

### PROTECTIVE FACTORS



## Montrose Recreation District Summer Enrichment Program

Montrose, CO

1,500

Average number of students served during the school year

51%

Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ Local government
- ▶ Program fees
- ▶ Grants
- ▶ Local sponsorships
- ▶ Montrose County School District Summer Food Service Program

## Providing an environment that models and makes time to practice positive skill development

New research tells us that the adolescent years are a highly important developmental period for brain growth and “the second most critical period of development.” However, there are factors at both the individual and community levels that impact the development process. This includes risk factors that increase the likelihood that one will take part in unhealthy behaviors, as well as protective factors that spur healthy behaviors and development. Young people need a continuous system of support from birth through adolescence into young adulthood, creating the conditions that help them thrive and build the skills and attributes that will have a positive influence on their lives as they face thousands of decisions each day. Afterschool and summer learning programs are a part of this continuous system of support, providing services during a critical time of development for young people that will help children grow their strengths, cope with the complications of life, and lead healthful lives to become healthy adults.

### Overview

The *Montrose Recreation District Summer Enrichment Program (Summer Enrichment)* provides a mix of fun, academically enriching, interactive, and hands-on indoor and outdoor activities through two four-week-long sessions during the summer. Operating Monday through Thursday, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., Summer Enrichment offers its Summer Adventures program for youth ages 6 to 10 years, and Club 1114 for youth ages 11 to 14. Since its inception in 2001, a central goal of Summer Enrichment has been to promote the physical, mental, and emotional health and wellness of their students.

### A typical day for students

When in session, students arrive at the summer program at noon to receive a free lunch provided through the Summer Food Service Program before the program officially begins at 1 p.m. After lunch, younger students break off into the Summer Adventures program and older students gather for Club 1114. Each week features a different theme, which in turn shapes students’ daily activities. During the 2019 summer, Healthy Habits was the theme of the final week. Kids sampled fruits, describing what they did and did not like about the taste; a nutritionist engaged students in hands-on activities with food; a dental assistant

spoke about her job and hygiene; and kids took part in physical activities, such as outdoor games and Zumba. Students in Club 1114 have greater choice and independence. For example, older students chose to garden during Healthy Habits Week, helping take care of the school garden—watering, weeding, and picking fruits and vegetables. Other themes have included “Every Day is a Holiday,” which celebrates different cultures and “Imaginarium” week, which uses students’ creativity to explore science, technology, engineering, and math.

## Outcomes

During the 2019 summer session, among parents responding to the program’s parent survey, an overwhelming majority rated the overall quality of the program as excellent (68 percent) and the overall performance of the staff as excellent (79 percent). One parent shared with staff that, “...[Summer Enrichment] and [the program’s] expert team have created an amazing program for children in the community. We commend you and your team [for] the fun adventures that you have provided, from the friendly faces that greet you to the guidance you have given. [Our child] said that this ‘is the best summer of her life.’”

## Program characteristics

While each week has a different theme, and each day different activities, all programming is developed with the goal of creating an enriching experience for kids that foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie. An example of this is that to set the tone of the program, students take part in an orientation where they collaboratively develop rules that everyone in the program will abide by during the summer, such as being kind and respecting one another. At the staff level, all staff participate in an orientation before the start of the program and along with discussing logistics, schedules, and responsibilities, staff practice their communication skills through scenarios depicting difficult situations they might find themselves in with students. Staff learn to ask youth questions to help them identify the issue at hand, taking the time to encourage them to think about their actions, what they can do if they find themselves in a similar situation, and how to move on from the situation.

In addition to embedding positive reinforcement and expectations into the program, Summer Enrichment provides programming specific to building protective factors. For instance, partnering with the group Peer Kindness, students in the program learn about the impact their words can have on others, discuss how they hold the power to manage their emotions and reactions, and share circumstances that are weighing on their minds. The program, established in response to a teen suicide, focuses on bullying prevention and promoting inclusion, positivity, empathy, and respect. Through the program, students have felt empowered to share issues they face, including peer pressure, incarcerated parents, vaping, and alcohol use.



## Challenges

***The importance of the adolescent years:*** Science shows that, from birth through young adulthood, our brains are continuously developing: brain pathways grow stronger, information is processed more rapidly, and we build more complex connections that enable more complex thinking. A child’s adolescent years hold enormous potential to grow and develop the skills—from building relationships to learning self-control—that they will need in adulthood. It is also a time when adolescents are in a more vulnerable state and their surrounding environments and supports—particularly non-familial supports—play a significant role in their development.

***The effect of our surroundings:*** Research has found that our surroundings at the community, family, and individual levels can have a positive or a harmful effect on our development. Poverty, community violence, conflict within the family, and parent or family members that struggle with alcohol or drug misuse are just a few of the risk factors that exist at the community and family levels.

***Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs):*** Close to half of children in the U.S. from zero through age 17 have experienced at least one ACE, an experience, such as being a victim of violence or having a parent or guardian who has passed away, that could have a negative and lasting effect on one’s health and well-being.

***Individual risk factors:*** Depression, cigarette use, and substance use and misuse are also risk factors young people grapple with today. In 2017, 32 percent of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless for persistent periods of time, 17 percent seriously considered attempting suicide, 14 percent reported misusing opioids, and e-cigarette use increased by 78 percent among high schoolers and 48 percent among middle schoolers from 2017 to 2018.

Read [Afterschool: Fostering Protective Factors that Can Last a Lifetime](#) to learn more.

## Risk Factors and Protective Factors

Risk factors and protective factors are present at the individual, family, and community levels. Below are examples of risk and protective factors for adolescents at the various levels.



**Individual**



**Family**



**Community**



### Risk Factors

- ▶ Low self-esteem
- ▶ Inability to communicate
- ▶ Substance use and misuse

- ▶ Family conflict
- ▶ Parent substance use
- ▶ Unemployment
- ▶ Lack of adult supervision

- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Exposure to a community or school related traumatic event or violence
- ▶ Favorable community or peer group attitude toward alcohol and drug use



### Protective Factors

- ▶ High self-esteem
- ▶ Positive self-image
- ▶ Positive peer relationships
- ▶ Engagement in school

- ▶ Supportive relationships
- ▶ Clear expectations for behavior
- ▶ Stability and consistency

- ▶ Positive adult mentor
- ▶ Engagement in school or community activities
- ▶ Healthy peer groups

*Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's "Risk and Protective Factors for Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Across the Life Cycle."*

## Program history

The Montrose Recreation District Summer Enrichment Program began in the summer of 2001 through a partnership with the Montrose County School District. Located in a small community on the western edge of the Rocky Mountains, Summer Enrichment grew out of an afterschool program provided by the Montrose Recreation District. Now solely a summer program, Summer Enrichment is exploring adding programming during the school year.

## Recommendations

*for providing an environment that models and makes time to practice positive skill development:*

- ▶ Create a program culture that promotes inclusivity, compassion, and acceptance. When students feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to open up, express themselves, and be receptive to new ideas.
- ▶ Don't underestimate the power of fun. Kids want to show up at Summer Enrichment because they are having fun while they are also developing new skills, building friendships, and learning how to live a healthy lifestyle.



**Afterschool Alliance**

[afterschoolalliance.org](http://afterschoolalliance.org)