



Salisbury University's
Presidential Citizen Scholars Program

PCS WHITEPAPER

COMBATING THE YOUTH
HOMELESS CRISIS THROUGH
COMMUNITY ACTION

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MEET THE SCHOLARS



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Senior International Business major, Dec. 2023, Salisbury University Football Player, Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society.

Combating the Youth Homeless Crisis Through Community Action

PURPOSE

The mission of our Presidential Citizen Scholars (PCS) Capstone Project was to connect and expand adequate professional development and educational resources for youth experiencing homelessness, specifically with consideration toward LGBTQ+ youth in the community.

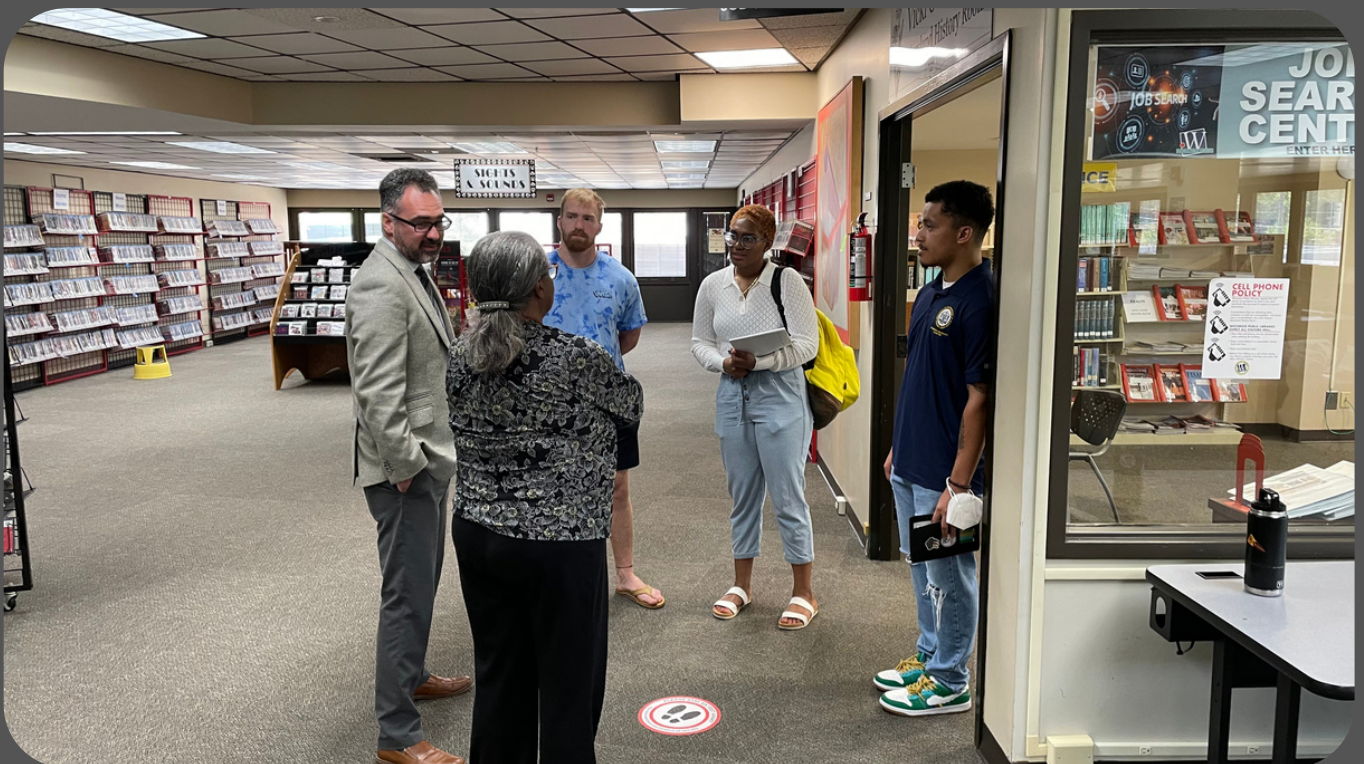
BACKGROUND

Our group was called upon to conduct this project through initial conversations with City leaders and community members. When we asked City leaders what some of the most pressing dilemmas, also known as wicked problems, were in the City of Salisbury we were told that youth homelessness was one of the most pressing concerns.

Youth, especially LGBTQ+ youth, are disproportionately impacted by the homelessness crisis due to the stigmas attached to the marginalized identities they may hold, combined with legal age barriers that may prohibit them from receiving various services. The COVID-19 Pandemic only heightened these disparities.

INITIAL STEPS

After meeting with City leaders in our first semester of the PCS Program, we began to construct our project around personal lived experiences in combination with the growing youth homelessness concerns in the Mid-Atlantic Region and the Delmarva Peninsula. This led us to begin collaborating with the Wicomico Public Library.



In our second semester, we worked towards making our project sustainable, along with providing as many resources as possible to youth at risk of homelessness. We determined that the specific location of the Wicomico Public Library Sarbanes Branch in Downtown Salisbury was a perfect location to reach the homeless population, specifically youth at risk of homelessness because of the prevailing community role that the WPL fills in the region.

We had numerous meetings with Library leadership to discuss areas of concern as it pertains to homeless youth. The WPL leaders educated us on the various needs of youth experiencing homelessness which included: luggage to carry clothes, business attire, access to jobs, and access to GED programs which are led on-site at the Sarbanes Branch by Wor-Wic Community College.

With the information we gained from the WPL, we were able to narrow our project to become sustainable in combating the homeless crisis by gathering community resources in one setting through a resource fair that youth can access easily and that Library leadership would be committed to maintaining at least twice a year.

LUGGAGE DRIVE

Many people who may benefit from a public resource and job fair are also those who may be forced to resort to 'couch-surfing' between relatives' or friends' homes. 'Couch-surfing' is a term that describes frequently moving from one host home to the next, often getting basic sleep accommodations, i.e. sleeping on a couch. Typically youth and individuals who couch surf, do so out of necessity because they do not have a consistent and safe home they can return to every day.

People may find themselves in this situation for a multitude of reasons. We determined an effective way to improve their quality of life instantly would be to provide them with a more dignified and secure way to transport their belongings from place to place with collapsable bags. We collected donations on SU's campus as well as in the community where people could donate gently used or new bags. We also received \$800 of mini-grant funding where we were able to buy new bags. We collected over seventy bags that we delivered to our community partners at the Wicomico Public Library. Where bags could be distributed as needed by the WPL and local nonprofit Fenix Youth Project.



BRIDGING THE GAP

Throughout our PCS Capstone Project, we found ourselves in a unique position because our project required the collaboration of multiple organizations at the City, County, and State levels. By being in this position we were able to help bridge the unspoken gap between organizations.

Our community research revealed that there are a plethora of resources that are at the disposal of individuals to use, and there are organizations that are different entities providing the same resources. One of our primary conclusions throughout our project was that there can sometimes be a lack of communication regarding

services and resources between organizations in the community. We believe that the Wicomico Public Library is uniquely postured to be a go-between for many nonprofits, community members, and government agencies. The WPL was instrumental in ensuring that our homeless youth resource event will continue to make a sustainable impact in the Salisbury community. WPL Executive Director, Seth Hershberger and his staff are committed to the partnerships created through projects like this one as a line of communication between organizations to provide resources such as education, job training, clothes, shelter, and internet access that are essential elements of human dignity.



PARTNERING WITH WPL

Our partnership with Cristi Richardson, Community Specialist with the Wicomico Public Library at the Sarbanes Branch will ensure that our PCS Capstone Project will be live beyond our time as students at Salisbury University and community members in Wicomico County.

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COMMUNITY LEADERS

Seth Hershberger (WPL Director /
Wor-Wic Public Libraries)

Cristi Richardson (Community
Support Specialist / Wor-Wic
Public Libraries)

Joan Harris (Case Coordinator /
City of Salisbury)

Brett Sanders (Housing &
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Jaime Riley (Director of
Partnership for Families and
Children / Wicomico County)

Amber Green (Director / Fenix
Youth Project)

SU CAMPUS LEADERS

Crystal Dickerson (Employer
Relations Manger/ SU Career
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Carolyn Lepre (President / SU)

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Ryan Weaver (PCS Director /
PACE/IDIS)

Pope Sandy (Director / PACE)

Joyce Green (AmeriCorps/
ShoreCorps student / PACE)

Erin Burgee (AmeriCorps/
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The Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) is a resource center where the SU community, local government, nonprofit and public groups can access knowledge and information. PACE draws on the interdisciplinary expertise of SU faculty, students, staff, and community partners. As a nonpartisan contributor, the Institute organizes projects and programs that are customized to fit the particular needs of the Eastern Shore community. For more information about PACE, visit www.salisbury.edu/pace (or email PACE@salisbury.edu).



The PCS Program prepares students to be community leaders through civic scholarship and community action. Over three semesters, Scholars meet with members of the community to identify and research an issue that will culminate in a Capstone Project. Scholars are supported through Salisbury University's Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) and the Office of the President. SU's highest purpose is "to empower students with knowledge, skills, and core values that contribute to lifelong learning and active citizenship in a democratic society." This elite program builds on SU's highest purpose by offering students of all majors and disciplines the opportunity to engage in the life of the community, develop habits of democratic citizenship, and become experienced civic leaders. The PCS Program operates under the direction and guidance of Ryan Weaver, PACE/IDIS Lecturer (rvweaver@salisbury.edu).