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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Youth Engagement Strategy

January 2023–December 2025



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Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago

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Culminating from a robust planning period funded by the Catholic Sisters Initiative of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago (CCAC) developed a three-year youth engagement strategy informed by local youth and parents, community leaders, effective practices, and research.

Between January 2023 through December 2025, CCAC, Catholic Sisters, and our partner organizations will implement an ambitious yet focused strategy, described here:

- **Program model and population served:** CCAC, together with Maryville Academy, will design, launch, and manage the Peace Corner Mentoring Program, a community-based initiative that will use a two-generation approach to support middle school youth (fifth through eighth grade; typically 10 to 14 years old) and their families.¹
- **Our overarching goal** is for the youth that we serve to successfully navigate the critical early adolescence period and transition into high school as resilient, self-confident leaders who pursue healthy lifestyle choices, positive social relationships, and civic engagement.
- **The problems we are working to address:** We are tackling three interconnected obstacles that youth from our under-resourced communities often face: lack of access to safe, welcoming, and accessible spaces; the need for positive and enduring relationships with trusted adults, in addition to those in their family unit; and support for parents and caregivers on their journeys. Our framework is grounded in three core beliefs: youth benefit from positive relationships with trusted adults; they love their families and their communities; and they desire a safe, inclusive “home away from home” – especially during the middle school years.
- **A coordinated Catholic response:** As the Principal Agency, CCAC will provide leadership oversight, program design and development, and day-to-day management of the program. Under the leadership of Sister Catherine M. Ryan, O.S.F., our Implementing Partner, Maryville Academy, will provide case management and wraparound supports to the families of youth in the program. Concurrently, we will learn from, share with,

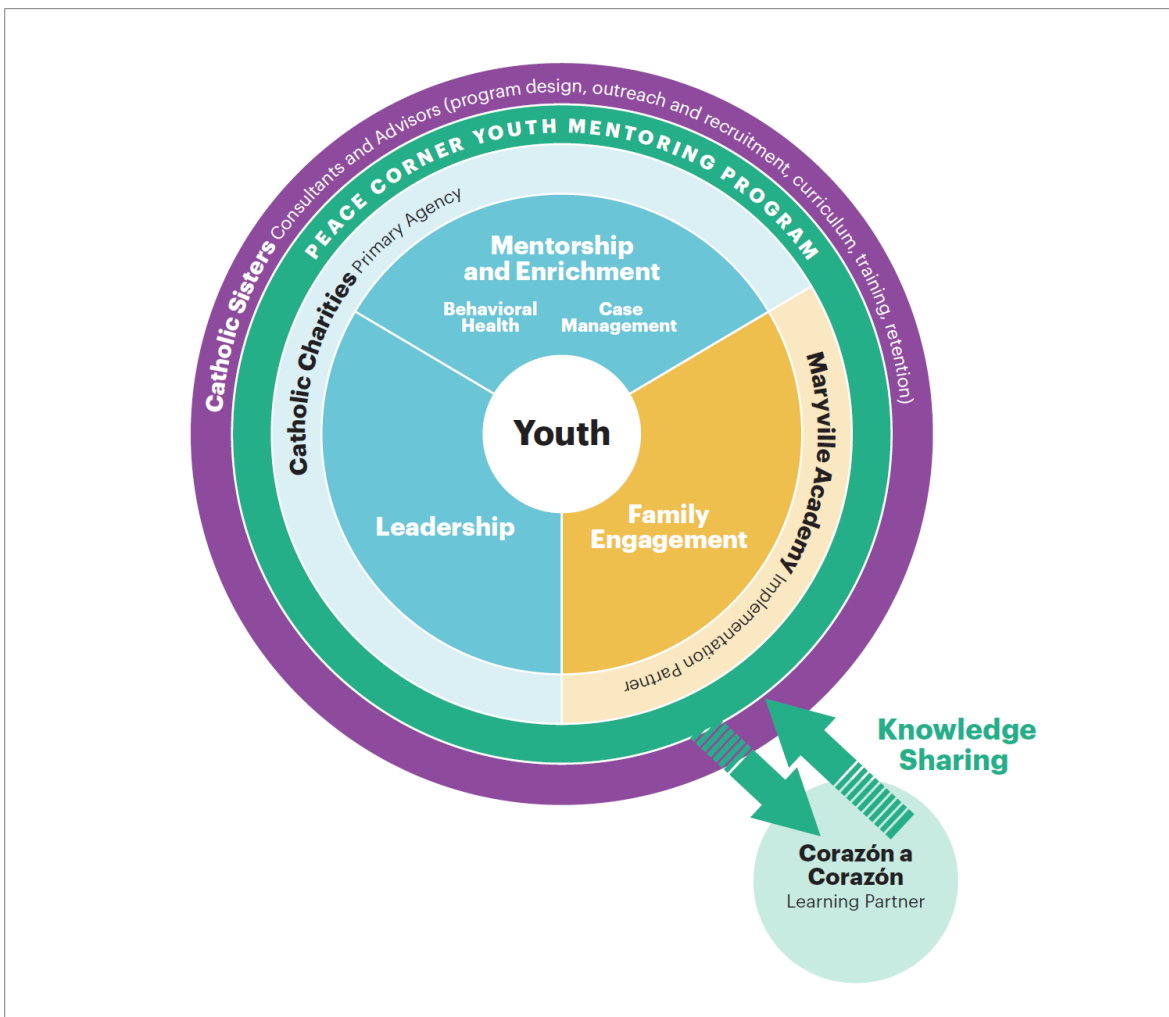
¹ A note about the term “middle school”: Within the City of Chicago (where our program will be situated) the majority of elementary schools are Kindergarten through 8th grade. Within these, middle school is often considered 5th through 8th grade, or ages 10 to 14.



and provide reciprocal support to our Learning Partner, Corazón a Corazón of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

- **Numbers served:** In Year 1, we will engage 225 youth and 25 parents and caregivers. In Year 2, we will engage 270 youth and 48 parents and caregivers, and in Year 3 we will work with 325 youth and 71 parents and caregivers. We will also impact at least 500 community residents annually through youth-led advocacy work.
- **Rigorous evaluation:** Notre Dame’s Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) will serve as our Research and Evaluation Partner and lead implementation and impact evaluations.

Peace Corner Youth Mentoring Program Model





Interconnected Program Elements

Through evidence-based programming, and together with their families, we will engage predominantly African American youth aged ten to 14 years old in grades five through eight through three interconnected program elements:

- **Intensive mentoring, enrichment activities, trauma-informed mental health services and case management**, all of which support their relationship capacity, emotional intelligence, and regulation skills;
- **opportunities for adolescents to develop and exercise their leadership skills**; and
- **simultaneous wrap-around support to youth, parents, and caregivers** to ensure youth are supported and developing in a safe, stable environment.

Youth in the Peace Corner Mentoring Program will enroll in one or more of three program tracks:

1. **Peace Plus**, our after-school program;
2. **Peace Camp**, our summer camp and spring break program; and
3. **Peace Matters**, our youth leadership council.

These tracks will be managed and supported by an onsite team of professional mentors and a full-time clinical case manager.

The Role of Catholic Sisters in Our Work

We are engaging the formal consulting services of two Catholic Sisters (Sister Miriam Pat Cummings, SSND and Sister Marie McKenna, SLW, LCSW) to inform program design, provide trainings on leadership and trauma-informed counseling, advise the program's future Youth Leadership Council, and support the spiritual development and resilience of youth. Perhaps most important, they will ensure the lens of Catholic Social Teaching is applied across the program and woven into its implementation.

In addition, we will also seek advice and counsel from CCAC's internal network of Catholic Sisters and other Sisters within the Archdiocese of Chicago and beyond to support and inform our work and community engagement efforts. We recognize that the impact of these existing relationships and the potential for new introductions will be a very valuable asset to our program and those we will serve.

To advance and leverage the specialization of other Catholic agencies, we will partner with Maryville Academy, a Sister-sponsored ministry in Austin, and Corazón a Corazón, an after-school mentoring program based in Blue Island, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. These partners share our goal of helping all people reach the fullness of their potential.



Measuring our Impact

We will measure our progress against four objectives, each of which is undergirded by measurable outputs and outcomes:

1. Youth will demonstrate an increase in their baseline of a) social and emotional well-being, b) quality of relationships, c) life skills, and d) civic engagement.
2. Family members who receive concrete “wrap around” services in partnership with Maryville Academy will secure resources, demonstrate improved confidence in parenting skills, develop a network of peer support, and build resilience.
3. The Catholic Sisters who consult with the Peace Corner will influence how youth perceive their own identity and worth, help staff improve their understanding of trauma-informed approaches, and design activities that reflect Catholic principles.
4. Corazón a Corazón and Peace Corner staff will lead more effective programs due to collaborative learning and support.

In addition, we will engage in robust impact and implementation evaluations – to truly understand our impact and to contribute to the field. As the end of this three-year strategy approaches, we will consider possibilities for scale, replication, and deepened collaboration.