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## **Bucks County Cares Youth Council Initiative**

### **Case for Support: Need and Opportunity**

BC Cares serves school age youth in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The population we serve includes students that attend Central Bucks School District, Quakertown Community School District, Pennridge School District, Council Rock School District, home schoolers, and other charter and independent school students.

The post pandemic world we are navigating has brought with it new sets of challenges. Organizations like The Jed Foundation have been researching how young people are affected by the current cultural and political climates. Their report on youth suicide found that 60% of youth ages 16-25 say they are “very” or “extremely” worried about climate change. More than two-thirds also reported being “very” or “somewhat” stressed about our nation’s future.

Similarly, The Trevor Project reports that more than 70% of LGBTQ youth often have stress and anxiety due to current issues such as efforts to restrict abortion access, gun violence, and police brutality.

Recently, The Walton Family Foundation and Gallup Gen Z Panel reported that young people worry about their ability to find financial stability in the future. They are concerned that their education isn’t giving them the tools they will need to thrive.

These findings are all measurements of the internal struggles young people are facing. These struggles can be amplified by a deficiency in support systems, mental health challenges, and tensions brought on by local struggles within their communities. This only covers the small scale themes occurring with so many families throughout the country. It isn’t even the whole picture.

According to the Newport Academy, a provider of mental health support and services nationwide: Vicarious trauma, or Secondary PTSD has become commonplace among adolescents as social media and the world wide web amplify disturbing events from around the world.

As a foundation that works directly with youth and students, our Youth Council Initiative is designed to directly address these alarming trends. It is our hope that the success of the pilot year will show that the initiative is replicable throughout all 13 school districts in Bucks County, and beyond.

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In our framework, we have adopted a research based approach from the Search Institute called Developmental Relationships. The five key elements of Developmental Relationships are:

- **Express Care:** Show me that I matter to you.
- **Challenge Growth:** Push me to keep getting better.
- **Provide Support:** Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.
- **Share Power:** Treat me with respect and give me a say.
- **Expand Possibilities:** Connect me with people and places to broaden my world.

These elements are rooted in creating and sustaining positive relationships regardless of the color of their skin, how much money their family has, their gender identity or sexual orientation, or the language they speak at home.

These relationships are for providing two-way development, not simply the socialization or training of young people. It allows them to participate in their own self discovery, the shaping of their own lives, and finding how they wish to contribute to the world.

The Developmental Relationships implementation and study conducted by the Search Institute has shown a measure of:

- Increased academic growth and learning
- Increased social and emotional growth and learning
- Increased sense of personal responsibility
- Reduced engagement in a variety of high-risk behaviors

Benjamin J. Houlter, the CEO of the Search Institute, says it best:

*“We have to agree that all young people deserve to feel like they are people of value and they are safe. When we establish that and provide access to meet their basic needs, it’s pretty amazing to see their resilience. And if we move beyond that and begin thinking about their aspirations and potential, we can create experiences that challenge them to grow, expand their possibilities and connect them to bigger things - opportunities, resources and networks.”*

BC Cares sees the need for creating programs like our Youth Council Initiative. We believe it will foster the growth of Developmental Relationships for students, families and communities. We are in a position to bring this initiative to life for the 24-25 school year, and are incredibly excited for the opportunity.

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Sources:

*The Jed Foundation* Youth Suicide: Current Trends and the Path to Prevention. 2023 Dec

*The Trevor Project* Negative Impacts of Anti-LGBTQ Policies on LGBTQ Youth *By: Trevor News*. 2023 Jan

*Walton Family Foundation and Gallup Gen Z Panel*. 2023 Sept

*Newport Academy* How National Tragedies Create Secondary PTSD. 2022 Jan

*Search Institute* The intersection of developmental relationships, equitable environments, and SEL {Insights & Evidence Series} 2020