



Problem/Opportunity

While Kensington is known for poverty, drugs, and crime, our local projects enable grassroots change magnifying our community's voice. Many existing local efforts focus on public health/harm-reduction for transient residents struggling with substance use disorder. Fewer engage neighbors who feel besieged in our own neighborhood by powerful forces of a nationwide crisis. Loneliness exacerbates mental health challenges. While trash alleviation efforts do exist locally, few of them are done by local neighbors; larger nonprofits and city services clean, leaving young people apathetic or passive in relation to their own neighborhood. Meanwhile, due to few financial opportunities locally, teens are attracted to the drug trade for fast money. Empty lots and alleyways become arteries for the movement and stashing of drugs, and neighbors stay in their homes and isolated from each other. [Updated: July 2026]

Mission

Our mission: 1) holistically empowering teen neighbors 2) through paid work to restore, beautify, and build up the neighborhood of Upper Kensington [Updated: May 2024]

The mission has two parts. The first dimension involves the holistic empowerment of local teens, with a focus on these dimensions: financial, career, civic, social-emotional, spiritual. The second is the vehicle for connection with the teens - beautifying their blighted surroundings through greening, environmental justice work, as well as participating in other neighborhood-uplifting work while preventing violence and encouraging positive social-emotional and relational growth. [Updated: Oct 2026]

Vision

Our organization's current vision is to see all teens in our immediate vicinity (*scope: H - D Streets, Allegheny - Thayer*) engaged in productive activity, and part of a neighborhood fabric that takes a sense of pride in the cleanliness, beauty, safety, and connectedness of our community. Our goal in relation to beautification is 1) to turn all neglected lots (currently, dumping grounds + drug sales/use) within our current scope into green spaces and vegetable gardens for neighborly connection. Our goals in relation to teen empowerment are 1) to be known within our scope as the go-to organization for teens who are looking for extra work, volunteering opportunities, or neighborhood involvement, and 2) to connect 50-75 unique local teens in the 2026 year with paid local beautification work. [Updated: May 2026]

Values (Keywords + our definitions, Updated July 2026)

- **GrassROOTED** (Grassroots Action + Rooted Presence): Going straight to the root of problems to address them directly (cutting past red tape, saving money, learning skills along the way); valuing local assets (Asset based community development principles); building relationships of mutuality and reciprocity (versus hierarchy, meritocracy); fostering a more circular economy and resisting extractive forces (neighborhood as oasis); listening to neighbors, soliciting feedback; hyper-locality (upper Kensington, block-level work), bias towards direct action over analysis-paralysis.
- **Holistic Empowerment**: Developing teens social-emotionally, culturally, spiritually, vocationally, civically while building up the neighborhood alongside them.
- **Humility**: Beauty redefined; seeing redemptive value and possibility where others only see deficits and weakness; sober-mindedness in evaluating our own impact and refusing to exaggerate our results; recognizing the value of the small over the fancy and big; fostering a value of self-assured humility in teens rather than a posture of arrogance/one-up-man-ship. We also would consider our value of modesty in economic spending and our bias towards making cost-effective financial decisions (defined by maximization of community impact, over external validation of our work, for instance) under this broader value of humility.
- **Perseverance**: Process over results; the intrinsic value of hard work; focusing on the long haul rather than only pursuing quick and unsustainable change.
- **Ecological thinking**: Systems thinking; recognizing the processes in which our neighborhood moves and seeking to identify places of leverage to make impact on those systems; valuing the environment and our relationship to it; reducing/reusing/recycling; composting and harnessing the power and rhythms of nature

to attune our bodies to this place; recognizing the interrelationship between economic, social, and environmental injustice (see: environmental justice)

History

After George Floyd (2020), our neighborhood's sidewalks were piled up with trash; rats were roaming the sidewalks. A collective of neighbors gathered together to clean the trash. In the process, we noticed how this inspired neighbors, gave us deeper connection to our community members, and motivated us to see local change. This process also connected us with other community activists and organizations. Since then, we have turned this initiative into a way of giving teens stipended work, lowering their attraction to the drug trade (or, providing alternatives for getting out of it) while providing inspiration to their neighbors about the possibility of taking pride in the cleanliness and beauty of their own neighborhood and about contributing to positive change locally. Besides cleaning a broader area of sidewalks, we have cleaned up and are now maintaining several large parcels of land as community gardens. (G and Madison/Willard; F and Hilton; Shelbourne and Madison) We are also building partnerships with local organizations for collaboration in urban agriculture and community organizing. We officially incorporated as a nonprofit and 501c3 in 2024 and have been growing deeper roots in the neighborhood ever since, expanding our teen work to involve projects pertaining to tree canopy equity, broader environmental justice work, and community engagement work.

Programs

- 1) **Garden Creators:** 30+ teens engage in sustainable beautification/garden efforts cleaning trash, building raised beds, planting vegetation, building fences. GC meets 3-4x a week throughout the year. Teens involved in GC are eligible for participation in social events, empowerment trainings, mentorship program, and special projects.
- 2) **Special Projects:**
 - a) [Aug 2025-Apr 2026] *Phila2050* - As 1 of 8 City Planning Commission [Community Partners](#), Klean Kensington teens gather neighbors' opinions/concerns for inclusion/consideration in city planning efforts
 - b) [March 2026 - Feb 2027] [Kensington Teen Tree Team](#) (KTTT), a cohort of 6 local teens trained by KK in collaboration with PTP as PHS Tree Tenders to change the tree narrative locally.
 - c) [Spring 2026-Fall 2027] [Revive and Thrive](#) Project: Participatory design + [building](#) with teens as park ambassadors to rehabilitate an [empty lot](#) adjacent to several drug corners into a neighborhood park/pocket [forest](#), with the aim of preventing dumping through local investment/[care](#).
 - d) [2026] [Gusset Project](#): Assisted in facilitating Mural Arts Color Me Back in a massive community art project
 - e) *Ongoing project*: Collaboration via neighborhood engagement with EchoSystems to [reduce plastic waste](#).
- 3) **Social Events:** GC teens are eligible for quarterly outings (paintball, skiing, downtown, camping, surfing, etc.) + local socials (game/movie nights, garden or holiday parties, breakfasts, community dinners, etc. for a safe time together in the community).
- 4) **Empowerment Trainings** (for GC + KTTT teens): Financial wellness, resume help, career workshops, trips to trade schools and colleges, deescalation, horticultural training, environmental justice education, social media and the art of conversation, mental health, VIA character strengths workshop, Asset Based Community Development, etc.
- 5) **Mentorship program:** Interested teens connect with community-based mentors for relationship-based empowerment
- 6) **Teen Leadership Council:** Functioning like a school's student council, the representative student body collaborates with staff in making decisions for the organization.
- 7) **Internship program:** We employ a part-time young adult intern who works in youth engagement, workday supervision, mentoring. The program involves a reading schedule, social-emotional & professional skills development, and a culminating final community project.
- 8) **Emerging Professionals Fellowship program** (\$10k/year, 8hrs/week): Teens in the post-high-school, young adult transition stage can apply for a fellows program geared towards their life stage. Fellows play a part-time leadership role through supervising teen work, overseeing garden maintenance, social media and communications, etc. Fellows also are empowered in nonprofit leadership and professional development skills.

Future (programming we hope to launch in the future, contingent on additional funding)

- 1) **Kenzo Green Thumbs:** In collaboration with local horticultural educators, we would create a program that combines our current community work in starting and maintaining local gardens with a deeper emphasis on youth horticultural education. Participants would be trained through a teen horticultural curriculum while also working alongside various local gardeners in various local gardens to create community garden-based programming for neighbor-engagement. This program would provide a skilled youth workforce for Kensington to maintain and engage a network of local gardens (see [map](#) of partners). The increased capacity provided by this skilled workforce would allow for us to build towards the next stage of local Kensington gardening (e.g. Farmers market?! Farm-to-table partnering with local restaurants? School garden club initiatives? etc.). Cost: \$30,000 (\$10,000 stipends for horticultural educators; \$18,000 for teen stipends; \$1000 travel; \$1000 program) sustains a year of this program.
- 2) **Neighborhood Builders** - construction education through rehabilitation of local housing (Details: TBD).

A glimpse What does Klean Kensington look like practically?

- Peruse [anecdotes/stories](#) of our programming
- Scroll through our [photo album](#) to catch a glimpse of our activities!
- Hear how our teens describe our work in [this podcast episode](#)
- [Teen perspectives](#) on Klean Kensington & Anti-Violence.

Population In 2024, we worked with more than 70 unique teenagers, all living within Kensington.

Metrics Numbers. Stats and Data

- **70+:** # of unique Kensington teenagers we worked with in 2024.
- **3200+:** # of hours of paid teen community work we have provided in 2025 (as of 8.25.25).
- **10+:** # organizations with whom we have established [partnership](#).
- **>20,000:** # sq.ft space turned into gardens: G & Willard; F/Hilton; Shelbourne/Madison.
- **250+:** # of attendees at May 2026 garden party
- **Qualitative:** [Teen testimonial videos](#); written [testimonials](#); [letters of support](#), [accomplishments](#).

Media

Photos: Main album - rebrand.ly/kleankenzo
 Videos: [Rebrand.ly/kleankenzovideos](https://rebrand.ly/kleankenzovideos); [7/20/2024 workday](#); [7/25/2024 \(2\)](#); [8/3/2024 workday](#)
 Maps: [Rebrand.ly/kleankenzomaps](https://rebrand.ly/kleankenzomaps); bit.ly/kkimpactmap
 Kensington Voice outlet coverage (6/23): rebrand.ly/kleankenzokvarticle
 Inquirer Op-Ed (12/23): [Rebrand.ly/kleankenzoinquirerarticleprint](https://rebrand.ly/kleankenzoinquirerarticleprint)
 From Kensington with Love podcast Interview (2/24): rebrand.ly/kleankenzopodcastinterview1
 Inquirer (10/24): rebrand.ly/kleankenzoinquireroct2024; IG (11/24): rebrand.ly/inquirerNov2024reel
 KCT (El)evated stoop (3/25) [highlights](#) Klean Kensington teens and garden party
 Lancaster Newspaper (5/25): rebrand.ly/kleankenzoLNPTomBecker
 Stan Deen Foundation Blog (5/25): rebrand.ly/emeraldreetending
 Workday video (filmed with teens and Stan Deen Foundation): <https://rebrand.ly/KleanKenzoWorkdayVideo>
 Green Philly podcast - "We Are Seeds!" (6/25) rebrand.ly/kleankenzogreengritypodcast
 Trash Academy feature (8/25): rebrand.ly/kleankenzotrashacademyfeature
 SustainPHL 2025 Neighborhood Champ nominee (9.3.25) rebrand.ly/kleankenzosustainphl2025
 Dreamers Dinner Kensington Voice article (10.20.25) bit.ly/dreamersdinnerkv
 Revive and Thrive coverage (12.16.25 [PA Environmental Daily](#); 12.17.25 [Philly Voice](#); 12.21.25 [KYW](#); 12.22.25 [Metro Phila](#), 1.22.26 PHL17 Morning [news segment](#))
[The Click](#) (Emilia Maia journalism class, 1.7.26)
 Tree Forward Grantees [Press Release](#), Awards [announcement](#) (2.2.26):
 Philadelphia Citizen, [Jeremy Chen highlight](#) (2.11.26)
 Everence Magazine ["It Takes A Village"](#) highlight (5.20.26)
 Princeton Alumni Weekly [Inspiring Alumni](#) highlight (5.29.26)
[KYW R&T transformation highlight](#) (6.20.26)
[6ABC Teens turn lot into park](#) (R&T update, 9.15.26)[KYW Teens transform vacant lot](#) (9.30.2026)

Updates

2/2025: <https://rebrand.ly/kleankenzo2025newsletterpdf>
 5/2025: <https://rebrand.ly/kleankenzomay2025newsletterpdf>
 10/2025: <https://rebrand.ly/kleankenzo2025newsletterpdf>

10/2026: <https://rebrand.ly/kleankenzoct2026newsletterpdf>

Diversity Our policy and commitment to diversity: rebrand.ly/kleankenzonondiscriminationpolicy
Volunteer Information about volunteering: [Rebrand.ly/kleankenzovolunteersinfosheet](https://rebrand.ly/kleankenzovolunteersinfosheet)
Contact Jeremy Chen, Director: jeremytchen@gmail.com; (717) 615 - 6462
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Online: www.kleankensington.org. Tax-deductible (EIN: 93-4668270).