



MY VOICE MATTERS: PHILADELPHIA YOUTH SAFETY REPORT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *My Voice Matters* project was designed to center the voices of Kensington and Fairhill residents, particularly young people ages 14-24, and understand their collective visions for safe communities and identify strategies that aid in fostering that vision. Through six art-based dialogue sessions and two strategy sessions, participants informed an analysis of systems of oppression and how they manifest on local and interpersonal levels, shared creative expressions and explorations of these issues, and affirmed the assets present in their communities. This report aims to highlight the wisdom of young people and their recommendations for identifying, analyzing, and deconstructing the problems they experienced and witnessed in their communities as they pertain to public safety and policing and disseminate their findings, recommendations, and demands.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

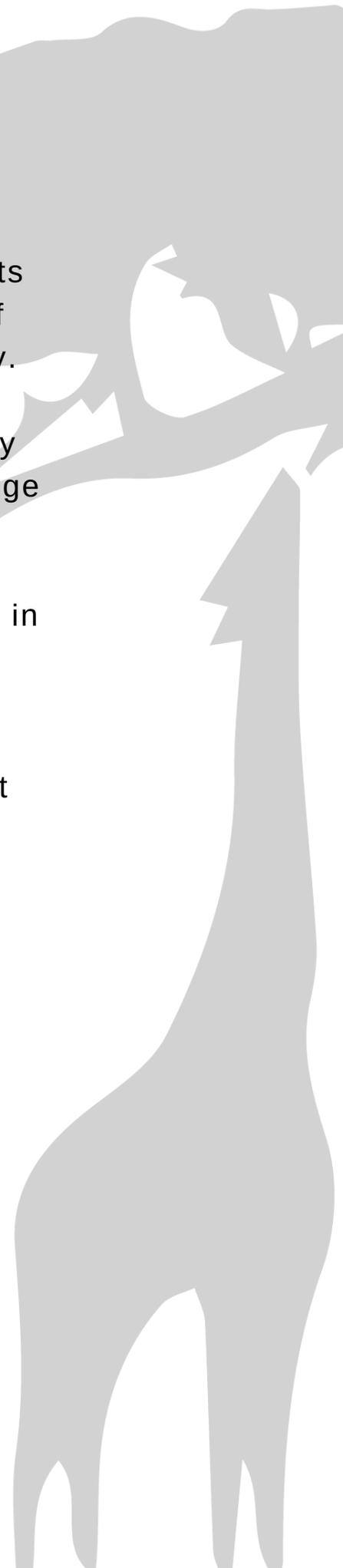
The sessions composing the *My Voice Matters* project were facilitated by Creative Praxis, an art-based, youth-centered training organization based in Philadelphia, using their anti-racist, humanistic framework, and supported by We CAN, a collaborative of three local nonprofit organizations, funded by the United States Department of Justice for community-based crime reduction initiatives. The We CAN collaborative consists of New Kensington CDC, Impact Services, and HACE CDC, with research partners at Rutgers University-Camden and has a shared vision of safe and unified neighborhoods with three primary goals: increasing collective efficacy, strengthening relationships and collaboration between the police and the community, and reducing physical disorder.

This document aims to summarize, with acknowledgement of and appreciation for the original authors, the full report of participants' analysis of systems of oppression, their creative expressions and explorations of individual cultural, and institutional-level issues, and their assessment of assets in their communities.

A LETTER FROM CREATIVE PRAXIS

We at Creative Praxis acknowledge families, community leaders, young people, and grassroots organizations that have been on the frontlines of change in the Kensington and Fairhill community. We honor the time, love, commitment, and perseverance you have shown to your community and the people and land within it. We acknowledge that there have been many efforts to change the systemic disparities that have existed in Kensington for over 60 years that have not been in partnership with the community.

We have found that the systemic oppression that has plagued the Kensington community also affects many other communities throughout Philadelphia and the surrounding area. These issues are not the result of the individual residents, but rather the result of institutional inequality that then impacts the residents of the aforementioned communities.

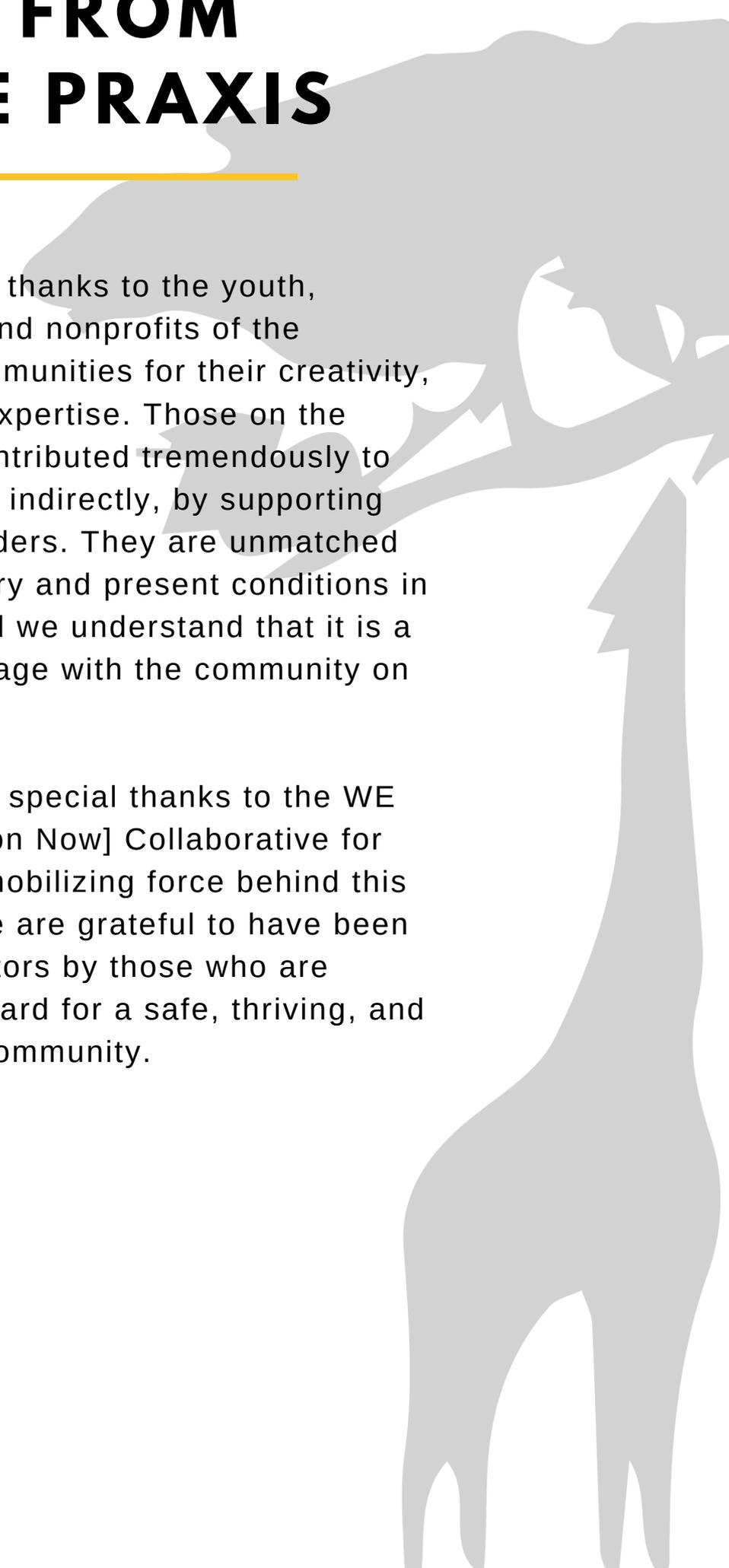


A LETTER FROM CREATIVE PRAXIS

We extend our deepest thanks to the youth, community members, and nonprofits of the Kensington/Fairhill communities for their creativity, time, knowledge, and expertise. Those on the frontlines of change contributed tremendously to this report, directly and indirectly, by supporting and uplifting young leaders. They are unmatched authorities on the history and present conditions in these communities, and we understand that it is a unique privilege to engage with the community on such a deep level.

We would like to give a special thanks to the WE CAN [Change and Action Now] Collaborative for having the vision and mobilizing force behind this initiative. Therefore, we are grateful to have been welcomed as collaborators by those who are illuminating a path forward for a safe, thriving, and equitable Kensington community.

In love,
Creative Praxis



A LETTER FROM WE CAN

Kensington and Fairhill face challenges decades in the making, the results of disinvestment and systemic racism that imposed poverty, little opportunity, and a crushing opioid epidemic on the City's most vulnerable. The way forward to a safe and healthy neighborhood must center on residents and their lived experiences. This is why in 2018, three community development corporations joined together as the We CAN (Change and Action Now) Collaborative to address neighborhood crime with community-based programming.

We CAN is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice to support a safe and unified neighborhood where residents work together to build trust, eliminate crime, and advocate for their community. Over the last three years the collaborative has worked to advance three project goals: (1) increase collective efficacy by bringing neighbors, building trust, and empowering local residents and organizations to make change, (2) strengthen relationships and collaboration between the police and the community, (3) and reduce physical disorder through cleaning, greening, and designing safer blocks.

A LETTER FROM WE CAN

One of We CAN's planned strategies to improve police and community relations included a series of conversations between young people and officers in the 24th District. These facilitated discussions were to be aimed at cultivating empathy and fostering an understanding of people's lived experiences.

However, shortly after We CAN began implementation of our Action Plan in May 2020, George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis and the City of Philadelphia erupted in anger and protest. Looting and fires tore through Kensington Avenue. Tensions between police and residents were high and the We CAN Leadership Team struggled to find a way forward that could ensure a safe space for all participants.

Differing experiences with the police made even the conversations amongst the leadership team challenging and heated. After weeks spent in conversation and reevaluating our priorities, the leadership team doubled down on supporting young people in Kensington and Fairhill to reimagine what safety could look like, what that means for relations with the police, and what resources the neighborhood needed to move forward.

A LETTER FROM WE CAN

We are so very proud and appreciative of the time, effort, and energy that went into these conversations and this report. We know that for programs and activities to be successful, they must involve those most affected. Young people have so much to contribute to conversations and solutions when it comes to public safety, innovation, and community - police relations.

We are in awe of, but we are not surprised by, the creativity and heart that our young neighbors brought to the table. We thank them for their commitment and We CAN pledges to continue supporting the implementation of their recommendations wherever we can.

We extend deep thanks to Creative Praxis for facilitating an amazing series of workshops, public meetings, and follow up discussions.

Sincerely,

We CAN (Change and Action Now) Collaborative
New Kensington Community Development
Corporation
Impact Services Corporation
HACE Community Development Corporation



REPORT BACKGROUND

Since 2018, Kensington and Fairhill community development corporations NKCDC, HACE CDC, and Impact Services have been working together under a \$1,000,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation program to promote community-based crime reduction efforts. The We CAN (Change and Action Now) collaborative works to increase collective efficacy - bringing neighbors together, building trust, and empowering residents and organizations to make change; (2) strengthen relationships between the police and the community; and (3) reduce physical disorder through cleaning, greening, and designing safer blocks.

Researchers from Rutgers University - Camden are providing research and evaluation support to measure the impacts of the collaborative's crime reduction efforts. The We CAN collaborative provides an opportunity to bring together the collective resources and capacity of its partner organizations. We CAN has been championed by residents and stakeholders for being innovative in its agency collaboration, resident engagement, support of existing efforts, and the amplification of community assets. Their vision is a safe and unified neighborhood where residents work together to build trust, eliminate crime, and advocate for their community.

REPORT BACKGROUND

During a six month Planning Phase in 2019, We CAN also worked on strengthening their collaborative initiative, setting joint goals, and establishing better ways of working together. All the information and feedback received during the Planning Phase helped the CBCR team refine their strategies designed to implement the following goals:

Goal 1: Increase Collective Efficacy

- Build capacity for grassroots initiatives.
- Expand micro community-based engagement programs by utilizing the Community Connectors model to build collective efficacy and social cohesion through trauma-informed block-by-block strategies.
- Expand the Livability Academy, a 35-hour course designed to help residents and stakeholders learn skills in community leadership, SafeGrowth, crime prevention, community organization, and project management.
- Launch a youth leadership development and empowerment component to the Community Connector program to provide opportunities for local youth to receive mentorship from community residents, participate in training and skills-building opportunities, and lead transformative community improvement projects.
- Implement the CURE Violence public health approach to reduce violence by training community members to interrupt high-risk perpetrators and mediate ongoing disputes.

Goal 2: Strengthen Relationships and Collaboration between Police and Community

- Increase community resident participation in law enforcement planning meetings to improve communication and buy-in.
- Hold focus groups with Kensington youth to make neighborhood safety recommendations.
- Develop and deliver trauma-informed training for police officers and provide them a toolkit for interacting with the community.

Goal 3: Reduce Physical Disorder

- Leverage community feedback on which Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies would be most effective in reducing crime in and around the hot spots.
- Implement CPTED strategies using Clean and Green programs, which build social cohesion and collective efficacy with an emphasis on neighborhood beautification.

REPORT BACKGROUND

The project's success and sustainability relies on each partner's relationships with residents, institutions, civic groups, faith-based organizations, and other local stakeholders forged over many years of work in the neighborhood. Additionally, each partner has the ability to leverage assets based on their trajectory and comprehensive neighborhood plans. Finally, each partner organization brings with it specific areas of expertise, such as housing counseling, commercial corridor management, real estate and workforce development, that will help inform and expand the reach of the CBCR work. The My Voice Matters Youth Safety Dialogues were developed as a part of We CAN Goal 2 Strategies.

This report is one of the products of six art-based dialogue sessions with youth ages 14-24 in and around Kensington/Fairhill. These online sessions focused on the creation of collective definitions of public safety, community leadership, and the role of police. All sessions were facilitated by Creative Praxis, an art-based, youth-centered training organization based in Philadelphia with note taking assistance from members of the WE CAN collaborative which included its research partners at Rutgers University.. Through these sessions, young people were engaged in the process of identifying, analyzing, and deconstructing the problems they experienced and witnessed in their communities as they pertain to public safety and policing. Following the online sessions, youth were invited to attend a gathering where they planned a community presentation of their findings, recommendations, solutions and demands.

REPORT BACKGROUND

This report is designed to bring together the findings of the youth participants and to share the vision that they presented for the present and future of their Kensington/Fairhill community. It includes participants' analysis of systems of oppression and how they manifest on local and interpersonal levels, their creative expressions and explorations of these issues, and their assessment of the assets present in their communities. This report also captures some of the central elements of the community presentation held on June 15, 2021 at the We CAN Monthly Community meeting. There were over 65 attendees, which included Chief Inspector Altovise Love-Craighead, 24th District Community Relations Officer, and officers and leadership from the newly established Kensington Avenue District.





METHODOLOGY

Members of the We CAN Collaborative posted a Request for Proposals for a facilitator for this initiative in October of 2020, with stated goals for the project including understanding residents' good and bad experiences with police; recording neighbors' understandings of alternatives to the institution of policing, including their understanding of how these will or will not work and perceived barriers; and developing a plan to share findings with the appropriate parties.



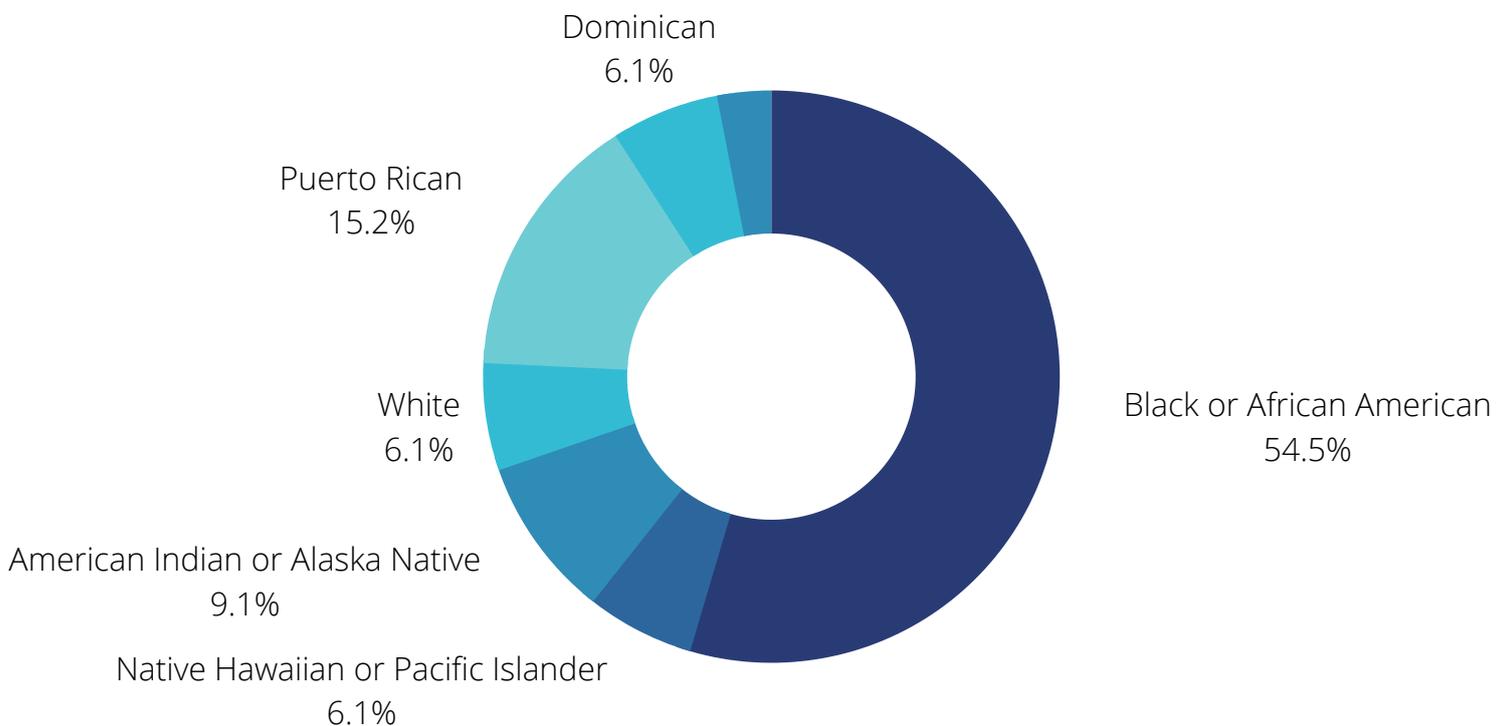
We CAN received 17 proposals in October and November of 2020, and interviewed 5 facilitators/facilitation teams in December of 2020. Creative Praxis was selected as the facilitator based on their strong background working with youth and young adults, expertise leading engaging discussions on a virtual platform, and clear demonstration of the complexity of discussions regarding public and community safety.

METHODOLOGY

Youth participants were recruited by members of the WE CAN collaborative, which encompasses the following organizations: New Kensington Development Corporation (NKCDC), HACE, Impact Services, and Rutgers University-Camden. Recruitment took place through social media outreach, direct outreach to current program participants, word of mouth, and social media posts. Youth registered for the sessions (either a one-time, two-hour session in March or a 4-session series held on Saturdays throughout April) via a Google Form, which was linked on the flyer through a QR code. Registration was open from February 22 - April 10, 2021.

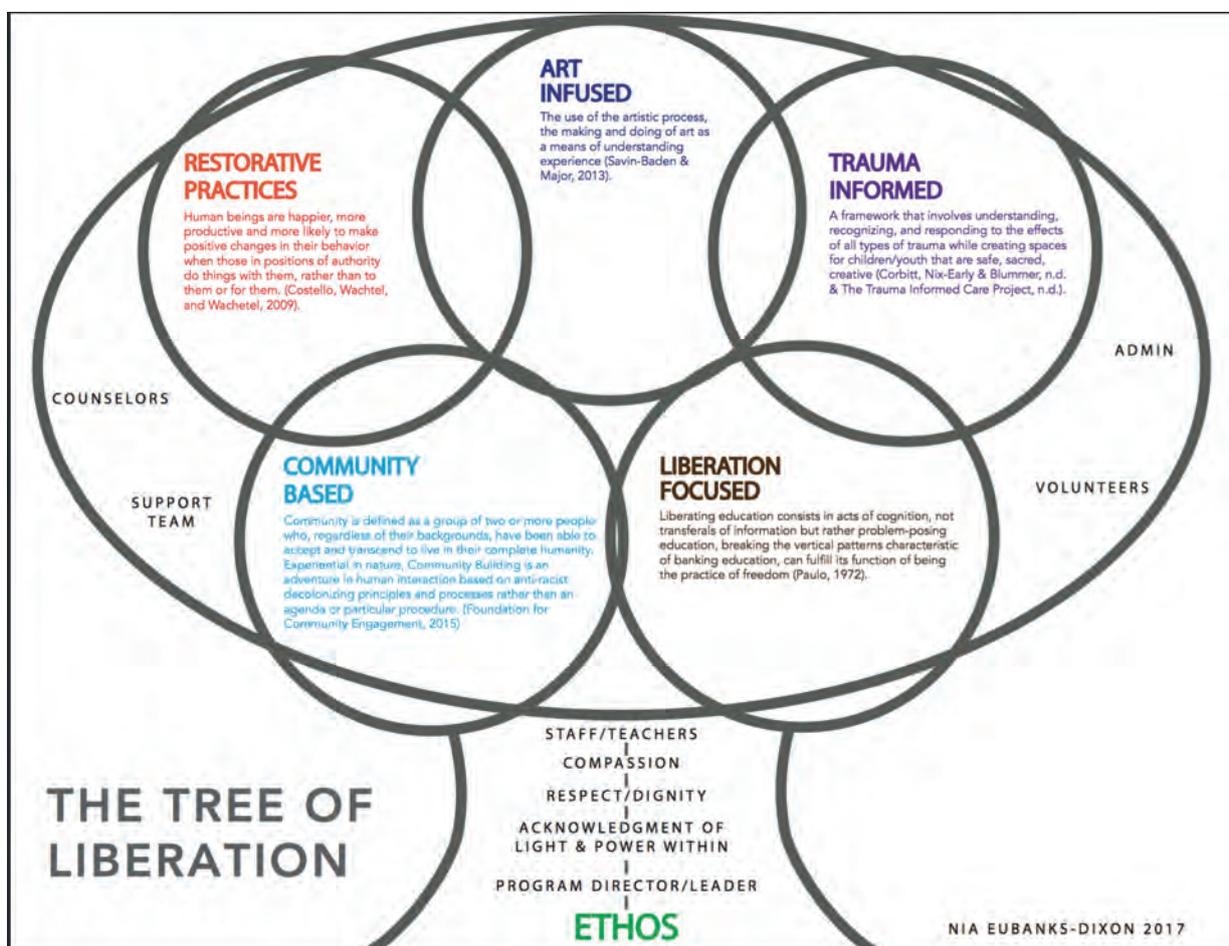
METHODOLOGY

A total of 28 youth participated in at least one workshop for this project. Of these 28 participants, 11 identified as women, 16 identified as men, and one identified as gender nonconforming. 18 participants identified their race as Black or African-American, 2 identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 3 identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2 identified as White or Caucasian. 16 participants identified as not Hispanic or Latinx, and 5 identified as Puerto Rican, 2 as Dominican, and 1 as Mexican. Participants' ages ranged from 14 to 24 with the mean age being 18.



METHODOLOGY

Creative Praxis planned and facilitated each session using their anti-racist, humanistic framework. Planning included research on the Kensington/Fairhill neighborhoods, U.S. and Philadelphia policing history, and the creation of a participatory art-based curriculum. Prior to each session, members of WE CAN and Creative Praxis met via Zoom to discuss the curriculum and delegate note taking tasks.



METHODOLOGY

All youth sessions in March and April were facilitated via Zoom. Youth connected to Zoom from smartphones, computers, and classroom smart boards. Participants received materials packages mailed by Creative Praxis, which included sticky notes, construction paper, magazine clippings, scissors, markers, and an affirmation card. These materials were used in activities throughout the sessions.

Each session, whether in the March sessions or the April 4-week series, was designed to elicit youth feedback and creation. The sessions each included rituals such as the password, community norms, and a closing practice. Sessions, especially during April, also included history of policing as well as analysis of racism and colonialism. Youth then used this information to craft collages, write demands, and formulate critiques. They also connected their personal experiences and knowledge to this information.

Throughout the sessions, youth contributed both in the large group and in breakout rooms. Responses were not only verbal statements, but also took the form of collages, drawings, poems, and slogans. Responses were recorded by notetakers.



We CWM

... & ... Noi

"Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it."
- Paulo Freire
CREATIVE PRAXIS

KENSINGTON HISTORY

Kensington is located in North Philadelphia, a historically industrial area of the city that housed factory workers, ship builders, and fishermen. Beginning in the 1950s, deindustrialization swept the nation, leaving many factories in disuse and disrepair. As jobs disappeared, so did many residents. This population shift left empty homes and factories, many of which went unused until recently.

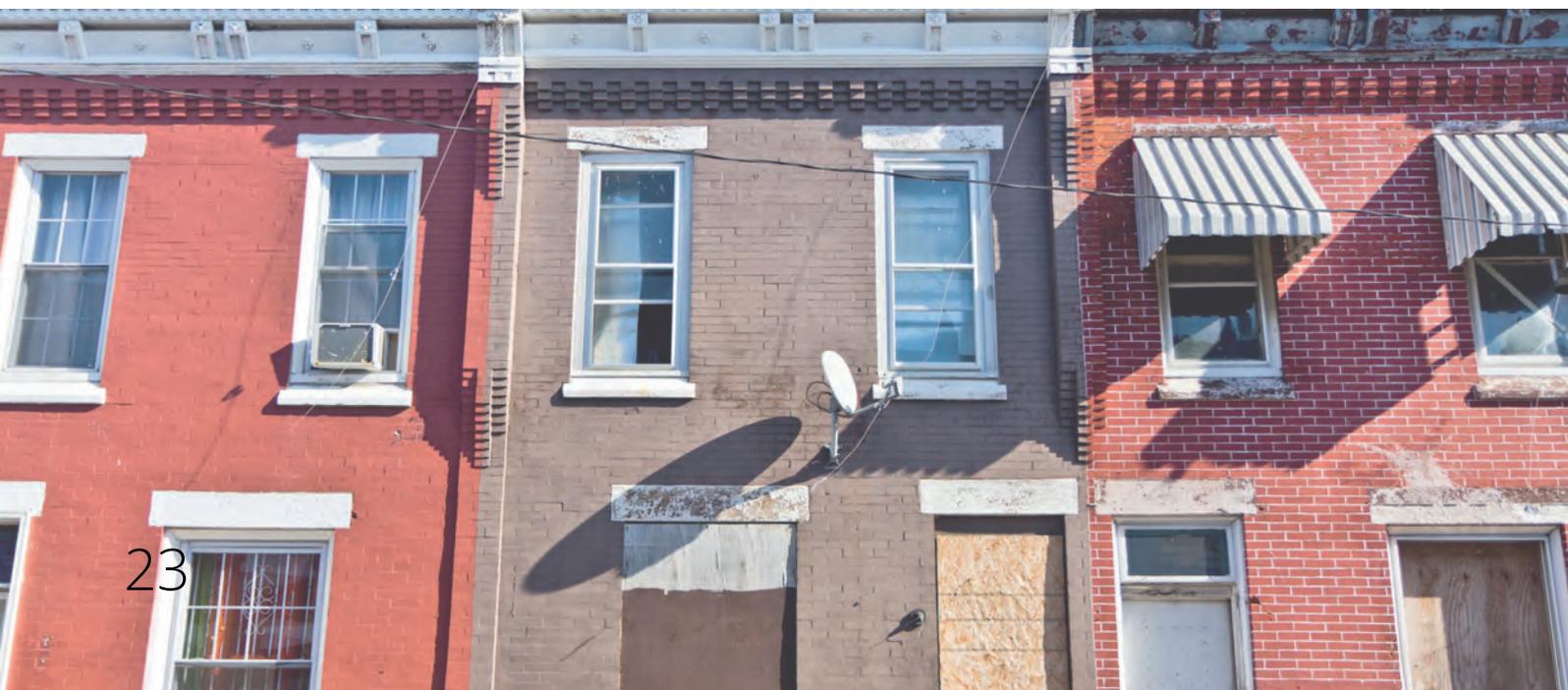
Throughout the 20th century, it was home to many different communities, including African Americans, Irish Americans, Latinx, and Asian immigrants. Today, it is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Philadelphia, racially and economically. In the 2010s, neighboring Fishtown experienced rapid gentrification, which has resulted in higher taxes, higher rents, and housing inaccessibility for working-class and low-income residents. Meanwhile, developers continue to take advantage of the empty housing left over from the mid-20th century population decline in order to build profitable housing.

Economic, racial, and ethnic segregation have affected Kensington for over a century. The neighborhood was almost exclusively white until the mid-1980s. At that time, Kensington began suffering the effects of deindustrialization. As jobs disappeared, many residents left and homes were abandoned. This created a number of social problems that went unaddressed by local government. At the same time, the diversification of the neighborhood was at times dangerous for people of color moving in.

KENSINGTON HISTORY

Drugs became an issue in Kensington beginning in the late 1960s and early 70s. Later, methamphetamine and crack cocaine were sold by street dealers and gangs. Over the next 3 decades, the drug market grew exponentially, becoming one of the largest on the east coast. Opiates overtook crack cocaine in the 21st century, which changed the nature of the drug situation: whereas people used to come to Kensington just to purchase drugs, opiate users stayed in the neighborhood, creating a large homeless population. Open air drug use has become prevalent, and the entire underpass of the Market-Frankford Line is inhabited by the drug trade and users.

Kensington's problem with drugs is a result of containment, as police and city officials pushed drug operations further into the neighborhood beginning in the 1980s. Interventions have mainly consisted of heavily policing the neighborhood. From 2002 to 2007, 100 million dollars was spent on Operation Sunrise, which brought city, state, and federal police forces into the neighborhood to address crime and violence. This initiative delivered no measurable impact, and contributed to an image of Kensington as a characteristically crime-ridden neighborhood that was spread throughout the region.



KENSINGTON HISTORY

In the 2010s, a shift from zero-tolerance policing to community policing occurred. This strategy included clearing homeless encampments, making way for expensive housing and further concentrating poverty and drug use into residential sections. Without a plan or funds for unhoused residents, the community has struggled to find solutions. The perception that everyone in Kensington is involved with drugs creates bias and discrimination against residents, both in individual interactions and in interactions with institutional actors like schools and police. At the same time, safety concerns continue to mount.

Amidst these conditions, Kensington residents are seeking spaces for refuge, and the ability to thrive, especially young people. The free and accessible community spaces that do exist are treasured, and there is a need for more. Kensington is home to elders, youth, parents, community organizations, and business leaders who work to make the neighborhood safer and prevent displacement. This is a powerful community that is working to be prosperous and inclusive, but is targeted by misinformation and misplaced policy priorities. Kensington residents persevere with their history and tenacity always in mind.

Photo by Erin Blewett for Kensington Voice



To the people, the ones in my community
The ones who look after those who have nowhere
else to go
People like my mom who took in a child who wasn't
hers
People who bend down to pick up the others around
them,
no matter what
That's what Kensington is to me
A place where we can go
A place where we do whatever it takes
to look out for the other
And even if we are hurt in the process, we do
what it takes to make sure everyone ends the day
safe
To the people who aren't with us anymore, we know
you did whatever it took to be here
We'll never forget you, you made a mark on this
place
We will look after those you left behind
We'll make sure this neighborhood you left gleams
and shines

Daisie Cardona, Youth Activist

FINDINGS

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Community assets came to light when young people were asked to define the words “protect” and “serve.” The word “protect” was defined as “willing to do what it takes to keep people safe,” and “serve” came to mean “To meet someone’s needs. To hold someone responsible.” This definition of serve also arose when some participants said that the people who keep them safe were those who kept them out of trouble/helped them make good decisions.

Youth identified leaders and other assets that their communities currently possess and value. Family was consistently named as a force that makes young people feel safe, protected, and provides a sense of belonging. Family could mean blood relatives or other community members who they are close to or grew up with. **In conversations about conflict resolution, several participants said that they can call on neighbors to help solve a conflict.**

“My best friend, her parents are methadone addicts. Her two little brothers are addicted to methadone. They made her drop out of school to raise their sons. She pretty much lived at my house for her childhood. There’s no loyalty like street loyalty.”

Youth also named local programs that helped them feel safe, such as Community Connectors and Play Streets. These programs give young people opportunities to lead and learn while under the guidance of others. They also close off local streets to traffic, allowing children to play in the streets during certain hours. These programs allow youth to stay in their neighborhood, have fun with other children, and know that they are being supervised by caring adults. Given that many young people stated that they felt unsafe going outside, these programs stand out as necessary community-based interventions.

FINDINGS

SAFETY AND PUBLIC SAFETY

During the course of 6 group sessions, the Creative Praxis team worked with young people to first identify and define the elements of safety. What are the core elements that make us feel safe and who are the people in our community that assist in not only feeling safe, but afford the opportunity to experience safety in a tangible way.

Youth participated in sessions that 1) drew on their existing knowledge of their neighborhood, city, and society and 2) asked them to expand on this knowledge through art and group brainstorming. The sessions asked participants to name the real assets and issues in their communities, and then create action steps toward a new, safer, and more equitable future.



FINDINGS

The following are some of the core components of individual and community safety as well as a shared definition of safety:

“I got myself” and “I got you” from support system, community, and/or institutions (the feeling and experience of being got, aka supported)

Safety is about how we communicate with each other; communication styles that are comforting, reassuring, and void of physical, emotional, or spiritual harm.



Youth Safety

Public Safety

Good communication

The ability to speak up, fight back and protect yourself

Not having to worry about what's going to happen when I leave my house

The ability to be oneself

Protection: idea of a shield.

Doing whatever it takes.

Being able to walk around my community and nation without fear that something is going to happen.

Safety

Being able to freely express oneself while respecting the expression of others.

Being protected from physical and emotional harm.

The feeling and experience of being got, aka supported

Safety is about people who are in service of protecting; idea of being protected or got

I Got You!

FINDINGS

Through the dialogue young people were able to associate places that provided a sense of protection and feelings of “I got you”, which were:

- Being in nature
- Being at a familiar friend or family member’s house

Youth also had an opportunity to define public safety and describe some of the core components of what it means to be publicly safe:

- The ability to speak up, fight back, and protect yourself
- Not having to worry about what’s going to happen when I leave my house
- Being able to walk around my community and nation without fear that something is going to happen.
- Good communication
- The ability to be oneself
- Physical safety measures such as proper stop signs, crossing guards, and sanitation
- Protection: being a shield, doing whatever it takes to protect others



FINDINGS

One of the key elements arose in the conversation about safety was the idea of protection. Young people described protection in the form of both service and trust. Young people described people or institutions who they felt either protected them individually or their community at large.

Protectors were described as people that have the best interests and positive intentions for the young people and their community. Protectors are people who act as shields, putting themselves on the front lines for their community.



FINDINGS



Some of the people/institutions they identified as displaying protective characteristics such as trust, positive intent, support, and reliability are:

- Frontline workers (EMTs, nurses, doctors, sanitation workers)
- Family (blood relatives and non-blood relatives)
- Community workers (block captains, city council, nonprofits that work on behalf of the community)

According to young people in the sessions, protectors are people who should see the intrinsic value and humanity in the people and communities that they are protecting.

With that understanding, young people identified that police and people in positions of power (i.e. city officials, corporations, and in some cases educational institutions) could be and should be in positions to protect communities, but often lack that function because of:

- lack of trust,
- bias (based on race, drug use, class, education level),
- improper training,
- and institutional oppression, such as racism, colonialism, and capitalism that intentionally place land and profit over people.

Way too many feelings and lost souls that we went through
I miss the presence of my girl so who to vent to
Instant gratification I need some answers
All this killing back to back while we throwing a tantrum
Guns killing black on black while we flexing the famines
We need the broken cycle
Brainwash of the pitiness turn to murder and bare rivals
No commitment to the change in yourself, guess who you lied to
Metaphor in which Black bodies and Latinos are presented as strange fruit
So many tears that we shedded on the same suit
Just know I'm tired of this controversy
I would say lets go blitz the capital but we'd all be buried
There's no equality
Never help within each other
Red flags kill blue flags I understand the history
But not our mothers
I don't think it was created to kill all the brothers
You got momentum to go pick up a gun
You watch his daddy carry it, go look at his son
Don't understand why he don't get it
And if you're white don't be afraid to come around
Change complication, mobility we all surrounded
Last year we seen a president gas innocent victims
Stay away from negativity, Trump I won't miss him
I can't breathe

Anonymous

FINDINGS

The Impact of Unsafe Communities on Young People

Many young people in the focus groups defined unpredictability as synonymous with feeling and being unsafe. That takes the form of not knowing what's going to happen to them when they walk outside of their house, not knowing how people are going to respond to them (i.e. how different police officers and people in positions of power might react to them on a given day).

A common theme that young people identified was acts of violence that could manifest in the physical, verbal, emotional, or psychological form. Young people could identify that when they feel unsafe, it produces heightened levels of stress, anxiety, fear-based reactions, and extreme discomfort, which is a hindrance not only to them, but how they then interact with their family, peers, and community.

Youth's responses to unsafe environments and circumstances trigger their stress response, which manifests itself as fight, flight, or freeze, which we know is a protective coping mechanism of the body.

FINDINGS

Community Issues

Young people identified some of the issues they see and experience in their communities that are unsafe on an individual, cultural, and institutional level. Creative Praxis worked with young people to not only be able to express what they see and experience, but also to articulate some of the root causes. Youth identified issues that must be addressed as systemic issues. This means that while they are often blamed on individuals, they are actually a result of policies, actions, and inaction led intentionally by people in power. The follow pages outline the issues that young people expressed.





Leaves

If your community were a tree, which issues would be on the leaves?

Which issues do you witness everyday?

What makes you feel unsafe?



FINDINGS

Gun violence: Across sessions, youth named gun violence as a significant issue in their community. This issue contributed to traumatic experiences and subsequent fears of going outside of their homes.

Police brutality, harassment, and negligence: Young people expressed that they feel fearful when they come into contact with or expect to come into contact with police officers. Several participants gave personal accounts of being harassed and wrongly accused of crimes by police both in their communities and in other areas of the city. Some youth expressed that although individual police officers could be good or bad, they have no way of knowing. Therefore, police are unpredictable and a source of anxiety. Police also fail to intervene when gun violence and other dangerous situations arise, contributing to youth's feelings of unsafety.



FINDINGS

Homelessness: Youth viewed homelessness (houselessness) as a product of both the lack of education/ opportunity and the government's failure to help people in their communities. Homelessness was often cited as a feature of their community that made them feel unsafe. Participants also expressed that homelessness was a product of government and societal failures, not individual ones.

Drug abuse: The issue of drugs encompassed both the use and the sale of drugs. Drug use was listed as a product of poverty, and often mentioned alongside homelessness. This impacts quality of life in the neighborhood. Some participants named drug dealing as a career choice made when no other options were made available by the education system. Other participants asserted that many drug dealers helped keep young people safe by intervening in shootings or moving homeless people to a different block.

"There are lots of situations where normal people become houseless. If people could be educated on every spectrum, [houselessness] would have less stigma. I experienced growing up in rich white neighborhoods/schools, where people see a homeless person and think they're a bad person."

FINDINGS

Trash: Participants said that trash made them feel unsafe and like leaders did not care about their community. Some witnessed people dumping trash outside of their homes, which could accumulate. The city does not provide public services to ensure that trash is properly disposed of and streets remain clear.



Unsafe streets/public spaces: Speeding cars were named as a facet of unsafe streets that made young people feel uncomfortable walking alone. This is coupled with experiences of sexual harassment that made female participants feel especially unsafe outdoors alone.

Trunk

If your community were a tree, which issues would make up the trunk?

What systems and individuals uphold the issues we see on the leaves?



FINDINGS

Lack of accountability from public officials: Public officials do not keep their word and disinvest from poor communities and communities of color. “Some challenges I notice in Kensington are homelessness, drug use, poverty, racism, ignorance, apathy. Why? Miseducation and ignorance keeps folks down/maintains the status quo. No incentive for powerful folks to change it because they benefit.”

Miseducation and lack of quality education: The education available does not support youth’s ability to create and sustain their own ventures (i.e. entrepreneurship) or to identify their own interests. Youth are placed on tracks based on race and income, and school offerings are limited. For example, one young person is in an automotive program at school and said that it does not pique their interest, and that their school does not teach them about careers or opportunities that are profitable.

Another participant added that school forces interests on students, and that they only learn how to make money by working for a company. Youth also expressed that their presence in school is unacknowledged and unvalued: “The government doesn’t care if people drop out of school.”

At the same time that schools do not provide useful or stimulating curriculum, there is also no effort to retain students.

FINDINGS

Divestment: Politicians, corporations, and others in positions of power divesting money and resources from communities for their own profit, gain, and political and financial upgrade.

Misappropriation of funds: Due to mass corruption on a local, national, and international level, funds are not equitably distributed. Continuing to promote a scarcity mentality, where people think there is not enough, when in all actuality there is plenty if people in positions of power would tell the truth and relinquish some of the wealth that was stolen, obtained by force or manipulation.

Inadequate healthcare and lack of mental health resources that are grounded in a whole-person approach: Healthcare is widely unavailable. This includes physical and mental health resources. When resources are available, they often replicate systems of oppression (i.e. medical racism) or providers do not understand the systemic nature of community member's issues. A whole-person approach would value people's identities, circumstances, and histories, and provide treatment that is appropriate to these elements.



Roots

If your community were a tree, what would be at the root?

What systems of oppression feed the practices, laws, and attitudes that cause widespread problems?



FINDINGS

Capitalism: *For-profit entities and government making money off of crises:* From drug abuse to poor education, young people recognize that some are profiting off of the issues that threaten their safety. Because there is money to be made by allowing these problems to continue, those with the resources to intervene do not. Real estate developers who drive gentrification and homelessness, corrupt city officials, and businesses that exploit workers are part of this category.

Racism: Youth expressed that racism has been built into U.S. and global society over centuries, and therefore manifests in all institutions. Institutions (such as police and schools) serve a vastly different purpose in black and brown communities than they do in predominantly white communities: to control rather than to serve. Many participants noted that institutions that are rooted in oppression cannot be reformed because they will still serve the same purpose, just in a different way. This is much like the nature of racism itself: it continues to be reinvented over time.

Colonialism: Throughout history, resources have been stolen from communities and lands and turned over to others. Youth stated that the lack of resources in their communities is intentional, and that disinvestment leads to myriad conditions that make it difficult to survive, let alone thrive. The strategy of divide and conquer was mentioned in sessions as a method used by the government and corporations to keep groups of people with the same interests from working together.

“In my neighborhood everything is kinda chill, but when outsiders come in and try to take over, sometimes it ends bad.”

“They’re profiting off of stolen items, they’re profiting off of us. They need us to buy the products.”

The role of police

Etymology of the Word “Police”:

Middle French, French: police public order, administration, government (late 14th cent.)

public order assured by the state (mid 15th cent.),

collection of legislative or administrative measures governing and facilitating social life (1451),

order and regulations established in a society, assembly, or other body (1636),

administration watching over the upholding of rules which guarantee public security (1651)

FINDINGS

During discussions of personal and public safety, youth named police as people who are in a position to help their communities, but often do harm to them. In several sessions, participants linked the widespread police brutality and violence of today to the slave patrols that became modern police. This history of policing was discussed based on “The origins of police in America” YouTube video by the Washington Post. In this video, journalists describe the metamorphosis of policing as an institution firmly grounded in slavery, Jim Crow, and the decimation of worker’s movements throughout the last 200 years. Participants shared that this video showed parallels between the past functions of police and the purpose that they have witnessed in the present: to protect wealth and land at the expense of poor Black and brown people’s lives.

Notably, youth participants emphasized that police officers are not from the neighborhoods that they work in. When police officers are not familiar with the community, they operate off of assumptions based on race, class, geography, and other social factors.



FINDINGS

Media and Policing

Media plays an important role in how police perceive the communities they work in: black and brown neighborhoods are depicted in media as inherently violent places that must be surveilled and controlled rather than protected. This leads to bias, which then translates into violent and unequal policing practices such as racial profiling. *“Now, judgement is about what kind of music in the car. Judging an individual.”* Ultimately, policing leads to high rates of arrest, court involvement, and incarceration, which do not make communities safer.

“Media treats our communities badly because they see people in our communities as what they’re calling us; relating that term to any POC, poor neighborhood, in their mind is a thug. The police are seeing that. From a community standpoint, worldwide standpoint: everyone who sees that media is gonna see them as a thug. We see gentrification in a neighborhood because they see us as thugs and think white people need to come and stop us, creating a separation.”



FINDINGS

Participants discussed the ideas of **force and control**, which lie at the foundation of policing. When asked what enables people and institutions to control others through force, they named manipulation and connection. Participants expressed that although police are supposed to be protectors, they often instigate or escalate conflict instead of solving it.

“It feels like police view people as something else, or like they are better than some people.”

How police perceive themselves and their role in society also plays into youth’s experience of policing. Media normalizes police acting with excessive force toward black and brown people. Some referenced protests, where police show up in riot gear and beat, tear gas, and arrest protestors. Lethal force is not questioned, and police are encouraged to act without asking questions. Police having guns was also raised as an issue, as police use lethal force before using nonviolent tactics to de-escalate a situation. All of these issues comprise the culture of policing.

**“THERE MAY STILL
BE VIOLENCE, BUT
WE’RE GONNA FIND
WAYS TO PREVENT
VIOLENCE.**

**POLITICIANS JUST
WANT TO PROTECT
THEIR ASSETS.”**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ultimately, all young people that participated in these dialogic sessions expressed that it is a human right to live and participate in safe communities. All human beings deserve access to a high quality of life, which includes equal protections under the law, quality education, and access to a fair and livable wage. Young people emphasized that these changes must come about via action from communities rather than a top-down approach (led by government officials and corporations). In order to obtain safe communities for all people in this nation, we must as a nation grapple with its history and legacy of systemic racism, colonialism, and capitalism. Below are some of the key recommendations that young people drafted to help move us closer to having safe communities where people can thrive and coexist with one another and the land.

To preface the recommendations, young people identified that there must first be an open and verbalized acknowledgement of the harm that has been caused to communities of color in the nation. This is particularly true as it pertains to policing and the centuries of abuse, torture, and murder at the hands of law enforcement to any human being deemed “other:” Black, immigrant, LGBTQ+, activist, drug user, formerly incarcerated, poor.

Even if it doesn't apply to a single officer, the institution of police and law enforcement is inherently racist, colonialist, sexist, and has historically served the interest of people in positions of power. There will always be distrust in poor communities of color until police and police departments can own up to historical abuses. With such an acknowledgement, we can start the process of truth and reconciliation in which we can hear from communities about their needs. It is only through this process that we can have an open and honest discussion about what policing could and should look like in our society. This discussion must be rooted in the redistribution of resources, which prioritizes community wellbeing and assets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To obtain these core areas, young people identified the key stakeholders who should be involved in prioritizing, designing, and implementing these suggestions:

lived experience practitioners (i.e. formerly incarcerated people),

community organizers,

community healers,

city officials,

police officers,

young people,

educators,

parents,

drug dealers,

and business owners.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Training

In order to address individual and cultural-level change as it pertains to safety and policing, there needs to be an investment in quality training. Training is necessary to educate officers and other actors on their own perceptions or biases and to adequately prepare them for what they may face in the community. Training must respond to the actual situations that officers will encounter (i.e. domestic violence) instead of the extremes, which promotes use of force. This means that nonviolent strategies must be prioritized.

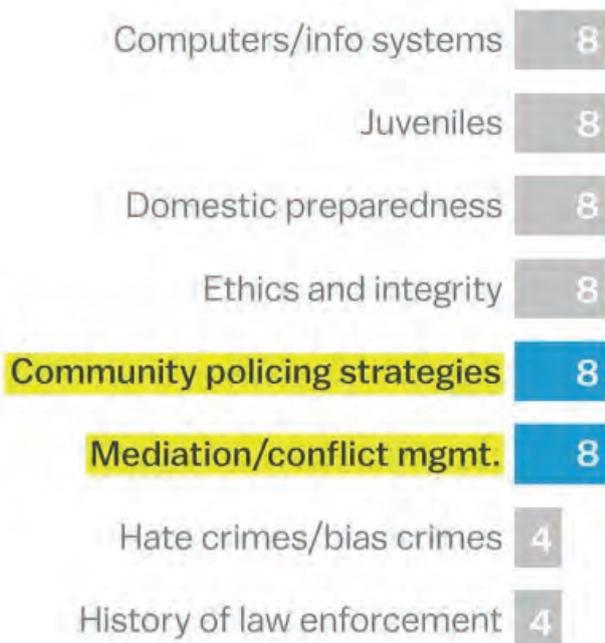
- Training police officers in anti-racism, de-escalation, mental health, bias (diversity and bias trainings can only be effective if they are coupled institutional laws that enable violence and harm toward communities of color). Increase training time in local and federal laws as well as the history of policing and its impact on communities of color
- Training local community members in de-escalation and conflict resolution
- Training community members on the history of policing and how policing works on an individual, cultural, and institutional level so that they can actualize a concrete plan to put alternative methods in place

What basic training looks like for state and local police

Most time is spent on...



Least time is spent on...



Data from a 2006 Bureau of Justice Statistics special report

Credit: Alvin Chang

Vox

Source: <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/1/21277013/police-reform-policies-systemic-racism-george-floyd>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Investment

Housing: The city is more interested in selling land to developers and tearing down homes to fit developers interests; while young people said money needs to be brought into the city, this shouldn't be done at the expense of humans and their livelihoods. Mixed-income housing, rather than gentrification, should be the goal.

Education: Equal distribution of education funds within the state of Pennsylvania and the city of Philadelphia. Hiring black teachers and teachers of color to work with young people. Investment in a whole-child approach to education, which includes attention to youth's extracurricular interests, social, emotional, and mental wellbeing.

Jobs: There is a need for more meaningful entry-level jobs. These are not "dead-end" jobs, but rather jobs that teach useful skills and prepare people for the future. These jobs should also allow people to contribute positively to their communities.

**“MONEY
ALSO ISN'T
NECESSARILY THE
SOLUTION.**

**THE PROBLEM IS
SYSTEMS.”**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Accountability measures for policing

- Community review process: There should be a community group that leads the training, hiring, incident reporting, and community relations for local police departments
- Police mentoring to recruit new officers from community
- Enforcement measures- when a new community-based policy is put in place, there is a clear pathway to enforce it
- Thorough review of policies and practices by local officials, community leaders, and young people
- Requirement of body cameras and turning them over to people who are not affiliated with the police department or subsidiaries

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community and police

- All police officers who are going to work in a district should be required to do service with that community. This service should be planned and led by community members in partnership with the Chief of Police. This includes having yearly sessions where communities can voice their recommendations and co-create plans that address issues facing their community. These sessions must include all actors and institutions involved in safety, such as EMTs, firefighters, emergency operators, and transportation workers.
- Fewer police/less police presence: Police presence can be overwhelming. Black and brown bodies and spaces are oversurveilled as a result of years of tough on crime policy on the local, state, and federal levels. This creates a feeling of being watched but not protected.
- Offer counseling for community members affected by police violence. Police violence creates a ripple effect that exacerbates trauma in communities that have been historically and systemically impacted.
- Block agreements: Public forums for community members to self-determine the safety measures that they deem necessary for protection, revitalization, and sustainment.
- Provide additional funds for grassroots organizations and local efforts that promote job security, housing access, mental health wellness, and equitable education that prepares young people to be thriving humans in society
- Know your rights trainings so that people know how to protect themselves against police and the criminal legal system
- A team of police officers that are unarmed and thoroughly trained in mediation and intervention. Philadelphia can pull from the work being done in cities like Detroit and Los Angeles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Restorative Practice

- Provide alternatives to the punitive court system that prioritize community wholeness and harmony over punishment and incarceration
- In schools, replace police officers with restorative councils that move away from the cycle of disruption and suspension toward repairing and reconciliation that is often afforded to white, upper middle class students in their schools. There have been countless studies that show the effectiveness of a restorative model in schools and a positive relationships between restorative practices and overall safety.

Real Mental Health Care

The rise of law enforcement as we know it today has occurred at the same time that community mental health resources have become scarce. In a recent report, almost half of all incarcerated humans suffer from mental illness that goes untreated. The treatment options that do exist are often highly surveilled and reliant upon psychiatric drugs rather than holistic treatment. People with mental illnesses should be treated in their communities, not removed or criminalized as indicated by the young people.

WE DEMAND STATEMENTS

We have a right to live

**We demand to invest in housing and
education and divest from police**

**We can take initiative and do some educating
and work ourselves, and more advocating**

**We demand a pilot program as an
alternative to policing, especially to address
mental health calls.**

We can make a difference.

TAKE ACTION

Now it's your turn.

The following pages include the Community Pledge presented to members of the Kensington and Fairhill communities by My Voice Matters and an abbreviated version of this report's findings.

You are invited to take the pledge or create your own. If you are doing community safety work and wish to share our findings, please use the documents on pages 64 and 65.

Please feel free to share these materials widely.

COMMUNITY PLEDGE

Young people from the Kensington and Fairhill community are calling on our community to stand together in solidarity for safer and more equitable neighborhoods.

Take the pledge and join the young people of Kensington and Fairhill.



First Name

Last Name

Address

Email Address

Organization

I would like to stay updated on We CAN My Voice Matter opportunities.

I pledge to intentionally include young people from within the community in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of any city initiatives around safety and policing.

I pledge to organize with my block. I will reach out to my neighbors to collectively plan to address issues that impact us, both on an individual and on a collective level. I commit to bringing these plans back to WE CAN to start a collaborative initiative.

I pledge to institute a community presence in police and city decision making. Kensington police and city officials will sit down with community members and the WE CAN collaborative for a series of strategic planning sessions to tackle core items listed in the youth recommendations.



MY VOICE MATTERS MI VOZ IMPORTA

Young people from Kensington and Fairhill are calling on our community to stand together in solidarity for safer and more equitable neighborhoods

Since 2018, three local nonprofits – HACE CDC, Impact Services, and New Kensington CDC – have been working with community partners, resident leaders, and the 24th District Philadelphia Police to build trust, reduce crime, and advocate for the Fairhill and Kensington communities. The collaboration, known as We CAN (Change & Action Now), is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice and supported by researchers at Rutgers-Camden.

The sessions for this project were planned and facilitated by Creative Praxis. These findings were brought together by a group of young people, aged 14-24, in a series of conversations and focus group sessions about creating safer, more equitable communities in Kensington and Fairhill, and beyond.

Young people identified some of the issues they see and experience in their communities that are unsafe on an individual, cultural, and institutional level. Youth identified issues that must be addressed at a systemic level with consideration of the history of policing and media bias. While communities are blamed on an individual level for their challenges, the fractures are actually the result of policies, actions, and inaction that have been led intentionally by people in power. The image at right illustrates what young people articulated.

A full report with session findings and youth recommendations will be available at NKCDC.org/we-can in Summer 2021.



Recommendations

INVESTMENT

Housing—Prioritize mixed-income housing and slow gentrification by ending the current practice of using land to fit developers' interests

Education—Distribute funds for education equally across the city and state with an investment in a whole-child approach and the hiring of black teachers and teachers of color to work with young people

Jobs—Create more meaningful entry-level jobs that teach useful skills and prepare people for the future

Restorative Practice—Provide alternatives to the punitive court system that prioritizes community wholeness and harmony over punishment. In schools, replace police officers with restorative councils

Mental Health—Provide mental health resources within communities, replacing the excessive presence of law enforcement that currently removes and criminalizes people with mental illnesses

TRAINING

Train police officers in trauma-informed practices, anti-racism, de-escalation and mediation, mental health, and bias while also supporting laws that protect communities of color from harm and violence. Additional training is crucial in that police officers only receive 760 hours of training which is extremely low given the severity of their jobs (cosmetologist require 1,250 minimum training hours to become a licensed hairstylist in PA)

Train local community members in de-escalation and conflict resolution

Train community members and police officers on the history of policing and how policing works on an individual, cultural, and institutional level so that they can actualize concrete plans to put alternative methods in place

We have the right to live.

We demand a pilot program as an alternative to policing.

We demand investment in housing, education, mental health resources, and a divestment from police.

We can, as young people, take initiative and be on the front lines to educate community members, city officials, educators, and other leaders in our community.

We can make a difference.

COMMUNITY AND POLICE

Lessen police presence in neighborhoods to address the historical over-surveillance of black and brown bodies

Require all police officers to do community service in the district in which they serve and work with residents to co-create plans that address issues within the community
Create public forums for community members to self-determine the safety measures that they deem necessary for protection and revitalization

Provide additional funds for grassroots organizations and local efforts that promote job security, housing access, mental health wellness, and equitable education

Offer 'Know Your Rights' training so that people know how to protect themselves against police that don't honor communities

rights and the criminal legal system

Offer counseling for community members traumatized by racial injustice and institutional police violence

“Media treats our community badly, calling people of color in poor neighborhoods thugs. The police are seeing that. From a community and worldwide standpoint, they treat them as thugs.”

ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES FOR POLICE

Involve community members in the training, hiring, incident reporting, and community relations

Create a police mentoring/internship program to recruit new officers from the community

Empower community members to thoroughly review community-based policies and create clear pathways of enforcement measures for new policies

Require body cameras to be used unconditionally and turned over to people not affiliated with the police

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We CAN
We WILL
We CONQUER!

#TogetherWeCAN