

YOUTH  
UNITED FOR CHANGE

VOTA!



FROM "BE SAFE"

TO "WE'RE SAFE"

*A vision for safety in Kensington &  
an understanding of why we don't have safety now*

# FROM "BE SAFE" TO "WE'RE SAFE"

When people think of Kensington they think "that's not a safe place". Many of us agree. We know that things like gun violence and drugs have impacted our ability to feel safe in the neighborhood. At YUC, we started to wonder what if we just removed drug use or shoot outs from our area, would we truly feel safe?

**Safety:** *the condition of being protected from danger, harm or risk*

When we looked at the actual definition of safety, we saw that it was much more broad than the few things that we immediately think of when we think of what makes Kensington unsafe. We started to realize that for working class Black and Latino people there are all kinds of harms that affect us on a regular basis. Whether its not being able to afford our rent or property taxes, needles on the sidewalk, trash not being collected, understaffed schools and more! All of these things make it harder for all of us to live in the kinds of places we deserve to live; places that are positive, healthy and supportive of all of us thriving.

We know that we live in a society where everyone's ability to live good and healthy lives is impacted both by our individual choices as well as by how the whole system functions. People who look like us and live in neighborhoods like ours often experience the most of that impact in a negative way, even if we try our hardest to make "good" personal choices. Because we are not wealthy and because of our race/ethnicity, we don't get to start off in a place that helps us reach our full potential. We don't get to live in communities that are protected from all the harms that places like Kensington experience...

but we believe that we can!

**Everyone deserves the ability to live safely, no matter how much they make, no matter where they live or what they look like.**

We, at YUC, believe that all of us should have safe neighborhoods, ones that are:

- S** *Supportive of community stability*
- A** *Have access to affordable resources that are accountable to us*
- F** *Be fully-funded & fulfilling places to live*
- E** *Are effective in addressing problems with empathy and empowers the community to do so, together*



# WHY IS THE NEIGHBORHOOD UNSAFE NOW?

Safety issues usually get blamed on the individual choices people make or don't make.

*"You didn't lock your door"*

*"You shouldn't have worn that!"*

*"They chose to steal so they deserve whatever happens to them!"*

*"If you stay in the streets, it's your fault. That's why I stay in my house!"*

But we know that it's not just people's choices that cause these issues. **People make choices based on what options they think they have.** If I don't have food, I make choices based on that. If I feel afraid, I make choices based on that.

## So who decides what kinds of options people have?

We know that when we really look at the root of things, the world that we live in determines who gets what in life. If we're working class, we go to schools that have less opportunities and resources than those who are wealthier. If we're people of color, we are treated differently than white people. This is because the world we live in creates these conditions. We then have to figure out how to deal with those conditions as we grow up. For example, if we have poorer schools, we have fewer long term choices in our lives. Some people are able to make something out of nothing, but not everybody can, nor should they be expected to. We all deserve as many choices about what our life can or should be, without the world limiting us because of our race, how much money we make or what our gender is. Unfortunately, our world is set up to systemically limit what options people from our community have in life.



## So what system do we live in?

There are 3 key parts of the system we live in:

**(1) only a few people own businesses and make decisions about what happens in our communities.**

This means only a few people make a lot of money while most of us struggle to make ends meet. It also means people who don't really know what we go through, tend to be in positions of power in society like in government, CEOs, etc.

**(2) we are more concerned about making money than about making sure we all have what we need to survive.**

Instead of making sure everybody has a safe place to sleep and eat, society tells us it's ok that people don't, simply because they can't afford it. We put money over people.

**(3) everyday people don't see the benefits from how hard they work.**

Even though we work hard and long hours, we hardly ever see the same kinds of gains that people with more money see in life. Despite what they say, most of us don't really get to have the American Dream no matter how hard we try.

**only a few people are in control**



**the  
world  
we have now**

**money over people**

**we don't benefit from our work**

## The system makes us into certain kinds of people

**All of us are shaped by the world we live in.** We generally understand that how kids are raised by their parents will shape who those kids become later in life. However, it's less understood that the way society operates also impacts who we are and who we will become. If I am told I am worthless my entire life, whether directly by people or indirectly in the way people treat me, I very well will grow up to believe and act as if I'm worthless.

In a society like ours, where working class people are told time and time again that if we just work hard enough we can make it out, that it's on us and nobody else, that our conditions we live in are dangerous and the people we are around are bad, we begin to believe this as true. It shapes us. **We begin to believe that the system is how it's supposed to be, that it's our fault if we don't become successful,** that we should look out for ourselves and no one else, that we should be fearful of our surroundings and those we live around.

**This isolation is something many community members acknowledged as a problem in the neighborhood.** On the flip side, many community members also identified that safe communities are ones where you know and help those around you, that people care for one another. If our society is structured to cause this amount of isolation from one another, how can we ever develop into the kinds of people who can come together to fight for one another and our community?

**We need a new way of doing things that brings us together, working together and building trust with each other instead of making us fearful of one another.** We need a new way of doing things that helps us see that we need each other to survive. A way of doing things that sees the structures we live in as the problem, not our community members. A way of doing things understands making us blame one another instead of the system actually keeps all of us down in different ways instead of helping each of us reach our fullest potential.



# It doesn't just make us isolated, it makes us think we can't be leaders

**The system doesn't only produce this kind of isolation, it also makes us believe that we are not capable of changing things.** Our schools don't teach us what we need to succeed and many of the jobs we end up in don't help us be the people we truly want to be. Our government doesn't invest in our neighborhoods and politicians don't listen to us. This isn't an accident. It, alongside with making us feel isolated, helps us to maintain the system as it is. We believe often "Who am I to have a say?" "I'm not smart enough" "I'm just a xyz while they're a abc" because we have been trained to believe that we fundamentally cannot be the ones who are in charge and make decisions over our lives and communities.

Even though society has made it so we don't have the skills we need and we often think we never will, we know that with work **we can build those skills.** We know that we can become the people who are able to fight for changes, who know what is best for our communities and can make decisions over what we want or do not want.

Like kids learn to walk while trying to walk, we must be given the opportunities to learn to make decisions by coming together and practicing how to make decisions. We must practice how to build honest and trusting relationships with one another, we must practice how to think about one another, we must practice having a voice and figuring out what steps we must take.

**Through practice, our muscles to do this get bigger.**

We no longer feel afraid to speak. We no longer feel that we are no able to do it. **We know that we can.**

But in order to get there, we must be brave enough to create the spaces for us to practice and we must fight for a world that no longer makes people feel as if they cannot be the ones to lead. **We have to create a system that from the get go teaches each of us that we have value and can be the ones who can decide.**



# **POLICING: DOES IT MAKE US SAFE?**

When we tend to think about “safety” we think about things like crime or interpersonal violence as the main things we need to be protected from. **Traditionally, we have used the police as a way to offer this kind of protection.** But if we 1. *Understand that safety is actually much broader than crime and interpersonal violence* and 2. *That society is actually structured in a way that causes people to live in unsafe conditions or make unsafe choices* then we must then ask what role does policing have in such a society.

In our current society, police act as a way to keep the system functioning as is. It stops people from questioning why society is the way it is, and instead helps us blame one another for the conditions we face or the choices one makes. If someone steals, we blame the person and call the police instead of asking what series of events led that person to be in a position where stealing makes the most sense to them?

**Policing controls a segment of the population who often already live in unsafe conditions and have fewer choices about their life to choose from.** It also helps control those who might have a few more choices in life, making them afraid to do anything outside of what the structure of society says is ok to do.

**Knowing this, then the police really help to just maintain the structure as it is.** It punishes those who have to engage in other means of survival in response to the conditions the structure puts us in and keeps the rest of us in line doing what the structures say we must do. Police don't help us address changing the structure, they keep it as it is. If we wish to change unsafe conditions, we must identify solutions for our communities that actually change the structures that produce the conditions we face.

**Police are bandaid solutions but don't actually address the majority of safety issues.**



# WHAT SYSTEM WOULD WE NEED TO ACTUALLY HAVE SAFETY?

The system we live in is one where only a few people make a lot of money and in order to do so, we don't get paid our fair wages so our bosses can keep the majority of the money. This system means that we ultimately won't have the things that we need and we are left with fewer options in order for some people to have a lot of options.

We need a system that allows all of us to have what we need to survive and participate in making sure that is the case. Instead of isolation, we work together. Instead of a few having what they need, we all do.

## **(1) all of us can make decisions and have a say.**

Instead of a few people being the boss and people who don't have our experiences leading, we all are able to decide what happens to the community.

## **(2) we prioritize people, not money.**

We ensure that everybody has what they need to do well in society; food, housing, healthcare, education, support, etc as opposed to expecting people to make do with what they have if they are working class.

## **(3) we all benefit from the work we do.**

Instead of just a few people gaining a lot from the work that a majority of us do, we all see the gains.

**all of us can make decisions and have a say**



**the  
world  
we need**

**we prioritize people, not money**

**we all benefit from the work we do**

# WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?

## The world we have

**A latino boy is born in Kensington to parents who did not graduate high school.**

His parents get **many different jobs** while he's growing up, **leaving him often alone** at the house.

**His homework often was late** and due to one of his parent's losing their job, they were **evicted, leading to them living in a shelter.**

The boy continues to **live in and out of shelters and falls behind in school.** He eventually does not see the point in school and **feels he's just too stupid** to get it.

## the world we need

A latino boy is born in Kensington to parents who graduated from high school because they had supports to make it through when they struggled.

His **parents were able to get jobs in fields they were interested in** and while they couldn't always be at home with him, **he was able to go to a local community center** where he learned new skills and built relationships with other kids his age.

The boy struggles with math but **is able to attend after school programs** where he gets the support he needs. When his family has to move due to financial issues, the community center is **able to help them find affordable housing** in time for their move.

The boy eventually **grows to love school because he learns things that interest him** and he feels his teachers care about him. While his parents have to work, his school works to ensure that **his family is kept up to date on his progress** and that they have a relationship with the school community.

**After being jumped one day, the boy begins to distrust his peers**, leading to fights in school. Because he is a low performing student and he fights, his **school labels him a “problem” child**.

After a number of suspensions, **the boy stops going to school** and just hangs out with some friends in the neighborhood. **They begin stealing** small things to eat during their days.

Quickly, **the stealing progresses to mugging** people. The group beat up a man to get his wallet. The police are called and **the boy gets arrested**.

**The boy goes to jail** where he ends up beaten by other inmates. The boy becomes even more distrustful of others. When he leaves he is **unable to get a job and goes back to stealing** to make ends meet.

**The boy continues to build strong relationships** with his peers, family and school community where he eventually is **asked to run to represent his class** on a student government board.

**The boy is elected to the student government. He regularly talks to his peers** about what things they want to see happen at the school and helps get them accomplished at the board.

As time goes on, the boy begins to get ready to graduate. **He wants to go to school locally** so he can volunteer in the neighborhood on weekends to teach other kids who struggle with math. **His teachers and other local community members support him** in his college search and **make sure he has the supplies he needs** on his first day of school.

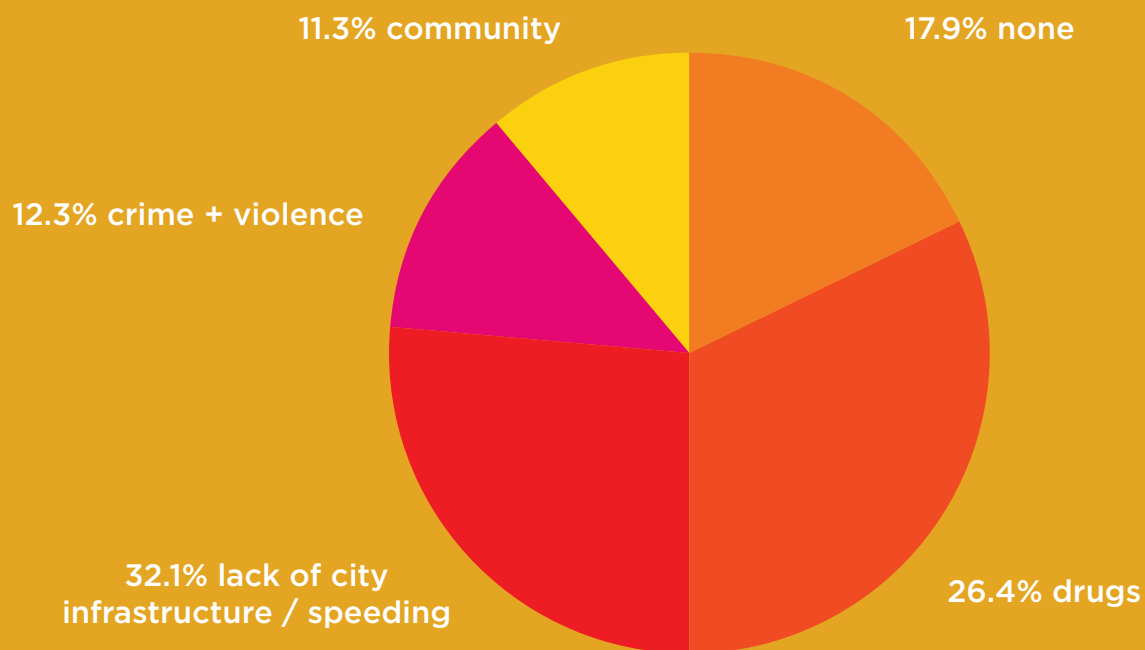
**The boy goes on to college** where he learns to be a teacher. Upon graduation, he starts **working at his local elementary school** as a math teacher.

**WHICH WOULD YOU RATHER HAVE?**

# BACKING UP OUR ARGUMENT

*In the summer of 2019, members of YUC surveyed community members all over West Kensington about their understanding of safety, their concerns about the neighborhood and whether they agreed with our safety framework. This is what they said:*

## biggest safety concerns



**When digging deep, this is what community members said made them feel safe:**

- we **solve problems** together
- **knowing everyone** + living somewhere for a long time
  - **believing in something bigger**
  - **clean and more areas to play**
- we talk to one another and **treat each other like family**
- the neighborhood is **invested in**

# HOW DOES OUR COMMUNITY FEEL?

**“I agree with the Safety Framework. I think that it is a lack of fully funded resources that make it not a fullfilling place to live.”**

**“People are disadvantaged because of lack of resources. These are good questions.”**

**“I agree, information is not being [effectively given out] and that city officials are not respectful to the community.”**

**“that’s how [the community] should be.”**

**“Everything [resonates]. Alot of people think about themeselves and it leaves people homeless.”**

