

Boosting Efforts for a St. Mary's County Youth/Community Center: Introducing *Community Youth Mapping (CYM)*

Many citizens and leaders of St Mary's County agree that young people need further facilities and resources. Approximately one year ago, the NAACP convened community members, businesses, organizations and elected officials to gauge support and take purposeful steps to establish a community youth center in Lexington Park. That meeting resulted in a Steering Committee for a Youth/Community Center Campaign.

The Campaign reached a milestone in the spring of 2016: including funding in the county's 2022 Capital Improvement Plan budget for planning and designing a Youth/Community Center. Yet that timing is unlikely to result in completion of a Center before the year 2026. As the promise of some kind of facility some time in the future does not help today's youth, the Steering Committee would like the Commissioners to speed the process by moving the allocation to the 2018 budget.

At the same time, the Steering Committee has identified a way forward that may both speed up the process *and* offer valuable experiences for today's young people: **Community Youth Mapping (CYM)**. *Community Youth Mapping* is a community-based process that involves youth and adults in gathering, analyzing and disseminating information about community resources for youth, children and families. This simple and cost-effective approach has been initiated in over 100 locales around the country. Data generated by piloting CYM in Lexington Park would contribute to making key decisions and allocating limited resources for the county - and potentially lead to CYM in other parts of the county.

Some key elements of CYM include:

- It should involve St Mary's county government; for-profit businesses and nonprofit organizations; the residents and families; *and the young people themselves.*
- It can be launched within several months, and spearheaded by young, professionally trained staff who would be paid for their work.

CYM would accomplish four primary results:

1. **Collect and synthesize data** to support the general agreement that the county's young people and families would benefit from building a Youth/Community Center in Lexington Park, as well to direct next steps;
2. **Expand the community of supporters** determined to see an appropriate project launched and completed sooner than now anticipated;
3. **Enable young people** to develop skills, contacts, confidence and respect within the community; and
4. **Culminate in an evidence-based platform to launch a local youth activities app and to speed a Youth Center's funding.**

Please join our efforts to launch Community Youth Mapping in St Mary's County. The Steering Committee is seeking members, partner organizations or businesses, and sponsors. For more information, contact us at smcyouthcenter@gmail.com.

Community Youth Mapping FAQs

**Developed by the Steering Committee for a Community Center
Lexington Park, Maryland**

What IS Community Youth Mapping (CYM)?

Community Youth Mapping is a process by which young people (typically between the ages of 15 and 21, but adjustable by community) engage in field research techniques to gather qualitative and quantitative data about youth-related needs and/or resources within their community. Predicated on a youth development approach, it stems from positive views of the capabilities and aspirations of young people. It values the skills and time of young people (hence compensating them for their mapping work), aims to build and strengthen respectful relations between young people and adults (in *both* directions), and supports the capabilities of young people for successful social and economic futures.

Why do Community Youth Mapping in Lexington Park (LP)?

The CYM aims to address several disconnects: (1) between young people and their community/life options, (2) between programs and services offered to young people and what young people know about - or want, and (3) between decision-making and resource-allocation, and the needs and wants of young people (to generate an evidence base that fits with St Mary's County's gap analysis). We focus first on Lexington Park, as a pilot; if it works well here, we may implement it elsewhere in the county.

What is the Steering Committee's vision for a Community/Youth Center?

The Steering Committee has both a short-term and long-term vision. Short term, the vision is of local young people who are excited to learn about their own community, contribute to decision-making and build enthusiasm among their families, neighbors and leaders. Long-term, the vision is of a vibrant Youth Community Center where many different young people - with different interests and needs - can find opportunities to grow and flourish.

I'm confused: How do the Youth Community Center and Community Youth Mapping relate to one another?

Our ultimate goal, as stated in the vision above, is a vibrant and dynamic Youth Community Center that serves the needs of many different young people. The Community Youth Mapping is a tool for getting to that, by generating data and information, and by mobilizing the community. At the same time, however, the CYM is expected to be a positive and valuable experience for the youth mappers and field supervisors - and to lead to spin-off opportunities that they identify. So CYM is a bridge to a Youth Center and enhanced services/activities - not an alternative.

What will be the result(s) for young people from having participated in CYM?

Through the youth mapping process that will be a summer job for them, young people will gain skills and confidence. They will also gain knowledge of their own community and of possibilities. They may also identify opportunities for themselves individually - whether for the world of work, of social belonging or of cultural engagement. In other places, participation in CYM has been transformative for the young people who are engaged in it.

What information can or would be collected through CYM?

The focus of data collection will depend on the organizers *and* on the youth mappers themselves. But it is expected that they will determine young peoples' needs and wishes, along with family and community expectations; along with a range of resources that includes physical places (both outdoor and buildings), activities currently offered, and opportunities to jobs, mentoring and other support for youth. The research tools may also include questions about health needs and services, and about employment-related skills. Useful information will be publicly available, including through an app that will identify existing activities with date, time, and place.

When would CYM take place in Lexington Park?

We are aiming for 6-8 weeks during the summer of 2017.

Who will the youth mappers be? Youth mappers would be young people who are residents of Lexington Park. Many will be young people who contend with barriers - for whom participation will be a turning point in their lives. It will be important to ensure diversity within the Youth Mapping teams - expected to be at least 24 young people, but possibly more if funding is obtained.

How can I, or my organization/institution/business help? As a community initiative, CYM depends on support from *everyone!* Support may include any or all of the following:

In the early phase: Help spread the word through your networks (clubs, churches, Facebook, newsletters, etc); Join the Steering Committee or Advisory Group; Provide Letters of Support for us to attach to Grant Proposals

Throughout: Share your expertise (for planning, serving as volunteer supervisors or offering additional training session for the youth mappers)

Recruit and identify young people to be youth mappers

Provide in-kind contributions, e.g. food, T-shirts & caps, transportation

Contribute financial support for paying the youth mappers

Submit additional data or analysis to complement or further make use of what the mappers collect



PLEASE SUPPORT *COMMUNITY YOUTH MAPPING AS A STEP TOWARD A COMMUNITY CENTER*

Community Youth Mapping is a way to:

- Train and engage young people ages 16-20 to gather data,
- Connect door-to-door with local people, organizations and businesses, and
- Collect information about youth & family needs, existing & potential activities (including recreational, cultural & educational), health concerns and skills needed by employers.

While Youth Mappers benefit from valuable experience, the community gains access to data for planning and investment.

WAYS TO HELP

- *Community Center Visionaries:*
\$1000+
- *Youth Champions:*
\$500-\$999
- *Mapping Investors:*
\$250-\$499
- *CYM Supporters:*
\$50-\$249
- *Any and all contributions are welcome!*

BENEFITS TO THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

- Companies gain **visibility** with local customers and establish business **linkages** with youth and parent customers
- A Community Center will be an **attractive local asset** for recruiting out-of-county employees with families
- Educational activities will build a **local labor force with 21st century skills**
- A positive and vibrant environment will **strengthen Lexington Park as a business location**

Please Make Checks Payable to:

St. Mary's County Community Development Corp noting, "For CYM"

Send to: CDC, 46940 South Shangri-La Drive, Suite 7, Lexington Park, MD 20653