

THE ASPEN TIMES

Nonprofit profile: Tomorrow's Voices steams ahead

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[Aspen, CO Colorado](#)
October 21, 2007

ASPEN — With a valley full of nonprofits, Tomorrow's Voices often slips under the radar, especially considering a budget that's smaller than the salary of many local executive directors.

However, the 8-year-old nonprofit has grown into an organization that now affects hundreds of kids in the Roaring Fork Valley with supplemental education programs ranging from a lecture series to college-credit classes for high school students.

"We came up with Tomorrow's Voices to inspire kids to find their civic voice and act on it," said founder A. O. Forbes, a full-time teacher at Colorado Rocky Mountain School. "We wanted to give kids the appetite to be engaged and give them skills they need to engage effectively and powerfully."

Forbes and co-founder Willard Clapper made \$36,000 last year and Piper Foster, the executive director, earned \$8,000. The nonprofit's payroll accounts for half of its yearly budget.

"Our board is really supportive of [our payroll] because our product is the service we are providing," said Foster. "We're doing so much with such little budget. People always ask, 'How come I didn't know about you?'"

During its first five years, Tomorrow's Voices consisted mainly of a college-credit course for juniors and seniors at five area high schools: Roaring Fork, Basalt, Glenwood, Bridges and Yampa. The geo-political course can be taken in lieu of an American democracy unit.

"It's discussion-based, Socratic-method teaching," Foster said. "The kids tell us they are pushed to reconceive opinions on long-held beliefs."

The class started out with fewer than 20 students. But this year the two-and-a-half-hour course has an enrollment of 50.

Other programs at the nonprofit also are growing. This year, the program "Building Bloc" has paired teachers talented and experienced in specific areas with other teachers who want a coach for a few days.

Foster said a good example of how the program has worked is a high school teacher in Carbondale who was assigned to teach drama, although she was not an experienced teacher in that subject. A teacher with decades of experience talked for hours to the teacher about techniques, spending ample class time with the students.

Also new in the last few years is a speaker series that brings environmental ethics speakers and advocates to those aged 35 and under to give lectures to valley kids. A new senior seminar also has been formed that is focused on sense of place.

Foster said the new seminar helps cure students of "senioritis" and gives those who are often already accepted into college a chance to do some experiential and service learning focused on "the premise that you can't know who you are until you know where you are."

The programs have been popular among kids and Foster said she has gotten some help with fundraising from many students who have come to speak to potential donors. The nonprofit raised most of its revenue from individual

contributions and grants. Last year that accounted for just over \$41,000.

Tomorrow's Voices also raises money through consulting contracts and tuition fees. There is also a 5k foot-race scheduled for Nov. 4 at 9 a.m. that will likely raise money this year, though last year it did not break even. Foster said they have some donations and more support for the race, so nearly all of the entry fees will go directly to Tomorrow's Voices.

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