

2024

Reviving the Spirit of

Hope



The Common Place

5736 Chester Avenue

Philadelphia, PA, 19143

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Southwest Philadelphia

Southwest Philadelphia (SWP) is a resilient community. From our state representatives, community development corporations, to block captains and residents, this large community relies on partnerships to acquire, connect, and provide residents the resources needed to make SWP a sustainable and vibrant community. Originally called Kingsessing, the vast area was a low-lying marshland. Before the American Revolution, the region served as a busy conduit between Philadelphia and Baltimore and also attracted farmers whose livestock grazed the area.

During the 20th century, Southwest Philadelphia has seen marked changes in population. World War I prompted a significant shift in demographics when both Black and White families moved north to escape the war. Black residents in the 1920s accounted for about 25% of the population. Racial tensions and White flight between the mid-1980s and 2000 led to another dramatic shift in demographics and again by 2010. Nearly 40,000 people call Southwest Philadelphia home. Spanning three zip codes, numerous neighborhoods, four main business corridors, and one police department, SWP is now a community on the fringe of opportunity and access to resources.

The issues that plague this collection of neighborhoods are complex and interrelated: poverty, joblessness, poor-performing schools, access to affordable high-quality nutrition, disproportionately poor health outcomes, violence, and childhood trauma.

A community in decline, SWP has a high concentration of young, single-mother households, 35% of whom live below the poverty line.

In Southwest Philadelphia, a staggering 23% of residents have not earned a high school diploma (or its equivalency), 40% have attained only a high school diploma, with only 6% graduating from college with a bachelor's degree, far below the local, state, and national levels of 18%.

Designated as a food desert, SWP lacks access to fresh, affordable, and nutritious food. While "corner stores" are scattered throughout the area, food is prepackaged, often not fresh, and almost always overpriced. There is also an abundance of fast-food franchises and unregulated beer outlets. Supermarkets offering affordable, healthy options are about 1-2 miles in any direction, making routine trips to the grocery store cumbersome for those who rely on public transportation. The lack of healthy

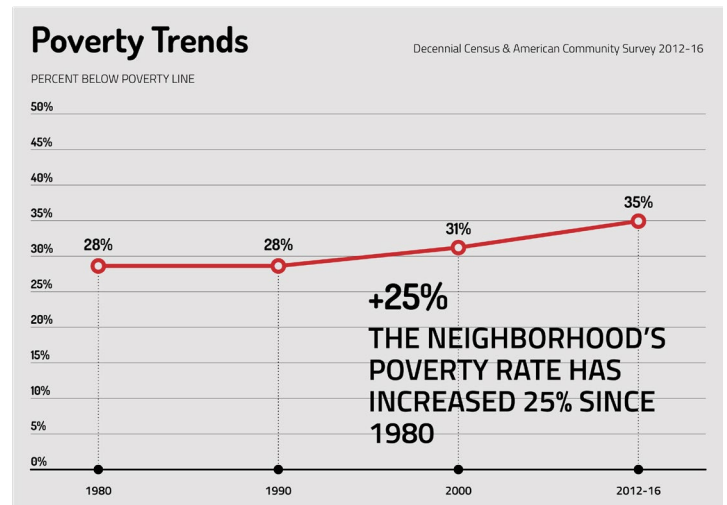
options combined with the accessibility of cheap, processed foods and alcoholic beverages result in disproportionately poor health outcomes – obesity, diabetes, and heart disease – for Southwest Philly residents. In addition, the effects on school-aged children living in a food desert adversely affect their ability to focus during instruction. Hunger is a significant contributor to existing trauma, behavioral issues, and poor academic achievement.

The Center for Disease Control describes Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood, contributing to the development of long-term health and mental health sequelae. Many ACEs, such as the experience

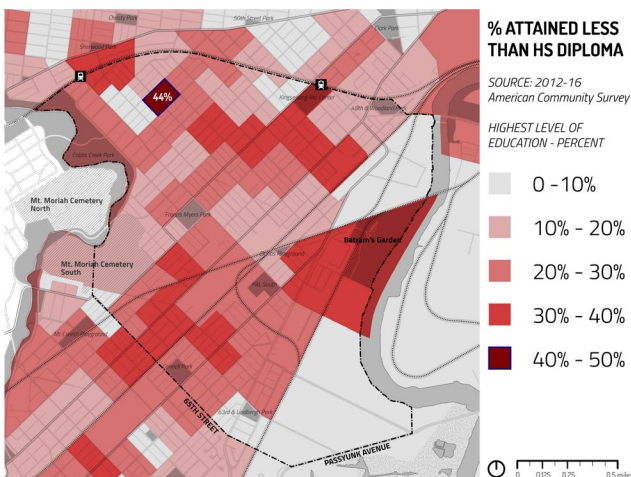
of racism, having a family member in prison, physical and emotional neglect, sexual abuse, or having a substance-abusing household member, are correlated with the experience of living in poverty; in fact, they are more prevalent in urban settings. ACEs can be used to indicate the potential impact of traumatic childhood experiences later in life. In many cases, the experiences mentioned above are significant and life-long determinants of one's future physical and mental health. The Public Health Management Corporation's 2013 ACEs study found that 30-45% of Southwest Philadelphia residents have experienced four or more ACEs.

SOUTHWEST PHILADELPHIA

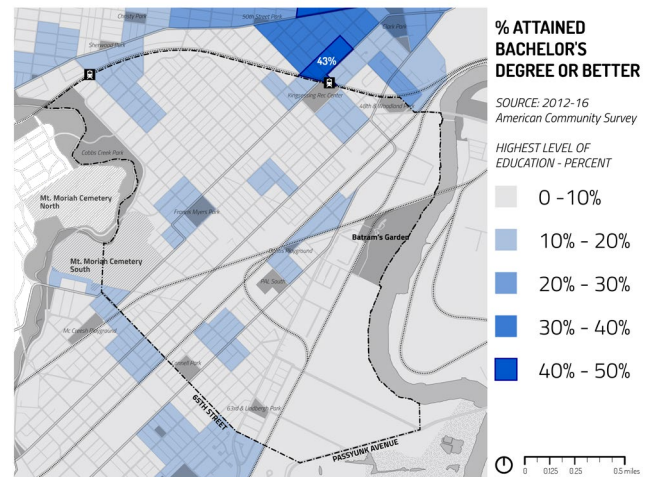
Poverty Trends & Educational Attainment



HIGH SCHOOL



COLLEGE



The Common Place

A SACRED PLACE TO DO LIFE TOGETHER

The Common Place (TCP) provides holistic support to children and their families in SW Philadelphia through educational programs, food sovereignty, community collaboration and welcome.

TCP was founded in October 2013 to address the needs of children experiencing the realities of:

- Poverty,
- Underfunded, under-performing, and overcrowded schools, and
- Violence.

Our goal is to broaden the horizons of children through art, music, and faith, while providing nutritious meals and a safe place to be creative, explore their imaginations, and hone their academic skills and talents.

The after-school program has a robust offering of modules such as:

- Financial Literacy – Children learn about banking, credit, budgeting, and responsible spending
- Cooking – Children learn how to cook nutritious meals with fresh food they can make at home with their families

#inReallife

In 2018, two preteen sisters who lived with their elderly aunt attended TCP's after-school program. Both parents were absent and their caretaker, who struggled with alcoholism, did her best. Realizing the need for a role model, TCP leaders took special notice of the two young girls. Beyond helping with school work and involving them in activities like music and cooking, the TCP community purchased clothing and other personal items for the young ladies when they needed it. Reviving the Spirit of Hope!





HOPE IN ACTION

WE ARE INSPIRED BY THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH,

Work for the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have called you... Pray to the lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper

- JEREMIAH 29:7, NIV

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, TCP was forced to halt our core programming in order to comply with mandated state-wide mitigation efforts. In partnership with Salt & Light, the congregation that occupies the sanctuary within our building, we were able to quickly assess the needs of our community around food and began a food pantry. We connected with local food distribution centers and provide meals to our neighbors from our parking lot twice a week. In addition, we understood how the pandemic displaced children from school and the impact this had on families to provide two additional meals during a challenging time.

This challenge exacerbated Southwest Philadelphia's food insecurity problem. During one of our food giveaway days, a young father who had heard about our food pantry program walked to TCP. As our incoming Executive Director, Christopher Holland, gave him a few bags of food, the man expressed the hopelessness he felt during this time. The

pandemic displaced his three children from school and now, as a result of civil unrest, his employer Save-A-Lot was closed. It had been damaged during violent protests that gripped the city the night before and there was nowhere to purchase food in the area. He couldn't draw an income or purchase any food.

#inRealLife

As the pandemic began to shut down Philadelphia, civil unrest stemming from the racial injustice protests severely damaged shopping centers in Southwest Philadelphia.

The Common Place

BUILDING ON A
LEGACY OF LOVE



The church edifice located on the corner of 58th Street & Chester Avenue has been a beacon of hope for the Southwest Philadelphia community for over 100-plus-years. The Common Place is building on that legacy of community service and ministry through supporting families, empowering and educating children, and transforming lives through impactful relationships.

WE'RE NOT ALONE...

We understand that what we are proposing amounts to a massive undertaking. However, we aren't alone. Your partnership and our relationship with the congregation of **Salt & Light Church** will help us fulfill our vision. Salt & Light has been a driving force of community service and a beacon of hope in Southwest Philadelphia for over 100 years. In fact, our partnership with this seasoned church helps us to reach people in ways we could not otherwise. While The Common Place provides educational programming and community service through collaboration; the Salt & Light church also provides volunteers from the community. This is evidenced by the success of the food pantry program.

and secure funding, food, and volunteers. The program serves an increasing number of families (currently, about 80 families) through weekly distribution as well as holiday drives that include clothing and toiletries.

The church also provides another essential aspect of reviving the hope of this community: it speaks to the spiritual and emotional needs of Southwest Philly families, uplifting and encouraging hearts, and motivating residents towards meaningful and progressive action. The service of faith that Salt & Light provides is just as important as the programming resources TCP makes available to community residents.

Both organizations work in tandem to seek

Touching Lives

"I would like to thank The Common Place Aftercare Program. After my parents retired, they moved out of state. My parents were my support team and their move made a huge impact in my life. While I am happy for my parents, a lot for me has changed. The Common Place is very close to home and my daughter gets walked right over to the aftercare program. It's a blessing that you are open on days that the school is closed. I would not have anyone to watch my daughter if you did not offer this. Thank you, Common Place!"

- Dominique Pratt, Parent 2018 – 2019

"I have been volunteering in the after-school program since last fall, usually one afternoon a week. Kids are kids wherever you go. They also love learning new things, so I have tried to introduce them to the cultures of other countries. We are using the Little Passports kits. I am constantly impressed with how much they want to learn. Every day brings a new awareness of the disparity between their world and the opportunities/experiences and resources children ought to enjoy. I think the Scholars Program is doing wonderful work to help bridge that gap."

- Linda Walters, volunteer (2017)

"My child has attended the aftercare program for the past 4 years...I really appreciate the homework assistance and all of the enrichment programs offered. I know my child is in a safe and loving environment....and she is usually not ready to go home because she is having so much fun. The staff and teachers genuinely care for each child and everyone is like family. I hope this program will continue to be accessible for families who will benefit from it."

- Tamica L Smith, parent (2018)

"We've had some problems at other programs, but you guys are doing a great job with my son. Don't let up. We appreciate everything you do."

-Thomas M, parent (2020)



Hope



Reviving the Spirit of Hope

MEET CARL

industry, with a certification in Pennsylvania's Safe Serv program and experience in a school-type environment, Carl was an ideal candidate for the job.

How fitting it is that our programs not only helped Carl with employment, but also helped him reinvest in his community. Carl's story is not just about his new job, rather this story's impact has greater significance: the restoration of personal dignity, community partnership, real opportunity, community involvement, and hope.

Carl lives three city blocks from The Common Place. Out of work for some time, Carl was one of thousands of Pennsylvanians caught in the backlog of unemployment claims. Hours of attempts to contact the unemployment compensation office yielded only busy signals. In a hopeless situation, Carl needed help. And TCP had a position.

Since March 2020, Carl has worked part time as our Food Pantry manager. Having previously worked in the food-service



A VISION OF HOPE IN ACTION

In seven short years, one thing is clear: God is changing lives through The Common Place! Our vision, though, is larger because the needs are great. Men, women, and families – all made in the image of God – deserve an opportunity. Our vision is for Southwest Philly to be a flourishing community, one that is thriving, not just surviving. We must extend our reach. This means establishing

a high-quality preschool, expanding our after-school program to multiple sites, and launching a produce market on our premises.

The Board of Trustees of TCP is also committed to a plan to acquire vacant and/or blighted lots and convert them into urban farms. Produce grown on the farm will be sold at our produce market and local restaurants. This will impact Southwest Philly's local economy in a positive way through reinvestment and jobs, while adding green spaces that beautify the neighborhood.

Our plan enlarges on our mission to holistically support families in Southwest Philly. We are asking God to revive the Spirit of Hope as we provide the necessary resource of faith through action. What God is doing at The Common Place is meaningful. It is important. It is a work of restorative justice and compassion. We are not just serving children and their families in Southwest Philly through educational programming, but we are building community and pulling them close.

We believe that in this special "community of the forgotten" are special people who have a purpose and that their contributions, faith, industry, creativity, families, and their lives matter. God is reviving the Spirit of Hope in this community.



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THE COMMON PLACE - EXECUTIVE STAFF

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Mr. Gene J. Burke, *Director of Operations*

Huan Baum, PhD Candidate, *Program Director*

Rev. Ashley Rossi, *Director of Donor Relations*

WAYS TO GIVE

Making a contribution to The Common Place can be accomplished through these methods:

- **Credit, Debit, and/or Check**
- **Online (The Presbyterian Foundation or PayPal)**
- **Appreciated Stocks**
- **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**

The Common Place is registered 501(c)(3) organization.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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