

RIGHT: Kids take a break from dodgeball during sports club. BELOW: AYC members show off their tie-dyed T-shirts during arts and crafts club. BOTTOM: Children make traditional flan during culinary club.



{ ASPEN YOUTH CENTER }

The Cause: Aspen Youth Center—recently voted Aspen’s best nonprofit organization—provides a safe and supportive environment for youth to enjoy themselves, interact with peers in group activities, and make meaningful connections with other kids and adult role models. The organization fosters an environment filled with respect, creativity, and teamwork to promote healthy interpersonal skills and develop confidence.

The Back Story: The Aspen Youth Center was founded in 1991 by a socially conscious group of teens and adults. In 2003 the center moved from downtown Aspen to its current location, directly across from the Aspen School District. “Being close to the schools has been an ideal location for us—we’ve definitely seen our youth visits increase,” says executive director Sarah Visnic. “Not only are we seeing Aspen youth, but we’re drawing young people from the entire Valley. We have an amazing board and staff dedicated to taking the youth center to the next level by finding innovative ways to meet the needs of our kids.”

Making a Difference: Aspen Youth Center is a drop-in center open to fourth through 12th graders. Throughout the year it provides a variety of programs, from homework help to culinary classes and sports activities to a newly developed program for high-school students. National statistics indicate that 3 to 6 P.M. is the riskiest time in any child’s day, and that quality after-school programs can transform those hours from time spent with crime, drug use, and reckless driving into constructive time to increase self-esteem, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment, while decreasing teenage pregnancy rates. “Last year we served over 1,000 young people in the Valley who either visited us in our center or participated in one of our after-school or outreach programs,” says Visnic. “This is why we exist. We’re an asset, not only to the youth and families, but to the entire community.”

411: Aspen Youth Center, 970-544-4130; aspenyouthcenter.org.