

eliminating racism
empowering women

ywca

Bethlehem

SOUTHSIDE BETHLEHEM Youth Engagement Project



JUNE - OCTOBER 2023

REPORT

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Purpose

The purpose of this project was to solicit input from Southside community members to better understand the current state of youth programming.

By gaining insight into community members' perspectives on this topic, we hoped to inform plans for future youth programs and services, including a Youth Advisory Council.

This program was made possible in part by Southside Tomorrow, a 6-year revitalization program of Community Action Development Bethlehem and the City of Bethlehem, with support from Univest Bank & Trust Co., Embassy Bank for the Lehigh Valley, People's Security Bank and Trust, PPL Electric Utilities, and Provident Bank.

Southside Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

South Bethlehem, colloquially termed "Southside," is bound by the Lehigh River to the north, Fountain Hill to the west, Hellertown to the south, and Lower Saucon Township to the south and east.

Historically home to the world-renowned Bethlehem Steel corporation, it has a vibrant, multilingual community with a population that is majority 42% Latinx and younger on average than the city at large (*American Community Survey 2019 5-year estimates*).

Cover: "Welcome to the SouthSide" mural by Max Meano located on W. 3rd Street, Southside Bethlehem



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Contents: "De Boriken, al Mundo" mural by Salina Almanzar-Oree located at the Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley on E. 4th Street, Southside Bethlehem

ABOUT THE

RESEARCH

Background

As part of the Southside's Tomorrow Master Plan, the Southside Communication and Connectivity Committee was tasked with establishing a Youth Advisory Council. Through this process, committee members recognized there was a need to further engage and research the community.

At the time, Delia Marrero, Executive Director of YWCA Bethlehem, was evaluating and restructuring the organization's youth programming. Anna Smith, Director of Community Action Development Bethlehem, and Marrero decided YWCA Bethlehem should lead a community-based research project to better understand the current state of Southside youth programming, gauge the potential for a Youth Advisory Council, and engage neighborhood youth program and service providers. The result is this research report.

Limitations

This project was directed by the researcher Dr. Erica Davis and Marrero. They solicited feedback from community members in both English and Spanish (the most common local languages). However, they were not able to engage with community members who did not speak either language.

The majority of this research was gathered during the summer of 2023, when the school year was not in session. Thus, the researcher was mostly limited to engaging participants at summer programs. Access to high school students was low, considering Southside youth summer programs primarily enroll elementary and middle school students. Soliciting participants for focus groups proved difficult.

While the researcher did access all three district schools located on the Southside, as well as Freedom High School, she did not get access to **all** public schools where Southside youth attend. Future research might coordinate additional resources or planning to address these limitations.

"Steelworker" mural by artists Denton Burrows, Jonathan Neville, Ramiro Davaro-Comas and Lauren Asta, located on W. 3rd Street, Southside Bethlehem

Community-Based Approach + Methodology

To achieve our purpose, we adopted a community-based approach that involved soliciting feedback from various Southside community stakeholders, including youth, parents, guardians, and key informants. Part of our approach included meeting residents where they were, including tabling community events and partnering with schools and community-based summer programs to engage face-to-face with participants.

By employing a bilingual researcher, providing all research instruments and advertising in both English and Spanish, and offering opportunities for either oral or written feedback, we eliminated language and literacy barriers for many participants.

We employed best practices in engaging diverse participants, including youth, such as soliciting open-ended and multimedia responses. Also, by leveraging both Dr. Davis' and YWCA Bethlehem CEO Delia Marrero's longstanding connections and commitment to the community, we were able to demonstrate cultural competence and build trust with participants.

100 youth*
PARTICIPATED

40 adults**
PARTICIPATED

* This number represents unique youth engaged. If youth engaged in multiple formats, i.e., surveys and focus groups and drawings, they were only counted once.

** This number represents unique participants engaged who identified as parents, guardians, community members, and key informants over the age of 18.



Surveys

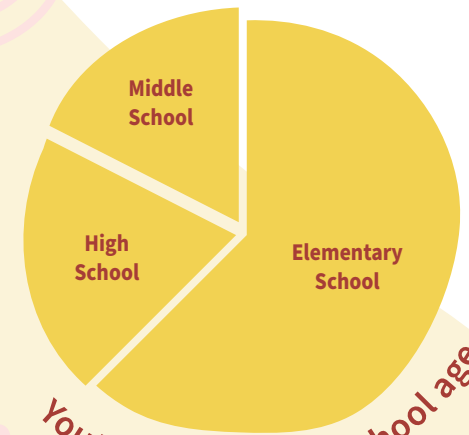
75 YOUTH SURVEYS

23 anonymous Youth Surveys were collected by the researcher or YWCA Bethlehem staff members between June and August 2023 from the following venues:

- ▶ Southside Branch of the Bethlehem Area Public Library
- ▶ Donegan Elementary School's summer program
- ▶ Broughal Middle School's football and cheerleading summer program
- ▶ Fountain Hill Elementary School Food Pantry

52 additional anonymous Youth Surveys were collected by the researcher or a school employee in October 2023 from students at the following schools:

- ▶ Donegan Elementary School
- ▶ Fountain Hill Elementary School
- ▶ Broughal Middle School
- ▶ Freedom High School (students surveyed identified as South Bethlehem residents)



93% responded in English

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

37 ADULT SURVEYS

27 anonymous Adult (parent/guardian/community member) Surveys were collected by the researcher from South Bethlehem parents and guardians who attended one of the following events:

- ▶ Yosco Park Mural Event on August 2, 2023
- ▶ Parent/Guardian Lunch at Donegan Elementary School on August 3, 2023
- ▶ Back to School Night on the Greenway on August 18, 2023

10 additional anonymous Adult Surveys were collected by the Hispanic Center of the Lehigh Valley (HCLV) in October 2023 from a mixture of community members that included HCLV employees and clients.

59%
responded in English

24%
responded in Spanish

14%
responded in both

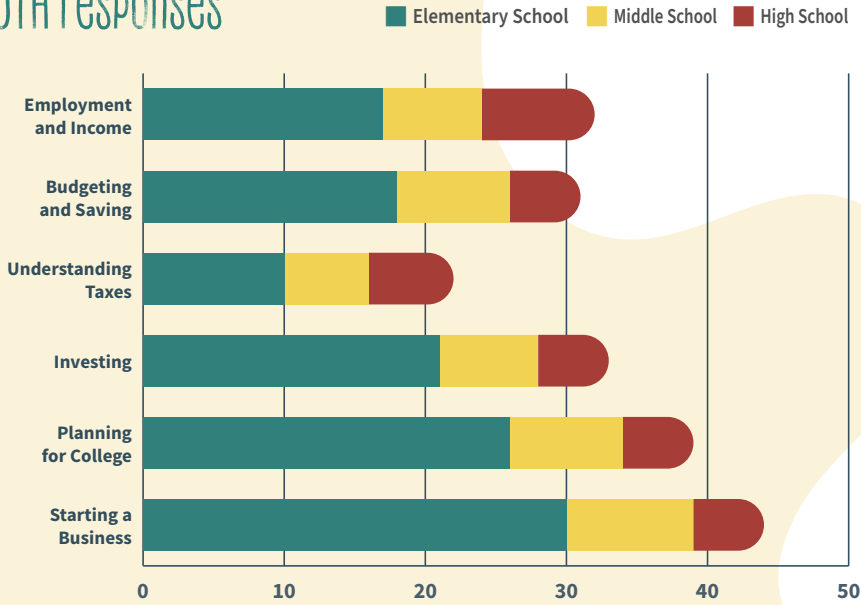


RESULTS

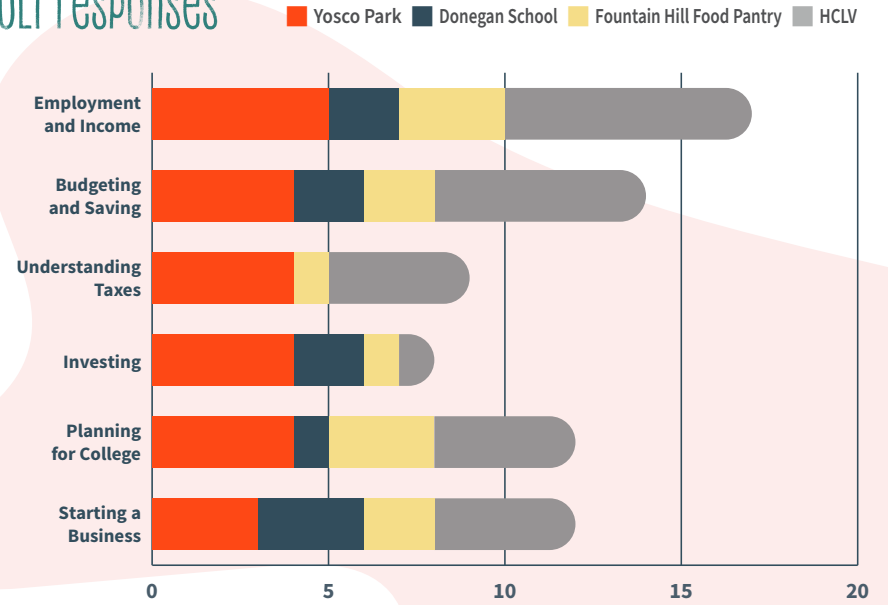
Results: "Calma" mural by Pau Quintanajornet located at Café the Lodge on E. 4th Street, Southside Bethlehem

What workshops/topics would you like to see offered in a new program? Choose up to three.

YOUTH responses

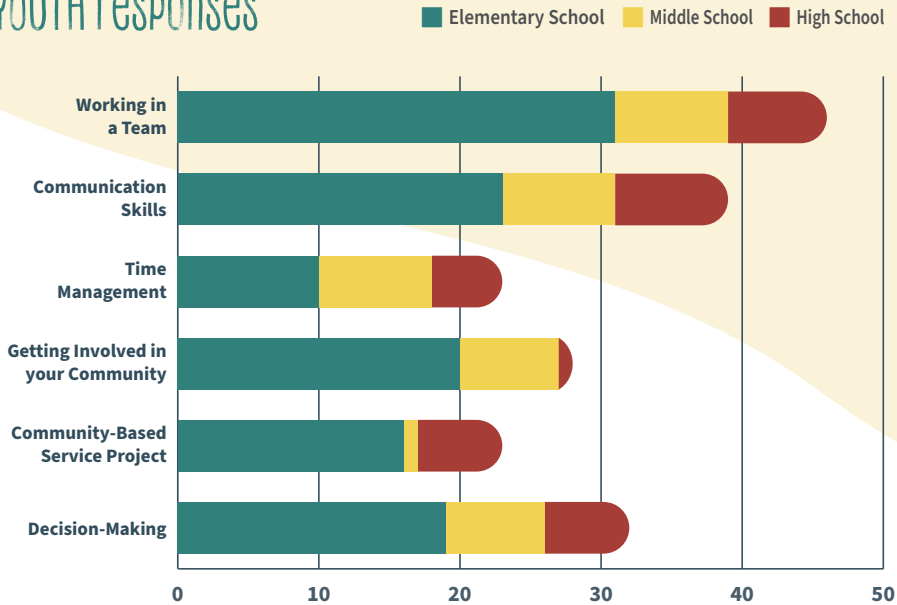


ADULT responses

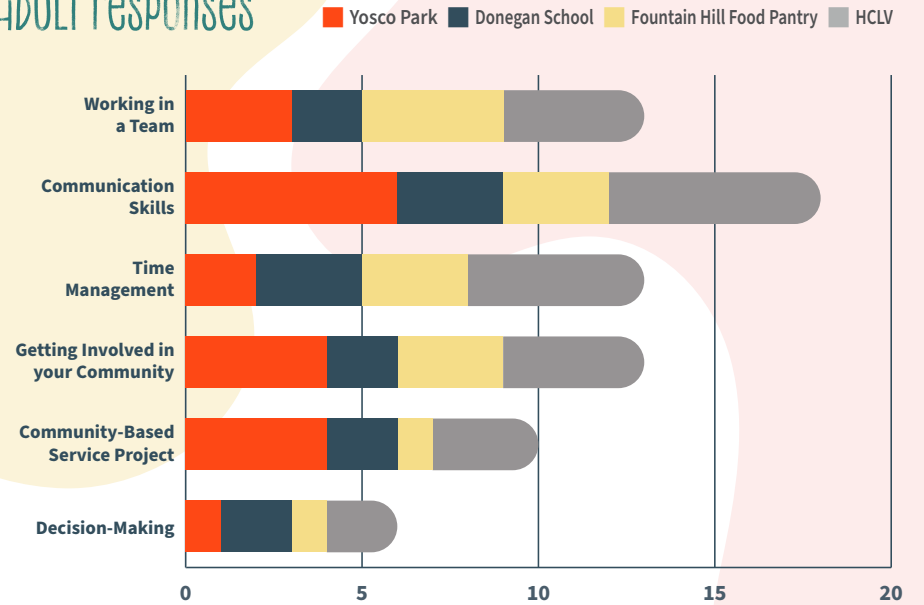


What workshops/topics would you like to see offered in a new program? Choose up to three.

YOUTH responses



ADULT responses



WHAT OTHER TOPICS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE OFFERED IN A NEW PROGRAM?

ADULT RESPONSES:



Art



Swimming



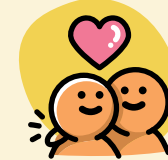
Healthy Habits



CPR



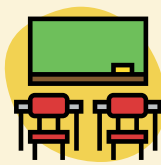
Language Classes



Relationship Advice for Youth



Bullying and Respecting Others



College and Trade Courses



Life skills and Responsibilities



Money Management and Investing



First-Time Home Ownership and Maintenance



Understanding and Engaging with Local Politics and Government



Student Community Service



Outside Programming in the Parks



Afterschool Programs



Rehabilitation Center for Youth

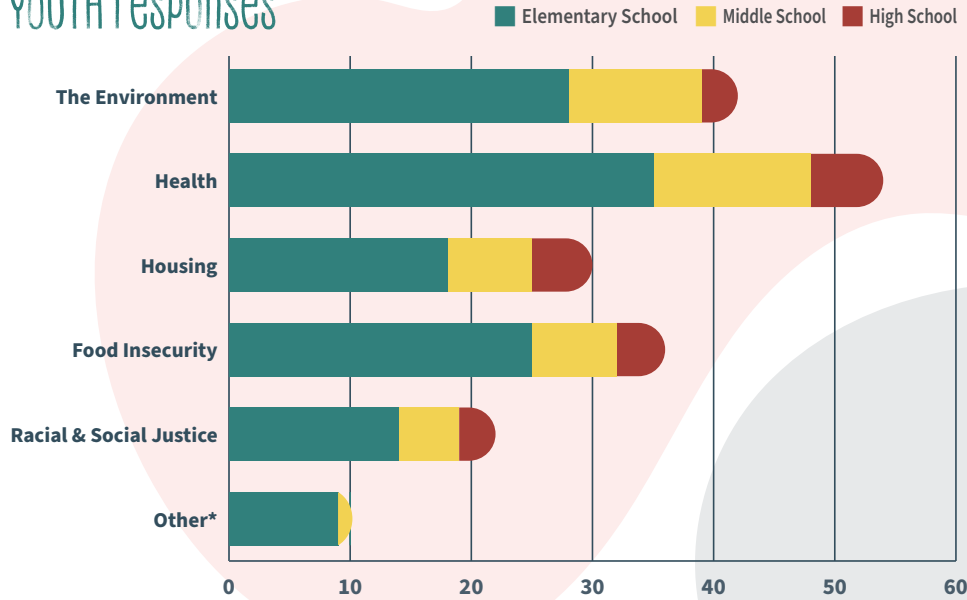


Shelter for the Homeless and Addicts



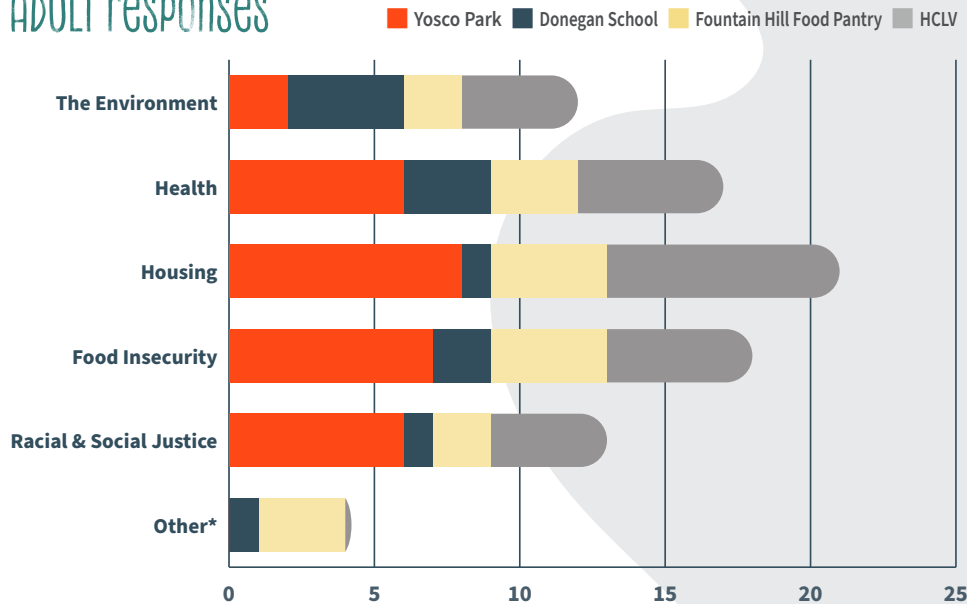
What issues do you care about the most? Choose up to three.

YOUTH responses



*Others: safety, helping people/being kind, school/learning, daycare, charity/shelters, corrupt businesses

ADULT responses



*Others: pets living on the streets; safety concerns about parks that are not enclosed, children can run into the street; education; crime; bullying

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO SHARE? ADULT RESPONSES:

“ me gustaría tener la oportunidad de un programa de empleo para cuando mi hija está en la escuela.
I would like to have the opportunity to attend a career development program while my daughter is in school.

Keep [our] community neat and clean, [and you'll] have a better world [and] safe place for everyone. ”

[Raise] minimum wage to \$15 not \$7.25 ”



more autism support groups and activities, more sensory friendly activities and accommodations, also the sidewalks are uneven - my son has to be in a stroller, but even with the stroller it's bumpy, more pedestrian friendly streets.

Tratar de poner más importancia a los niños que están creciendo, tenemos que actuar antes que hacen drogas; educación; que unamos más la comunidad y tenemos reuniones; que personas que quieren abrir un rehab center.

We should try to put more attention/effort towards youth; we have to act before they get into drugs; education; we should come together more as a community and hold meetings; there are people who want to open a rehab center.

Art programs for all ages, I will ask to volunteer if it's ever done!

Si, las armas [son] el problema con la juventud.

Yes, weapons are the problem with our youth.

Los niños de charter school no pueden ir al campamento [de verano] de Fountain Hill
Charter school students cannot attend Fountain Hill Elementary School's summer program.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

ADULT RESPONSES:

The following summaries are AI-generated from actual responses

What does “community” mean to you?

- ▶ **Family-centric Focus:** Many responses emphasize the concept of community as an extension of family, with repeated mentions of family as a core element.
- ▶ **Belonging and Interaction:** The idea of belonging, interaction, and care within a group is highlighted, emphasizing the importance of supportive relationships.
- ▶ **Safety and Wellbeing:** Concerns for the safety of children, creating a safe environment, and supporting each other's wellbeing emerge in several responses.
- ▶ **Cultural and Commonalities:** Recognition of shared characteristics such as language, values, and customs as unifying factors within a community.
- ▶ **Support and Helping Each Other:** A strong theme of mutual support and assistance runs through responses, emphasizing the collaborative nature of communities.
- ▶ **Extension of Home:** The community is seen as an extension of home, a place to live peacefully, support one another, and contribute positively.
- ▶ **Children's Future:** The future, especially for children, is highlighted as a significant aspect of community concern, emphasizing the collective responsibility for the younger generation.
- ▶ **Diverse Perspectives:** Acknowledgment that all individuals are valued and have a place within the community, emphasizing inclusivity and diversity.
- ▶ **Neighbors and Uplifting Each Other:** The idea of neighbors coming together to uplift and support one another, both emotionally and practically.
- ▶ **Basic Needs and Union:** Meeting basic needs, such as food on a daily basis, is mentioned, and the sense of union and togetherness is a recurring theme in defining community.





What do you love about your community?

Community members appreciate the closeness among residents and the diverse ethnic and cultural makeup. They love the variety of food available and value the concern, passion, and diversity of the people. Parks, programs at Cops ‘n’ Kids, and educational opportunities contribute to their positive experiences. The community is described as quiet and safe, with a strong focus on looking out for children. Residents also appreciate the accessibility of essential places like schools, hospitals, parks, and shops.

The community's artistic and college-town atmosphere, walkability, and easy access to parks and schools are mentioned. Interactions with law enforcement and church, along with programs at Madison Park, help alleviate fears and tensions. The sense of unity and collaboration is emphasized, along with long-lasting connections with neighbors. Support and mutual assistance among community members are highlighted, recognizing the importance of housing in the overall community experience.

If you could change one thing about your community right now, what would it be?

- ▶ Improve the way landlords handle rental properties
- ▶ Address disparities in food access
- ▶ Resolve parking issues
- ▶ Advocate for more affordable housing
- ▶ Empower the community
- ▶ Establish a program to keep kids busy during the summer
- ▶ Improve funding for schools
- ▶ Assist animals in the neighborhood
- ▶ Start a community garden
- ▶ Provide education and job assistance for migrants
- ▶ Address the lack of garbage disposal education and infrastructure
- ▶ Improve road safety and visibility in blind spots
- ▶ Expand available programs for work
- ▶ Combat drug-related issues
- ▶ Support individuals on the street in getting back on their feet

SURVEY

BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT ON THE GREENWAY

ADULT RESPONSES:

Adults who were surveyed at the Back to School Night on the Greenway were provided a slightly different survey than those on the previous pages.

What services are currently available for youth in your community, and are they meeting the needs of the youth?

- ▶ WIC, Food truck
- ▶ YMCA, Valley Youth House, Boys & Girls Club, PA Mentor, Communities in School
- ▶ I'm not 100% sure what programs are available for my child
- ▶ The Public Library
- ▶ School days should be shorter with increased access to courses by skilled experts (for example "growing food" "musicians")

What role should schools and community organizations play in supporting youth and families?

- ▶ They should inspire our children and help them reach personal education goals
- ▶ Help people/parents get the assistance they need
- ▶ Fill in the gaps when it comes to needs
- ▶ Courses by experts in different fields
- ▶ Offer transportation

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the needs of youth and families in your community?

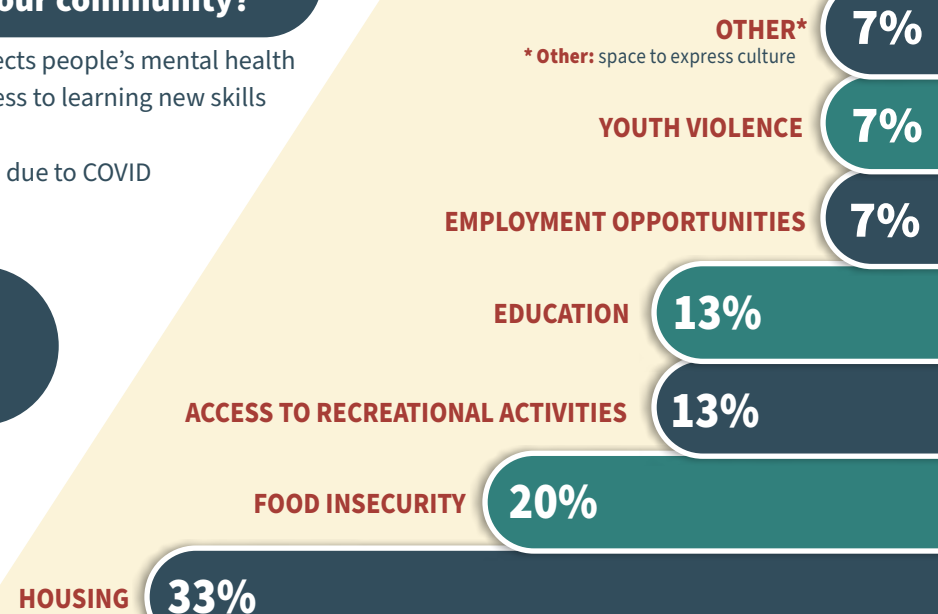
- ▶ The youth was unable to socialize. That affects people's mental health
- ▶ Everyone's lives shifted in some way, so access to learning new skills
- ▶ Income / Employment
- ▶ A lot of people lost their jobs and their homes due to COVID
- ▶ Daycares closing

What resources and support do youth and families need that aren't available in your community?

- ▶ Housing, Rental, and Moving Assistance
- ▶ Utility Grants and Assistance
- ▶ Accessible Food
- ▶ Access to artistic expression
- ▶ Childcare and Afterschool Programs
- ▶ Transportation to and from activities



What are the biggest issues facing youth specifically in your community today?



How can we improve communication and collaboration among schools, community organizations, and families?

- ▶ Allow parents to suggest programming activities and be supported by schools and organizations. Surveys like this help.
- ▶ Better Communication / Send Texts
- ▶ More Activities / Programs
- ▶ More Funding

How can we ensure that the needs and concerns of youth and families are included in community decision-making processes?

- ▶ Pair events that seek ideas for communal activities with cultural presentations (music, plays, dance, visual art)
- ▶ Polls amongst the youth (give them a voice)
- ▶ More physical and social engagement
- ▶ Send surveys to parents to fill out
- ▶ Informing parents

As a parent, do you feel that your voice is being heard in the decision-making processes of your community?

“There needs to be more programs for homeless youth to connect to one another in a safe space.”

NO 33%

YES 67%

“Yes, with the school.”

Is there anything else you want to share?

“No. Because we are homeless living in a shelter, I feel like my opinions are ignored or considered unimportant.”

39%

BASD NEWSLETTER

How do you currently get information about youth services and programs?

* Other: street signs; public library

8%

LOCAL NEWS-PAPERS

15%

OTHER*

23%

SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS

SOCIAL MEDIA

15%

9%

OTHER*

33%

TRANSPORTATION

What are the biggest barriers to accessing services and programs for youth and families?

* Other: lack of cultural programming

25%

LACK OF RESOURCES

LACK OF INFORMATION

33%

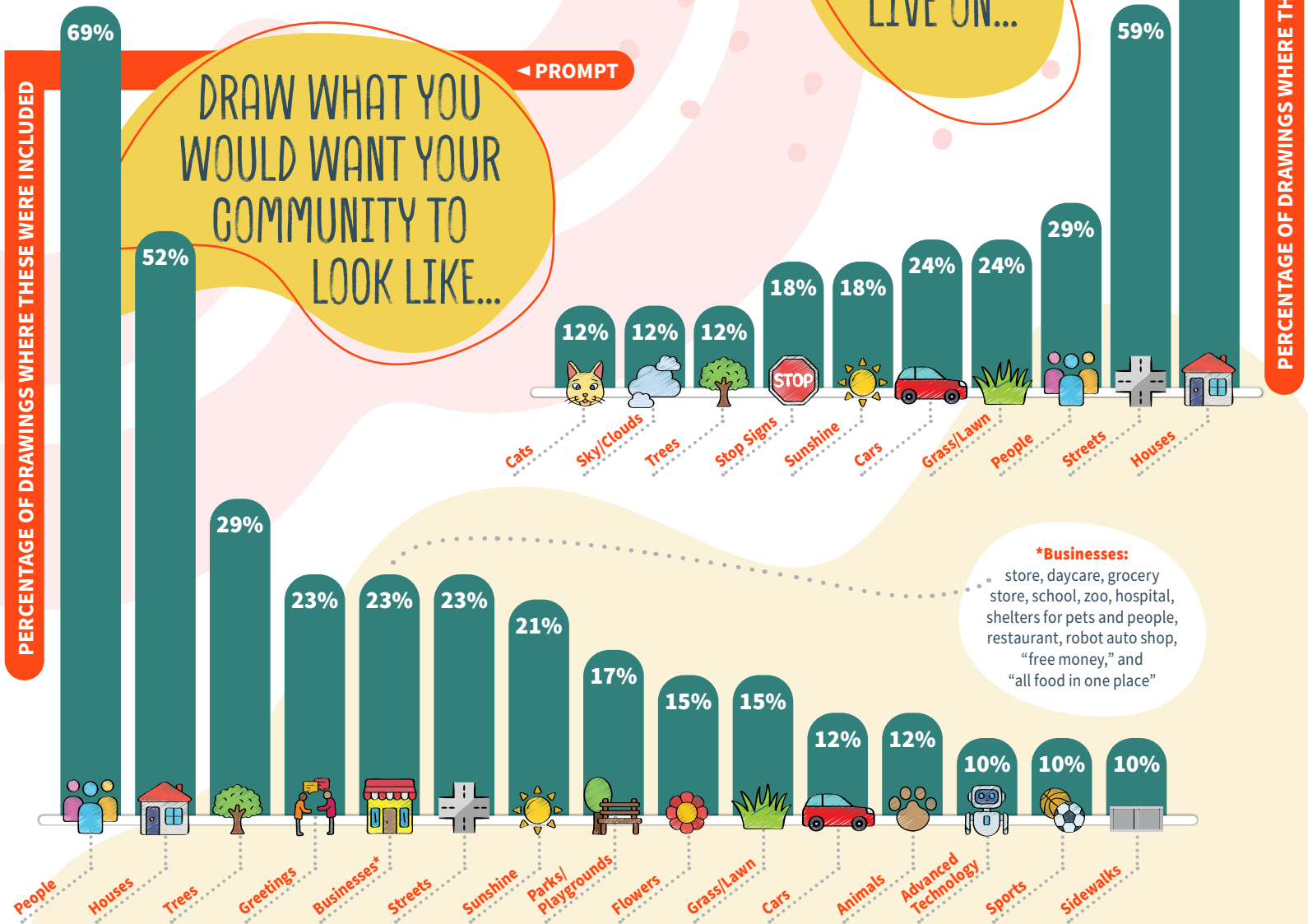
Depictions

68 YOUTH DEPICTIONS

17 youth drawings were solicited at two events:

- ▶ Boys and Girls Club of Bethlehem Summer Program
- ▶ Back to School Night on the Greenway

51 youth participants answered a prompt at the end of the surveys that asked them to **write** or **draw** their response



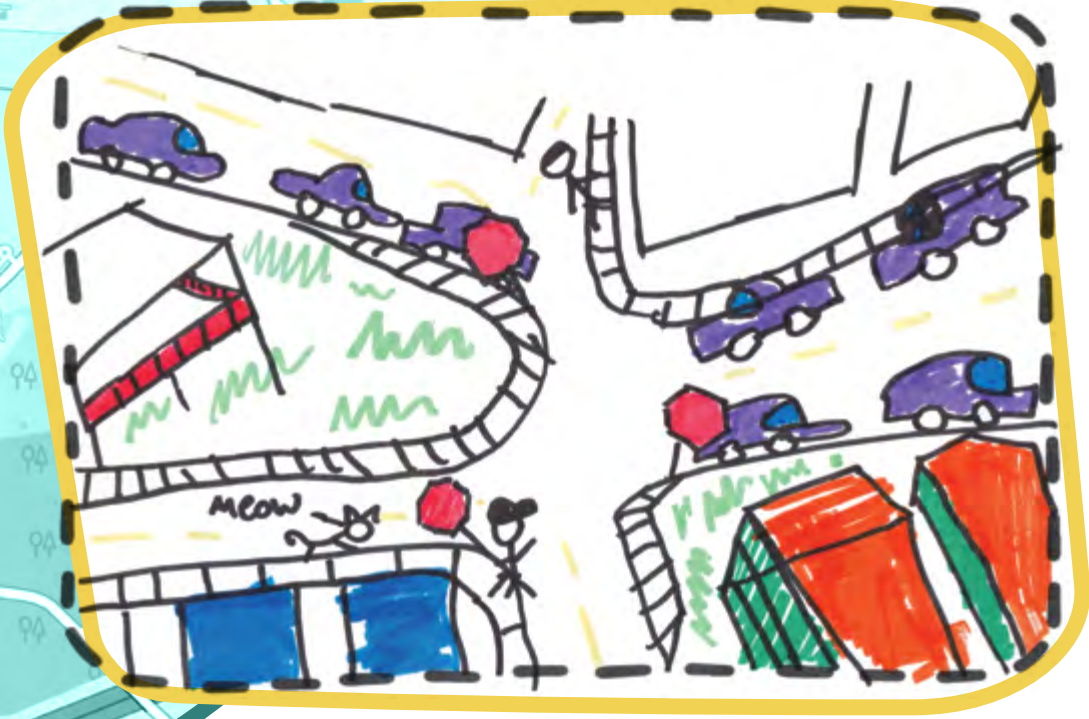


youth

DEPICTIONS

Depictions: "Southbound" mural by Matt Halm located at the corner of 3rd and New Streets, Southside Bethlehem

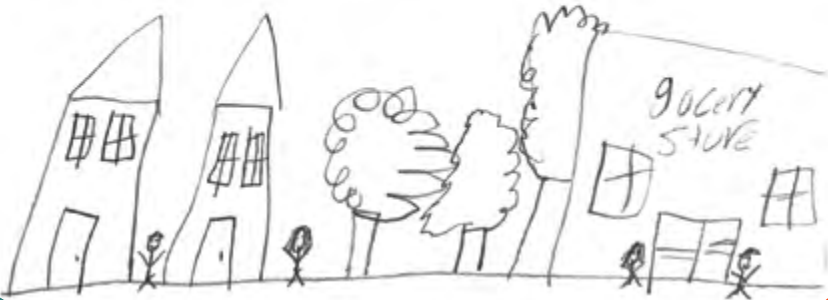
DRAW THE STREET YOU LIVE ON...
DIBUJA LA CALLE DONDE VIVES



WRITE OR DRAW HOW YOU WANT YOUR COMMUNITY TO LOOK...

ESCRIBE O DIBUJA CÓMO QUIERES QUE SE VEA TU COMUNIDAD

I everybody to have enough Food and have a house



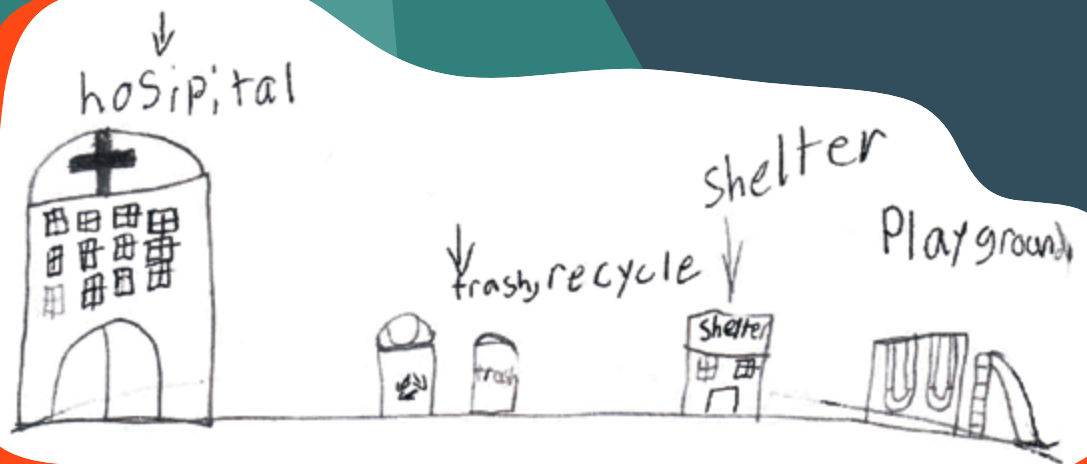
Yo quiero ver que no haya nada malo
Y que no haya basura en las calles
Que todos se lleven bien.

I want to see that there is nothing bad and that there is no garbage in the streets. That everyone gets along well.

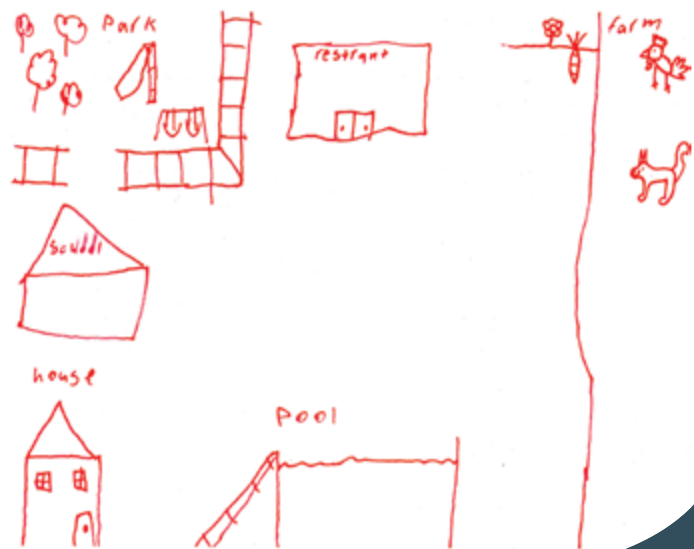
I would like communication



Safe Play grounds



more houses to live





I want my community to be healthier and no more killing, and I want homeless people to have homes.



No one on streets, free housing, everyone being friendly and seeing hope in peoples eyes

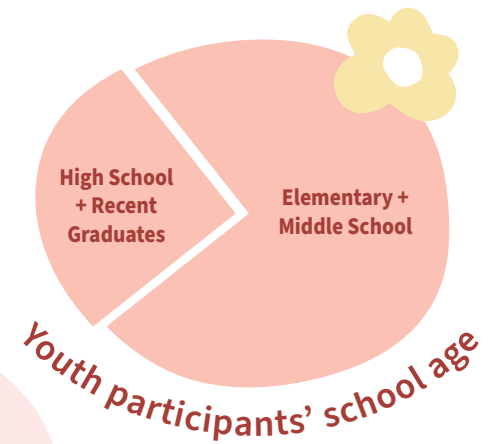
FOCUS GROUPS + Interviews

5 FOCUS GROUPS

All focus groups were held between May and September 2023 and were advertised by the YWCA or local schools. Food was provided as an incentive.

4 Youth Focus Groups with 16 Participants were conducted by the researcher or YWCA Bethlehem staff members at the following venues:

- ▶ Southside Branch of the Bethlehem Area Public Library
- ▶ Lynfield Community Center
- ▶ Boys and Girls Club of Bethlehem Southside Summer Program
- ▶ Hi Pot Restaurant on E. 3rd Street in South Bethlehem



100% preferred English communication

All youth participants preferred English communication, resulting in English-only sessions.

1 Adult (parent/guardian) Focus Group with 4 Participants was facilitated by the researcher and bilingual guest researcher, Julio Villa Palomino at:

- ▶ Donegan Elementary School's summer program

50% preferred English communication

50% preferred Spanish communication

The adult group had both English- and Spanish-dominant participants, prompting bilingual facilitation and live translation.

2 KEY COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

These stakeholders were selected based on their proximity to Southside youth and families, coupled with their extensive decades-long experience with youth programming in the Lehigh Valley. All interviews were facilitated by the researcher and conducted over Zoom.

1 Interview with 3 Participants was conducted in August 2023 with:

- ▶ **Anais Martinez**, Community School Director of Broughal Middle School
- ▶ **Paige Hoffman**, Community School Director of Fountain Hill Elementary School
- ▶ **Rosa Carides-Hof**, Community School Director of Donegan Elementary School

1 Interview was conducted in September 2023 with:

- ▶ **Winston Alozie**, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Bethlehem, Bethlehem School Board Director



+ INTERVIEWS

Interviews: "Rebuilding and Remembering" mural by Devyn Leonor Briggs located on the back of 314 Fillmore Street along the Greenway, Southside Bethlehem

ISSUES FACING YOUTH

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS:

Lack of youth centers, hang out spots, or youth sports facilities

High school participants and recent graduates expressed disappointment over the lack of programs, safe spaces where teens can gather. One noted that a lot of restaurants and local activities cater to Lehigh students, and music events at Steelstacks cater to an older crowd. Younger participants expressed disappointment that there are no recreational sports facilities where they can play.

Elementary and middle school students who attended the Lynfield Community Center Focus Group shared that the Center was one of the things they love about their community. It provides a positive place where they can get out and play with friends.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Offer additional programming, activities, and events** that specifically cater to Southside teens.
- ▶ **Open additional youth or community centers** with homework help/tutoring and sports facilities across South Bethlehem.

“

I love [Lynfield] Community Center and I always get to play here with my besties.

I love this place because the people and it is fun and really good and it is a good place to go when you're bored.

“

me, personally, I would just like to see a place for kids to go after school for either programming or enrichment stuff, because I see a lot of kids just running around on the street not really doing much of anything. And even for older kids, there isn't stuff to do.



Growing population of immigrant youth and families face additional hardships, barriers

“ EBT is only for people with residency. ”

Youth and families without residency do not have access to the same social services or safety nets. Of particular significance is that most scholarships and grants are only available to U.S. citizens or residents, and our schools do not have resources to advise/assist refugee or undocumented students in planning for college or a career.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Partner with Migrant Ed program and experts** to assess needs of immigrant families without residency
- ▶ **Reassess services** for gaps that prevent participation based on status and create/share resources

Disconnect between generations


“ Adults don't like to listen to kids. ”

When asked about the potential for a Youth Advisory Council, two recent high school graduates were skeptical that such a council would be taken seriously by adults in the community. They also expressed concerns about a general lack of interest among Southside teenagers because of factors such as stigma associated with being from the Southside and lack of exposure to political engagement. One teenager suggested an exit poll for graduating seniors to reflect on and identify what supports they felt were lacking.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Solicit input from youth** in meaningful ways and respond with action
- ▶ **Engage Southside youth in leadership, community action, and local politics** starting at a younger age
- ▶ **Incorporate an exit poll** for graduating seniors to identify gaps in preparedness





We need more
close by activities.

Transportation

Youth, primarily at the Lynfield Community Center focus group session, brought up concerns that there were not enough activities for youth in their neighborhood. While they liked having the Community Center, they expressed interest in transportation to access youth events outside of their neighborhood.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Reassess youth programming to ensure that the location is accessible** (may need to offer/alternate between multiple locations)
- ▶ **Increase accessibility of transportation**

Cost of living (food, housing) impacting basic needs, social emotional wellbeing

“It’s hard because when you move you have to start a new school, make new friends.”

While youth did not openly name inflation or housing as the biggest issues facing youth today, they did allude to issues that stem from a high cost of living, such as having to move often. Another topic that came up across multiple youth focus groups was the lack of full-service, affordable grocery stores. Youth noted that there are plenty of bodegas, which some participants liked, but they often do not offer fresh, healthy options.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Increase affordable housing and programs and services** that help residents attain/maintain stable housing
- ▶ **Incentivize bodegas, small businesses** to offer affordable, fresh produce or healthy food options
- ▶ **Open a grocery store** closer to Lynfield neighborhood

ISSUES FACING YOUTH

ADULT FOCUS GROUPS:

Lack of mentoring, guidance, leadership cultivation

One parent, whose daughter recently graduated from Freedom, expressed disappointment that she graduated with a 3.7 GPA but was not advised/mentored on how to get into college because she is here on a refugee visa and does not have citizenship or residency.

Other parents agreed that communication, mentoring, and advising is lacking at the high school level, and that there are not enough programs/resources to encourage diverse career paths.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Increase programming, services at the middle and high school level** to offer mentoring, guidance, and leadership opportunities
- ▶ **Increase engagement with families at the high school level** to assist in goal-setting, career planning and learn more about resources available for different career paths

Lack of communication from schools and service providers

Parents expressed that while the community may have many programs and services offered for youth and families, they are often not aware of opportunities until the last minute or after the fact. One parent expressed concern that some families get offered opportunities first because they are well connected. Other parents expressed interest in a communication page where all community resources could be listed and updated regularly.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Improve communication** regarding available programs/services in terms of accessibility, publicity, timeliness, and accuracy





Lack of free, low-cost, accessible programs available for children

Parents felt that there is a lack of low-cost/free programming available and accessible to all children. While many recognized that the schools offer afterschool programs, they still claimed there was not enough low-cost/free programming for younger children just entering school or not of school age.

They also noted that high quality programs, for example, those offered at the Banana Factory, might have applications for fee-waivers that make them somewhat accessible, but these only run a couple of weeks.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Offer more free/affordable, public youth programming** outside of schools for younger children
- ▶ **Share out resources** regarding availability of early childhood and childcare programs, services

ISSUES FACING YOUTH

KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS:

Minor barriers to accessing programming can become major barriers for families living in “triage mode”

“ The majority of our families live in triage mode, which means that they are living day by day. Paycheck to paycheck. When something goes wrong, when they lose a job, they immediately are in default with their rent or with their utilities. And that is like a snowball effect that once they are late on something, they continue to be late... When families are in triage mode, they are thinking about their kids, but they are thinking in a different way. They are thinking, ‘How can I provide food? How can I provide shelter? Those are my main things.’ And then everything else – like whether the kid has access or could potentially apply for a grant for an art program at ArtsQuest or Banana Factory – that’s the least of their worries. And because of that, some of our kids do not get [to access] these opportunities, because the parents are not fishing for opportunities like other parents that have no issues are doing.”

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Consider eliminating as many barriers to participation in youth programming** as possible, such as a grant/scholarship applications and nominal fees





A big issue that affects youth - but they probably wouldn't say that - is lack of housing. We see a lot of kids and families moving around a lot or leaving the community because they can't afford to live in the area. South Bethlehem [was] the affordable part of town, and that's not the case anymore. Some kids are growing up homeless. They're not on the street, but they're staying at a cousin's place one moment, next they're at grandma's, [it causes a] lot of instability.

Housing crisis

“ There's a lot of parents and families that come here, and they're always asking, 'Do you have a New Bethany application so I can apply for housing or any type of assistance?' From what I'm hearing, the funds are really low, or they're not taking applications right now. It's kind of sad that we can't offer those services. We [the schools] can only do so much because we don't have the capacity or the funds to be able to help in a more functional way. We have our food banks. We have our clothing closet, everything. But a basic need [in our community] is shelter. ”

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Address the rising cost of living** (and the housing crisis and transiency rates connected to it) by increasing funds for housing assistance and housing advocates assigned to schools




Lack of a youth recreation center in Southside

- “ Oftentimes, I hear from parents asking for a place where the kids can do homework, and then do some basketball or some type of sport where they can be active. ”
- “ I feel like the school should offer open gym one day – to keep the kids off the street, especially the middle school kids that can be seen as troubled if they’re [hanging out] in the street. ”

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Open another youth or community center** with homework help/tutoring and sports facilities
- ▶ **Schools and existing organizations can offer open gym or recreational programming** once a week to give middle school age students and teens a safe, social, and healthy activity option



I think the biggest thing that our children are lacking is a non-school-related, community recreation kind of hangout spot. ”

“Love” Public Piano by Christopher Colon located on E. 3rd Street, Southside Bethlehem



ArtsQuest has an after school program, [and] most of our kids are walkers, but a lot of kids just don't [know about it]. And ArtsQuest tells us, 'Oh, Northeast [MS] comes here. Nitschmann [MS] comes here.' Communication is a big thing. You need to offer those [programs] to the people that live in this area. A lot of kids just don't know that these programs are happening.

Accessibility of programming

- “ I think there could most certainly be more [accessibility], whether that's providing more consistent transportation or assisting with transportation. Because one of the things that also stopped the [Southside] Boys and Girls Club is that kids don't walk in Southside like they did 30-40 years ago. [In the past], there was an expectation that a child at the top of South Terrace would walk down to the 100 block of East Fourth Street because that's what you did, because people didn't have cars. You walked or you took the bus, and people [still] take the bus, but the bus is expensive, and it's a different society. People don't walk over a mile to go do stuff. And, so, providing that transportation, I think, is helpful. ”
- “ I've been noticing that we have Portuguese speakers that live in this area. We have Arabic speakers. Not only Spanish and English. And that's a big thing [in terms of accessibility and language]. ”

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO ABOUT THIS?

- ▶ **Increase transportation provided to and from youth programming**
- ▶ **Improve public transportation in terms of routes, schedule, and cost** to make it more accessible and efficient for Southside families
- ▶ **Increase advertising for high quality programs** on the Southside to Southside youth, or consider reserving a certain percentage of spots for Southside youth
- ▶ **Offer translation in additional languages** beyond English and Spanish

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMING

ISSUE: Youth feel that generational differences will prevent them from being taken seriously by the community at large.

- ▶ To address this, program providers and community leaders must solicit meaningful input from youth and use that data to drive decisions locally, for example:
 - **Employ exit polls as students graduate from elementary, middle, and high school** to identify specific trends in terms of gaps or needs
 - **Hold community conversations** to address stigma and disparities, and invite Southside teenagers as panelists

ISSUE: There is significant potential (and need) for a Southside youth empowerment program (such as a Youth Advisory Council).

- ▶ Recommendations include:
 - **Start engaging with youth around leadership, community action, and life skills while they are young** (for example, start a cohort in fifth grade at each Southside elementary school, follow them to middle school and continue to engage with them as they grow)
 - **As they get older, incorporate participation in local government** as a means to achieve change

Recommendations: "Diversity" mural by Maltas Con Leche (a Family of Artists) located at Café the Lodge Courtyard and the Greenway on E. 4th Street, Southside Bethlehem



SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR YOUTH & FAMILY PROGRAMS & SERVICES IN SOUTHSIDE

ISSUE: Lack of programming, recreational center / Disparities in resources

Leverage existing partnerships and funding to increase programming, activities, events, and resources in Southside that specifically cater to:

- Teenagers
- Young children, not yet school-aged
- Youth and families without citizenship status (i.e., refugees, undocumented immigrants)

Southside schools and existing program providers with recreational space can offer free, supervised recreation time (such as open gym) to provide a safe space for youth in the community to engage in physical activity and socialization.

ISSUE: Accessibility

Improve accessibility of current programs and services, by:

- ▶ **Auditing current communication/marketing plans to determine effectiveness and reach** (i.e., Do we need to advertise in more languages than English and Spanish, such as Portuguese and Arabic? Are we seeing the same families over and over because they are the only ones receiving our communication? Are we updating information about our programming, service offerings often or early enough to provide timely and accurate information?)
- ▶ **Consolidating information on specific programs and services available** at the school, neighborhood, or city level
- ▶ **Investigating ways to address transportation barriers** (such as alternating event/program locations across the Southside)
- ▶ **Eliminating minor barriers to participation for Southside youth and families** (such as foregoing scholarship applications for a short-term program or nominal entry/participation fees, or reserving some number of slots for Southside residents)

ISSUE: Food insecurity

Incentivize bodegas, small businesses to offer affordable, fresh produce or healthy food options





“Stained Glass SteelStacks” mural by Lauren Kuh located on W. 4th Street, Southside Bethlehem

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR YOUTH & FAMILY PROGRAMS & SERVICES IN SOUTHSIDE

ISSUE: Lack of programming, recreational center / Disparities in resources

- ▶ Open additional youth or community recreation centers across South Bethlehem that provide both homework help and sports facilities
- ▶ Increase programming targeting Southside teenagers and their families, with the goal of increasing:
 - **Access to mentoring, guidance, and leadership opportunities**
 - **Additional resources in life skills** (such as goal setting, career planning, securing employment, and college)
 - **Family engagement at the high school level** (because Southside families do not reside in the same proximity to the city’s high schools as they do at the elementary and middle school levels, additional efforts must be made to meet these families’ needs)

ISSUE: Accessibility

- ▶ Improve access to transportation for youth and families, for example :
 - **Bethlehem Area School District (BASD) might partner with LANTA** to offer free fares to BASD students and increase the frequency of public transportation on Southside
 - **Individual programs might investigate long-term solutions to transportation barriers**
 - **The city might investigate grants, additional funding to subsidize public transportation city-wide**

ISSUE: Food insecurity and housing crisis (inflation)

- ▶ Increase affordable housing and programs and services that help residents attain and maintain stable housing, such as:
 - **Low-income housing**
 - **Housing assistance and vouchers**
 - **Educational programs around homeownership**
- ▶ Increase access to healthy food by opening more affordable grocery stores on the Southside (this will also take some pressure off food pantries)

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Erika L. Davis, PhD

Dr. Erika L. Davis was contracted by YWCA Bethlehem to conduct this community-based research on Southside youth and family program and service needs. Dr. Davis, local to neighboring Allentown, Pennsylvania, has a combined 10 years of experience in youth programming, education, and community-centered research. She holds a Master of Education from Lehigh University, a Master of Arts in Latin American Studies, and a Doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction, with a specialization in Critical Studies of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture.





LOOKING FORWARD

Center of the “SouthSide Proud” mural by Joseph Iacona located on 4th Street, Southside Bethlehem

This report marks the beginning of a YWCA Bethlehem future where connectivity in the community is part of a spirit of equity. YWCA Bethlehem is transitioning to create a presence of belonging for young women in Bethlehem, where we center the stories of our Bethlehem residents as a guide to help us create and improve our services so that they respond to community needs.

As we reflect on our programs and mission, we are seeking to connect with like-minded individuals and organizations that can enhance our capacity to provide impactful programming throughout our Bethlehem community. This report was our first step towards building meaningful partnerships in Bethlehem.

Our partners throughout Bethlehem share our commitment to ensuring that the next decade of youth programming and leadership opportunities respond to the unique needs and desires of a post-pandemic community. By working collaboratively through coalitions with shared goals, we are building a framework to maximize impact with our available resources. We are grateful to all our partners in this work, and we hope that this report serves as a resource and tool for convening conversations about the future of youth leadership in Bethlehem.

Delia Marrero

Delia Marrero
Executive Director
YWCA Bethlehem

Anna Smith

Anna Smith
Director
Community Action Development-Bethlehem

YWCA IS ON



A MISSION





**eliminating racism
empowering women**

ywca

Bethlehem

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