

**🥳👏👏 Shelby County YPAR Pilot KICKS OFF! 🥳👏👏**

1 message

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This week's Shelby County Youth Participatory Research Pilot Newsletter celebrates the project kickoff that happened this past Wednesday evening, October 4th, at the South Memphis Porter-Leath Early Childhood Academy! 🥳👏

**Everyone meets for the first time!**

The kickoff marked the first time that all the project participants—our Local Research Coordinators, the Opportunity Accelerator and Code for America teams, members of the Shelby County Youth and Education Steering Committee, and most importantly, our twelve young adult researchers and one alternate researcher—met in person!

Here are our researchers and their Local Research Coordinators at the end of the evening:

**Preparing for the work ahead**

The goal for the evening was to get to know each other and learn a bit more about Youth Participatory Action Research and the challenge of reconnecting opportunity youth.

Things kicked off with a networking bingo icebreaker. Everyone got a bingo sheet full of boxes with prompts like “Speaks another language” or “Has been to Graceland.” They had to find different attendees to sign off on a box that applied to them. Things went so well that we had to shift the object of the game to who had the most signatures because one of the researchers had Bingo in under 5 minutes. [Download a PDF of the Bingo Sheets.](#)



Introductions came next. Everyone got in a circle and shared their name, their neighborhood, a strength they bring to this project, and who they are doing this for. After that, the researchers heard from Shelby County Manager of Community Partnerships, Janet Lo, and County Mayor Lee Pace.



After a talk on Youth Participatory Action Research ([download a PDF of the deck](#)), and some delicious boxed meals, everyone rolled up their sleeves and got to work thinking about what leads youth to become disconnected. This was done through a variety of activities. The researchers reflected on “mural” prompts like “What connects us?”, “What divides us?”, and “What does neighborhood mean?” They wrote their responses on large sheets of paper on the wall.



Then everyone divided up into their teams: one for Frayser, coordinated by [Beyond Educating](#); one for Whitehaven, coordinated by [RESPECT the Haven](#); and a cross-Shelby County team coordinated by [The Collective Blueprint](#). Each team started work on one of three questions: (1) who are disconnected youth?, (2) what things are disconnecting youth?, and (3) where can we find disconnected youth? The teams rotated questions three times so everyone got a chance to contribute to each question.



The goal of these activities was to help all the researchers see that while they often had similar answers to these questions, there were places where their perspectives were different. They also got the chance to talk about what they wanted to learn about Opportunity Youth and what things they wanted to test.

While all these things were happening, members of the Youth and Education Steering Committee were there to listen and learn from the researchers. The evening finished with another circle and everyone recentring themselves on our goal of engaging 300 community members in this research.

## Next Steps

Over the next two weeks, the Researchers will train on YPAR concepts with our partners at the [Network for the Development of Children of African Descent \(NdCAD\)](#). These remote sessions will be recorded, archived, and made available to any organizations on the Youth and Education Subcommittee. The Session themes are:

- Questioning Narratives & Telling Our Own Stories
- Indigenous Approaches to Building & Sharing Knowledge
- YPAR as a Methodology
- Understanding Power Dynamics & Using Our Power to Influence Change

## Comments or Questions?

We want to hear from you! If you have any questions or comments about how the project is going, please reach out to the [shelbyYPAR@codeforamerica.org](mailto:shelbyYPAR@codeforamerica.org). We'd also LOVE feedback on how to improve future newsletters.

👁️ Be on the lookout next week for another update. 👁️

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### **Matt Bernius**

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