



Final Youth Assessment Report

December 2015

Introduction:

This final report documents the activities and outcomes of the youth assessment project conducted in Allegany County, MD. Many thanks are extended to the Rural Maryland Council, Upper Shore Regional Council, and Center for Rural Entrepreneurship for allowing us to utilize their framework, and to the public and private school administrators and staff for their support of this project. Participating schools are: Middle Schools-Braddock, Mount Savage, Washington and Westmar, High Schools-Allegany, Fort Hill and Mountain Ridge, and Private Schools-Calvary Christian Academy, Lighthouse Christian Academy and Bishop Walsh School.

Youth Assessment:

In the fall 2015 1088 7th and 9th grade students in public and private schools 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 supervision.

48% of survey respondents were 7th grade students and 52% were 9th grade students. Overall, females represented 49.6% and males 50.4% of total survey participants.

The youth focus groups included over 250 representative middle school and high school students. The focus group participants worked in small groups of students to discuss their current likes and dislikes regarding their communities, and their vision for what they wanted their communities to be like in 10-20 years if they were to stay or return as young adults.

Survey Highlights:

Most students plan to attend college or technical school after high school.

73% of respondents plan to attend college or technical school, 9% plan to enter the military and 8% of youth surveyed plan to enter the workforce after high school. 10% 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 (32%), Arts, Broadcasting, Film, Printing or Journalism (32%), Health, Science or Biotechnology (29%), EMS, Firefighter or Police Officer or Military (26%) and Education or Training (20%).

Youth feelings are mixed about their community providing a good quality of life.

31% of survey respondents rate their community as an above average to excellent place to live as a youth. 25% 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.

23% of youth surveyed have a business now and 46% are interested in owning their own business in the future.

Less than half of youth surveyed would like to live in the local area in the future.

41% of youth surveyed picture themselves living in their hometown area in the future. This is substantially more than the combined 28% who indicated very strong likelihood to stay or return to their hometown area (15% stay and 13% return).

Among reasons given for living in their hometown area in the future, 55% indicated it is a good place to raise a family. 48% noted family ties in the community, 32% indicated job or business opportunity and 32% ranked quality school and health care as important factors in their desire to live in their hometown area in the future.

Conversely, 65% noted career opportunity elsewhere, 64% marked make more money elsewhere and 48% indicated crime, drugs and safety concerns as reasons they would not live in their hometown area in the future. 44% indicated lack of entertainment as a reason.

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 29%, followed by more local job opportunities for youth at 29%. More local shopping and restaurant options was ranked third at 23%, and additional opportunities to be involved in community events and projects came in fourth at 19%.

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

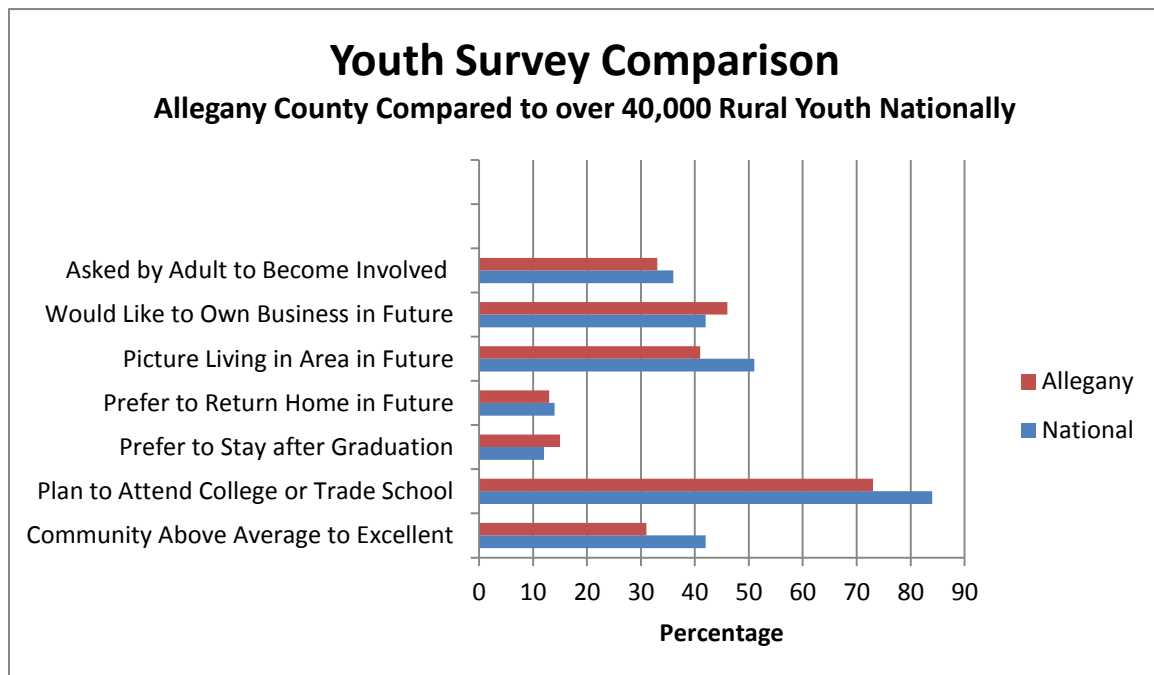
33% of youth surveyed indicated that adults have asked for their input on what would make their community a better place to live for teens. 75% stated they would volunteer if asked by an adult community leader to become involved in making their community better.

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

84% of survey respondents stated that they currently have access to high-speed Internet at home. 53% indicated that access to high-speed Internet would be a very important factor in their decision about where to live in the future. 6% responded that this would not be important or somewhat important in their decision.

Allegany Survey Results Compared to National Data:

Over the past decade, the survey conducted with Allegany County 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 Allegany County compared to the national youth data.



Specific ideas to make our community better:

- Add more things for youth to enjoy
 - Stores
 - Playgrounds
 - Restaurants
- More jobs, including jobs for youth
- Have more opportunities to help other people and volunteer
- Clean up our community
 - Pick up trash and recycle
 - Fix up houses and streets
- Reduce drugs and crime rates

Focus Group Themes:

The outcome of the youth focus groups was community models created by the participants working in small groups. When students were asked to describe the community in three words, the following were the most prevalent:

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|--------------|-----------|---------|
| • Unsafe | Sports | Jobless |
| • Historical | Cold | Small |
| • Mountains | Beautiful | Boring |
| • Poor | Friendly | Old |
| • Drugs | Dirty | |

When asked what they liked and disliked:

Likes:

- Development
- Beautiful Mountains
- History
- Relaxing
- Festivals/Events
- Churches
- The canal
- Everyone knows each other
- Near big cities
- Wildlife & trees
- Family & friends
- Bike/hiking trails
- Restaurants
- Schools
- Sports
- Limited traffic
- YMCA

Dislikes:

- Little recreation & entertainment
- Limited job opportunities
- Run-down neighborhoods
- Small selection of stores
- Violence
- Low population
- Transportation
- Not clean
- Old
- Crime- unsafe areas
- Drugs
- Bullies and bad people causing destruction

The community models included multi-purpose skyscrapers with various amenities, key services central to the community, addition of more stores, restaurants, services for those in need, and increased technology, parks and jobs.

Youth Engagement Assets:

An inventory of opportunities available to youth in our community was compiled. Career development and civic engagement activities seem to be less than desired.

Town Hall Meeting and Next Steps:

Results from the survey and focus groups were shared and suggestions for action were discussed. The Youth Engagement Workgroup will be further analyzing the data and following up on next steps. Possible actions include: engaging youth in community improvement activities such as home repair and clean up, offering programs to help youth and parents dream a positive future story, and communicating more with youth.

Questions regarding this report should be directed to:

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