

Brownfields

Success Story

Overbrook Environmental Education Center Becomes Community Hub

Philadelphia, PA

Site Description

Overbrook Environmental Education Center (OEEC), a subsidiary of JASTECH Development Services, has transformed a former quarry located on the 6100 block of Lancaster Avenue in Philadelphia. Today, it stands as one of the first urban environmental education centers developed along a commercial corridor.

Targeted Brownfields Assessment

In 2004, a Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) was conducted for a cost of \$36,899. Starting in 2005 and completed in 2006, a Phase II environmental site assessment identified asbestos, lead, and petroleum contamination. This assessment laid the groundwork for future cleanup efforts.

Cleanup

JASTECH was awarded \$423,088 in cleanup grant funds to address contamination at two brownfield sites at 6122 and 6150 Lancaster Avenue. The 6122 site historically operated as a filling station, motorcycle and auto repair shop, and storage facility, whereas the 6150 site was formerly a building supply and construction materials company. The history of both sites has left behind contamination from semivolatile organic compounds, heavy metals, and hydrocarbon-related materials. Currently, the site is undergoing geotechnical work to address existing challenges identified by the Philadelphia Water Department and to support further site analysis.

The cleanup for both locations is expected to be completed in 2025.

Land Revitalization Technical Assistance

In 2022, JASTECH received Land Revitalization Technical Assistance (LRTA) to help develop a site reuse assessment and concept. The assistance included performing a market study and identifying funding resources for site development. Ultimately, the assistance provided a plan towards the site's redevelopment of senior affordable housing, public event space, a health center, and expansion of the education center. An approach to the *Farmacy Redevelopment* was also provided, outlining the steps to bring the idea to life. Once completed, the *Farmacy* will serve as a wellness center for the community, offering healthy, organic food to encourage healthier living.



Outside Front View of OEEC

EPA Grant Recipient:

JASTECH Development Services Inc.

Years Awarded:

2004, 2021, 2022

Grant Types:

- TBA
- LRTA
- Cleanup

Site Former Uses:

- Liquor Store
- Convenience Store
- Junkyard
- Supermarket

Site Current/Future Uses:

- Environmental Education Center
- Resilience Hub
- *Farmacy*



Inside Area at the OEEC

Jerome Shabazz and dedicated Overbrook community member



“ There’s no way to learn about the environment without being in the environment. ”

Jerome Shabazz,
Executive Director of JASTECH
Development Services Inc.

About the Project

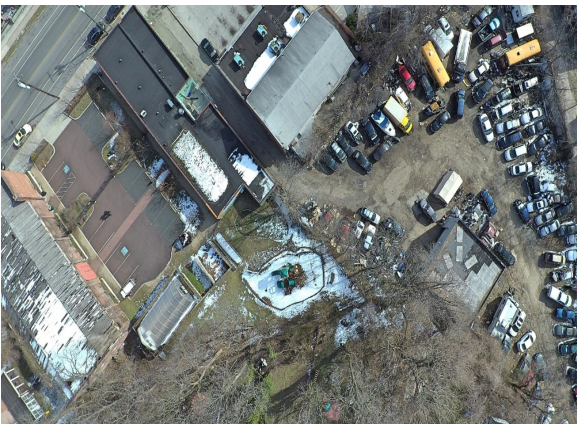
The center provides an urban oasis with native plantings, outdoor biology labs, and green architecture. Its project initiatives include a bio-retention basin and urban garden, all part of a living laboratory that measures environmental indicators such as the impact of road salts on water quality. The OEEC has received recognition for their initiatives, including the 2006 Stormwater Best Management Practices award at the Academy of Natural Sciences.

Starting a New Chapter for the City

The OEEC is more than just a place for environmental education, it is a community resource that fosters conservation, public health, and personal enrichment. Its mission is to remove barriers that often prevent communities from using Philadelphia's technological and environmental resources. Through public participation, the center has been promoting sustainable and environmentally friendly behaviors that can help address pollution issues and contamination in our water sources, land, and air.

Programs offered at the center are tailored to students from across the region, with initiative like the Overbrook Art Center, movement classes, Philadelphia Orchard Project Partnership, and a Lead Program.

The OEEC is uniquely located within the Schuylkill River Watershed and serves as a tributary to the Delaware River and Estuary. The 45,000-square-foot former brownfields site sits approximately 1.5 miles from Concourse Lake in Fairmount Park and approximately 3 miles from the Schuylkill River. Since its opening, the OEEC has dramatically improved the local community's environmental awareness.



Above (Before): Neglected junk yard
Below (After): Green areas at OEEC



Motivational mural of Muhammad Ali’s “Impossible is Nothing” quote on rear of OEEC building.

OEEC Community Hub As Of 2024

According to residents, the OEEC is recognized as a vibrant community hub that encourages people to meet their neighbors. The center has events where residents come together for activities like gardening, fitness, and cooking classes, as well as community information sessions where residents can learn about resources available to them.

Residents are also excited about the upcoming developments at the OEEC, such as the proposed farmers market, the **Farmacy**, which will provide fresh produce and goods, and the **Resiliency Hub Community Center**, a space for community gatherings. All these community developments were made possible through TBA grant funds, which laid the foundation for these positive transformations. Community cleanup continue across different parts of the city, contributing to a heathier environmental for all.



Cheryl and Viery

Cheryl: A 40+ year community resident who went to Overbrook Elementary.

When asked about how Overbrook has impacted her neighborhood, “It’s a gathering spot. It encourages people to get out and meet their neighbors. Normally you might see your neighbor and say hi, but not meet your neighbor. You can get certified as a Zumba instructor and fitness classes are held on site. We can meet people we didn’t know in class. The center has events that bring out neighbors, from testing soils to letting them know what is available to them. Jerome created a gathering space. Jerome is trying to make it easier to have more spaces.”

When asked about her future hopes for Overbrook, Cheryl states “People are interested in health and fresh fruits and veggies. Where we can get those things and meet our neighbors, I think that would be good.”



William Nasir

Head of Haverford Ave. Business Association and a local business owner of 20+ years.

Generally unfamiliar with Brownfields but knowing Jerome previously, “Working with him (Jerome) has been awesome for the community. Before working with the OEEC, I wouldn’t have paid attention to ‘certain things’ but Jerome has opened my eyes to things like removing shoes before entering a house because our shoes are full of lead.”

Mr. Nasir continues to say, he “Opens our eyes to what’s going on in our community. Jerome and the Center has helped secure funding and added environmental education. I partner with the OEEC and Jerome helped write a grant to clean up my neighborhood.”

Educational Partnerships

The OEEC has built strong relationships with nearby schools, including Overbrook High school and Overbrook Elementary school, to provide resources and opportunities to enhance students’ quality of life. Over the years, OEEC has reached approximately 45,000 students and hosted 1,200 interns. Some of the activities offered are the summer programs, *Overbrook Arts Center* initiatives, and educational courses and tutoring sessions.

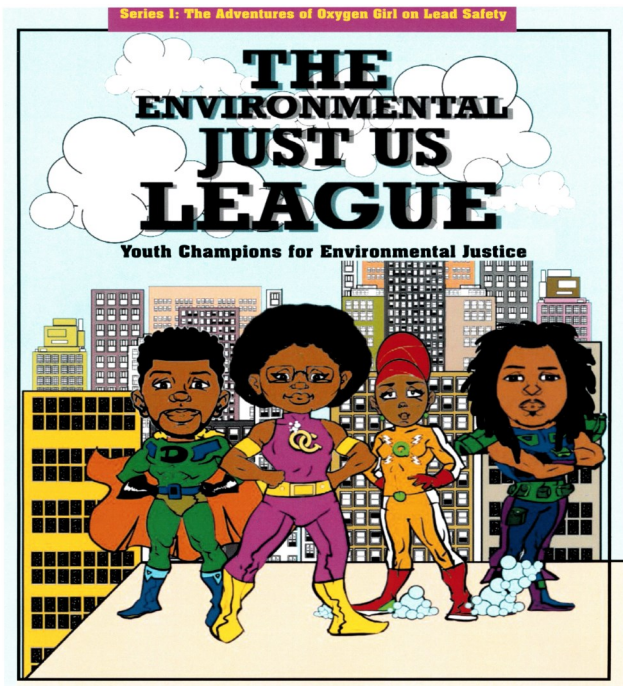
The center is not just improving the lives for those individuals within their community, but for high school students overall.

In 2024, the OEEC awarded its first “**Philadelphia High School Environmental Justice Scholarship**” to high school seniors who focused their time and knowledge for the advancement of environmental and climate justice, and who are dedicated to pursuing studies in environmental sciences, technology, engineering, architecture and urban planning.



While attending an Environmental Justice training camp at the OEEC, young scholars created “**The Environmental Just Us League**” **Comic Book Series**.

This series supports the OEEC’s programs by highlighting environmental issues in communities and creating a family-friendly approach to promoting awareness for sustainable environmental practices.



The Environmental Just Us League

Youth Champions for Environmental Justice

The Environmental Just Us League is a team of young scholars who assembled while attending an Environmental Justice training camp at Overbrook Environmental Education Center. It didn’t take long before this diverse group of talented young people bonded together over their mutual love for the environment and community. Each member has special qualities that makes them memorable and unique: **Oxygen Girl** is referred to as a “breath of fresh air” whenever she enters a room. From the U.S., she’s always smart, positive and helpful. **Prophecy** was aptly named for his great skills of perception. A native of Puerto Rico, he’s keenly observant and sees trends in the environment that are often overlooked. **Quick Chick** as she calls herself, is a quick thinker and fast on her feet too. As an honors student and athlete from Jamaica, she is always on the move. **The Dump** is a master innovator, his ability to upcycle and recycle is phenomenal. Color and texture remind him of his West African roots, for he consistently sees value and art in the discarded things amongst us.



About the Creator:

Jerome Shabazz is the founder and director of the Overbrook Environmental Education Center and is active in local, state and national environmental justice issues. Jerome has a Bachelor of Art degree in Organization Management from Eastern University and a Master of Science degree from St. Joseph’s University in Environmental Safety & Protection. Illustrated by **Darryl Durham**

What's Next?

Resilience Hub, Farmacy, and Bakery & Café!

Resilience Hub

The OEEC is planning to establish the **Resilience Hub** at 6150 Lancaster Avenue. This space will serve as a community lifeline, to assist those in times of need, such as power outages or extreme weather events. The goal is to provide a supportive environment for both young and elderly community members, who may be facing challenges in their homes.

It will also host after-school programs powered by solar energy, offering a reliable place for students to gather and complete their projects.

Farmacy

At the same location, the **Farmacy** will become a community wellness center, with an emphasis on health through the "Prescription 4 Better Health" program.

This initiative focuses on four key areas: food literacy, access to healthy food, physical activity, and overall wellness.



Bakery and Café

A vibrant community space is coming soon for gathering, connecting, and sharing meals with one another!

The **Overbrook Bakery & Café** will soon offer high-quality products and specialized service, where residents can relax and enjoy nourishing meals. The Café aims to create a sense of home and belonging, fostering relationships and embracing the diversity of each unique human expression.

Planned features for this site include:

- Farmer's Market
- Community Farmacy
- Health Clinics
- and more!

For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact **Brett Gilmartin** at (215) 814-3405 or Gilmartin.Brett@epa.gov

