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# DIALOGUE

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A historic-area tour that he conducted prompted columnist Clark DeLeon to reflect on at-risk teens. TOM GRALISH / Staff Photographer

## ISSUE | AT-RISK TEENS

### Rays of hope brighten Kensington encounters

My heart sank at Clark DeLeon's account of his experience with students from Kensington ("Connecting with embattled youths," Nov. 2). DeLeon lamented the challenges faced by teachers who serve youths with "nonexistent attention spans" who "reacted with sudden bursts to anything and everything," yet somehow couldn't appreciate his 90-minute tour of the historic district. Working with youths in Kensington, I see something very different. I see a rapt attention to life, and an eagerness to explore and discover. I see children longing to be just that — kids — and not defined because of where they live.

I shared DeLeon's article with teens who mentor in our after-school program. I was proud of their response. Working with kids takes patience, they said. And they crave what we give: the benefit of the doubt. I wish the courage and strength of our youths could be what's shared about this neighborhood. When I arrive at work each day, I do not see any heart of darkness, but many hearts filled with light.

■ **Maura Bernt**, director of youth programs, Providence Center, Philadelphia