

Community Heart & Soul®

Name of CHS Project/City, State: Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul, Carlisle, Mt Holly Springs, PA

Population: 21,289

Challenge: Reaching missing voices, bridging divides

Focus: Involving everyone, community engagement beyond town lines

Key Tool: Engagement Activities & Community Network Analysis

Brief Description/Summary of Community:

The historic towns of Carlisle and Mt. Holly Springs are in Cumberland County, PA. With tree-lined streets once walked on by George Washington, Molly Pitcher, and other early American icons, the area is rich in history. Located near Harrisburg and Gettysburg, the towns are easily accessible and offer plenty of outdoor recreational opportunities, shopping, and dining.

Greater Carlisle Heart & Soul “By the Numbers”:

- 1000 Stories Gathered
- 5 Heart & Soul Statements
- Over 10,000 people visit every year with the annual “Car Shows” in Carlisle

Local Condition:

Civic engagement was splintered and divided in the Greater Carlisle region. To encourage greater community involvement, the Community Action Network applied to the Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) to be one of three pilot communities to participate in Community Heart & Soul. In partnership with the PHC, the Great Carlisle Project (GCP) was formed in 2016. Following the Community Heart & Soul framework, members of the GCP, with the leadership of the Project Director, worked with their community to come together, listen to, and share stories about the cultural heritage of the community. Through the storytelling process residents came to know the "heart and soul" of their community - what matters most, how they relate to each other and to their landscape, and what they want for their future.

The hope was that Heart & Soul would become a forum where residents would gather to talk about community issues and create a process which would benefit the entire region, learning what people thought collectively to make the region a better place to live, work, and play.

Volunteer and Community Response:

Engagement activities went hand in hand with story gathering. Activities needed to transcend the physical boundary lines, which was key to reaching the most rural parts of the region. The Community Network Analysis was an eye opener for the team, helping them to think more broadly, not just about race but cultural identity as well. This was an important engagement strategy to reach voices that were missing.

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Volunteers were keen to help gather stories by recording oral histories. As they collected stories, they heard great ideas and were motivated to take action. Through the Heart & Soul process, residents became aware of all the ways they could be engaged and many who had not previously been involved began volunteering in their community.

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

Mt. Tabor Church, an original and long-forgotten African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, was rediscovered through Heart & Soul storytelling. Residents believed the building was beyond repair and had proposed tearing it down. However, this important landmark of African American history is now in the process of becoming registered under the National Register of Historic Places with the National Parks Service.

During story gathering it was revealed that racial bullying was happening in the high school. The students who heard the stories created a town hall meeting with students, parents, and educators to address the issue. They then crafted and delivered a letter to the school board outlining the issues and suggesting ideas for action. The school board was impressed with the students peaceful and respectful manner and the letter was the first of its kind to be presented to the school board.

YWCA, Hope Station, and the Cumberland County Historical Society came together to produce a social justice seminar to discuss social justice issues in the wider region of Cumberland County involving workplace, race, and immigration. This first partnership between these organizations showed the Historical Society how they can be relevant in community issues.

Cumberland County Historical Society created a new position, Outreach Manager, based on the data received from the stories gathered during Heart & Soul. This unique position works closely with community groups and organizations to forge partnerships that benefit the area.

