



Commission on Children and Youth

Annual Report

2021-2022



Mission Statement

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2022-2023 Commission Priorities

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE), and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding, and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all the County's young people.

Commission Structure

The Commission and its committees meet on the second Wednesday of every month (September to June) from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The Youth Advisory Committee meets from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. the first Tuesday of every month (September to June). The Commission meetings are open to the public. Currently, the Commission is hosting all meetings virtually.

The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission typically holds an annual strategic planning retreat in June and selects priority issues for the upcoming Commission year. Subcommittees are formed around the selected priorities. The CCY hosted a virtual planning retreat on June 8, 2022.

In 2021-2022, the Commission elected to prioritize the following priorities:

- Accessible Youth Spaces
- Youth Employment Opportunities

Letter from the Chair



October 1, 2022

The Honorable Marc Elrich
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable Gabe Albornaz, President
Montgomery County Council

The Honorable Brenda Wolff, President
Montgomery County Board of Education

Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director
Montgomery County Department of Health
and Human Services

Residents of Montgomery County

Dear Mr. Elrich, Mr. Albornaz, Ms. Wolff, Dr. Crowel and Residents of Montgomery County,

For the Commission on Children and Youth, this FY22 Commission Year ushered in a lot of new and inspiring energy and commitment to the work of the Commission, as we were able to welcome nine new Commissioners, including two youth, into our membership! Our priorities this past year centered around exploring opportunities and pathways for youth seeking employment in Montgomery County, as well as examining various public spaces and how they can be more accessible to our youth. During the research phase of our work, we were excited to meet with a number of community members and program partners whose work centered around youth employment and accessible public spaces, including conversations with school career counselors, transitional services for youth with disabilities, youth employment agencies, Montgomery County Department of Recreation and Department of Parks and Planning.

In addition to regular commission business, we had the pleasure of hosting our 15th Annual "Youth Having a Voice Roundtable" event virtually on March 2. We registered and welcomed over 50 Montgomery County youth, as well as a number of county and community representatives, as they listened intently while our young people shared their thoughts and insights related to this year's commission priorities. From this discussion, our commission members were able to focus this year's final recommendations on the areas that resonated the most with our youth participants. We are always grateful for our youth commissioners and youth volunteers who exclusively facilitated the discussions and engaged with our youth participants to share their thoughts freely and in a safe space.

As we gear up for another year of Commission work, we thank you in advance for your support as we work to address the needs of youth and their families in Montgomery County. You will find, included in this report, our Commission's findings and recommendations related to the two priority areas: Youth Employment Opportunities and Accessible Youth Spaces. I am also happy to share that Ms. LaTanya Johnson will now serve as the Chair of this Commission, as I have come to the end of my term. I am confident that Ms. Johnson, with the support of the entire Commission, will continue the excellent work of the Commission and also move us forward, to greater to support the needs and interests of children and youth in Montgomery County. We also welcome increased opportunities for partnership with other Boards and Commissions as we all work to serve our local community.

Sincerely,

Renae McPherson
CCY Chair, 2020-2022

Membership 2021-2022

The Commission on Children and Youth has 27 membership positions including one representative from Montgomery County Public Schools; one representative from an independent school in the County; one representative from the Montgomery County Department of Recreation; and two representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services.

The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience with agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents.

Youth Representatives

Phebe Melaku
Simoni Mishra

Parent Representatives

Anna Marie Finley
LaTanya Johnson
Tatiana Lollo
Thanh-Thuy "Twee" Nguyen
Albert Reed

Private Agency Representatives

Stephanie Clark	Leaders Institute
James Hopkins	Voices 2 Empower Youth Program
Chanel Speaks	Every Mind

Public Agency Representatives

Kirsten Andersen	Linkages to Learning, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Rena McPherson	Montgomery County Public Schools, <i>Commission Chair</i>
Jeanett Peralta	School Health Services, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
VACANT	Montgomery County Department of Recreation
VACANT	Representative, Private/Independent School Community

Commission Staff

Dr. Pearline M. Tyson	Program Manager, Department of Health and Human Services
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Commission Activities

2021-22
GUEST SPEAKERS AND
TESTIMONY

Guest Speaker Highlights

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Gabe Albornaz
*President, County
Council*

Lynn R. Harris
*Board Member,
Office of the Board of
Education*

Judith Docca
*Board Member,
Office of the Board of
Education*

Danielle Susskind
*Board Member,
Office of the Board of
Education*

**Dr. Raymond
Crowel**
*Director, Health &
Human Services*

Dira Treadvance
*Chief, Children,
Youth and Family,
Health & Human
Services*

Guest Speakers

This year the commission welcomed several guest speakers to receive more insight and expert opinion on their two priority topics.

Our **Youth Accessibility** subcommittee welcomed the following guest speakers:

- Romona Bell-Pearson, *Office of Community Use of Public Facilities*
- Tiffany Nelson, *Montgomery County Recreation and Parks*
- Jerome Jackson, *Montgomery County Recreation and Parks*
- Marhonda Williams, *Montgomery County Recreation and Parks*
- Hyojung Garland- *Maryland-National Capital Parks & Planning Commission*
- Cristina Sasaki- *Maryland-National Capital Parks & Planning Commission*

These speakers discussed what programs are currently available for Montgomery County youth and what is needed to expand these programs. Speakers also discussed components of an accessible program, such as: multifunctionality, co-location with other programs, transportation accessibility and having a space that responds to the cultural needs of the community.

Our **Youth Employment Opportunities** subcommittee welcomed the following guest speakers:

- Leslie Cardenas, *Transition Services Unit, MCPS*
- Cintoya Somerville, *CCIC (College/Career Information Coordinator)*
- Chass Seymour, *Coordinator, TeenWorks*
- Mirin Phool, *Workforce Development*

Speakers discussed where youth could find career and post-secondary opportunities, current county partnerships with youth employers and job training/apprentice programs available.

Commission Activities

On November 17, 2021, the Commission participated in the County Council HHS Committee virtual roundtable discussion and communicated the top two policy priorities for the 2021-2022 commission year.

Commission Activities

2021-22
GUEST SPEAKERS AND
TESTIMONY

Commission
Activities Highlights

Policy Priority
Presentation, HHS
Committee of the
County Council
November 2021

15^h Annual Youth
Having a Voice
Roundtable March
2022

15th Annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

The Commission hosted its 15th annual *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* on March 2, 2022. This year, the roundtable was held virtually and welcomed approximately 40 youth from various middle and high schools throughout the County. Youth commissioners engaged students in a lively discussion focused on three key priority areas identified by the commission: youth employment opportunities, accessible youth spaces and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the youth.

Consistent themes emerged from the discussions on these topics. Overall, students expressed a lack of knowledge concerning available youth spaces and available employment opportunities. Students were also disappointed by the quality and appeal of the food offered during their school day. The youth also expressed their experiences and/or observations about the negative change in overall school climate following a return to school since the pandemic began. Specific youth responses included:

- More access to “non-traditional” activities, such as gaming, art, cooking, and gardening.
- Increased access to areas/spaces where youth can lounge and/or take showers.
- Creation of a map/guide for the community to navigate youth spaces.
- Opportunities to learn more about money and independence.
- Increased entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Increased understanding from teachers concerning their emotional well-being.
- Peer to peer conflict mediation in schools to curb youth violence.
- Access to technology centers.

2021-2022 Priority Recommendations

Youth Employment Opportunities

This subcommittee was comprised of four human services professionals and two high school students. We narrowed our focus down to youth, ages 15-21 and reviewed both opportunities and barriers to employment. The subcommittee learned about how youth currently find jobs, what job programs are available to them through agencies such as schools, recreation centers, etc., and what career-readiness programs are available that include paid work experience. We invited personnel from various agencies in this space, such as the Department of Recreation, Worksource Montgomery, school-based career counselor, and a representative from transitional youth services in the county. In March 2022, CCY hosted the yearly Youth Having a Voice Roundtable where youth were asked questions about youth employment.

The following report contains our findings and recommendations for the council around opportunities to further explore the issue of youth employment in the county.

Why focus on youth employment?

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, increased cost of living, and recent inflationary prices there's an even more immediate need for youth to find support in getting a job to be able to contribute income to their household. Meaningful and gainful employment is now more important than ever in terms of giving youth a sense of purpose and increases a sense of mental well-being by giving them a positive outlet to focus energy.

Early exposure to the workforce allows our county's youth to gain on-the-job and life skills. As we know, youth become the future workforce and investment in youth employment can lead to a stronger, more skilled workforce. With job experience, youth can also learn about and generate interest in a field or industry and pursue that industry as part of the adult workforce. Providing adequate wages from the job training to the full-time employment phase is also important since many youth are still relying on transportation and other support.

Employment is a protective factor for youth. For example, a strong youth employment network can help interrupt the school to prison pipeline. Employment gives youth a sense of purpose, builds confidence, and can keep them from engaging in negative activities and behaviors.

In our research, we did not have the opportunity to engage with employers and/or business owners. However, we were able to engage youth during the youth roundtable, workforce coaches, career counselors, and we drew from our own sub-committee's experience in various industries. From these sources, we believe the opportunity for employers to employ youth – with support from local agencies who provide training and/or subsidies – can allow employers to give back to their community and become invested resources. Employers like business owners can become mentors to youth in the community and solid references for future work or higher education.

2021-2022 Priority Recommendations

Existing Youth Employment and Job Training Resources

Some examples that we researched or learned about through guest speakers who represented various organizations are the following:

- School-based career services, such as internships and apprenticeships provided by programs like Seneca Valley, Edison, P-Tech
- Programs with the Department of Recreation, including TeenWorks
- SSL learning programs
- Transitional Youth services (serving youth with disabilities)
- Worksource Montgomery (serving students unenrolled from HS)

Two “models” or approaches that are worth exploring and implementing with other programs are the TeenWorks and Transitional Youth services model used by Montgomery County Public Schools.

- TeenWorks: The model is to start students/youth as volunteers and then provide them a structured path to become paid employees of different organizations. There’s to expand the reach of this program so it’s available to students across the county, and not just one region.
- Transitional Youth services for students with disabilities: This model assigns a dedicated Case manager that follows the student/youth through their journey, from job skills and training to getting certification and paid employment.

What did we learn from youth at the roundtable?

From the youth roundtable, insights were provided from youth participants, and we heard that they felt employment was important for income but also independence. From the discussions, our subcommittee learned that finding paid internships, apprenticeships, and jobs is difficult. We learned that middle schoolers, especially eighth graders, want to learn about future opportunities that will be available in high school- like the county’s internship program- so they can begin to prepare as they transition into high school. Youth also shared there was not a lot of information available to them on how to apply for jobs and interview. One of the big takeaways was that youth stated there isn’t one comprehensive website to look for resources and programs provided by the county.

Barriers and Opportunities:

- We learned that supply (opportunities to work) isn’t meeting the demand (youth wanting to work) and that employers aren’t reaching out to youth to promote opportunities. We found there was not a clear path for youth to gainful employment - there could be more straight-forward paths like from SSL to employment or workforce development programs to employment.
- Youth with jobs want more hours or enough hours to make the commitment worth the time. Job training and youth employment programs have to offer enough hours of employment to be appealing.
- Incentivizing employers is important so that they want to participate in employment programs or job training programs. Employers have to see what is in it for them.
- In our research, we didn’t find any structured program from the county for youth that are interested in becoming entrepreneurs or could benefit from mentorship while building their own business as young entrepreneurs.

2021-2022 Priority Recommendations

Youth Employment Opportunities Recommendations

Based on our research and the insights we've gathered, we have several recommendations for county leaders to explore.

1. Improve communication and outreach to youth: Consider a central website for youth to use for finding opportunities and learning about county programs and market the website consistently, especially leveraging platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Facebook, etc.
 - Consider parents as your secondary audience for promoting the platform, such as through NextDoor, Facebook, or neighborhood and municipality communications, etc.
2. Within existing programs: Build intentional opportunities for agencies and organizations working youth job training to work together and collaborate, such as through a coalition or working group to share ideas, address youth employment issues, and engage youth about the issue.
3. Generate more youth employment opportunities: Consider County priorities like efforts to reduce our carbon footprint and what jobs could exist for youth. For example, recycle clubs in high schools could lead to volunteer opportunities within the county waste management system, training, and eventually employment.

The youth employment subcommittee strongly believes that these recommendations will provide youth a more cohesive and supportive system for obtaining job training and securing employment.

Accessible Youth Spaces

As we emerge from extreme isolation that youth experienced during the height of the pandemic, youth in Montgomery County need safe and accessible spaces, outside of school, where they can come together. These are locations where young people can connect with their peers as well as access social-emotional, recreational, and academic support. When considering spaces, the committee reviewed multiple aspects of accessible, including geographic locations, availability and/or need for transportation, cost, cultural relevance, and accommodations for youth with physical and/or emotional needs. The committee collected and considered input from the Department of Recreation, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF), and a youth forum in formulating the following recommendations to support youth access to accessible spaces.

Overall, the committee found that community and county outreach on accessible space is still inadequate, and the information is not reaching enough of the targeted population. There is a need for increased information dissemination and social media presence to inform youth in an easy and equitable manner about existing programs and locations.

2021-2022 Priority Recommendations

Accessible Youth Spaces Recommendations

1. Facilitate increased access for smaller, nonprofit, local community organizations to fields and facilities. This is especially important in areas with the highest poverty rates, such as near Title I schools or schools with high Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMs) rates.
 - Provide funding to subsidize usage fees to these groups for facilities and fields in traditionally underserved areas. Priority should be given to minority led organizations that will serve low income and minority youth. During the pandemic, the use of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or CARES Act funds for this purpose increased usage and diversity of usage by 50%.
2. Increase funding for County run Recreation Centers to adapt to the changing demographics and activities interests of their communities while being inclusive of youth with mobility limitations. Specifically:
 - Increase technology space for in-person and group virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) activities that will bring youth together and reduce youth isolation of engaging in these activities alone at home.
 - Increase technology spaces for youth entrepreneurs to reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET).
 - Increase electronic interactive real-time platform of shared resources with chatbots, e-sport room, live-streams and text messaging options for increased engagement.
3. Provide or convert existing open fields and spaces to meet the needs of the community
 - Increase adaptive spaces that allow youth with different abilities to access spaces for adaptive and culturally appropriate open fields and spaces
 - Assess predominant cultural background of the community and covert fields or spaces to provide culturally relevant recreational spaces, such as converting baseball fields into soccer fields or tennis courts into pickleball courts
4. Prioritize neighborhood accessibility for future or newly renovated/redesigned spaces that are within walking/biking distance to eliminate the transportation barrier and to promote:
 - Environmental benefits and less carbon pollution
 - Equity of making spaces available to all neighborhoods.

In conclusion, we recommend that County executives conduct a county-wide self-audit of the existing programs every four years, in alignment with the election cycle, to identify the priorities/adjustments, accessibility and equitability component in alignment with population and census.

Policy Priorities for the Commission on Children and Youth 2022-2023

Priority 1: Equal Education Opportunities

The Commission on Children and Youth seeks to explore current educational and resource gaps in Montgomery County Public Schools. A focus will be placed on current resources available to low-income youth and students with disabilities. CCY will also examine how the school system engages and shares resources with Montgomery County families.

Priority 2: Safety Amongst Youth

One of the aims of the Commission on Children and Youth is to promote the well-being of our county's children and youth, so that they feel safe and protected in and outside of school. A way to support this, is by examining the safety among Montgomery County youth. Emphasis will be placed on physical safety, mental health, drug abuse and current programs available to youth outside of school.

Marc Elrich, County Executive
Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director of Health and Human Services
Dira Treadvance, Chief, Children Youth and Family Services



Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Children, Youth and Families Services
Commission on Children and Youth

For more information about the Commission on Children and Youth, please visit:
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccy

Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.

For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.

Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission/access to its programs and services.