



Homework help: Becky Galdo, a senior at Radford University and intern with NRVCS, assists a pair of students with homework during the After-School Program at Narrows Elementary/Middle School. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

Narrows after-school program continues to have positive impact on students, families

By **Mike Wade / NRVCS**
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NARROWS - While only a small percentage of his students are involved, Narrows Elementary/Middle School (NEMS) Principal Rick Franklin believes the impact of its after-school program is enormous.

“Our community and our kids have really come to embrace the program,” declares Franklin. “It is a very important part of our school...and it’s been incredibly successful.”

The After-School Program (ASP) is the result of a long-standing collabora-

tion between NEMS, Giles County Public Schools and NRVCS that dates back to the late 1990’s. In fact, the program was already in place when Franklin was named principal at NEMS more than 15 years ago.

Approximately 20 students (grades K – 5) participate each year in the program – which is offered on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Students begin each afternoon with 15 minutes for a healthy snack, followed by 30 minutes of physical activity. The remaining time involves a structured discussion about healthy emotions and behaviors (using the evidence-based Positive Action program), as well as homework

assistance and tutoring. The program typically concludes at approximately 5:15 p.m.

Children in ASP typically have academic needs and are at-risk of engaging in problem behaviors. Participation in the program is voluntary, although referrals are often made by the school’s guidance counselor, classroom teachers, and/or the principal. Franklin says the program has become so popular that there’s actually a waiting list of families who want to get their children enrolled.

“It’s been refined over the years and really

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is a model program,” Franklin explains “We’re involving our community, the local universities, stakeholders...it works and the kids love it.”

Franklin went on to say that the program has proven to have a lasting impact on students.

“For many of these kids, truancy is rarely a problem after they move on to middle school – they get in this program and that’s fixed – and we also usually don’t see them relapse and start getting into trouble for bad behavior,” adds Franklin.

Facilitators for the program include Prevention Specialists from NRVCS and interns from nearby universities (Virginia Tech, Radford and Concord). NRVCS’ Tyler Vance, in his first year with the ASP, says there are multiple benefits for students and their families.

“We have a unique opportunity as facilitators to watch these kids grow – we see them succeed and we support them when they are struggling,” Vance notes, “and with the Positive Action curriculum, we get to teach them about things like empathy, being a good friend, and sportsmanship.”

“The After-School Program provides programs that support those values, and we’re doing that in a safe environment,” Vance adds. “Plus, we have tons of fun during our time together!”

Even with the constant rotation of interns – and occasional changes in staffing – Franklin feels the program is “seamless.”

“The staff have really made the program the success that it has become and that’s a testament to the training that the interns and new employees receive,” says Franklin. “They always come prepared and the kids naturally gravitate to them – children are very resilient – and they also like new faces.”

Above all else, Franklin says the biggest benefits of the program are assistance with homework and the ability to have regular contact with families.

“The opportunity that these students have to seek immediate remediation for something they are struggling with is priceless,” Franklin adds, “and the direct dialogue that staff are able to have with their parents or guardians is so important – because we don’t always get to interact with families during the regular school day. So, that’s huge.”



“High five!”: Morgan Bays-Simpson, a senior at Virginia Tech and intern with NRVCS, celebrates with a student during the After-School Program at Narrows Elementary/Middle School. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

“It can be difficult for some parents to emphasize homework at the end of the day – much less to make sure they’re doing it correctly and learning from it,” says Vance.

“When we have those brief conversations with parents at the end of the day, the students get to hear us reflect on what type of day they had and they get to hear us praise them for good behavior and hard work,” Vance adds. “So, just to know that adults are paying attention to them and recognizing those things gives the students positive reinforcement and builds their resilience. Hopefully, that goes a long way toward setting them up for future success.”

“It’s a real security blanket for a lot of our families that opens up a healthy line of communication between them and someone connected to the school,” concludes Franklin. “Which is ultimately what it’s all about because we’re all in this together.”



Structure and support: NRVCS Prevention Specialist Tyler Vance checks in with students attending the Narrows Elementary/Middle School After-School Program. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

COMMUNITY COALITIONS in the NEW RIVER VALLEY

Throughout the New River Valley, key community stakeholders collaborate and meet regularly to discuss and address the prevention of youth problem behaviors.

All five jurisdictions in our region have active community prevention coalitions that include representation from many sectors of the community, including (but not limited to), schools, law enforcement, social services, businesses, medical services, faith and civic groups, parents and youth. The coalitions are also open to interested members of the public.

Included below are updates on each of the New River Valley's community coalitions, as well as their regular meeting dates/times and contact information:

- The **Pulaski Community Partners Coalition (PCPC)** is in the process of building capacity to achieve population-level change by training staff to address prescription abuse and heroin use via a new five-year Partnership for Success grant from the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS). While currently focusing on capacity, PCPC will soon begin a new assessment process using the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF), which will lead to the development of a strategic plan to prevent and reduce use of these substances.

To learn more about PCPC, please contact Becky Hubble (rhubble@nrvc.org).

- **Floyd's Multi-Disciplinary (MD) Team** is currently focused on efforts to prevent and reduce substance abuse through a grassroots effort known as STOMP (Standing Together to Overcome Meth Problem). While the group is primarily focused on addressing the use of methamphetamine, the group also supports NRVCs' prevention efforts in the local schools that are designed to prevent use of gateway drugs such as tobacco, alcohol and marijuana.

For more information about the Floyd MD Team, contact Chris Taylor (ctaylor@nrvc.org).

- The **Giles Youth-Adult Partnership (GYAP)** was the first community coalition of its kind in the New River Valley - dating back to the 1990's. The group is currently recruiting community partners to participate in monthly meetings and scheduled events. This year marks the fifth year that GYAP has partnered with the Women's Resource Center of



Members of Montgomery County Prevention Partners
(NRVCS file photo)

the New River Valley to offer a "Healthy Relationships Week" at both Narrows and Giles High Schools.

To learn more or to get involved with GYAP, please contact Rene Cox (rcox@nrvc.org).

- **Montgomery County Prevention Partners (MCP)** is working through the Strategic Prevention Framework in order to educate the community on the power and sustainability of prevention services. The group is also looking at community needs related to youth and their families. MCP will conduct a family event at the Christiansburg Aquatic Center on May 21 from 4 - 6:30 p.m. to help educate families about local resources. Admission to the "SOUPer Splash" event is free with the donation of a non-perishable food item. Collected food items will be donated to the Montgomery County Emergency Assistance Program.

For more information about MCP, contact Bethany Webb (bwebb@nrvc.org).

- The **Radford Youth-Adult Partnership (RYAP)** is currently assessing the needs of the Radford community and the group is actively seeking new membership. Meetings are held the first Thursday of each month from 4 - 5 p.m. at the Radford City Department of Social Services.

To find out how you can get involved with RYAP, please contact Tyler Vance (tvance@nrvc.org).





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Floyd, Pulaski receive obesity prevention grants

Both communities awarded \$60,000 to prevent increase in childhood obesity rates

Floyd and Pulaski counties each recently received \$60,000 grants from the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY) to help prevent childhood obesity in their respective communities. The grants will fund projects and activities related to obesity prevention over the next two years.

Funding for Floyd County will be utilized by the Floyd Healthy Community Team (HCTeam), while activities in Pulaski County will be coordinated through the New River Health District and the Healthy Citizens Pulaski County Coalition.

The Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY) empowers Virginia's young people to make healthy choices by promoting active, nutritious and tobacco-free living. VFHY's funding comes from an 8.5% share of Virginia's annual payments from major U.S. tobacco manufacturers through

the Master Settlement Agreement.

According to Floyd Project Coordinator and NRVCS Prevention Specialist Meredith Dean, the Floyd HCTeam has been working to educate families about the health risks of childhood obesity and how to prevent it since 2010.

Dean says the new grant funds will support the continued expansion of the Pre-school Produce program currently offered in county classrooms and Head Start. The funds will also help create new family recreational opportunities and further integrate healthy eating and good nutrition lessons and activities into elementary classrooms county-wide.

Key partner agencies for the Floyd grant include: Plenty!, Virginia Cooperative Extension, NRVCS, the Floyd/Floyd County Parks and Recreation Authority, Floyd County Public Schools, Head Start and Floyd County High School's Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA).

Dr. Pam Ray, Project Coordinator for

the Pulaski grant, says their group's focus will be on increasing community access to healthy foods and physical activity for residents of all ages. Included in the partnership are (among others): the Pulaski County Commission on Children and Families, Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Pulaski County Farm-to-School Program, and the county Department of Social Services.

Ray notes that recent county health rankings showed that 32% of adults in Pulaski County are considered obese, while nearly one-fourth (20% - 24%) of the county's youth are obese.

As part of the grant, Pulaski's Hensel-Eckman YMCA will be offering an evidence-based program called, "Healthy Family Home," that will also emphasize the importance of good nutrition, healthy food preparation, and increased physical activity.

"The grant is primarily aimed at childhood obesity prevention, but we are taking a more holistic approach to include the entire family," Ray adds.