



Final Upper Shore Youth Assessment Report

April 8, 2015

Introduction:

This final report documents the activities and outcomes of the youth assessment project conducted in Upper Shore, MD including the counties of Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's Counties. The assessment gathered quantitative data and qualitative input from young people in the three counties and was conducted by Craig Schroeder, Senior Fellow, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship in partnership with the Rural Maryland Council and Upper Shore Regional Council, with support from school administrators and staff. Assessment reports were generated by the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship for each of the three counties and presented at town hall meetings in each county in December 2014. Community and regional assets for supporting youth engagement were also identified during the town hall meetings. The outcomes and themes that emerged from the assessment and town hall dialog were evaluated by the project leaders to determine next steps for youth engagement in the Upper Shore Region and in the policy work of the Rural Maryland Council.

Upper Shore Youth Assessment:

In the fall 2014 semester, 2,512 6th through 12th grade students in Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's Counties participated in an online survey to measure their perceptions of their community, future education and career plans, and desire to live in the local area in the future. The survey was administered in classroom environments with teacher supervision.

High school students constituted 26% of total respondents, with 11% being juniors and seniors. 74% of survey respondents were middle school students. Overall, females represented 49.8% and males 50.2% of total survey participants.

The youth focus groups included over 140 representative middle school and high school students from Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's Counties involved in student leadership roles, or enrolled in technology or vocational programs. The focus group participants worked in small groups of 4 to 8 students to discuss their current likes and dislikes regarding their communities, and their vision for what they wanted their communities to be like in 10 years if they were to stay or return as young adults.

Survey Highlights:

Most students plan to attend college after high school.

76% of respondents plan to attend college or technical school, 6.8% plan to enter the military and 6.7% of youth surveyed plan to enter the workforce after high school. 9% indicated other career plans.

Youth are interested in a spectrum of career opportunities.

Youth indicated interest in a wide variety of career fields, with the most popular options being: Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (30.4%), Medical, Firefighter or Police Officer (30.1%) and Arts, Broadcasting, Film, Printing or Journalism (29.8%).

Many youth feel their community provides a good quality of life.

58.5% of survey respondents rate their community as an above average to excellent place to live as a youth. 12% rated their community as a below average to poor place to live as a young person.

A number of youth are interested in owning their own business.

17% of youth surveyed have a business now and 48% are interested in owning their own business in the future.

Half of youth surveyed would like to live in the local area in the future.

51% of youth surveyed picture themselves living in their hometown area in the future. This is substantially more than the combined 37% who indicated very strong likelihood to stay or return to their hometown area (18% stay and 19% return).

Among reasons given for living in their hometown area in the future, 69% indicated it is a good place to raise a family. 44% ranked quality school and health care, 43% noted family ties in the community and 39% indicated job or business opportunity as important factors in their desire to live in their hometown area in the future.

Conversely, 57% noted career opportunity elsewhere, 56% marked make more money elsewhere and 41% indicated lack of entertainment as reasons they would not live in their hometown area in the future.

Youth are seeking more entertainment and recreation options, and jobs.

Youth were asked to rank changes they would like to see that would make their community a better place to live. More entertainment and recreation options received the highest first place ranking at 33.5%, followed by more local job opportunities for youth at 29%. More local shopping and restaurant options was ranked third at 24%, and additional opportunities to be involved in community events and projects came in fourth at 13%.

Many youth have not been asked for their input, but most would volunteer.

24% of youth surveyed indicated that adults have asked for their input on what would make their community a better place to live for teens. 76% stated they would

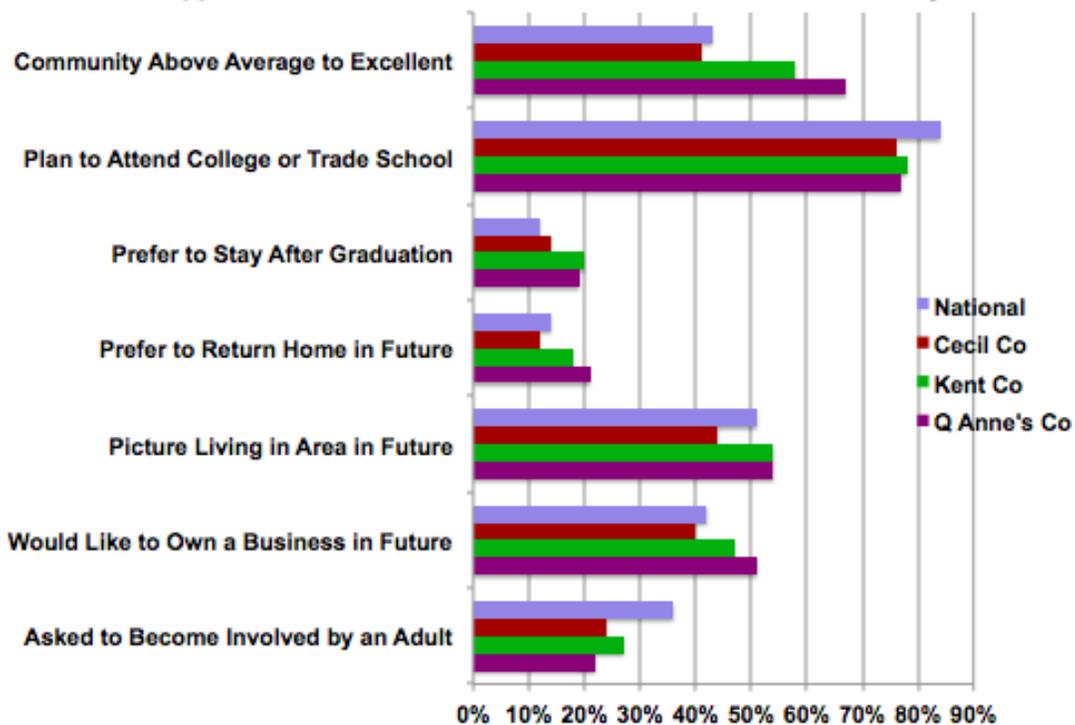
volunteer if asked by an adult community leader to become involved in making their community better.

Most youth have access to high-speed Internet at home.

83% of survey respondents stated that they currently have access to high-speed Internet at home. 45% indicated that access to high-speed Internet would be a very important factor in their decision about where to live in the future. 7% responded that this would not be important or somewhat important in their decision.

Youth Survey Comparisons

Upper Shore Youth Versus Over 40,000 Rural Youth Nationally



Upper Shore Survey Results Compared to National Data:

Over the past decade, the survey conducted with Upper Shore youth has been administered to over 40,000 young people in rural communities across the United States. The chart above indicates how the results from students in Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne’s Counties compared to the national youth data.

Survey Response Analysis:

Several survey questions provided the opportunity for participants to share narrative feedback regarding their perspectives about their community and the future. The following is an analysis of the responses to these questions.

Question 5: What are your plans after graduation?

In addition to responding to the question options, survey participants provided some additional information on their plans after high school, including pursuing an advanced college degree and specific careers including nursing, veterinarian medicine, engineering, professional sports and attending the U.S. Navel Academy.

The large percentage (76%) of youth planning to attending college after high school indicates that community leaders may wish to focus on attracting alums back in addition to retaining young people who wish to remain in the local area. In the case of youth pursuing careers important to the region, some of which may not require an advanced degree, high school apprenticeship and mentoring programs can provide pathways to quality careers while retaining more young people in the region.

Question 9: What specific ideas do you have on how to make your community a better place to live?

The narrative responses provided by 2,119 survey participants indicate a very strong interest in improving their communities and the environment through litter reduction and cleaning up public areas such as parks, beaches and roadways. Many youth also expressed concerns about drugs and crime, and recommended increased law enforcement to address these issues.

"I think that the whole community can clean up trash. Also we could have more community gatherings."

"More volunteering and cleaning up our community."

"Everybody could just do a little at a time to make the community a better place, like if you see trash on the side of the road, pick it up."

"Every Saturday to have a day where you find some way to clean trash off of the ground. And to take shifts for 20 min breaks including lunch and drink provided. You don't get paid because having a clean earth and ground is enough of a reward."

"I believe that the area I live in should create more hangout spots for locals so that people my age have more things to do and wont get into anything illegal such as drugs and alcohol, or gang violence."

"Don't sell drugs, be respectful to others, respect your elders."

"To make my community a better place is more awareness of the harms of drugs and other things so teenagers and adults will less likely start doing harmful things. More community projects to clean and make our town look better should take place."

"I think that people that are doing illegal things should be monitored more often. Our police officers hardly ever pay attention to people that look or are suspicious of doing illegal things."

"Find some way to get drugs off the streets and build more kid friendly places to go."

The youth respondents also expressed a strong desire to build positive relationship with others in their communities through participation in community improvement projects. They also felt their communities would be better places to live if more quality jobs were available that paid higher wages and if homeless people and people in need receive help in getting back on their feet.

"We could have more events to get connected with more people."

"Maybe something that will bring our whole community together as a whole, like some sort of event that we could get together and become closer."

"Having places were youth could go to bring everybody together."

"I will help the older people in my community plant flowers and do other things."

"Provide more opportunities for children to help their community."

"Get teens involved with everything such as rec groups clubs and just everyday life."

"Job options for teens would be really nice- a lot of aren't on allowance from our parents anymore, and we want things like cars. It's also a great opportunity for learning new things."

"More job opportunities for everyone so that we have a better self-economy."

"Our community need more jobs for parents and teens."

"I want the people in our community to have more job opportunities so people can have a better living and provide for themselves or even their families."

"Make it a cleaner environment. Get more involved in local activities. Help people in need."

A large percentage of youth shared ideas for community amenities that would be valued by young people and families including improved public parks, bike trails and sidewalks, water park, community garden, dog park, movie theater, swimming pool, arcade, improved athletic fields and a YMCA. Ideas for community events and activities that would improve their communities included outdoor concerts, ice and roller-skating, bowling, and miniature golf.

"We could build a movie theater or bowling alley to give kids a better entertainment option than video games and social media."

"Our community should have more sports teams and activities for the kids in middle school. There is already so many things for the highschoolers to do, but not so much for middle schoolers."

"We need a skate park because cops yell at us for skating in town, but we have no place to skate."

"Have new places for children and teens to go to and have fun so their not on the streets getting in trouble."

"If I could change the community to be a better place to live, I would make a place for kids/teens to hang out in a good environment that's safe."

"I feel like a lot of kids everywhere don't have enough opportunities in school and out of school a lot of kids have been left out on there own because there were not enough events to participate in or the event price was not cost effective enough."

"I think there should be an interactive children center where student of under the age of 21 can work together in fun activities and challenges."

"Adding more pools or recreational places for teens to work."

"I believe our community should build a stage somewhere in our town so that kids can break out of their shell and preform their talents in front of people. (Maybe a talent show)"

"Making more entertainments and events so everyone can get to know each other better and live a happy strong community"

"I wish it cold have more places to go and do activities. There is not much that you could go out and do with your friends on Friday night or weekends. There should be a movie theatre and some restaurants."

A number of youth noted challenges in accessing community amenities due to distance and a lack of sidewalks or biking trails. There were also a number of survey participants who expressed a desire for more local retail businesses, restaurants and entertainment so residents do not have to travel long distances and to create more jobs for young people within their local communities.

"More places to walk to for kids to be safe."

"More entertainment options for kids that are closer to us so we don't have to travel so far to get to them."

"Have a trail to walk through that is clean and safe."

"Where I live, we have to drive about 20 minutes just to go to the grocery store. We should have more shopping stores closer to us so we don't have to spend so much money on gas to get things we need."

"We really need to have stores and shops and restaurants because we have to drive like 20 minutes just to get to they grocery store or to get something to eat."

"Fix up the run down places and make them places where teens have more job opportunities and more community involvement."

“Better local stores that provide the essentials for living at reasonable prices for growing families in the area. Better local restaurants that serve healthier and better quality foods than fast food businesses for those who live in the area, but don't have the time to make dinner every night. More job opportunities for children in middle and high school.”

Several young people shared thoughts about the business community supporting students and schools to improve education, putting more focus on students as individuals as less emphasis on Common Core. A specific recommendation was creating a makers-space as a place to connect the local community with new technologies.

“Have local businesses be more open to giving jobs to students -start community wide projects for students to be involved in to also help the community and environment”

“My community could have more shops so teens will have the opportunity to experience the work force.”

“I think there are not many places for youth to work or apply for a job. I personally would like to start working at a young age but need to find the right place that hires youth/teens.”

“I think that we should have more events, so teens can help out with the community more. More job opportunities might help out with the teens trying to make money for college so they don't have to take out that many loans. There should be like a event where people are hiring teens would come, and teens would come and see if the job suits them.”

Question 14: Please list two specific careers that you are interested in pursuing.

The most popular responses regarding specific career plans included Engineering, Nursing and Teacher followed by Military, Designer and Doctor, Mechanic and Artist. Lower on the priority list were Marine, Police Officer, Lawyer, Business Owner or Manager and Professional Athlete.

Question 15: Do you have a business right now?

Responses from youth included Lawn Care, Baby Sitting, Selling (Ag products, baked goods, crafts such as bracelets and selling on craigslist.org), Working for a Business Owner and Dog Walking.

Question 16: Are you interested in owning your own business in the future?

A variety of business ideas were provided by respondents from lawn care to medical services to photography. Several ideas expressed for starting a company included software and video game development, design (clothing, interiors and jewelry), welding, construction, engineering and landscaping. A number of respondents would like to own a businesses that care for animals such as a shelter or veterinary practice, or a restaurant, bakery, dance studio or retail shop such as a clothing store

or sporting goods store. Several respondents expressed interest in farming in the future.

The variety of career and business interests expressed by youth participants indicate to community leaders that youth need opportunities to explore their varied interests with the support of the local business community through job shadowing, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship programs that expose young people to a variety of career and business options, and help them develop their skills.

Question 18: Reasons you picture yourself living in this area in the future?

In addition to responding to options for why participants would picture themselves living in their hometown area in the future, respondents provided additional feedback about the importance family and friends, love of their community, nice people, open spaces and quiet, and growing up in their hometown as important factors in their decision.

Question 19: Reasons you don't picture yourself living in this area in the future?

Reasons expressed for not living in their hometown in the future included desire to live in a bigger city, family ties elsewhere and moving to someplace new (warmer climate, mountains, international travel), cost of living too high in their hometown, desire to attend college elsewhere and concerns about drug use in their community.

Local leaders can respond to the perspectives of young people about living in their community in the future by reinforcing the positive attitudes youth express about their community and addressing concerns about living in their hometown in the future by involving youth in activities that help to improve their community.

Question 20: Please list the school and community activities and organizations in which you actively participate.

Youth participating in the survey are involved in a wide variety of activities and organizations including school and summer sports programs, clubs such as yearbook, robotics, 4-H, art, church, boy scouts, Interact (Rotary) and drama. A number of respondents are also volunteering in their community with pet rescues, homeless shelter, church activities, fire department, Character Counts, senior center and hospital food drive.

Community leaders should seek opportunities to connect with programs and organizations that involve a variety of youth, and support their activities in the community, versus starting new youth organizations that compete for limited time and resources.

Question 22: What activities are already happening in your community that you would like to be involved in, but are not?

Many survey respondents stated that their view is there are limited community activities to become involved in. Some expressed lack of interest in becoming involved. Ideas shared about ways youth would like to be involved included community, park and beach cleanup, pet rescue, horse therapy, after school programs and sports.

Question 23: Why have you not been able to participate in the activities you listed above?

Participants responding to this question stated that they feel there is a lack of activities or awareness of them among youth and lack of interest among youth. Several respondents noted that they were too young or too busy to become involved.

As noted above, community leaders may not want not look towards creating additional youth programming, but rather connect with current youth programs, where possible. Adult leaders may also wish to share community event calendars with educators so this information can be communicated to students with an invitation to become involved.

Question 24: Do you currently have access to high speed Internet in your home?

Among the eighty-three percent of survey participants (83%) answering yes to this question, access to the Internet is their cell phone (28%), Wifi connection (16%), laptop computer (12%) or iPod (7%).

Question 26: What ideas do you have about how high-speed Internet access could make your community a better place to live?

There was a strong mix of attitudes about the role high-speed Internet plays in making their community a better place to live. Some youth felt it is vital and some felt people are too focused on social media and the web, and that it is impacting their community in bad ways. Positive attributes expressed were improving access to education, finding jobs, working from home, community within the community and globally, more free time provided by fast Internet. Several youth felt that their community should provide community-wide Internet access.

Several participants expressed concern about school-issued Chrome Books (Internet dependent) not working for classmates in homes without Internet access, requiring these students to use computers at school or the public library after school hours. This is an issue that school administrators may wish to pursue further on behalf of these students.

"I think high-speed Internet can deeply affect the choice to continue to live here from a lot of teens. Internet can help you communicate better with the outside world."

"It will make people want to live here and definitely stay here. Higher speed Internet will improve education and the happiness of most people."

"I think that the community should have automatic high speed internet (like the community should provide for it, or the government) so that teens and kids can do their homework at home and not have to worry about the homework being late because they weren't able to go to the library."

"If we have better Internet then more people can get online educations and jobs and more people will be able to succeed in more ways."

"With the internet people can access areas outside of the community but still stay at home. They will know what is going on around the world and know more about other people. People would become more accepting."

"With high speed Internet you can have Netflix and really bond with your family and friends instead of driving very far to the movies."

"Honestly the kids with only become more and more obsessed with the Internet. I don't like how people are too interested in the Internet and then the schools go and by the kids at the school a Chrome Book and are wondering why we are getting less and less active its because people do things like this. I'm not saying cut out Internet completely but have a balance and that is why it's not important to me because it really doesn't matter! People are still going to be completely consumed by the Internet any way so I chose to stop it while I can."

"High speed internet won't make my community a better place because people will be locked up in their house playing on their computer or phone instead of being outside and being healthy and happy."

"I think that people don't need the Internet to make the community a better place to live. People should work hard and learn that working hard really pays off. The Internet is important, but shouldn't influence people to make the community a better place to live. That is how you treat your community and how you work to make it a better place."

Focus Group Themes:

The outcome of the youth focus groups was display boards and community models created by the participants working in small groups of 4 to 8 students each. There were several key themes for community priorities that emerged from each of the county focus group activities. Focus group priority themes included:

Cecil County:

- Career & Business Opportunities

- Community Activities for Youth
- Improvements to Schools & Programs
- Protect the Bay and Natural Environment
- Transportation, Walkable Communities and Public Safety

Kent County:

- More Local Career Opportunities
- School and Hospital Improvements
- Community Activities for Youth & Families
- Preserve Agriculture & Environment
- More Local Businesses & Growth
- Increased Broadband Access
- Public Transportation and Walkable Communities

Queen Anne’s County:

- Preserve Small Town Quality of Life
- Greater Variety of Community Activities
- Preserve Agriculture & Open Spaces
- Higher Paying Career Opportunities
- More Variety of Businesses & Restaurants
- More Walkable Communities

Youth Engagement Assets:

On December 8th, 9th and 10th, town hall meetings were held with community leaders and representatives from the youth focus groups in each county to review the youth assessment results, and identify opportunities to engage young people through current programs and resources in the three counties. The following assets and resources were identified by the town hall participants in three key areas.

Entrepreneurship Education and Career Development:

- School Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs
- EQUIP - Education Quality Improvement Programs
- FFA, FBLA, 4H – Career Development Programs
- Chambers of Commerce - Youth Entrepreneurs Academy
- USDA-Rural Development Young Farmers Program
- Eastern Shore Entrepreneurial Center
- Local Libraries – Business Information and Training Resources
- Business Internships and Job Shadowing Programs
- Career Centers

Youth Leadership and Community Involvement:

- FFA and 4H Programs
- Class Officers and Student Council
- School Board
- Dixon Leadership Day
- Parks and Recreation
- Teen Book Club
- Church Youth Groups
- Movie on the Lawn
- Interact

Community Investment in Youth Enterprises:

- Rotary
- Sports Programs
- College Scholarships
- Farmer's Market
- FFA Community Improvement Projects – i.e. KCHS Tree Project
- Public Library Programs

Goals for Youth Engagement:

Utilizing the assessment information and asset mapping information, participants at the county town hall meetings discussed potential opportunities for addressing youth priorities. The following are possible goals identified for the next phase of developing youth engagement action plans with youth and adults each county:

Cecil County:

- Chamber and Cecil College sponsor a Youth Entrepreneurs Academy
- Secure funding from USDA-RD for youth entrepreneurship program
- Identify more opportunities for community partners to mentor young people
- Increase student exposure to local businesses and career opportunities
- Job shadowing (Union Hospital) and mock interviews
- Outreach to businesses on benefits of community and youth engagement
- Facilitate hands-on application of STEM concepts through 4-H programs
- Outreach to recent high school graduates who are struggling economically
- Match growing businesses seeking new employees with job seekers
- Educate employers on how to utilize underemployed workforce and their skills
- Involve Elkton main street with the arts (i.e. North East)
- Increase access to arts programs
- Improve awareness of career development opportunities
- Address community apathy and increase participation – transportation
- Engage youth task forces and involve young people in dialog

Kent County:

- Network Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers with local industries
- Involve Chamber of Commerce in supporting youth enterprises
- Communicate with SBA regarding program resources
- Engage FFA in tree and stream restoration project
- Connect with County Commissioner summer youth employment
- Seek grant funding through Local Management Board
- Engage local businesses in recruiting high school age interns
- Enhance and expand joint Chamber and high school staff meetings
- Opportunities outside of school for public, private and home school students
- Job shadowing for all students (i.e. college drama professor, gallery owner)
- Students shadow GIS program at Washington College
- Establish a Youth Board

Queen Anne's County:

- Job shadowing for middle school students
- Student business tours
- Career fairs provided on a regular basis at intervals
- Outreach to students about local career opportunities
- More leadership building and mentoring opportunities with youth and adults
- Create a business advisory group with Chamber and school system
- Maryland Leadership Workshop with Washington College
- Youth technology incubator
- Rotary club mentorships with youth
- Hands-on internship programs to learn about local businesses and careers
- Business owners mentor young people
- SCORE and QAC Economic Development mentoring opportunities
- Invite students to participate in Town Council meetings
- Grants for students to start their own business

Town Hall Outcomes and Themes:

Conference calls with Craig Schroeder and the Executive Directors and staff of the Rural Maryland Council and Upper Shore Regional Council were held on January 16th and February 9th, 2015 to discuss the outcomes and themes of the county town hall meetings, and activities for the Rural Maryland Council and Upper Shore Regional Council to pursue with policymakers, state agencies, youth-serving organizations, economic development leaders, educators and young people.

In regard to next steps in the Upper Shore Region, it was decided that the goals generated in the town hall meetings should be further discussed with youth in the three counties before proceeding with action plan development. In addition, the GIS

survey data analysis being conducted by Washington College will be shared with community leaders, educators and young people. Doris Mason, Executive Director of the Upper Shore Regional Council, will lead the work to bring youth and adult leaders together for the next phase of regional action plan development and program implementation in the three counties.

In regard to policy priorities for the Rural Maryland Council, the project team identified three primary themes from the youth assessment and town hall dialog.

These themes included:

1. Youth involvement in land use planning and opportunities in agriculture.
2. Entrepreneurship education and career development programs with youth.
3. Public safety and transportation issues related to rural young people.

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director of the Rural Maryland Council, will lead the work to engage policy makers, government agencies and organizations involved in these priority areas to consider the perspectives of young people in policymaking and in setting program and budget priorities. In addition, the Upper Shore Youth Assessment Report has prompted several state, regional and county leaders to inquire about how they may support priorities identified in the assessment including public transportation, entrepreneurship education and youth mentoring.

The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship will continue to assist the Upper Shore Regional Council and Rural Maryland Council in the deployment of youth engagement resources as a result of this youth assessment project.

Respectfully Submitted by:

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