

COMMUNITY



Kelley Cox Post Independent

A "breaking" dance class is one of many after-school activities offered by ACCESS Roaring Fork. New Castle's Riverside Middle School students, shown from left, are, David Bahena, Moises Gomez, Nathan Tomasello and Ismael Mellin.

ACCESS Roaring Fork supports teachers and students

After-school programs are fun and affordable

Amy Hadden Marsh
Post Independent Contributor

ACCESS Roaring Fork provides after-school programs in Garfield County schools and has been living up to its five core concepts — safe, fun, educational, diverse and creative — for more than eight years.

Programs include academic assistance as well as enrichment classes, taught by community members, focusing on health and safety, the arts, and physical fitness.

"The kids love it," said executive director Deb Rice.

Programs began in the Roaring Fork School District Re-1 and now include Garfield Re-2 and District 16. ACCESS Roaring Fork (ARF) partners with all five middle schools in Garfield County.

"We served 2,000 kids from Carbondale to Parachute in 2011," said Rice. ARF also works with Crystal River and Sopris elementary schools and will open a program at Basalt Middle School later in 2013.

And what is it the kids love so much? Graduating from middle school, for one. Rice said in the 2011-12 school year, there were 28 eighth-graders at Carbondale Middle School who weren't going to make it to high school. They entered ARF's XLR-8 program, which pairs math and reading coaches — in school and after-school — with teachers and eighth-graders who need help.

Coaches who work in the classroom during the school day learn the curriculum and build relationships with the teachers and kids, explained Rice.

"They are an interactive part of the classroom and know exactly what the students are working on."

She said coaching helps students focus. "They're getting one-on-one help."

Kids commit to after-school coaching twice a week, said Rice.

"Parents sign a contract with ACCESS Roaring Fork and pay \$50 for nine weeks," she explained. "Kids can't miss except if they're excused."

Nonprofit Spotlight:
ACCESS Roaring Fork

Executive Director: Deb Rice
Board Chair: Laurie Michaels
P.O. Box 819, Carbondale
963-4402
Email: info@accessrf.org
Website: www.accessrf.org
Year founded: 2003
No. staff: 3 full-time, 2 part-time
No. volunteers: Average of 6-10
Mission: ACCESS Roaring Fork partners with local schools to provide opportunities for all students to further develop academics, social and physical skills in a safe and healthy environment within extended day programs and beyond.

"We want to engage the instructors to offer exciting classes so the kids can come home and say, 'I learned something incredible today.'"

Luis Polar
ARF elementary school program manager

Surprisingly, she said, most of them ask to come back for a third session.

This kind of extra help was offered to those 28 eighth-graders, and guess what? "Twenty-seven of the 28 kids went to high school," said Rice.

ARF initiated similar programs at Crystal River and Sopris elementary schools in 2012, which are for students selected by the principals and teachers.

After-school enrichment

Rice's thoughts echo those of other school volunteers who believe it takes the entire community to educate children these days.

"Everybody's busy and the teachers are overworked," she explained. "The national education system has

definitely changed."

Enter ARF's after-school enrichment programs.

"If we look at the Roaring Fork Valley, there are usually two working parents with multiple jobs," said Rice. "The days of parents picking up kids and taking them to art class are over."

The best thing about ARF's Second Shift program is that it's fun. It offers all kinds of after-school classes and the kids don't have to leave the school.

Luis Polar, ARF elementary school program manager, said the challenge is to keep middle-schoolers interested.

"We want to engage the instructors to offer exciting classes," he explained, "so the kids can come home and say, 'I learned something incredible today.'"

Rice said kids no longer have enough opportunities to participate in hands-on projects, which is where Second Shift steps in.

"We provide CPR and first aid so kids can get their babysitting certificates," she said. "About 100 kids throughout the Roaring Fork Valley are certified."

Other classes have included cooking, guitar, dance, martial arts, sewing, rocketry, 4H and unicycling. "Where else are you going to learn how to ride a unicycle?" asked Polar. Everyone is welcome to teach a class.

"There are a lot of people in the Roaring Fork Valley who have a lot of knowledge," said Polar. "We want to get more outside help."

Firefighters and police officers volunteer their services, said Polar, but all other instructors are paid \$25 per hour to teach one class weekly for 10 weeks. Teachers don't have to possess any fancy certifications.

"You've just got to have a certain attitude and background to deal with kids," Polar explained.

The second best thing about Second Shift is that the classes are affordable for families: \$20 for two weeks. Scholarships are also available. "We don't turn anybody away," said Rice.

Kids attend Second Shift four days per week from 3-6 p.m.

"We're giving fun choices to kids instead of just going home alone," Rice said.

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