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# Measuring Success: Reflections on the Youth VOICES Summer Academy

*By Catie Cavanaugh, Associate Director, Youth Civic Engagement*

**39 YOUTH**

- 12 Community Partners
- 10 Temple students
- 3 Youth Opportunity Centers
- 2 Temple Faculty

**ONE Youth VOICES Summer Academy**

From July 1<sup>st</sup> to August 9<sup>th</sup> of this year, youth from across Philadelphia participated in the UCCP's first ever **Youth VOICES Summer Academy**. For six weeks, participants met daily in their own communities to identify and address issues of importance in their neighborhoods. They were guided, challenged and inspired by Temple students who served as Summer Academy instructors and special project managers.



*Youth VOICES summer academy participants take a break on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during their visit to Washington, D.C.*

On Tuesday of each week, everyone who participated in the Academy met on Temple's campus to deepen relationships, critique each other's progress and take part in workshops intended to sustain commitment and develop important community building skills. In between a lot of hard work, Summer Academy participants traveled to both Fellowship Farms in Pottstown, Pennsylvania for a day-long series of activities designed to foster teamwork, and to Washington, D.C. for an introduction to the nation's capital.

Numerous individuals affiliated with Temple gave generously of their time to support the

work of the young people who participated in the Summer Academy. Among these were Dave Marshall, news reporter for The WB and a graduate student in the Temple University SCAT program and Dr. Nathaniel Norment, Jr., Chair of Temple's African American Studies Department. Dr. Norment

offered thoughtful, constructive feedback that many youth identified in program evaluations as critical to helping them improve their projects.

***So what issues did youth address and how did they do it?***

Youth from the American Street YOC surveyed peers, parents and community members to get a better understanding of the factors that influence teens decisions regarding whether or not to become sexually active. They drew from the findings of their survey to create an engaging booklet aimed at challenging young people to think critically about the impact of peer pressure and the media on their decision making related to sex. They presented the booklet to their peers as part of a day long series of workshops that American Street youth planned and executed with the help of community partner, Sherice Johnson from CHOICE.

In West Philadelphia, youth focused on rebuilding relationships across generations. For a first hand account of their experience, read Shanefia Barrett's article "Friends Be-

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## A Message from the Director.....

As we leave the warm days of summer behind and enter into the crisp cool days of Fall, the UCCP is energized by its successful summer initiatives and the promise of more good things to come—new projects, new partners and new members of the UCCP family.

This past summer, the UCCP successfully launched its first Youth *VOICES* Summer Academy. This intensive six-week, 120 hour program integrated the work of all three Youth Opportunity Centers through a series of joint retreats, field trips and weekly workshops at Temple University. Based on feedback from participating youth and course instructors, the Summer Academy was clearly a hit! And, best of all, the experience was captured on video. Under the direction of Jonathan Corliss, a doctoral student in Temple's Anthropology Department, several *VOICES* participants conducted a video ethnography of the Summer Academy, representing another new initiative for the UCCP. The video is available for those interested in seeing youth in action in their communities.

Our Youth *VOICES* project was also the subject of a feature story in the Fall issue of *Trust*, the quarterly magazine of The Pew Charitable Trusts. The story provides another opportunity to learn about youth who are grappling with larger issues in their communities and their schools.

The UCCP is clearly in an expansion mode. The addition of staff, projects, and partners promises to bring excitement on many fronts.

We are pleased to welcome Jon Rodgers, Ximena Varela, and Valerie Adams to the UCCP family. Jon Rodgers, a doctoral student in Anthropology, will be working with our youth civic engagement initiative, helping to coordinate the Youth Opportunity sites. Ximena Varela, a doctoral student in Political Science, joins our newly funded youth planning initiative in Pt. Breeze. She will be working very closely with the Point Breeze Community Development Coalition and other community members to develop a comprehensive neighborhood-based youth services system in Point

Breeze. Valerie Adams will be responsible for coordinating the Youth *VOICES* program. Valerie holds a Masters Degree in Urban Education from Temple University. Her position is jointly funded by the UCCP and our partner organization, Youth Empowerment Services (YES). Finally, Catherine (Catie) Cavanaugh, our Associate Director for Youth Engagement, will now be working full time in this position.

The UCCP is also undertaking more projects and working with new and exciting partners. Thanks to funding from YouthWorks under the Federal Work Force Investment Act, the UCCP will be expanding its Youth *VOICES* project to two new sites this coming year: the Beacon School at Sayre Middle School in West Philadelphia in the fall and the Beacon School at Vare Middle School in South Philadelphia in the spring. The Beacon Schools are part of a larger, and quite successful, national initiative that began in New York City. We are very pleased to be working with these individual schools and to be part of this larger initiative. Additionally, we will be partnering with Nueva Esperanza Academy Charter School where we will incorporate a community-based research component into their existing Civics classes. We will, of course, continue to offer *VOICES* classes at the three Youth Opportunities Centers. We appreciate the continued support of the Philadelphia Youth Network for our work at these Centers.

We have also undertaken new initiatives in Point Breeze, strengthening existing partnerships as well as adding new collaborators. Under a grant from The William Penn Foundation, we are working in partnership with the Point Breeze Community Development Coalition to chart out a comprehensive, collaborative, neighborhood-based youth services system in Point Breeze. The project will combine community asset mapping and needs assessments with research on best practices in youth development both in Philadelphia and beyond. We expect significant community stakeholder participation

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## Event & News Update

### Funding

The UCCP received funding from the Philadelphia Youth Network to continue its popular Youth *VOICES* program at all three Youth Opportunity Centers and to expand to new sites—including: Nueva Esperanza Academy Charter School and the Beacon Schools at Sayre Middle School and Vare Middle School.

### Conferences/Meetings/Workshops

The *American Youth Policy Forum*: Catherine Cavanaugh and Barbara Ferman (UCCP), Mike Sack (YES) and Susan Goldberger (JFF) hosted a discussion of the Youth *VOICES* project at the American Youth Policy Forum in Washington, DC on October 4. The Forum was attended by policy makers and other key staff involved in youth and education issues.

*Higher Education Community-Based Research (CBR) Network Conference*: In June, UCCP staff participated in and led workshops on CBR in Spartanburg, SC. The Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation coordinated the conference.

### Upcoming

*PHENND Conference*: The Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND) will hold its annual conference on January 25, 2003 at Bryn Mawr College. The conference will feature presentations and workshops on community-based research and youth civic engagement. For further information, please see their website: <http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/PHENND.html>

*HOPE VI Workshop*: The UCCP will host a two day workshop for HOPE VI youth civic engagement projects in the New Jersey, Delaware and Eastern Pennsylvania regions. The workshop will be held in February. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development is supporting the event.

# Bolstering the Breeze: Towards a Strategy for Revitalizing the Point Breeze Avenue Commercial Corridor

By T.L. Hill, Associate Director, Community Economic Development

After a year of work, several researchers recently presented what we hope will be the first in a series of projects that approach community economic development by focusing on a neighborhood's commercial corridor. Nearly a year ago, at the request of the Point Breeze Community Development Coalition (PBCDC), and with the generous support of the Philadelphia Commerce Department, the William Penn Foundation and the Corella and Bertram F Bonner Foundation, three students and two faculty started work with the PBCDC to try to create an evidence-based strategy for revitalizing Point Breeze Avenue. This working team included: TL Hill, Assistant Professor of General and Strategic Management, Temple University's Fox School of Business; Darlene Atta, Associate Director of Temple University's Small Business Development Center; and Temple students Michael Gomez, Eric Hsu, and Eliza Wu – ably guided by Adrienne Sherrod of South Philadelphia H.O.M.E.S., Inc.

We started with two assumptions: That commercial corridors are worth preserving because they provide a place for social and cultural interaction, economic services (shopping and jobs), and an engine for development (to the extent that jobs and ownership are local). And that economic, transportation and retail realities have all changed so much that today's sustainable commercial corridors must look different from yesterday's.

We approached the challenge first by trying to understand the long-term forces that press on Point Breeze's commercial corridor: looking at old and new maps, learning about the corridor's history, delving into the shifts in the design and location of retail firms. Because Point Breeze Avenue is such a local landmark (not a destination), we then explored the local demand for corridor-based goods and services, identifying both \$250 million of possible demand and remarkably steady and diverse use of the corridor by a broad swath of local residents.

Interviews with business owners helped to underline both

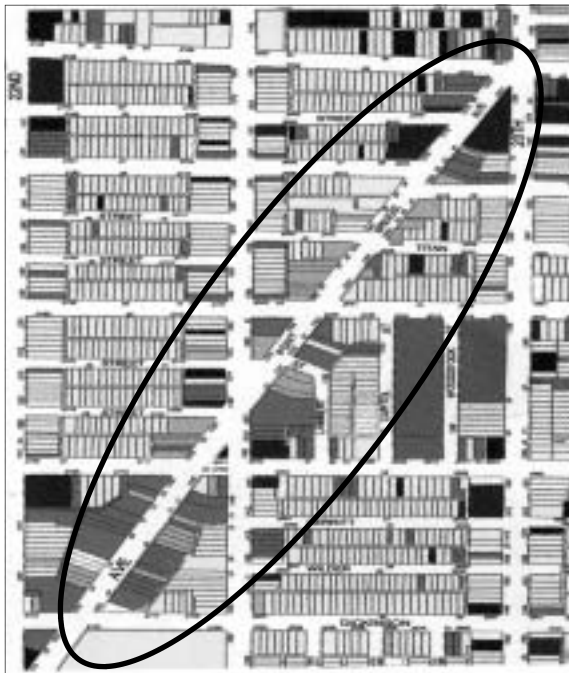
the economic development impacts – while only about ¼ of the employees are area residents, nearly 1/3 of the owners live in the neighborhood – and challenges – chiefly drug pressures and a lack of organization – faced by existing firms.

And finally, case studies pointed to promising strategies, ranging from ideas for store mix to image building to design (eg., transforming some of Point Breeze's vacant lots into buildings more amenable to modern retailing). While we need to do more, notably focus groups, to propose a custom strategy for Point Breeze, it is already clear from the cases that all successful corridors are very well organized. And indeed, during interviews, business owners' expressed a strong interest in reviving their business association, an interest the PBCDC has taken to heart.

All of this was presented on September 19<sup>th</sup> to a gathering of community organizers, planners and politicians, who committed themselves to producing, with input from business owners, a funded plan for a commercial corridor manager. This group included: representative from the Point Breeze Community Development Coalition, South Philadelphia H.O.M.E.S. Inc., Universal Companies, St Thomas Aquinas, US Representative Chakah Fattah, State Senator Vincent Fumo, State Legislator Harold James, Council President Anna Verna, the City

Department of Commerce, the City Planning Commission and the State Department of Community and Economic Development.

Meanwhile, the research process itself led to the police taking more notice of illegal activity on their block of Point Breeze and 24 existing businesses signing up for business support from the Small Business Development Center. Now the pressure is on to finish the report (we've been learning a lot about some of the challenges of coordinating this sort of action research) – and to replicate and improve the process for Nueva Esperanza as they turn their attention to revitalizing North Fifth Street.



*This land use map shows the commercial heart of Point Breeze Avenue, which is bordered by Federal Street to the North and Dickinson to the South and lies between 20th and 23 streets. Land maps such as these are a vital part of the development process because they allow the community to explore the relationships between commercial, institutional, industrial and mixed-use residential properties (all represented in darker tones).*

# Friends Become Family in West Philly

By Shanefia Barrett, Youth VOICES Student



*Shanefia and her extended West Philly YOC family share an afternoon with seniors from Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly.*

Shanefia Barrett is a sophomore at St. Maria Goretti High School where she is active in Student Council, Community Service Corp, the Presidential Committee for the Goretti Peace Ambassadors Corps, Cheerleading Squad, Varsity bowling and soccer. She is also a Junior Daughter of the Knights of Peter Claver.

My name is Shanefia Barrett. I worked with the West Philadelphia VOICES Project this summer. It was a great experience to meet new people and discover new qualities about ourselves. As a participant in VOICES, I learned about friendship and that hard work pays off. I realized that working together as one is better than working alone. Most importantly, I gained confidence.

Over the course of six weeks, my group became a family. We helped each other with anything we needed and if there was a problem, we were there for each other to help fix it. I think that having this experience made me more aware of the world around me and that just because we are teenagers, doesn't mean we can't make a difference in the world.

I would like to explain to you what I call our six-week progression.

During the first week we tried to get to know each other and I can honestly say that it was really hard in the beginning. But after a while, it became easy. During the second week, we decided on our project topic: "Servicing the Elderly in our Community." The person who suggested this topic was me but the way it became finalized was that everybody voted on it. I chose the topic because of my grandmother. I plan to take care of her when she can't do all of the things that she does now. Our project was very important because nowadays people don't care for the elderly the way they should and I just wanted to bring it back to the community's attention.

We began the third week by splitting up into groups to get

the job done. One group was the phone committee. Their responsibility was to organize opportunities to visit elderly people that fit into our summer schedule. Another group went out into the community knocking on the doors of elderly people to get their opinion about how the community has changed in their years of living in the neighborhood. We used this information to teach other young people about the experiences of their elders. The third group visited nursing homes and spent time with elderly people.

Towards the end of the program we put on a variety show for guests of the "Christmas in July" luncheon hosted by "Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly." After seeing the smiles on the elderly peoples' faces, we realized that they really appreciated us being there.

The project wouldn't have been as successful as it was without the help of Brendan Mims, Jon Rogers and Hakeem Hall, who were the instructors for the West Philly VOICES Project. Finally, a special thanks goes out to the West Philly family-Tali, Reese, Don, Eric A., Eric B, Merrick, Lou, Victor, Dominique, Monique, Dezi and Ke-yairra. I will never forget this summer, especially because I made a new family.

## Change in UCCP Youth Staffing Leads to an Exciting Addition: Welcome Valerie Adams!

Beginning this fall, Cathy Smith left her position with our partner Youth Empowerment Services (YES). While we miss her tremendously as a full time member of our UCCP Youth Civic Engagement Team, her continued work on curriculum development for **The Youth VOICES Project** will be critical to our program expansion efforts. We wish Cathy all of the best in her new endeavors and credit her enthusiasm and commitment to the UCCP as central to the success of our youth initiatives.

In Cathy's place, YES has hired a remarkable woman whom we are delighted to welcome to the UCCP. Valerie Adams, VOICES' newest project coordinator, is an alumna of Philadelphia University and a recent graduate of Temple University's Urban Education masters program. She has extensive experience working with urban youth through Philadelphia Futures, Penn State University as a 4-H Extension Agent, Junior Achievement of Delaware Valley and as a consultant with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Philadelphia.

# Measuring Success: Reflections on Summer *VOICES*

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come Family in West Philly" on page 4 of this newsletter.

At the North Central YOC, youth addressed the issue of teen pregnancy. They prepared and performed a mock talk show for their peers at other centers aimed at raising awareness around issues related to teen pregnancy. To inform their presentation, youth did a great deal of research on the Internet and surveyed a number of teen parents.

Finally, a small group of young people from West Philly and North Central YOCs collaborated with Jon Corliss, a graduate student in Temple's Anthropology department, to produce a 40 minute documentary of the Summer Academy titled, "Echo with *VOICES*."

Towards the end of the summer, one of the *VOICES* participants asked Summer Academy co-coordinator, Cathy Smith, whether

or not she believed that their work was making a difference. "I struggle with that a lot," she responded thoughtfully. "How much of an impact do we make? Does what we do here really lead to change? But then I think, change doesn't happen overnight. What we're really trying to do here is grow leaders and I think we are doing a good job. I see young people whose voices are being heard, whose ideas are being fostered. Through a lot of activities, young people are starting to think harder about the tough questions that exist in their communities. They are really making strides."

And so, as the UCCP's Youth Civic Engagement Initiative moves into its third year, we too are making strides. We understand that change is a slow process, one that requires the same commitment from us that we ask of young people. As we recall the Summer Academy with great fondness, we are already in the thick of implementing *VOICES* in its fall format. Steeped in a host of new challenges,

we look forward to the learning that will prepare us to report on our progress in the Spring issue of *Partners for Change*.



*Highlights from a day of team building at Fellowship Farms.*

## *What Can Be Done to Increase Parent Involvement at Nueva Esperanza Academy? Youth Find Out!*

By *Catie Cavanaugh, Associate Director, Youth Civic Engagement*

For the past two years, the UCCP has worked closely with Nueva Esperanza, Inc. (NEI) on community economic development issues. This past year, we expanded our relationship with NEI to include an exciting new youth initiative rooted in the CDC's charter high school, Nueva Esperanza Academy (NEA). Reverend Luis Cortez, NEI's Chief Executive Officer, and Angela Gonzalez, the head of NEA, had been struggling for the past year and a half with the question of how to get parents more involved at NEA. When the UCCP approached Rev. Cortez and Ms. Gonzalez with an interest in collaboration around youth, they were immediately eager.

Through a series of intense planning meetings, the UCCP youth staff worked closely with NEI leadership and NEA faculty to design a pilot civics course with a strong community-based research component. In the spring of 2002 we put our plan into action. Over the span of twelve weeks, with the training and support of UCCP staff and NEA faculty member William Johnston, a group of 22 NEA students designed a survey (in both English and Spanish) that they administered to over 300 parents. After recording the data they collected, they analyzed the findings in an extensive

report that they presented at NEA's June board meeting.

Everyone associated with the project has been inspired by the degree to which students took ownership over their research and understood its relevance to their community. Angelica Rodriguez, currently a junior at NEA, shared the following in an essay reflecting on her participation, "Doing the survey project not only helps the school, it also helps our community along with Nueva Esperanza, Inc. In conducting our survey, we were able to learn of other people's feelings towards school and with this information we may change things for the better of our community." Another student, Crystaliz Reyes, expressed similar sentiments. "Making this project a success was not easy; it was a challenge for me....In completing this project I realized many things. First, I realized that this community is not the way it was many years before but there is still hope to make it better. This project opened a lot of doors to make things known. I learned that many parents do want to get involved but don't know how. Many things can be done and now is the opportunity to do something about it."

The project has had a tremendous impact at NEA. Johnston

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## Director's Message

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in this project, especially from the youth in the neighborhood.

On the community development front, we will be working very closely with Church of the Redeemer in South Philadelphia, helping them to set up a credit union that will serve the residents of the Point Breeze community. This project will involve students from a course taught in the Fox School of Business by T.L Hill. The students will work on various aspects of the project including the development of a business plan for the Credit Union. Additionally, TL Hill will be overseeing commercial corridor research for Nueva Esperanza, Inc. This work, which will replicate and refine the methodology developed for a similar project in Point Breeze, is supported by funding from the Philadelphia Department of Commerce.

Barbara Ferman

## Parent Involvement at Nueva

*(Continued from page 5)*

recently described the school's reaction to the project with great pride. "Ms. Gonzalez has this report hanging on her door because it symbolizes what the school was designed to accomplish, to engage students in the process of building up their own community. Incoming civics students are equally enthusiastic. They have heard about the work of their peers and are excited about playing a role in future research."

As a new school year gets underway at NEA, the school board has committed to using the students' research to inform parent outreach programs. Students are engaged in shaping that process and are working on follow-up research questions. This fall's focus: What do **students** think about parent involvement in their education? Tune in to the February issue of the UCCP's "Partners for Change" and see what they find out!