

Dreaming Big for Youth

**An Expert Working Group Analysis of Data
Collected by Community Youth Mappers**



**Campaign for a Community/Youth
Center**

July 2018

**COMMUNITY YOUTH MAPPING DATA ANALYSIS:
WHAT WE HAVE, WHAT'S MISSING—AND
WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE**

I. INTRODUCTION: The Campaign for a Community/Youth Center Organized a Community Youth Mapping Project to Collect Data about Resources for Young People and Their Families in a Targeted Area of St. Mary's County

For years, St. Mary's County has lacked things for young people to do. Ask adults who grew up in the county about activities for young people and they nearly uniformly respond, "There's never been anything for young people to do here!" Ask young people today, and they typically respond, "Of course there is nothing to do—other than sports ... or drinking."

Determined to address the problem head-on, a coalition of community organizations and citizens came together three years ago to launch a Campaign for a Community/Youth Center (the "Campaign"), and establish a Steering Committee. (See Annex A, Steering Committee Members.) A milestone was achieved in the Spring of 2016 when the County Commissioners included funding in its Capital Improvement Budget ("CIB") to start planning and design for a Community Center in 2022. While that was, and is, appreciated, the timing does not address current needs. Further, if the process remains as scheduled, it is unlikely that there will be a functioning Community Center before 2026 at the earliest — which means that children currently ages 10 or older will not have access to a Center until they are 18 or older. Today's middle school and high school students, and their families or mentors, will not be able to rely on a Community Center until those students themselves are young adults or parents.

Even if the County begins planning and design in 2022, children now ages 10 or older will not benefit from a center until they have graduated from high school.

Recognizing the need to engage the community in an active discussion and to provide evidence for identifying priorities and investing more resources in young people, the Campaign began exploring a youth-driven research methodology called Community Youth Mapping ("CYM") in the fall of 2016.

Thanks to partial funding from the County, matched two-to-one by partners and many generous donors, 31 local youth ages 15-19 (the "Youth Mappers") started a six-week data collection process in early July of 2017. By the project's completion, they had administered 260 "place-based surveys" by going door-to-door to businesses and organizations throughout Great Mills, Lexington Park, Park Hall, and California. They had also completed 600 "people surveys" with local residents found

in front of stores like Giant or Shoppers, the Farmer's Market, and the Library.¹ Daily throughout the research period, the Youth Mappers entered the data into predesigned databases.

While the Youth Mappers gained valuable work experience, the primary objective of the research was to collect information. The data were to enable evidence-based community discussions of how to invest more county and private resources in young people and their families.² To analyze and share the data for such discussions, the Campaign assembled a Data Analysis Working Group (the "Working Group") of local experts to review and analyze the collected data and to make recommendations. (For a list of Working Group members, see [Annex C.](#))

II. What the Data Tell Us: What We Have, What We Lack, and What Youth and their Families Encounter as Obstacles

The collected data have enabled the Working Group to answer four questions that emerge from targeting a circumscribed geographic area but are relevant for much of the county:³

- (1) What does the County offer, in the way of activities and programs and support, for young people and their families?
- (2) What is missing? What is the difference between what we might expect in a healthy, supportive community and what we find we have?
- (3) What are the obstacles that prevent youth and families from accessing what we currently offer—and would presumably impede access for any additional resources?
- (4) What are priorities for investment in youth and families?

¹ Sixty-five percent have lived in St. Mary's County 11 years or more, and only 21% five years or less. Respondents identified their communities as follows: Lexington Park (47%), California (12%), Great Mills (10%), Hollywood (7%), Leonardtown (7%), and Park Hall (4%).

² The CYM data also resulted in an App, "*MyStMarys*," with which anyone can access the data to learn of resources and spaces for young people and their families.

³ While this particular effort addresses needs in the Lexington Park area of St. Mary's County, it is clear that other parts of the county face similar needs. This is by no means intended as the only focus for the county. A county that will soon have three senior centers should similarly support its young people and young families with multiple community centers. The County needs to begin somewhere—and an area with higher population density, proximity to military families living or working on Base, and several Title I schools is an ideal location.

A. What We Have, and What Is Missing

The following analysis addresses *opportunities for youth ages 12-24* within six categories of activities, programs and resources for young people: (1) Arts & Music, (2) Employment & Job Readiness, (3) Learning & Growing, (4) Sports & Fitness, (5) Support and (6) Transportation. It also looks at the space question: Where are places to go or to "hang out"—and are they sufficient?

1. Arts & Music

In most healthy communities, there are resources for young people to learn, practice, and appreciate arts and music. In this area, however, they are quite limited. For young people wanting to sing or play a musical instrument, to draw or paint, such opportunities are primarily available through the St. Mary's County Public Schools — such as the Chesapeake Charter School, the Academy of Visual and Performing Arts at Chopticon High School, and the drama clubs at middle and high school levels. But those are school programs for youth currently enrolled in school, and not all students have the time in their school day for them. Beyond the schools, the range of offerings is limited and constrained by membership, location, and cost. **St. Mary's County could be capitalizing on the many developmental advantages of the arts themselves, as well as opportunities for youth to connect with one another and with mentors.**⁴

a. Visual Arts

There are surprisingly few opportunities for young people (or young adults) to learn to draw, paint, sculpt, engage in ceramics, or focus on photography and film. For those who can pay the fees, Michaels offers some crafts classes and Crazy 4 Ewe offers knitting.

The County's Rec & Parks program offers some classes, varying from quarter to quarter, targeting specific age groups, and often requiring a fee. For example, the last quarter of 2017 and first quarter of 2018 included model airplane building (ages 8 & up, *free*), quilting (all ages, *\$12/year*), children's arts & crafts (ages 5-10, *\$30*) and Pottery & Ceramics (ages 13 & up, *\$75*).

The College of Southern Maryland (CSM) also offers classes, but typically for older youth—and requires transportation for those living in the Lexington Park area.

⁴ It should be noted that for young families considering job opportunities at the Base, the lack of such resources for their children (as compared with what is available in Northern Virginia, Montgomery or Howard counties), is a significant negative factor.

Art is available for viewing at the Boyden Gallery at St. Mary's College, or the North End or Opal Galleries in Leonardtown. Art may be displayed at the Lexington Park Library, the PaxRiver Museum, or St. Inie's Coffee.

b. Music and Dance

For music, there are very limited possibilities for young people who want to learn to play a musical instrument. Allegro Music Service offers instrument rentals and private lessons. The College of Southern Maryland offers a range of classes, but they are far from the Lexington Park area, generally targeted to older youth, and require fees.

For vocal groups, some churches such as Church of the Ascension, Trinity Church or Living Hope offer programs, particularly through choirs. Dance instruction and performance is available from Ballet Caliente but for a fee. Rec & Parks offers ballroom dance classes at Chancellors Run (ages 16 & up, \$60). Belly dancing and adult jazz/tap are offered at Leonard Hall and Hollywood Recreation Center—not easily accessible for youth in the Lexington Park area.

The county has a Summerstock program organized by Rec & Parks to produce an annual musical. Open to students 7th grade to 21 years old who audition in April, cast and crew may involve between 60 and 100 students with a 25-person pit band made up of youth and adults. The shows are rehearsed and performed at Great Mills High School, with no charge to audition or participate. Shows are typically two weekends (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) in July/August. Costs are covered by ticket sales and sponsorships.

There are also few opportunities or spaces to perform. Recently, OpenMic nights at St. Inie's or the Mad Moon Café enable performances. They are filling void in the community and are welcome—but youth depend on businesses to continue them.

The simple assessment of opportunities for youth and the arts is that it is inadequate and diminished from years past. A great deal could, and should, be offered to young people and young adults whose enrichment and talents may relate to the arts rather than STEM or sports. Whether after school, on weekends, or during summer vacation, the County should have a purposeful, public-private approach to encouraging and supporting the artistic and musical talents and enrichment of young people.

2. Employment & Job Readiness (including shadowing, internships, and volunteerism)

Many businesses responded that, in principle, they would hire young people. But for young people to obtain their first or early jobs, they require foundational support: They need (a) information brokering and connections that lead to (b) soft skills and

experiences making them "job ready," along with (c) coaching and practice relating to interviewing, filling out applications, and compiling résumés.⁵ **The Youth Mappers found that even those prospective employers who said they were open to hiring young applicants did not seem enthusiastic about taking a young, new hire under their wing to get them started. Young people face the classic "Catch-22": to get a job, you need experience; but to get experience, you need a job.**

A major missing first step is that young people need to be exposed to broad ranges of the possible: the range of jobs or professions, and what they entail.

One way to increase awareness of possibilities is through "shadowing": simply providing an opportunity for a young person to see how a job or operation works over the course of one or several days. Yet the Youth Mappers found that most businesses are not aware of shadowing as something that they could offer to local young people. If businesses were aware of the need and willing to offer shadowing experiences, however, there would then be a need to let young people and their mentors need to know about them.

Further, however, preparing for and succeeding in the workforce requires more: Work experience is critical. Yet there are limited opportunities for internships—dependent on gaining access to sparsely shared information, and often on knowing the right people. Most relate to STEM fields and arise from participation in school-based STEM programs. For example, those in the STEM academy in 11th grade may have access to internships for summertime—but it is limited to those in the STEM academy. There are very few opportunities for young people with talents outside of engineering or athletics.

During debriefing at the end of one mapping day, an excited young man leaped to the front of the room and eagerly announced, "Barefoot Graphics said it would offer shadowing!"

While volunteerism is often an effective way to learn of possibilities and gain experience, it depends on access to information that is not widely available—and often requires family connections and encouragement. Often conflated with "community service hours," volunteer experiences are not widely recognized as valuable ways to build experience and resume value. In addition, there is often an economic factor: that some young people cannot afford to volunteer when they need to generate income. **Many young people are glad for income-generating jobs, but lack opportunities to gain experience relevant to their vocational or career objectives.**

⁵ In fact, Community Youth Mappers have expressed appreciation that the CYM experience provided such foundational support.

A number of businesses responded that they provide mentoring. It was not clear from the simple survey instrument, however, whether they have purposeful mentoring programs—for their own employees and other youth in the community—or whether they were referring to informal, internal mentoring of younger employees.

In terms of current resources, young people can find some support at JobSource or TriCounty Youth Services Bureau. But much more purposeful and accessible support is needed.

3. Learning & Growing (including childcare, camps, education & training, mentoring, tutoring, and financial assistance)

When we think about children and young people learning, our thoughts first turn to schools. Of course, schools are a major pillar of education at all ages. Yet schools are not the only place where young people can or should learn and grow. Families and young people seek learning before schooling begins, in daycare; and when school is not in session, such as after school, weekends, and vacations. The data suggest that St. Mary's County offers some such resources, ***but not nearly enough***. While there may seem to be many resources for childcare, camps, education, and financial assistance, specifics often prove otherwise.

Regarding daycare, the mapping research identified 7 providers for school-aged children, 8 for pre-school, and 7 for infants/toddler.⁶ Five cover all three age groups. Seven of the daycare respondents report that you need to pay for their services directly, or be a member. Some churches provide daycare or preschool care for their members, such as Lexington Park Baptist, Trinity Lutheran, or St. Andrews. Even if there may be sufficient possibilities, many find that daycare is very expensive—if not cost prohibitive.

Furthermore, there are often issues of location, as well, when parents seek childcare that is near their places of employment (in part because of traffic or lack of access to transportation). And many parents encounter difficulties when facilities establish their hours according to the relatively early schedules for people on Base (6 a.m.—4 p.m.) that are not consistent with the hours of other working parents whose days extend to 5 p.m. or later.

In terms of camps, there are 17 in the Lexington Park area, but all are seasonal: for summertime. Some are offered by a government-subsidized organization, such as schools or by Tri-County Youth Services Bureau; others are provided by for-profit, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations.

⁶ Note that home-based daycare services were not surveyed because of constraints of the mapping process, i.e., only public premises.

St. Mary's County Recreation & Parks provides fee-based camps for many levels including sports camps. Information is available in *The Scoop* at www.stmarysmd.com/docs/thescoop.pdf or in the Rec & Parks Program Guide at www.stmarysmd.com/docs/currentprogramguide.pdf

While summer camps seem to be an area with better resources, they raise questions about families knowing about them, awareness of scholarships, and transportation availability. As noted above relating to childcare, the hours for camps are often problematic if they are offered for half-days when parents work full-time.

Cost is often a major factor: Daycare is quite costly, and well out of reach for households with modest incomes. Camps and summer programs are also costly. It should be noted, however, that to the extent that people know about them, the Rec & Parks system offers some scholarships. (See page 3 of *The Scoop*, www.stmarysmd.com/docs/thescoop.pdf)

As some young people struggle in school, and may drop out or graduate without basic skills, there is growing concern about providing robust resources for tutoring and mentoring. These resources are quite limited and there is no avenue that provides information on available tutoring resources. Unfortunately, there is a substantial need and demand while the County offers quite limited resources. One possibility is the schools themselves. But both time and resources are limited during school hours: high school students have a one-hour lunch period for seeking help from teachers or peers, and elementary/middle schools offer some homework help before activities. Improvements could include more peer-to-peer help during or after school, extended subject matter beyond math, and availability at a student's request rather than awaiting a teacher's recommendation. Referring to her peers, one Youth Mappers has noted: "Actually, everyone has said, 'We need more!'"

With limited hours and over-extended educational staff, the schools cannot and should not be the only places for mentoring and tutoring. The Lexington Park library has space for tutoring, but the **space is in high demand**. While there is a Mathnasium in California, students need support in the whole range of subjects.

Some faith-based institutions, such as Church of the Ascension, offer study groups, mentoring, and tutoring. Yet there is no purposeful coordination among county clergy. Basketball4LYFE is an important resource for outreach and mentoring that offers teen spring/summer travel basketball, three-phase mentoring, "Education First—Rise to the Challenge," Grind time, Step and a dance team (the Diamond Divas and Guy Dancers).⁷ Young people often reference their positive experiences with this program.

⁷ The Basketball4LYFE mission is "to bring together community leaders and members of the basketball community to improve the lives of the youth and families by education them on

For a young person or his/her family member seeking academic support, there is no centralized mechanism to identify resources. Preparing young people for their future, whether in the workforce or more broadly in society, means ensuring that they have solid educational foundations. This county must invest in more tutoring resources.

Another gap is financial support: Many educational resources or supplementary academic assistance depend on scholarships or financial assistance. If it exists (and little was identified through the Community Youth Mapping process), most young people, family members, or mentors have little idea of where to look.

Finally, the "growth" dimension of youth development goes beyond school subjects. Growth and maturity can and should be supported and strengthened through leadership programs, scouts, and other structured programs. Tri-County Youth Services Bureau offers three programs — Step on Up, Ready4Life and Best Foot Forward. Again, some faith-based institutions offer programs for their youth—but not community-wide. Yet again, programs tend to be *ad hoc*, and depend on community volunteers who come and go — and little information reaches parents or mentors who would be glad to refer young people to them.

4. Sports & Fitness

This is the strongest area in St. Mary's County, particularly in terms of outdoor sports. The County's Department of Recreation & Parks maintains many parks, ball fields, and playgrounds. They are real assets that are utilized and valued by youth and families.⁸

There are also several independent basketball programs led by members of the community, including Pax River Silver Stars that serves girls in the 5th to 12th grades and The Dream for boys and girls in 3rd to 12th grades. There is also a new program, SouthernMD Lady Prime. While these groups are good resources, it must be noted that their offerings are limited because of lack of facilities.

Recreation & Parks also provides space and instruction for aquatics and gymnastics; and instructions relating to dance and fitness, self-defense, and specific sports like field hockey, tennis, and golf. Yet enrollment is limited. Beyond the Great Mills Swimming Pool, which is a valuable resource, swimming resources are limited in the

BB4L core values: Hard work, teamwork, discipline, and dedication to Academic Success."
(See Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Basketball-4-LYFE>)

⁸ Most use of these public resources is without charge. Some do, however, have minor charges (such as the Spray Park at Nicolet Park) that may limit use by some young people and families. It is good news that even as overall park supervision will *increase* for the Skate Park at Nicolet Park, Rec & Parks has eliminated the user/entrance fee.

summer. And in inclement weather, or the cold of winter and heat of summer, the spaces and opportunities are very limited.

Commercially offered classes are also available, such as Ballet Caliente, Black Belt Academy, Evolve Yoga, Knowledge Boxing, and Salt Studio; and the county now has several fitness clubs, including World Gym and Planet Fitness. Typically, however, the costs place them out of reach for many youth and young adults in the Lexington Park area.

5. Support services (including People with Disabilities, Out-of-School Youth, Behavioral & Mental Health, and Job Searching)

While the CYM process did not focus on social services, the place-based survey captured data related to any support that is offered to youth and their families within the geographic target area. This particularly included support for youth with disabilities and their families, and for out-of-school youth (typically those who have dropped out of school).

With regard to support for people with disabilities, the place-based survey focused primarily on accessibility. The findings suggest that while most businesses are partially barrier free, many are not *fully* barrier-free because they fail to provide automatic doors. In particular, it is surprising that many large, well-resourced chains or "big boxes" fail to meet this standard. St. Mary's County does not have a local ordinance requiring it, and businesses can opt out of providing an automatic door.

Beyond physical accessibility, the CYM process did not capture many programs focused on people with disabilities. The primary businesses that focus on services for people with disabilities are schools, medical facilities, adult service providers and some churches. Recreational activities are available from Rec & Parks, Greenwell State Park, Special Olympics, and Southern Maryland Community Resources. The Department of Social Services can provide financial assistance for camps for youth with disabilities. The Department of Social Services can also place and refer homeless youth with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 24 for priority to housing programs.

There was little indication of purposeful support for out-of-school youth—other than the Tri-County Youth Services Bureau and JobSource if youth and mentors were aware of them and prepared to take advantage of it. There is a GED program at the College of Southern Maryland—and it is without cost—but young people must know about it, *have support to apply*, and figure out transportation issues.

Walden is a crucial source of support for young people with behavioral health issues, along with programs provided by Tri-County Youth Services Bureau. Walden offers "The Cove" that serves youth with drug or alcohol concerns, including active

misuse or recovery, family drug or alcohol concerns, and incarcerated parents or older household members. The Cove provides a safe place for youth to gather and enjoy after school activities as well as mentoring and academic support, along with activities and events for when youth are out of school, such as trips to amusement parks, movies, and other fun places in the community.⁹

And there are some private counseling services, even including those that accept insurance or Medicaid, or offer sliding scale fees—but information is not widely available. Hospice provides grief counseling, such as Sunrise for ages 6-12 and Through My Eyes for ages 13-15.

Many in the county turn to the faith-based community for support. Religious institutions offer a great deal, ranging from food pantries to youth programs. These are valuable, but fail to gain the reach and impacts that they might if there were greater coordination. Leadership do not always see themselves as a *community* working on common purposes. One positive exception is the WARM program, which has brought the faith-based community together. If our country's faith-based organizations were to work together to recognize challenges for young people and provide them with spaces and support, there is potential to serve youth and families more efficiently and effectively.

Information flow remains an ongoing problem. The *MyStMarys* app, developed as a mechanism for sharing information gathered by the Youth Mappers with the community and offered free of charge, is one mechanism with which to share information—as it now does through the "Support" section of the What to Do area. It is still important, however, that faith-based organizations, educators, and other adult mentors know about existing resources and help young people to access and make good use of them.

6. Transportation

Transportation is widely recognized as a major obstacle for young people wanting to access existing resources. They consistently express frustration at being stuck at home with nothing to do but look at screens—and are clearly enthusiastic for opportunities to get out, connect with people, and gain new experiences.

⁹ In addition to its support for youth, Walden offers Beacon of Hope Recovery Center, which focuses on the well-being of adults and young adults who are struggling with or have struggled with addiction from drugs or alcohol.

As is evidenced by the "Getting There" section of the *MyStMarys* App, there are few options: St. Mary's Transit (STS) is the only truly functioning system. But it is not point-to-point; often it does not make sense for efficient travel to a destination. Safe-Ride Express is cash only.

Meanwhile, the private sector is increasingly stepping in regarding transportation elsewhere in the county—with Lyft or Uber, bicycle-sharing programs, etc. In St. Mary's County, there is limited service by Uber or Lyft—but they could be extraordinary resources offering a non-governmental, private sector solution.

For young people, however, the private services pose two challenges: safety for a young person traveling alone, and cost. Both could be addressed through a purposeful partnership of government, youth and children's specialists, and civic organizations. For example, drivers could be approved for transporting young people only after undergoing a background check. Costs for young people might be handled through a carefully designed and monitored government-funded sponsored voucher system.

Both the County's recent "Gap Analysis" and the CYM data collection highlight transport as a key obstacle. It is time for the community to collaborate on some innovative solutions—whether by the public or private sector.

7. Places to Go or to "Hang Out" (Outdoors and Indoors: to Meet, Party, Picnic, Play Music, Play Games ...)

Quite a number of Youth Mappers expressed their delight with the Youth Mapping process because it "got them out of the house"! They noted that they would not be stuck sitting at home, looking at screens, if they had somewhere to go, but their options are limited.

Places to go may include parks—of which there are many. Those are terrific resources in St. Mary's County. They are accessible for young people and for families, with playgrounds, ball fields, and sometimes tennis courts or picnic areas with charcoal grills. Some include specialty facilities, such as the dog park and disc golf course at Lancaster, spray ground for young children at Nicolet, and horseback riding at Greenwell State Park. There is also bike riding now along the Three Notch Trail. All are great resources, but depend on good weather.

The County offers several museum sites like Historic St. Mary's City, the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum, and Historic Sotterley Plantation. They are terrific educational resources for families, but charge admission and are not places for adolescents to visit regularly.

But beyond outdoor facilities, there are very few **indoor** options for young people to "go and hang out"—and most are private: There are coffee shops with areas to sit and visit, like the Beanery, Mad Moon, and St Inie's. There is High Tide Games and Esperanza (Bowling) Lanes. The most frequented place is the Lexington Park Library, a great place to hang out and work together on projects — but the demand far exceeds the availability as rooms are often fully booked some weeks in advance. In fact, during the summer the library serves as a sort of Community Center - that is fully in demand and overwhelmed.

Existing spaces are not enough to meet all the aspects of youth development: Young people need more physical spaces where they can meet, work together on a project, play games, make music, get exercise, and relax. They need indoor spaces both when it is cold in winter and blisteringly hot in summer. They need ways to get away from isolation and boredom at home; ways to connect with peers and adults; ways to enhance their skills and feed their talents; and ways to grow and mature.

B. The Obstacles to Accessing Youth and Family-Related Resources

The "people surveys" were a mechanism for gaining individual input from adults and youth who reside in the county. The aim was to learn what they regard as obstacles that may prevent open, easy, equitable, and regular access to what is currently offered — and might impede access for any additional resources.

Respondents expressed concern about four barriers as follows:

Cost: 79%
Transportation: 75%
Availability: 63%
Information: 59%

Regarding financial barriers, many cite the cost of activities—whether privately offered or Recreation & Parks. Few know of the possibility to apply for scholarships (See www.stmarysmd.com/recreate/register, with Form F).

As was discussed above, transportation comes up again and again: Young people alone do not have ways to get to activities and programs. It is even more difficult for young people with disabilities and their families.

Availability is widely cited either because activities are simply not available in the community, or because people do not know about them. Older respondents frequently refer to what *used to be offered* in the County, recalling some decades past, when grants funded programs that were not picked up or continued by the County.

The Data Analysis Working Group noted that there is much less support than in the past: Much of past support was funded by grants that lapsed and continue to be at risk. Without an overarching county commitment to fundamental programs, the offerings are subject to the ebbs and flows of private funding along with the goodwill and energy of dedicated volunteers.

The last barrier was knowledge or information. Looking at the data, and referencing their own knowledge and perspective, members of the Data Analysis Working Group expressed concern about ensuring that young people and their families have access to information—regarding support for academics, a wide range of skills and talents, academic proficiency, and entering the workforce. In the meantime, the new App that captures the collected information—*MyStMarys*—and that will [take new information as submitted](#), should provide an interim mechanism.¹⁰

Yet the Working Group added a further dimension to the problem of information: Potential users often do not know what to ask for, and need assistance being connected with the effective resources. This means a need for some brokering or advising, along with basic information. As one member said, "We're going to need one heck of an information center [in the Community Center]."



C. How the Data Relate to the Call for a Community Center

The collected data relate to the County's planning for a Community/Youth Center in several ways:

First, a Center would provide space when it is clear that there are very few indoor spaces where young people and their families can go, hang out, and engage in enriching and entertaining and socially positive activities. There is a need for more space in general, but also for spaces that are dedicated and multi-purpose, small and large. A Community/Youth Center will need to be a structure that offers a range of

¹⁰ Additional information may be submitted at:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfgE_xJ55iNoawyAv151MluluzUoj5Eqr2EzC7Cw7Ej_xDZTg/viewform

specialized spaces—whether for learning to cook or practicing a musical instrument, whether focused on academics or arts or fitness. There is a need for spaces that are consistently open and available when young people and their families have free time.

One Saturday morning in early August last summer, the Youth Mappers intended to administer their surveys with players and families using the many ball fields at Chancellors Run Park—but it poured all morning. What happened to all of those people? Were the teams engaged in some alternative activities indoors? Unfortunately not: A hopeful visit to the indoor resource in the park, the Loffler Center, found it completely dark and locked up.

Second, there is a need for a "One-Stop Shop" at which young people and families can find both information and support to identify and access valuable programs. While such a resource might be developed and located somewhere else on a temporary basis, it should be a central feature of a Community/Youth Center.

Furthermore, locating a range of activities in one place is efficient for families with multiple youth who have different skills and interests—while the parent(s) may wish to engage in activities as well. The alternative—multiple locations—requires transport, driving and dropping off at multiple facilities, carefully coordinating schedules, and spending valuable time in traffic.

Third, a Community/Youth Center is like a home: It is not just a physical structure that is valuable, but what goes inside it. While a home requires furniture, appliances, and supplies, what makes a house a home is that it has human connections. Of essential importance for young people and families—particularly at a time when being "disconnected" poses such emotional challenges and threats—is that a Community Center will enable connections: among young people as peers, between youth and adult mentors, and among young parents. It should become a vibrant space for individual enrichment, meaningful relationships, and community connections.

*Community
Center
Supporter*

III. RECOMMENDATIONS: It Is Time for Holistic and Organized Goals, Leadership, Collaboration, and Resources

The data collected by Youth Mappers is helpful on a piecemeal basis, identifying specific gaps. There is hardly an individual—adult or youth, commissioner or constituent—who does not agree that St. Mary's County needs to offer more for

young people and families.¹¹ One approach is to focus on filling those gaps, with the attendant disagreements regarding costs and priorities—and with the loudest voices or most powerful interests gaining first. In fact, however, putting the pieces together presents a broader picture: the need for a process that is transformative rather than simply additive.

The emerging picture is of a community that lacks any overarching vision for youth development—and the necessary strategy and policies to achieve it. If we do not know where we want to go, we do not know how to get there. Currently, resources and support are provided to families in a piecemeal, *ad hoc* way by the public schools, Recreation & Parks, the county libraries, civic organizations, faith-based organizations, and others. If there were a clear picture of how the residents of St. Mary's County want to support young people and families, it would be clearer to determine what needs to be done, and who may take responsibility for achieving it.

A thoughtful and complete vision should lead to a Youth Development Policy with a strategy for implementing it. A strategic plan would identify clearly defined actions, assign responsibilities, and establish target dates. The plan would be implemented by a private-public partnership supported by the full commitment and engagement of the County government (including the public schools), civic organizations, the business community, and the faith community.

CYM data collection and this data analysis are steps toward defining a countywide vision, and articulating how to achieve it. For now, the Community Youth Mapping data suggest a number of initiatives that can be agreed upon and undertaken quickly—and then properly incorporated into a comprehensive plan.

Specifically Recommended Actions for Identified Community Actors

County government should:

- Initiate a process for developing a Youth Development Policy led by representation from the County, the schools, the faith community, the Southern Maryland Navy Alliance and Patuxent Partnership, health professionals, and civic organizations. It must include youth along with adults, perhaps engaging the new Youth Advisory Committee.
- Allocate resources to address current and urgent gaps—while recognizing that they are temporary fixes for a larger and more complex challenge. In particular, focus on the arts, mentoring and tutoring, and identifying safe communal spaces.

¹¹ When asked in the “people survey” whether programs that support children and youth ought to be given greater priority, eighty-three percent said “yes” and eleven percent were “not sure.”

- Capitalize on the newly formed Youth Advisory Committee to build a broader Advisory Board (as there was for Boys & Girls Club) for youth and families of limited economic means.
- Support an information center providing easy-to-access information **along with** advice or brokering.
- Assign *full-time* responsibilities to a county employee to lead a participatory process for developing a Youth Policy and oversee interim activities.
- Provide resources for a system to coordinate a highly professional, standards-based system of volunteers for tutoring and mentoring outside of school hours.
- Rent an existing space to serve as an Art Center accessible to all youth who may have the talents or interests for pursuing the visual arts or music. Classes should be of minimal cost, scholarships should be well known and available, and instruments should be cost-free.
- Pass an ordinance requiring that the physical premises of all business chains and big boxes must be *fully* accessible, with automated doors, perhaps grandfathering existing buildings.
- Move up the date in the Capital Improvement Plan for starting the Planning & Design phase for a Community/Youth Center in Lexington Park from 2022 to 2020.

Civic organizations should:

- Work in partnership with County government to develop and implement a Youth Development Policy.
- Coordinate through the Vital Community Connectors (VCC) to exchange information regarding youth and family-focused programs.
- Establish their own, annual targets for supporting young people.
- Establish a mechanism for linking youth with volunteer opportunities, purposely taking it beyond affluent young people who have the connections and can afford to invest time without income, to provide guidance and modest compensation for youth for whom income generation is essential.

The business community, in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, and Dept. of Economic Development, should:

- Develop a countywide, robust shadowing program that includes: (1) defining what shadowing entails, (2) establishing standards, (3) identifying businesses and professionals committed to shadowing so that young people are able to see what a profession or business is like, (4) compiling a list of

businesses and contacts, and (5) designating representatives to design and manage an outreach program for all youth.

- Post job opportunities for young people ages 16-24 with JobSource in order to facilitate open and accessible youth knowledge of such opportunities.
- Establish STEAM internship opportunities (incorporating the "A" for "arts," and going beyond the limited cohort of students) specifically for lower income youth and families.

The faith community should:

- Establish mechanisms for communication and coordination regarding youth-oriented support.
- Explore ways to serve and support young people based on proximity rather than religious affiliation or membership.
- Share "best practices" employed with youth in their congregations.

Young people themselves should:

- Volunteer for the county government's new Youth Advisory Committee, and weigh in purposefully to guide county policy and resource allocation.
- Take leadership to form affinity groups based on hobbies, skills, identities, and common aspirations.
- Identify and work with adults committed to youth development and opportunities.
- Attend and speak up on public forums, voicing their needs and expectations.
- Ally with the Campaign in building community support and demands for a Community Center.

IV. CONCLUSIONS: It is Time for Community-Wide Vision and Leadership

While there are many reasons to declare urgency regarding young people throughout our country and within St. Mary's County, it should not be necessary. Young people are not a problem; they are assets. But they are assets to whom we owe purposeful and proactive attention.

Last summer, thirty-one Community Youth Mappers, ages 15-19, undertook a serious research project in the summer heat. They worked hard; they did their part to generate data for us. It is now up to us, still in partnership with them, to use the data for the benefit of our community.

It is in the interest of every resident of St. Mary's County to ensure that we are supporting young people. They are the future of this county in every way: socially, economically, and politically. Irrespective of how the county arrived at a point where former resources had dried up and current resources were not being allocated, the future is up to us. There are opportunities to rectify the situation and invest properly in our young people.

To be clear, responsibility does not lie solely with government—nor with schools, and nor with parents. The consultants hired by St. Mary's County last year to undertake a Gap Analysis made a point of highlighting this county's real assets: its active, committed community actors. They said they have rarely seen such engagement. But the community cannot and should not manage the challenges alone, either. There is a need for leadership, for coordination, and for constancy.

St. Mary's County has been transformed in the last decade from a rural county to one with an ever-growing private sector. Though driven by the PAX Naval Airbase, the result has been great affluence—while others have been left behind.

It never was sufficient to rely on *ad hoc* support for young people, but that's how it was. Perhaps that worked for some because the community was made up of people who had been here for generations, and who connected and supported one another through many family connections. But St. Mary's County is quickly changing, with the ever-growing influx of newcomers. What only partially worked in the past is no excuse for allowing *ad hoc* mechanisms to continue in the present—or to be expected to suffice for the future. Together, we can ***Dream Big for Youth***. Doing so will benefit us all. Let's get started!

ANNEXES

Annex A: Members of the Steering Committee for the Campaign for a Community/Youth Center

Mia Bowers
Amy Ford
Alonzo Gaskin
Marcia Greenberg
B.J. Hall
Chanda Norton
Susan Rork
Janice Walthour
Laura Webb

Annex B: Members of the Data Analysis Working Group

Amber Young, Youth Mapper
Amy Ford, St. Mary's County Library
Angie Funya and Sarah Tyson, Chesapeake Charter School
Arthur Shepherd, Recreation & Parks
BJ Hall, Campaign Steering Committee
Chandra Norton, Campaign Steering Committee
Cheryl Long, St. Mary's County Public Schools (designated by the Superintendent)
Curtis Brown, Rotary Club of Lexington Park
Donovan Weekley, Youth Mapper
Glen Ives, Sabre Systems
Glori VanBrunt, social worker
Greg Syler, Church of the Ascension
India Taylor, Youth Mapper
Janice Walthour, Campaign Steering Committee and NAACP
Joe Anderson, Vital Community Connectors, retired defense contractor
John Ball, Trinity Church of St. Mary's
Julie Randall, Rotary, Southern Maryland Community Resources, retired defense contractor
Kerry Miciotto, Dept. of Social Services, State of Maryland
Marcia Greenberg, Campaign Steering Committee, Chair of Community Youth Mapping subcommittee

Mia Bowers, Chair, Campaign Steering Committee (ex officio)
Robin Martin, Dept. of Juvenile Services
Roy Maddox, The Cove/Walden
Taylor Berry, Youth Mapper
Viki Volk/Ashley Renshaw, Community Development Corporation

Annex C: Donors, Supporters, and Partners of Community Youth Mapping

Bay District Firehouse
Cedar Point Federal Credit Union
Community Alcohol Coalition
Cook's Liquors & Deli
County Commissioners of St. Mary's County
Dyson Building Center
Gary Rogow, ABC Liquors
GoFundMe Donations
Healthiest Maryland Business
Helen & Tom Daugherty
Heron Systems
Medstar St. Mary's Hospital
NAACP
Patuxent Dental
Phocus Video Communications
Rotary Club of Lexington Park
Sabre Systems
SMECO
St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's Community Development Corporation
St. Mary's County Department of Aging & Human Services
St. Mary's County Department of Transportation
St. Mary's County Housing Authority
St. Mary's County Library
Staples, Inc.
TriCounty Youth Services Bureau
The Trading Post
Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions



With generous contributions by many individual residents of the County