
- Parents leaving early for work in the morning, and the kids having to get themselves (and sometimes their siblings) to school.

- There are things parents can do to help their students with attendance, such as:

- Know the laws and district policies about attendance.
- Know the consequences of lack of attendance. For instance, students who miss school not only miss class. They miss out on participating in the school culture (sports, clubs, dances). Additionally, as a consequence of lack of school attendance, parents can face up to six months in jail when a student is referred to court for habitual truancy and his attendance doesn't improve.
- Check in with your child about school as a whole rather than just academics. Parents are encouraged to ask their student about friends, teachers and other social aspects of school to make sure she is feeling comfortable. It might be helpful to ask, "How was your day?" rather than "How was school?"
- For parents in the St. Vrain Valley School District, be proactive in checking Infinite Campus and calling the school if you suspect your child is trying to avoid school.
- Know that you as a parent have support in the school! Counselors, interventionists, administration, and secretaries all want to help your student succeed. Use them as a resource.
- Participate in the PTO or other school activities. If your child sees that you enjoy being around the school, they'll be more likely to want to be there.
- Keep your student accountable. If your child has to get to school on his own, call him and make sure he is getting ready, or ask a neighbor or other family member to check in on him.

You can find more information about truancy and school attendance at the following websites:

[Colorado Compulsory School Attendance Law](#)
[National Center for School Engagement](#)
[School Attendance: Issues to Consider](#)
[St. Vrain Valley School District Code of Conduct and Discipline and Board of Education Policies, Rights and Responsibilities of Students and Parents](#)

Note: Information from the Attendance Advocates was contributed by Lauren Ruth. Websites are provided for information and do not indicate an endorsement by Alternatives for Youth. You can find past No "Kid"ding . . . Did You Know? articles on our website by [clicking here](#).

Alternatives for Youth, Inc.'s mission is to promote academic persistence and success of youth by instilling values that lead to positive choices and positive community impact and by encouraging social, cultural, and self development. Since 1978, Alternatives for Youth has been providing services to youth and their families in the Longmont community. Last year, over 1,000 youth and their families received services through Alternatives for Youth, including after-school homework clubs, parenting education, an alternative school for expelled youth, positive recreational activities, youth leadership opportunities,

academic enrichment activities, and service learning activities.

Thank you for your support!

Alexa Van Dalsem
Resource Development Director
Alternatives for Youth

get involved!

Yes! I/We want to help young people succeed! I/We wish to support Alternatives for Youth's work in helping youth succeed by:

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