

# COALITION FOR RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

ADVANCING EQUITY AND JUSTICE TOGETHER

YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador Program

1st Year Program Implementation

2022-2023 Report

# I- Executive Summary

The YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador Program (DAP) was implemented during the 2022-2023 academic year as an eight-week initiative designed to address the prevalent issues of insensitivity and intolerance among students. Created and led by Dr. Bernadine Ahonkhai, the program aimed to equip young individuals with education, skills, and tools to excel, while fostering a culture of diversity and social justice.

The primary objective of the YouthBuild DAP was to counteract the harmful effects of racial, ethnic, and social bias by affirming each student's personal identity and experiences. By creating a safe space for participants to share their personal stories and experiences in and outside of their school, to affirm their unique, personal identities and experiences, the program aimed to foster empathy, solidarity, and understanding among diverse groups. Additionally, the program focused on developing interpersonal and leadership skills to empower students and facilitate their personal growth and development as healthy, productive members of their communities.

Through targeted education and skill-building activities in small and large group settings, participants gained the confidence and competence to become advocates for diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Significant progress was made in achieving the desired outcomes throughout the program's inaugural year. Students actively participated in sharing their personal narratives, which not only validated their unique identities, but also encouraged open dialogue and respect for others. The program successfully created an environment that promoted inclusivity, understanding, empathy, and appreciation for diversity.



Fig. 1: C-CATE Students Sharing their DIVERSITY Box Project (April 2023).

## II- Introduction

The YouthBuild DAP's first-year implementation has laid a strong foundation for diversity, empathy, and excellence among young individuals. By affirming personal identities, promoting understanding, and equipping students with essential skills, the program has created a transformative experience that reshapes their perspectives and attitudes about identity, diversity, and inclusion and prepares them to be proactive and engaged citizens. Through targeted education and skill-building activities, students gained the confidence and competence to become advocates for diversity, equity and social justice.

Moving forward, it is crucial to continue YouthBuild DAP to ensure a sustained positive impact on students, schools, and their communities. Strengthening partnerships with local organizations and institutions will allow program participants to expand resources and opportunities. Furthermore, ongoing evaluation and assessment of the program's effectiveness will enable necessary adjustments and improvements for future iterations.

## III- Activity 1: Students Enrollment Process in the Program

Several area school districts and community organization youth programs were approached about Coalition4Justice YouthBuild DAP. North Penn and Norristown Area school districts, and a community organization in Norristown (C-CATE) that provides after-school education programs to students, responded positively to our request to provide our youth program to their students.

The two school districts had to figure out how to accommodate our program, and this took some time during the school year to come up with a plan of action. After some delay, eventually we were able to provide our youth program in the spring of 2023 (April to June) to both school districts and the local after-school youth program.



Fig. 2: EAST Norriton Middle School Students with their Certificates of Participation in the YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador Program (June 2023).

## IV- Activity 2: Selection of the Schools for the Program

We were scheduled to provide the youth program to the three middle schools in the Norristown Area School District – Eisenhower Middle School, East Norriton Middle School, and Stewart Middle School. Due to scheduling issues at Eisenhower Middle School, we ended up working with sixth-grade students at East Norriton Middle School and seventh-grade students at Stewart Middle School instead. At North Penn School District, we were initially scheduled to provide the program during the school day. The school district administration later changed that arrangement to after-school hours. Consequently, this last-minute change affected the number of sixth grade students enrolled in the program at Inglewood Elementary and Gwyn-Nor Elementary Schools. At the local Community Youth program (C-CATE), we had students in 6th to 11th grades who participated in the YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador Program. We provided our youth program to eighty-five students across the five cohorts.



Fig. 3: Students at East Norriton Middle School (NASD) During YouthBuild DAP Lesson (May 2023).

Two master's level educators, and two assistants were employed by Coalition4Justice to facilitate the youth program, along with Dr. Bernadine Ahonkhai who also supervised the implementation of the YouthBuild DAP. The youth program curriculum content is organized into eight lessons, and an instructor binder was provided to each educator and assistant. Each student in the program was provided a student binder for use during the lessons. At the end of each lesson, students were provided snacks and a take home summary of the day's lesson in a folder to share with their parents or caretakers.



## V- Activity 3: YouthBuild DAP Implementation

The students in all five locations were very engaged with our instructors and assistants. They freely shared their life and school experiences with our team. We learned from the students about incidents of unfair and unjust treatment, e.g., racial discrimination, micro aggression from some teachers and school staff, bullying and cyberspace harassment incidents by students within school property and in the community, as well as fighting on school property and outside in the community. In one of the schools, because of our presence, we were able to bring the pervasive micro aggression incidents to the attention of the school district administration personnel, who were invited to attend one of our sessions with the students.

The students who were targets of micro-aggression informed us when asked that they had told their parents of the incidents, but their parents did not contact the school, perhaps afraid of further negative repercussions for their children. However, the school district administration attended one of our lessons with the students and heard directly from the students about their experiences in the school. Dr.Ahonkhai was informed by the administrators that the matter would be addressed. We are pleased to have served as a facilitator in exposing a micro-aggression situation in a school and bringing it to the attention of the school district administration.



Fig. 4: Dr. Ahonkhai with C-CATE Student Alison Calderon (June 2023).



Fig. 5: Students Watching a Video Clip During the YouthBuild DAP Lesson (May 2023).

## VI- Activity 4: Program Certification Ceremony

The students in each of the five locations were presented with two certificates at the end of the program—a Coalition4Justice Program Certificate of Program Completion and a Certificate from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives via the offices of two local legislators. They were also given a book about a Montgomery County physician and resident of African American descent who made exceptional contributions to Pennsylvania and the country – Dr. Frank E. Boston, authored by George Whitehair, Esq. North PENN School District schools (Inglewood and Gwyn-Nor), and C-CATE were also given a collection of books with multicultural themes. Unfortunately, books earmarked for East Norriton and Stewart Middle Schools were not given to these schools when the students and their teachers informed Dr. Ahonkhai that their schools had no library or librarian. Dr. Ahonkai found later, by researching the PA Education Code, that the language in the Code does not require public schools to provide a library in the school. Dr. Ahonkai reached out to some legislators about the lack of library in schools, and a meeting is scheduled with a Montgomery County senator in this particular school district. In Inglewood Elementary School (NPENN school district), we were included in the 6th-grade graduation ceremony (see Fig. 6 below).



Fig 6: Dr. Ahonkhai (Back Row) and Mrs. Aiyegbusi (R) with Stewart Middle School students Holding their Program Completion Certificates (June 2023).

Regrettably, the C-CATE program in Norristown was forced to close on their graduation day due to poor air quality from the Canadian wildfires, and it was the last week of their afterschool program. As a result, we missed the opportunity to formally present certificates and gifts to the students as planned, and to have a group photo taken with them. The certificates and gifts for students, teachers and C-CATE were later dropped off at the program.

## VII- Feedback from the Students

The Coalition4Justice YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador program was well-received and highly rated by the students. A total of 85 students participated in the program at the five locations (Inglewood Elementary School, Gwey-Nor Elementary School - NPENN, East Norriton Middle School, Stewart Middle School - NASD, C-CATE). Surveys from participating students, teachers, and administrators affirm the importance and need for the Youth Build Diversity Ambassador program.

96.5% of the students rated the program overall either excellent or good.

92.3% indicated the lessons helped them understand their personal, cultural, and social identities, and that of their peers, and that it will help them get along better with other people who are different from them because of their identity, race or culture, and other differences. Students indicated they felt empowered by participating in the program to use their voices and the skills acquired from the program to be up-standers for fairness and justice.

95.6% indicated more students should be provided with the YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador Program.

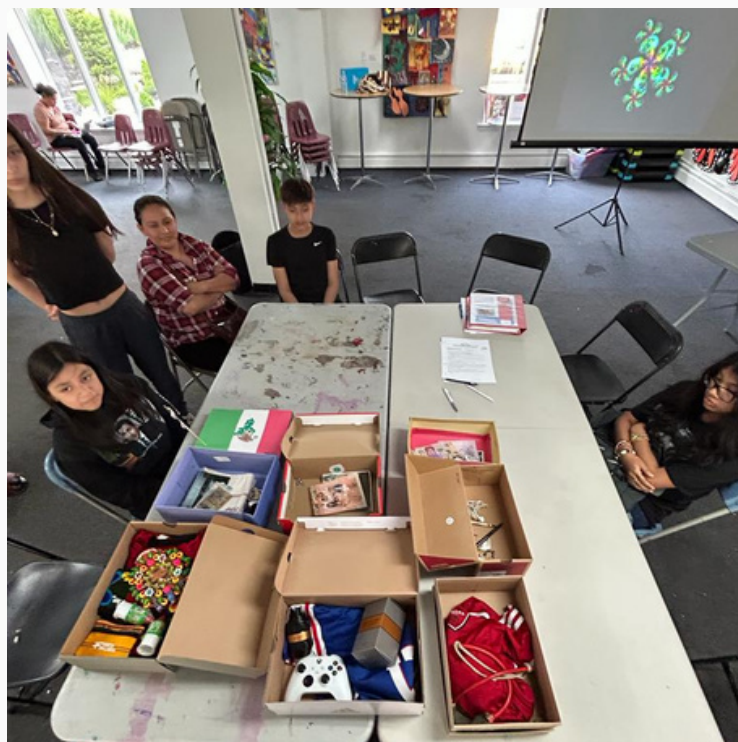


Fig 7: C-CATE Students at the Youth Build Program (April 2023).



## VIII- Feedback from Teachers/Administrators

Teachers and administrators in the 2 school districts (NPENN and NASD) and the local community organization (C-CATE) praised the YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador Curriculum content and program implementation. When asked if there was anything that should be removed or added to the curriculum content, the overwhelming response was “NO”. One school district administrator did, however, comment that he would like to see the eight-week program extended to ten weeks, which may be logistically very challenging for school districts especially to accommodate. The public schools and the community organization expressed satisfaction with the quality of curriculum content and instruction and hoped we would return to their schools and program in 2023-2024.



Fig 8: Dr. Ahonkhai (Middle), ESL Teacher, Stephanie Levitt (Left), Ellen Price-Maloy, Coalition4Justice Volunteer (Right) and Inglewood 6th Grade Students at Graduation (June 2023).



Fig. 9: East Norriton Global Leadership Teacher, Jerry McGrier with L to R Tola Aiyegbusi, Ellen Price-Maloy (Coalition4Justice Volunteer Staff) and Dr. Bernadine Ahonkhai, Coalition4Justice Founder & President (June 2023)

TOTAL POSTS



# IX- Conclusion

Coalition4Justice is grateful to the HealthSpark Foundation for the initial seed grant to create the YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador program and develop the curriculum, and the Montgomery County Grant Office for the subsequent grant from the ARPA fund. Both grants have helped us provide a much-needed service to our country's youth at a time when our country is struggling with misinformation and false narratives about people of color in the United States. Coalition4Justice adult and youth programs serve as tools for personal and institutional transformation and social change. We are impacting both young and older individuals in our communities, as well as systems. It is our hope that Coalition4Justice will be able to access more funds to continue to provide the YouthBuild Diversity Ambassador Program to students in Montgomery County every school year.

Below are some photos taken during the youth program.



Fig 10: Ethan Salinas (C-CATE) Sharing an item from his Diversity Box (April 2023).



Fig 11: Gwyn-Nor Elementary School 6th Grade Student with Mr. Jerry More, Mrs. Abigail Ray, and Dr. Bernadine Ahonkhai (June 2023).



Fig.12: Inglewood Elementary School 6th Grade Graduation - Dr. Bernadine Ahonkhai & Mrs. Stephanie Lewitt (ESL Teacher) (June 2023).