
A Community Plan for the Coatesville Youth Development Initiative

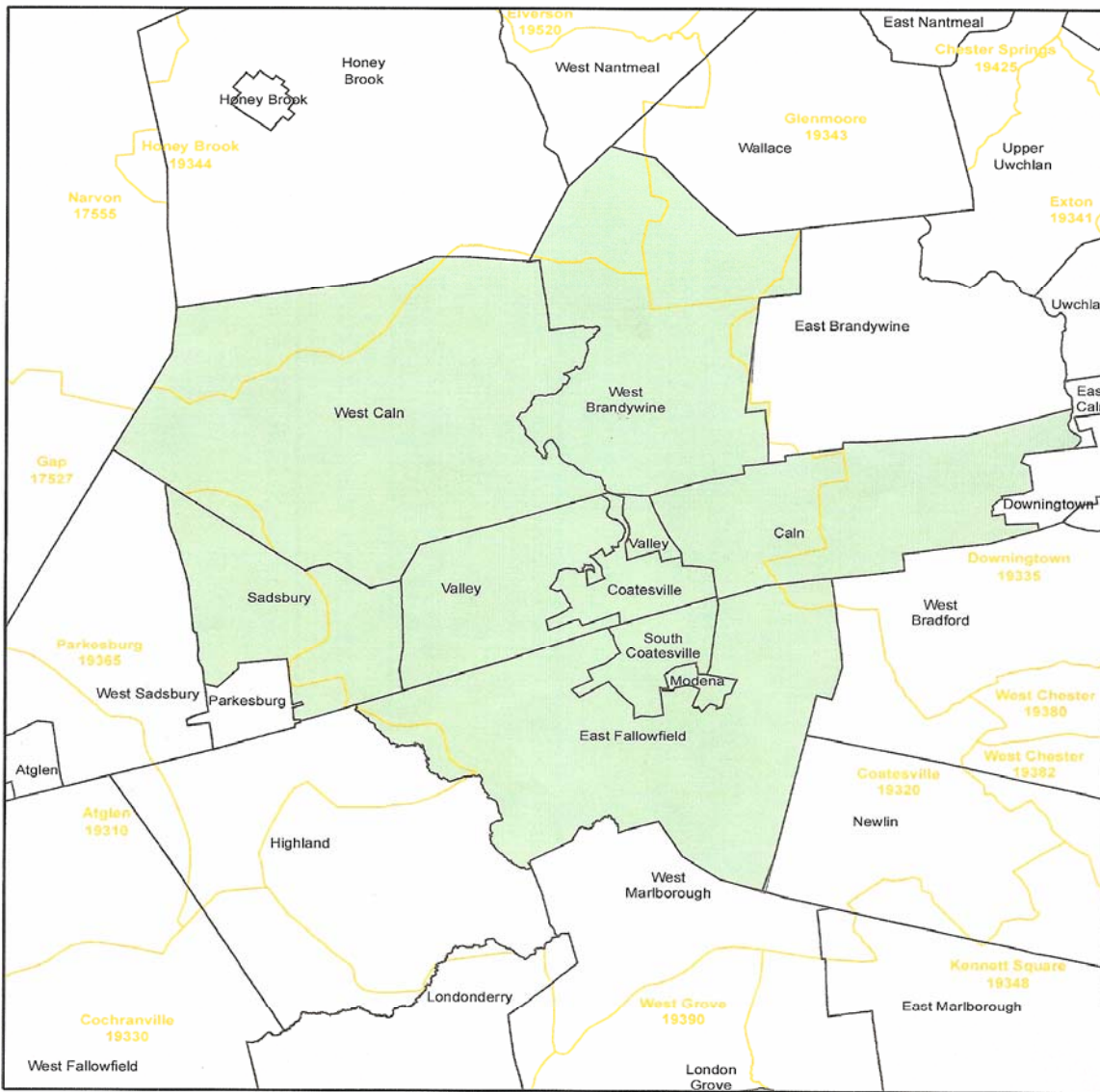
Executive Summary

**Prepared for the
Brandywine Health Foundation**

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Coatesville School District Area



- Coatesville School District
- Municipalities
- Zip Code Areas



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Data Sources: CC GIS, CCHD



Introduction and Background

In July 2008, the Brandywine Health Foundation¹ asked the Urban Ventures Group, Inc.,² to facilitate a 12-month community planning process as part of the Coatesville Youth Development Initiative. The planning process convened a cross-section of stakeholders to develop a shared plan to address the needs of youth and young adults, ages 12–24, in the Greater Coatesville Area. To better understand and identify their particular needs, the full plan (available on-line at www.brandywinefoundation.org) documents that process, which involved the gathering and synthesis of perspectives of a broad set of stakeholders, and data on the well-being of Coatesville's youth and young adults. The Brandywine Health Foundation and its partners intend to use this document as a blueprint for the next phase of an iterative process that will continue to engage local leaders, youth serving organizations, youth, parents and residents to take action around the targeted priority areas presented in this plan.

With funding from the William Penn Foundation, ArcelorMittal, the United Way of Chester County and the District Attorney's Office of Chester County, the Brandywine Health Foundation commissioned this community planning process as a starting point toward launching the Coatesville Youth Development Initiative. The impetus for the initiative and planning process evolved out of growing concern about the overall health, well-being and future prospects of youth in the Greater Coatesville Area. There was also the recognition that a growing subset of youth residing in Coatesville was neither being reached by existing youth programs nor taking advantage of resources and opportunities that were available to them. Further, there was an awareness that, without early intervention, many of these young people faced a bleak future. In pursuit of a meaningful way to respond to this issue, the Brandywine Health Foundation learned of the William Penn Foundation's funded youth development initiative, which was implemented and replicated in three Philadelphia neighborhoods, the City of Chester and Norristown; the Brandywine Health Foundation decided to replicate this community planning model in Coatesville.

The Brandywine Health Foundation took the first step, inviting broad participation of stakeholders from organizations already targeting youth in the Greater Coatesville Area to form a Youth Development Steering Committee. This committee would play a vital role in shaping, articulating and supporting the development and implementation of the key priorities outlined in this plan. For many, this planning process distinguished itself from other community engagements that have sought to bring together youth-serving organizations and stakeholders around a specific goal. In the past, efforts of this nature have been limited to the City of Coatesville, whereas this initiative included the surrounding townships and boroughs within the Greater Coatesville Area (the boundaries of the Coatesville Area School District).

What Was Accomplished

Over the course of the 12-month planning process the following tasks were accomplished with the support, participation and/or input from the steering committee.

- Conducted ongoing facilitation with the Coatesville Youth Development Steering Committee and its auxiliary committees (the Data and Information Committee and the Outreach and Communications Committee) throughout the planning process.

¹ The Brandywine Health Foundation is a public charity established in 2001 to improve the health of those living in the Greater Coatesville Area. [www.brandywinefoundation.org]

² The Urban Ventures Group, Inc., is a national consulting firm based in Philadelphia that undertakes a variety of professional assignments in the urban revitalization arena. The planning team included Evette Banfield, Director of Programs, and a consultant, Chaya Scott, who resides in Coatesville. [www.urbanventuresgroup.com]

- Completed a scan of existing youth programs and activities, including a brief programmatic description of the types of youth programs offered (numbers of staff, hours of operation, number and ages of youth served, and locations of program services). An auxiliary table was developed to highlight the gaps and frequency in the accessibility and availability of youth programs. (See Appendices A and B of the full plan for the scan of programs.)
- Outlined the early framework to enable the steering committee to develop the mission statement and goals guiding the planning process.³
- Completed the community profile of youth and young adults in Coatesville, providing quantitative data on the well-being of youth and young adults within four key areas: (1) demographics and household characteristics; (2) educational and employment characteristics; (3) health and well-being; and (4) public safety.
- Coordinated a group site visit to The Garage, a community and youth center in Kennett Square, with members of the steering committee and a handful of youth to observe their program. The visit provided stakeholders with the opportunity to learn best practices and to see firsthand how another organization addressed the needs of youth.
- Conducted in-person interviews and focus groups with a broad representation of stakeholders to obtain their input on the concerns, issues and needs of youth. The planning team worked with Coatesville School District administrators to organize focus groups with middle and high school students at their schools and with local organizations providing workforce readiness to gather perspectives from young adults.
- Convened a series of facilitated working meetings to guide steering committee members through structured discussions to develop a set of targeted priority areas, along with supporting tasks to accomplish those priorities.

Section One:

Stakeholder Perspectives and Observations

This section presents key perspectives and observations gathered from a broad spectrum of stakeholders over the course of the planning process, to shed light on the assets, needs and gaps impacting the lives of youth and young adults. The reflections offered here are drawn from three focus groups and seven in-person interviews with local leaders representing city government, the faith-based community and the school district. Two of the focus groups were conducted with youth program staff and stakeholders at the Brandywine Center, and a focus group was convened at Career Link, to gather the views of young adults enrolled in workforce training in conjunction with the EARN Center and Chester County OIC. With the support of school administrators at the Coatesville Area School District (CASD), the planning team conducted six additional focus groups with middle and high school youth at the North Brandywine, South Brandywine, and Scott Middle Schools, the alternative Gordon Education Center, and at the two buildings that comprise the high school: 9/10 Center and Coatesville Area Senior High School. Focus groups were also convened at the YMCA and the Bridge Academy. Approximately 8-12 individuals participated in each of the nine focus groups.

The mission and goals are attached as page 15.

Summarized below are the perspectives and observations of local adult stakeholders (which include local leaders, youth program staff and young adults), and then middle and high school youth stakeholders, along with a table synthesizing their feedback.

Perspectives of Local Adult Stakeholders

- **Coatesville youth are resilient, open minded and adaptable.** It was unanimous that the majority of youth in Coatesville have tremendous talent and creativity and that they desire opportunities to demonstrate their positive attributes. Stakeholders indicated that, while they believed students desire to do the right thing, they were more likely to adapt to the current situation and circumstances dictated by their environment. Other stakeholders said that youth were open to taking advantage of new opportunities and have a willingness to broaden their minds and explore the world outside of Coatesville.
- **Coatesville's residents are one of its greatest assets, despite the negative press the community receives.** The interviewees thought the area was filled with families that cared about their community and noted that people were the community's most positive asset. Stakeholders were disheartened over the negative press the community has received over the years, which has created an impression that Coatesville, and particularly the City of Coatesville, is unsafe.
- **The Coatesville community is unable to share and disseminate information about local events, activities, opportunities, issues and concerns without a viable communication infrastructure or outlet.** Stakeholders expressed frustration over the inability to communicate local news, events, activities and opportunities to residents, parents, businesses owners and service providers. They felt that the lack of a communication outlet has also prevented local stakeholders from collaborating with key institutions, such as city government and the CASD, around the coordination of information about service delivery and programs.
- **Many rural students transitioning into the middle and high schools must adjust to an urban environment.** A few stakeholders indicated that cultural differences exist between students in the surrounding communities (in areas such as West Caln, Sadsbury and East Fallowship) and the City of Coatesville. For some middle and high school students coming from more rural settings, it is an adjustment—and at times a challenge—to negotiate new and unfamiliar situations in the transition from elementary school to middle and high school.
- **Negative influences seem to have a greater pull on the lives of youth in Coatesville, particularly if they are not using their time constructively.** There are a number of negative influences enticing youth with limited parental supervision, namely gangs, crime and drugs. There is a growing concern among stakeholders that gangs are recruiting youth to sell drugs in the community and that these gangs are behind the increase in violence. The use of drugs is also a negative factor that is on the rise.
- **In many instances, youth are assuming the role of the parent, taking care of their siblings when the parent is unable.** Interviews and focus groups revealed a concern that many young people are forced to take on adult responsibilities to rear or care for younger siblings. In some cases, parents have thrust this responsibility onto the oldest sibling if they are working or if they themselves are not well emotionally, physically or psychologically. Under these circumstances, youth are unable to work or participate in extracurricular programs or activities.
- **Youth are gravitating toward negative influences because of a lack of employment opportunities and social outlets.** Stakeholders indicated that job opportunities continue to be

scarce in Coatesville, and there are no real opportunities for youth to work. Young adults expressed frustration that there were not positive outlets for youth and young adults in Coatesville, stating there was “nothing to do” in Coatesville. They cited a short list of venues and/or businesses that did not exist, such as a skating rink, movie theatre or bowling alley.

- **Coatesville lacks a safe place for youth to congregate for recreational activities.** A few interviewees commented that the community does not have an adequate recreational facility. Without a central place or location to house programs and activities, youth typically do not have anywhere safe to go, particularly between 6 and 9 p.m.
- **Coatesville has a lot of youth programs, but they are not well attended and the programs are not reaching the “at-risk” population.** A few stakeholders seemed to think that the existing programs are not doing enough to reach out to youth in advertising their offerings. Without a local community newspaper, newsletter or venue to advertise their programs, many learn about what is available only by word of mouth.
- **Despite the options available to students to participate in programs and activities at school, many complain there is still nothing for them to do.** One stakeholder indicated that there are places where youth hang out “from bridge to bridge” in Coatesville because they are not connected or involved in school or non-school based programs or activities. Stakeholders indicated the apathy that exists is not limited to youth residing in the city; it also applies to students in the surrounding communities of the Greater Coatesville Area. The public schools offer a myriad of after-school programs and activities for students, which operate on school grounds or in-house, and summer school.
- **The faith-based community is making an effort toward building an alliance to respond to the needs of youth.** Stakeholders recognize that a number of local churches are coming together to identify ways to help youth. Many churches are stepping up, playing a more visible role by offering programs and activities for youth that promote and instill important character-building principles. Interviewees also acknowledged that despite these efforts, more work was needed to build collaborative relationships among local churches and faith-based groups.
- **Despite its willingness to collaborate, the faith-based community continues to experience some resistance to working together.** Territorial issues and limited communication between churches has been an impediment for many in the faith-based community to working together in order to address the needs of residents. However, the ministerial alliance is working toward bridging that divide, by disseminating information about available resources, services and programs to community stakeholders via a weekly e-newsletter.
- **There are few youth programs offering skill building and job training to help prepare youth to transition from high school to the workplace.** The majority of stakeholders indicated that Coatesville needs to offer training opportunities for youth: teaching computers, job preparation and life skills. Interviewees said youth were completing high school ill-prepared to balance a checkbook or write a resume.

Middle and High School Youth Stakeholders

- **Middle and high school students enjoy spending spare time participating in a multitude of activities, from playing organized and recreational sports to socializing with friends.** The interests of the youth in the focus groups varied, depending on their level of connectedness and engagement with their school or community. It seemed that connected youth who are actively

involved in their school or community spend time developing talents or interests. Youth shared their talents, which ranged from sports and writing to singing, dancing and drawing. A good number of the middle and high school youth said they spend their free time interacting with their peers in an organized program or activity and recreationally. A few youth said they stay indoors after school or spend their free time sleeping.

- **A broad representation of youth has mixed opinions about their community at home and school.** The middle and high school youth think there are many good people doing positive work in the community, but they also noted a lot of gangs, drugs and crime. They view the high visibility of police as negative, and think the police target them or their friends without just cause. The youth spoke disparagingly about the lack of businesses, social outlets (i.e., bowling alley, skating rink or movie theater) and transportation.
- **Youth feel that adults stereotype them and believe they are trouble-makers who are “up to no good.”** Very few youth think that adults have a high or positive opinion of them. Those youth who do were able to offer examples of relationships they had established with an adult who cared about them, such as a teacher or counselor, and a few youth mentioned their parents. Some conveyed unpleasant experiences with teachers or other adults who viewed them less favorably.
- **Youth feel unsafe traveling home from school and in their neighborhood during non-school hours.** The presence of drugs, cliques or gangs and crime causes many middle and high school students to fear being alone or without their peer group. The increased presence of police does not seem to make the youth in the focus group feel safer or protected.
- **Youth want to relocate outside of Coatesville after graduating from high school.** They feel that Coatesville does not offer them any opportunities beyond high school, and they find no reason to stay in Coatesville. The majority wants to attend college and wants guidance in how to get there.

Section Two: Key Quantitative Findings from the Community Profile

This section presents key quantitative findings from the community profile report on the well-being of youth and young adults in the Greater Coatesville area. The full array of data gathered for the community profile is shown in Appendix C on-line.

The geographic area for the community profile encompassed all communities in the Coatesville Area School District; these include: Caln, the City of Coatesville, East Fallowfield, Modena, Sadsbury, South Coatesville, Valley, West Caln and West Brandywine. Where possible, data for Chester County and Pennsylvania were also gathered to enable comparisons to be made. Although a broader set of indicators was identified at the start of this process to guide the data-gathering effort, not all of the data proved to be obtainable. This was because: (1) some of the data-providing agencies were not able to report their data at the neighborhood level; (2) some of the agencies were not collecting data for certain of the indicators; or (3) certain types of data proved too difficult to acquire.

The data that was gathered does provide a solid base of quantitative information to complement the qualitative findings reported above. The following table highlights key findings in each of the three data areas defined above.

Summary of Key Quantitative Findings

Key Data Findings
Demographics and household characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In 2000, a total of 17,997 children, youth and young adults were living in the Greater Coatesville Area (GCA); 45.4% of this total (8,173) were in the 12–24 age range. Children ages 5-11 accounted for 32.7% (5,882). The remaining 21.9% (3,942) were children under 5. ▪ The 2000 populations of youth and young adults were highest in South Coatesville (4,446 or 24.7%) and Caln (3,811 or 21.3%), followed by the City of Coatesville (2,474 or 13.7%). ▪ Of the total 2000 youth population in the GCA, Whites age 12–24 made up 25.4% (4,577), Blacks 12-24 made up 10.7% (1,921) and Hispanics age 12-24 comprised 3% (546). ▪ Of the 18,458 households in the GCA in 2000, a total of 1,747 or 9.5% were female-headed households with children; another 5,142 or 27.9% were married couples with children. A total of 7,478 households in the GCA (40.5%) had one or more people under 18. ▪ In 2000, more of the GCA’s female-headed households were concentrated in the City of Coatesville (874) and Caln (310). ▪ The areas with the lowest median family income in the GCA were Modena (\$34,000), City of Coatesville (\$36,375) and South Coatesville (\$41,528); these areas were significantly below Chester County (\$76,916) and Pennsylvania (\$48,184).⁴ ▪ Median family incomes in Sadsbury, Valley, West Caln, Caln, East Fallowfield and West Brandywine ranged between \$55,288 and \$69,514; all were below the Chester County median but well above the state median. ▪ The GCA had a total of 888 families living in poverty. The City of Coatesville had 55.1% of that total (489).
Educational and employment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall school enrollment decreased by 245 students between the 2004-05 and 2006-07 school years. ▪ Coatesville Area School District (CASD) data shows a small increase in the number of middle and high school students that dropped out of school. In the 2004–05 school year the percentage of dropouts among 11th and 12th grade students was 1.14% (13); it rose to 1.74% (19) in 2006–07. A similar change occurred among students in the 9th and 10th grades – an increase from .56% (7) in 2004–05 to 2.1% (26) in 2004–05 to 2.10% the following year. The number of students dropping out of school appeared relatively small given the number of students enrolled. ▪ Overall, the truancy rate in 2005–06 was 8.9% and dropped to 4.9% in 2006–07. The truancy rates were higher for students in middle school and 9th graders; this rate declined for students in grades 10 through 12. ▪ The number of out-of-school suspensions for all students dropped between 2005 and 2006 school year, from 1,452 to 1,224. ▪ According to Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores, the percentage of students testing at basic and below proficiency in math has decreased in grades 6, 7, 8 and 11 over the past three years. Overall, the number of students testing proficient and advanced in math increased for grades 6, 7, 8 and 11. ▪ The level of reading proficiency ebbed and flowed across grade levels.

⁴ The median household and family income for the region can not be calculated since the reported figures represent the median.

Key Data Findings
Health and well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The GCA had a total of 87 teen births in 2005 and 86 in 2006. Teen births were highest in the City of Coatesville, a total of 50 (57.5%) in 2005 and 46 (53.5%) in 2006. Caln and Valley Township also had high teen births compared to other neighborhoods in the GCA. In 2005, Caln had a total of 10 (11.5%) teen births and 12 (14%) the following year; Valley Township had 9 (10.3%) teen births in both 2005 and 2006. ▪ In the Coatesville area (zip code 19320), the total number of youth, age 15–17, with approved claims to receive mental health services increased annually from 76 in 2005, 85 in 2006 to 98 in 2007. Similar increases occurred for older youth, age 18–21, 47 approved claims in 2005, 55 in 2006 and 68 in 2007.
Public safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There were more reported juvenile victims, age 10 and under to 17, in Caln and Coatesville compared to other neighborhoods in the GCA. In 2005, Caln reported that 30 juveniles had been victims of a crime; this number decreased to 17 in 2007. ▪ Drug arrests that occurred in the GCA dropped significantly from 355 in 2006 to 145 in 2007⁵. ▪ A similar change occurred for young adults arrested for assault, which decreased from 268 in 2006 to 167 in 2007. ▪ A comparison of arrests between 2005 and 2007 reveals that more young adults, age 18–24, were arrested for drugs than alcohol and assaults.

Section Three: Targeted Priority Areas

This section presents the targeted priority areas the steering committee developed during a series of working meetings. The members on the steering committee elected to focus on: (1) increasing parental engagement; (2) providing youth with more mentoring relationships; (3) making the pathway to post-secondary opportunities—such as college and entering workforce—more accessible for youth; and (4) facilitating better program coordination across the various youth organizations and programs and utilization of program space.

Given the vast needs of youth and young adults, it was difficult for the steering committee to narrow its focus and agree on a starting point that would best address these interests. The planning team reminded the steering committee that this is an iterative process and that it was more important to build upon existing strengths, capacity and resources. Small group discussions enabled steering committee members to compare and contrast the feedback of youth and adults to identify points of intersection. Overall, the steering committee was thoughtful in its deliberation and decision-making, which was reached by consensus. These targeted priority areas reflect the committee's best thinking and best work.

⁵ The data on total arrests of young adults may include individuals who live outside of the Greater Coatesville Area.

Targeted Priority Areas and Tasks

Targeted Tasks and Activities	Benchmarks	Information Gaps	Partners and Stakeholders
Pathways Beyond High School: Support youth in a process of information gathering and active preparation for college, post-secondary training and/or employment			
<p>Task 1: Work with the Coatesville Area School District (CASD) to investigate and develop a plan to provide middle and high school youth increased access to career planning and/or college preparation</p> <p>Task 2: Convene a meeting with key stakeholders to explore ways to provide youth with internships, paid work and volunteer opportunities</p> <p>Task 3: Work to expand summer programming targeted to middle and high school youth (e.g., career exploration, life skills)</p> <p>Task 4: Develop information forums to educate parents and youth of options after high school</p> <p>Task 5: Broaden and expand the Chester County Futures, Big Brother/Big Sisters and other organizations to increase and enhance programs offered</p> <p>Task 6: Support youth through the transitional grades moving from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Taskforce is formed in partnership with the CASD to promote and ensure greater access to career planning and/or college preparation resources ▪ Taskforce coordinates and/or hosts its first annual career and college fair for youth and parents and identifies sponsors to support the fair ▪ Programs and/or organizations are identified that are willing to coordinate internships and/or job shadowing opportunities for youth ▪ Partnerships are formed with local leaders and stakeholders to provide youth and young adults with year-round volunteer opportunities ▪ Current youth programs are expanded to meet the needs of middle and high school youth ▪ The number of youth participating in summer programs increases ▪ Informational and educational forums are convened for youth and parents; increased engagement and participation of parents at these forums ▪ Increased number of high school students participate in the mentor training program; the program extends to other schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What resources and programs are currently available to middle and high school youth, to help them prepare for college and enter the workforce? ▪ Who is responsible for career and college planning at the middle and high schools? ▪ How much information is provided to parents? ▪ What is the current funding stream for youth employment opportunities? How is funding allocated? What are the requirements? ▪ What other career and college preparation programs are successful in other districts, particularly evidence-based programs? ▪ What can we learn from other school districts or communities hosting similar forums and fairs? ▪ What role do other organizations like Chester County Futures play? ▪ What are CASD students doing their first year out of high school? Five years out? ▪ What supports are needed, and who can provide the best support? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth ▪ Parents ▪ CASD administrators and guidance counselors ▪ Businesses/Employers ▪ CASD Board ▪ Community organizations providing similar services ▪ Training and certification programs ▪ Religious community

Targeted Tasks and Activities	Benchmarks	Information Gaps	Partners and Stakeholders
<p>Task 7: Promote coordination of program between the CASD and Coatesville community while consistently demonstrating support for youth programs</p>			
<p>Greater Parental Engagement: Support the establishment of a network of supports and resources for adults, parents and grandparents to foster the building of stronger relationships with youth</p>			
<p>Task 1: Work with existing programs to identify helpful resources and information to share with parents, adults, grandparents and other guardians to help them understand and relate better with youth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents seek out information and attend meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What kinds of support and resources do parents and guardians need? ▪ What are some of the ways youth and adults can strengthen their relationships? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth ▪ Parents (particularly fathers and other male guardians) ▪ Community organizations (churches, governments, human services and school district) ▪ Funding sources
<p>Mentoring Relationships with Adults: Develop a holistic approach⁶ for mentoring of youth, to build relationships with adults that provide guidance and support</p>			
<p>Task 1: Identify all mentoring activities and programs as a targeted task</p> <p>Task 2: Assess availability and accessibility of current mentoring programs for middle and high school students</p> <p>Task 3: Engage and partner with existing mentoring programs to explore ways to expand and broaden</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A comprehensive plan is developed to increase, expand and broaden mentoring opportunities and gaps in services for youth ▪ A local and national scan of mentoring programs is conducted to learn best practices ▪ Effective partnerships are formed among organizations involved in mentoring youth to build mentoring capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does an effective mentoring program look like? ▪ What resources and funding are needed to offer a mentoring program? ▪ Who is providing mentoring to youth in the community now? ▪ How do we know that the programs are effective? ▪ What measures and outcomes are being used to show impact? ▪ How can current programs be strengthened? ▪ What resources and support do existing programs need to expand and broaden? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth ▪ Parents (particularly fathers and other male guardians) ▪ Community organizations including churches, governments, human services entities and school district ▪ Entire community ▪ Funding sources

⁶ As defined by the working group, a “holistic approach” reflects the belief that in order to impact youth significantly, there need to be mentoring efforts from Pre-K through 12th grade.

Targeted Tasks and Activities	Benchmarks	Information Gaps	Partners and Stakeholders
Optimizing Resources and Space with Better Program Coordination: Create a network of youth organizations and programs working together to coordinate programming, communication, scheduling and improved service delivery to strengthen capacity and lay the foundation for the development of a recreation center			
<p>Task 1: Form an ad-hoc group to work with youth serving organizations and programs to create a schedule of all programs and activities (e.g., program dates, hours and locations)</p> <p>Task 2: Have youth task force develop a communication strategy and relationship with stakeholders to disseminate information about youth programs and activities</p> <p>Task 3: Identify resources and opportunities to build capacity of existing youth programs and activities (e.g., trainings and workshops)</p> <p>Task 4: Assess the need to conduct a feasibility study to develop a multi-purpose recreation center</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dissemination of a comprehensive calendar and schedule of youth programs and activities ▪ Create a clearinghouse or hub for youth, parents and community members to access information about programs and activities ▪ Partnership agreements signed with youth organizations and programs, committing to coordinate and collaborate ▪ Youth organization and programs use a standard registration form to enroll youth in programs and activities (e.g., a back-to-school event) ▪ Youth organizations and programs have established regular meetings to share information, network and build their capacity ▪ Feasibility study is completed and shared with the youth development steering committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the contact information for each youth organization? ▪ How frequently should calendars and schedules be updated and disseminated? ▪ What are the costs involved? ▪ What are the details of programming and activities currently being offered (times, dates, etc.)? ▪ What resources exist to assist organizations and programs to tailor their programs to middle and high school youth? How do we keep current with what interest youth? ▪ Who are potential sponsors to support the dissemination of information and building capacity of youth programs? ▪ Who are potential funding sources to support a future recreation center? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth ▪ Parents and other guardians ▪ Funding partners ▪ Partners: organizations serving youth

Section Four: Concluding Observations and Recommendations

This section provides concluding observations about the overall planning process and recommendations for the steering committee to consider during the next phase of its work. The purpose of the 12-month community planning process was to support a broad representation of stakeholders in developing a set of priorities or action plan to address the needs of youth in Coatesville. This plan reflects months of discussion, debate and deliberation among steering committee members to determine a way to support and equip youth and young adults with the skills and experience to be self-sustaining and productive members of their community. Through this process, the steering committee made important strides toward achieving that goal. Stakeholders discussed and tackled longstanding issues impacting the lives of youth and banded together to take steps to resolve systemic problems.

As the steering committee reconvenes to continue its work, it should consider the following:

Concluding Observations

- **Better coordination and dissemination of information to youth, parents and youth serving organizations is essential.** The long-term success of this initiative is contingent on the ability of youth programs, youth serving organizations, city government and the school district to coordinate, share and disseminate information. For so long, many stakeholders have operated independently of each other, forming silos or only collaborating with their partners, and this likely contributed to the breakdown in communication and collaboration. It is important for stakeholders to draw upon each other's assets and strengths to reach youth effectively, particularly those youth who are not currently connected to their school or community, and to overcome the existing constraints on resources and space. For example, better coordination among youth programs and service providers could help to reduce or eliminate duplication of efforts and possibly lead to better utilization of limited program space.
- **Build and strengthen the capacity of youth programs through training, peer learning and best practices.** Well-intentioned youth programs can quickly grow outdated and lose touch with the interest and needs of youth. Ongoing training is critical to strengthen the delivery of youth programs and to equip staff and volunteers with the necessary training needed to work effectively with youth. Moreover, youth programs can learn and adopt best practices through peer-to-peer learning and by visiting other programs within and outside of Coatesville and Chester County. For example, during a recent visit to The Garage in Kennett Square, those who were unfamiliar with this facility were energized by the type of programming it offered to its youth, and this interaction could facilitate the transfer of new ideas or practices.
- **Engage youth in a more meaningful way to capitalize on the input youth provided about the changes they desire to see in their community.** The steering committee should use the next phase of work to carve out a platform for youth. Given the current structure of the steering committee, there needs to be further discussion of how to provide opportunities for youth to play an active role in this process or to support their own committee or council.
- **The steering committee needs to remain focused and resist either taking on too much or straying away from the targeted priorities that were agreed upon.** Early on in the next

phase, the steering committee needs to reach consensus on how to continue working together, to ensure that there are checks and balances in place to prevent it from veering off course. Developing and adhering to a structure and a process will promote transparency, communication and collaboration as the steering committee continues to build upon its early accomplishments and moves to implement elements of the targeted tasks.

Recommendations

1. **Sustain the work of the steering committee.** The stakeholders that signed on to participate in this process played a critical part in the overall success of this plan; their input and contributions have shaped the making of this plan, which reflects their best thinking about how to impact the lives of Coatesville's youth and young adults positively. More importantly, this plan and process reflects a new strategic direction in the way youth programs and organizations have operated in the past. It provides a real opportunity to create a new paradigm in how stakeholders collaborate, share information and support and engage youth and parents.
2. **Promote better coordination of information among key stakeholders and institutions.** The steering committee and others with a vested interest in addressing the needs of youth need to devise an efficient and effective way for key stakeholders to coordinate the dissemination of information. This is a critical next step in order to centralize and communicate pertinent information that is beneficial to youth, parents, residents and other community members. It will also help to foster stronger relationships and better collaboration among key institutions such as the Coatesville Area School District, city government and service providers.
3. **Continue to promote transparency.** Moving forward, the steering committee needs to ensure that it remains open and shares publicly its opinions and decision-making process, to continue building a trusting relationship among the participating stakeholders. Particularly because the steering committee is still young and needs to solidify as a group, it must engage youth in a more meaningful way and members must resist the impulse to diverge from the committee's established goals, even if doing so is perceived as good for the committee or advancing its goals.
4. **Engagement of youth.** Youth in Coatesville need an outlet or venue to express their views and to be heard by their peers and adults. It is paramount to help and work with youth to create a venue for them to speak and be heard. Organizing periodic youth forums is one way to facilitate this, but the steering committee also needs to help youth to organize and plan around their own needs; this could evolve either organically or more formally, but it is essential.
5. **Seeking out best practices.** It is critical that members of the steering committee step out of their comfort zone and reach out to other organizations that are already working with youth, to see how other communities of a similar size are addressing these needs. In being less insular with regards to new ideas and partners, committee members can support youth programs and organizations that add to the wealth of knowledge that already exists in Coatesville and identify other resources to support its goals.

Mission and Goals

Mission

The Coatesville Youth Development Steering Committee is engaged in a community planning process to develop and articulate a shared agenda to improve opportunities and supports for youth and young adults (ages 12–24) in the Greater Coatesville Area.

The Steering Committee aims to be individually responsive to all youth and young adults within the Greater Coatesville Area by continually supporting a continuum of resources and programs that enhance the knowledge, skills and strong character of our youth as a means to reach their fullest potential and become productive citizens in a caring environment that fosters unity and shared responsibility.

Our Goals

- To understand and acknowledge the strengths and needs of the Greater Coatesville community and its families and use them to identify and prioritize strategies that will address the needs of the youth and young adults in the Greater Coatesville Area.
- To foster trust, cooperation and collaboration among community stakeholders residing in or serving the Greater Coatesville Area around a mutually agreed-upon vision, goals and objectives that support youth and young adults.
- To complete a community-specific needs assessment and comprehensive mapping of resources to identify the strengths and needs of the Greater Coatesville community.
- To increase networking and communication among all youth and young adult services planning and delivery entities.
- To increase the coordination and utilization of youth and young adults resources.
- To build a continuum of resources that serve youth and young adults in a comprehensive manner.
- To establish partnering relationships with youth and young adults and help ensure their participation in the planning process.
- To continually review and refine the Steering Committee's vision, goals, objectives and implementation strategies to ensure we are meeting the needs of the youth and young adults in the Greater Coatesville Area.

Members of the Coatesville Youth Development Steering Committee

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Diamond Divas

Kristen Geiger
City of Coatesville

Ken Allen
Community Resident

Joshua Grove
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Cleo Alston
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Mark Bailey
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Little League and Midget Football

Ceil Harkness
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