

Vail Daily

Making the most of after school in Eagle Co.

Instead of going home to a television, hundreds of students stay busy with the After School Literacy Program

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Vail, CO Colorado
February 3, 2008

GYPSUM, Colorado — Walk around Gypsum Elementary after 2:50 p.m., and it doesn't look at all like school's out.

In one room, you'll find students putting together the school newspaper and working on homework.

In the next room, fifth graders are editing photos for the yearbook. Down the hall, you'll find students with headphones in the computer lab, sprucing up their reading, writing and math skills with the "Study Island" program.

Second grader Nick Thompson, right, works on math homework during a Youth Foundation after-school program at Gypsum Elementary on Thursday.
Theo Stroemer/Vail Daily



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The Youth Foundation

The Youth Foundation was founded in 1997 to help out economically disadvantaged youth from preschool to college.

Other programs run by the Youth Foundation include:

- Guardian Scholars program, aimed at helping high school students find money and do well in college.
- Magic Book Bus, which delivers books to trailer parks in the valley.
- First Tee, which teaches kids life values through golf.
- Academic soccer, where students play the sport and get help with school work.
- Neighborhood Net, which teaches kids how to use high level technology.

with grades. The program also enrolls a large number of students who are still learning English.

It's all part of the Youth Foundation's larger mission — to reach out to economically disadvantaged youth in the valley who need help.

"We want to provide opportunities to the underprivileged and level the playing field," said Katie Bruen, the marketing and event coordinator for the Youth Foundation.

Students spend two days a week working on homework after school with teachers and get one-on-one tutoring.

Some students take violin lessons. Others are surrounded by glue, scissors and crayons, immersed in an art project.

A short walk away, at the Gypsum Recreation Center, several students are getting exercise on the climbing wall, doing laps in the pool or working up a sweat with the video game Dance Dance Revolution.

All this is part of the After School Literacy program, sponsored by the Youth Foundation.

The big idea is to keep these students busy and doing something productive and enlightening after school, instead of going home to an empty house, where a television may be the only baby-sitter until the parents get home.

Igloos and fishing

You can find the After School Literacy Program at Edwards, Avon, Meadow Mountain and Gypsum elementary schools.

To join the program, students have to be referred by a teacher or counselor. Most of the students either come from low-income families or are struggling

This is when students can sharpen their skills and get the attention they aren't always able to get at home.

"Many students need help with homework because their parents don't speak English," Bruen said.

Two days a week, the students do something a little more fun.

What that "fun thing" is depends on the creative minds of the teachers at each school.

At Meadow Mountain Elementary, students spent weeks learning how to build an igloo and how they can keep people warm.

At Avon Elementary, just a short walk away from Nottingham Lake, students learned how to fish — a lesson that eventually led the students to a lake-cleanup project.

Another teacher at Avon Elementary started teaching students Yoga and actually tied some of the Yoga positions to animals they learned about in class.

In Gypsum, the students get to play at the recreation center.



Fourth grader Carlos Quezada climbs the rock wall during a Youth Foundation after-school program at the Gypsum Recreation Center.
Theo Stroomer/Vail Daily

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'Letting them have fun'

The Literacy Program used to be all homework, all the time, which made the program something kids didn't really like attending. Now, with big activities like rock climbing, the students look forward to the program, Bruen said.

"We want them to be excited to come here after school, and they genuinely like coming here" said Johnna Williams, a teacher at Gypsum Elementary and coordinator for the After School Literacy Program. "We're letting them have fun, but we still make time for the academics."

Most of the instructors with the After School Literacy Program are teachers who already work in the school district.

The programs gives teachers a chance to see a different side of the students, and it pays pretty well too, Williams said.

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