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**about this project**

PhiladelphiaNeighborhoods.com is the capstone class for journalism majors at Temple University.

In addition to being a multimedia class, we are a website that is a public service for the underserved people in under-reported communities of the city. We tell the stories that most media outlets pass over.

Thanks to a generous grant from Lew and Janet Klein, during the summer of 2017, five recent graduates served as Lew Klein Fellows, continuing our coverage during a time when classes are not in session and our reporting usually goes dark.

**contact**

Please email Professor George Miller at [gwm3@temple.edu](mailto:gwm3@temple.edu) with story ideas, corrections, donations, glowing praise, requests for magazines or anything else.



**Jonathan Ginsburg**

Jonathan is a May 2017 graduate of Temple University's Klein College of Media and Communication. He now works as an associate producer for the CBS21 news team in Harrisburg. In his free time, Jonathan enjoys singing, binge-watching television shows and playing pickup sports.

**Jared Phillips**

Jared graduated from Temple University in May 2017 with a degree in journalism, focusing on sports broadcasting. As of September, Jared has accepted a sports reporter position with Channel1450.com in Springfield, IL, covering premier local high school sports for their digital platform as well as featuring on their weekly radio formats.



**Ramona Roberts**

Ramona is a 2017 graduate of Temple University's journalism program. She is currently freelance writing and designing, learning to strengthen her skills and unlock her passions. She hopes to one day start her own online magazine dedicated to telling the stories of Millennials.



**Brianna Spause**

Brianna is a multimedia journalist, born and bred in Philadelphia. She currently works as the multimedia associate for the Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Department, specializing in photo, video and graphic design. Brianna is passionate about social justice, art education and all things quirky.



**Bob Stewart**

Bob left a construction career to follow his journalism dream. Since graduating from Temple, he has written about politics, government, crime and regular people doing cool things for the Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia Daily News, New York Daily News and Philadelphia Magazine. He lives in Northeast Philly with his wife, son, daughter and orange tabby cat.



# A Snapshot of the City Today

One of my favorite books about Philadelphia is a guide book. From 1937.

In response to rampant unemployment during the Great Depression, the federal government started the Works Progress Administration, which in turn created the Federal Writers' Program. The FWP began producing the American Guide Series, a series of books covering the history and culture of each of the then 48 states, as well as various cities and regions. The nearly 6,000 writers employed to produce the guides included the likes of John Cheever, Saul Bellow, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and Zora Neale Hurston. Two of my favorite writers, Nelson Algren and Studs Terkel, were among hundreds of other anonymous contributors.

While some of the people, places and things in the WPA Guide to Philadelphia are no longer relevant or in existence, even reading about the defunct or deceased offer a glimpse of the city at a particular time. It aimed to take a snapshot of the city exactly as it was, capturing all its allure and all its warts. The guidebook does not gloss over the ugly and does not dwell on its beauty. It simply presented Philadelphia as it was: a particular place at a particular time.

While the ultimate intent of the project was employment and the guides lean more academic than journalistic, I can see parallels in spirit between that tome (my copy comes in at a whopping 704 pages and weighs three-quarters of a pound) and the work produced by the Lew Klein Fellows this past summer.

While a straightforward account of the state of affairs and present resources available for those that live here wasn't precisely our goal--fellows incorporated narratives around the ideas--the missions weren't entirely dissimilar. Then, as now, there are places the city as well as inhabitants both struggling and succeeding, in spirit and in practice.

Philadelphia has transformed from an industrial city filled with factories to a city filled with education, medicine and hospitality industries. It has always been a blue-collar city but, as with any transition, the move to a

more knowledge-based economy has left many behind. As jobs left the city, so did people, taking with them a significant amount of the tax base.

On the brink of bankruptcy in 1992, city government outsourced many of its responsibilities to the private sector to cut costs. The measures relinquished management and control of formerly public services and spaces to private entities. With thin city resources available, shoe-string budgeted non-profits and bottom-line private companies were, and are, left to fill the void, with mixed results. Many of the remaining agencies and institutions are still left in shambles.

As they say nowadays, the struggle is real. But so is the resilience. While the WPA Guide to Philadelphia captured the city, the Lew Klein Fellows captured the city, the organizations, the resources and the people. The reporting within these pages aims not only to be revealing, but allow room for the city and the inhabitants' honest self-reflection.

*Good reporting shouldn't tell you what to do, but inform you to know what you can do.* Whether in our How To section or though the resource and contact information offered, we want to provide a service. Our Q&As aimed to introduce and put a face to the organizations and city employees affecting a positive change; not all of them end up in jail. (Or deserve to.)

While some parts of WPA Guide to Philadelphia haven't stood the test of time (*Hotels. These run the gamut from 25 cent "flop houses" to the palatial central city hotels. Room rates in the better hotels range from \$2 up.*), I'd like to think other parts have.

The mayor of Philadelphia at the time of the book's printing, Samuel D. Wilson had this to say in the book's foreword:

"A book can tell only a part of Philadelphia's story. The whole story can be known by seeing and enjoying these things which Philadelphia holds for visitors and Philadelphians alike."

If anyone is interested in retracing the tours in the back of the WPA Guide to Philadelphia, comparing then and now, please get in touch.

- Christopher Malo



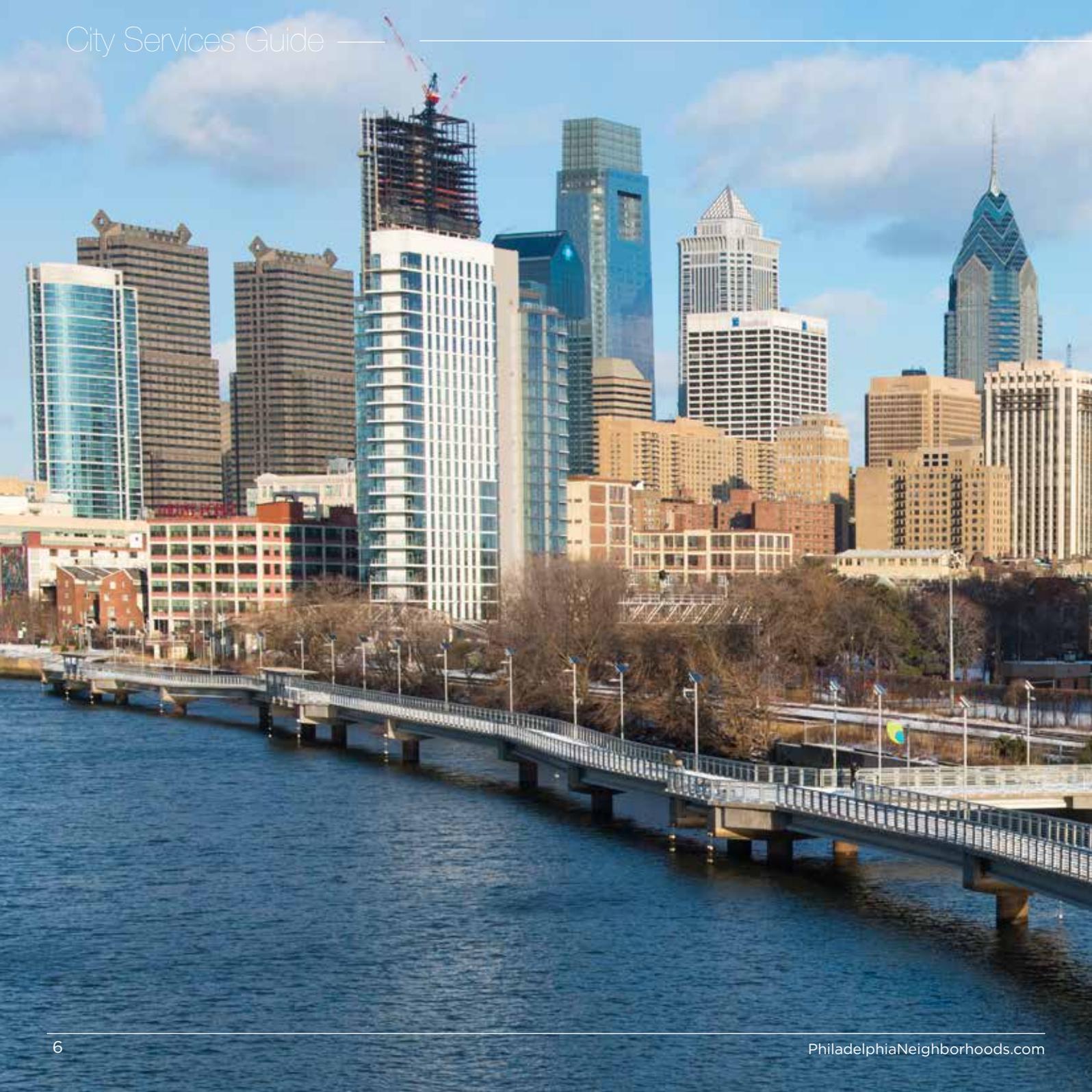




Photo by Brianna Spause.

# You Can Do This!

It's way easier to get things done in Philadelphia than you may realize.

Over the next few pages, see ways that you can get involved, take charge, get free stuff, beautify your property, get things fixed and much more.

## Become a Block Captain

The City of Philadelphia provides support for citizens who'd like to become active in their community. While anyone can round up their neighbors to keep their street clean, the city can help by providing supplies and special trash pickups.

The Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee (PMBC) runs a Block Captain program (<http://www.philadelphiastreet.com/pmbc/become-a-block-captain>) where someone wishing to become one will sign up and have a form mailed out.

Once the yellow form is received, the next step is to have more than half of the block's residents endorse the candidate.

"We do require at least 51 percent of the residents to sign it," said Sandra Miranda, who oversees the 25th and 26th districts for PMBC. "You return it to us and we register your block for street clean-up."

Getting the signatures also serves another purpose.

"It's letting the residents know that their block is participating in a very unique program, which is cleanliness," Miranda said.

Cleaning an entire block may seem like a daunting task, one that block captains get some help with.

"We provide them with the bags, brooms (right) and trash pickup," she added. There are scheduled street clean-ups by district.

"Each district will get three clean-ups per season," which is March to August said Miranda. "We also have a junior block captain program ... because we see them as future block captains."

There's even something for the competitive folks.

"We also have a contest every year," Miranda said. "It's a clean block contest."

There's more to it than just clean though.

"We go the extra mile, which is the beautification project; putting flowers out there, trees, painting, decorating and those kinds of thing," she said. "Doing those kinds of things brings unity to your block"

PMBC sees clean blocks as more than just litter-free streets.

"A clean block is a safe block," Miranda said. "The blight is what brings that vandalism and the drugs and everything else."

**- Bob Stewart**



Photo by Bob Stewart.



# Stage a Legal Protest

The city defines a demonstration as “a public assembly, a meeting or gathering, a rally or protest event, a political rally or event, a demonstration, speechmaking, marching, the holding of vigils or religious services, and all other like forms of conduct, the primary purposes of which is expressive activity or the communication or expression of views or grievances.”

The conditions state a demonstration would be engaged by more than 75 people or will occur on any city street, sidewalk or alley that does not comply with normal traffic laws.

When expressing the right to peacefully assemble, there are guidelines to follow in Philadelphia. Here’s a breakdown of the rules to apply for a permit for demonstrations.

## Apply for a Permit

No demonstrations are allowed without a proper permit. Demonstration permit applications are available online.

Applications can be delivered in person or by mail to the managing director’s office, 1401 John F. Kennedy Blvd., room 143.

Applications should contain the name and contact information of the applicant, person in charge of the demonstration and any sponsors. In addition, the date, time, duration and location of the event as well as an estimate of the amount of participants must be provided.

An explanation of the reason for demonstrating is required, whether the event is a spontaneous reaction to a specific occurrence or a planned event.

## Deadlines and Fees

Applications must be submitted five business days before the proposed event. The city will accept last minute applications if the demonstration is spontaneously planned in response to a recent event (such as political announcements) or decisions in regard to local, state or federal laws.

In order to request city equipment or to erect tents or statues, the permit must be received 60 days in advance

Each permit costs a non-refundable \$20 by check or money order, due with the application, which should be made out to “City of Philadelphia.” An expedited application, one needing less than the typical five day approval period, costs \$25.

The city government retains the rights to deny a permit for demonstrations or shut down an ongoing demonstration if the event is a threat to public safety or does not comply with law-enforcement and agreed upon regulations.

## You Need Insurance

Part of the city policy for organizing demonstrations is a certificate of general liability insurance for a minimum of \$1 million that includes protections for the City of Philadelphia, officers, agents and employees.

You can find the affidavit online or contact the city’s risk management division at (215) 683-1708 for more information on insurance.

For more information about permits and demonstrations, contact the managing director’s office at (215) 683-3666.

**- Brianna Spause**

# Plan Your Own Neighborhood Clean-up Day

This City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection is known for cheesesteaks, murals, arts and of course Rocky Balboa.

Philadelphia is applauded for its vibrant culture, yet the city is ridiculed for its sometimes trashy appearance in places. Many communities in the city have streets, sidewalks and vacant lots filled with trash. This is an ongoing issue and many organizations have developed as a result to tackle the problem.

However, sometimes the quickest way to get the results you want is to do it yourself.

Here is a guide to help you plan a neighborhood clean-up.

## Choose a Date

Allow enough time to plan and promote a clean-up event when choosing the date.

Make sure to look at a calendar of other community activities so the event won't clash with another and lack participation.

According to Community Life Improvement Programs, Saturday mornings are popular and predicted to be most successful in participation.

## Choose your Block Radius

Finalize which blocks to focus on. This will help in choosing the best locations for trash drop-offs for volunteers. Specifying block radius will also give a good idea of how many volunteers will be needed, as well as how much supplies to request.

## Promote and Advertise

Reach out to nonprofit organizations such as Keep Philadelphia Beautiful and PowerCorpsPHL. They will help with gathering more volunteers and providing a good experience.

Contact local residents and businesses in the



Photo by Ramona Roberts.

focused neighborhood.

Create digital and print flyers and posters to promote the clean-up. Contact local schools, churches and religious organizations to promote the event to students and members.

Outside of social media, Eventbrite and Nextdoor are websites to assist getting the word out about an event in the community.

## Request Supplies

Make sure to have an organized method of keeping track of supplies. Perhaps have specific monitored locations for pick-up and drop-off of materials.

Organizations may be willing to donate or rent materials for a neighborhood clean-up.

The Community Partnership Program has an application process to request necessary supplies. The application must be submitted at least a week before the event. Materials can be picked-up from its warehouse at 4000 N. American St. (entrance on Luzerne Street).

The following equipment is available for request: leaf rakes, bow rakes, scoop shovels, digging shovels, sweep brooms, push brooms, sidewalk edgers and paper trash bags.

The program also offers the option to help coordinate bagged trash pickup after the clean-up is completed. This must be requested prior to the event.

## Clean-up Day

Have a sign-in sheet available for volunteers, including email addresses. This will help start a contact list for the next community clean-up, as well as to send out appreciation to volunteers.

Having water and refreshments available is helpful in keeping volunteers motivated and energized.

Take before and after pictures to broadcast the success of the clean-up.

Once completing a neighborhood clean-up, congratulate everyone on a job well done! Every neighborhood clean-up is one step closer to a cleaner city.

**- Ramona Roberts**

## Community Life Improvement Programs

[www.phila.gov/clip/  
communitypartnershipprogram/Pages/  
EffectiveCleanup.aspx](http://www.phila.gov/clip/communitypartnershipprogram/Pages/EffectiveCleanup.aspx)

## Keep Philadelphia Beautiful

[keepphiladelphiabeautiful.org](http://keepphiladelphiabeautiful.org)

**Power Corps PHL**  
[powercorpshl.org](http://powercorpshl.org)

# Start a Community Garden

Finding a place to care for plants or harvest crops in an urban setting like Philadelphia may not be easy. However, throughout the city there are more than 60 community gardens at the public's disposal.

If none of the established gardens are close enough to home, or the waiting list to join is too long, there's always the option to start a community garden on vacant land.

Various groups in Philadelphia, like Grounded in Philly, a project of the Garden Justice Legal Initiative, offer resources for community gardening in Philadelphia.

Call Neighborhood Gardens Trust and ask how to obtain permission to garden on a vacant lot in your neighborhood.

Figure out the street address(es) of the lot. If not obvious, this can be done by looking at the addresses of the houses closest to the lot.

Follow the guidelines outlined by Grounded in Philly on methods for obtaining permission to start a community garden on vacant land. This advice provides the framework for licensing,



Photo by Jonathan Ginsburg

leasing and purchasing land from the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, the Department of Public Property and the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation.

Write out a set of guidelines so that everyone who uses the community garden knows the rules and how to treat the land.

Obtain materials like fencing, soil and tools.

Add organic matter. For example, residents can get free compost from Fairmount Park Recycling Center.

Then, start planting!

Sally McCabe, associate director of community education for The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society teaches the training program Garden Tenders.

"It walks the group through the process of what they need to know to get a garden that can last for a long time," McCabe said. "We set up this program as a kind of DIY boot camp, so people come to the

training and they decide when they're ready."

According to McCabe, some community gardens get started with no permission whatsoever, due to apathy regarding who actually owns the land the garden might be on. Facilitators of community gardens typically either make an agreement with the owner or simply squat on the land and hope they don't get removed.

"We do it [the program] as an eight-week course, kind of like Weight Watchers, where each week we learn something new," McCabe said. "For example, we'll learn about how to find out who owns the land and how to go about getting permission, and everybody goes home and they work on it."

McCabe said PHS is working to streamline the registration process and make it easier for people to start using a city-owned community garden.

- **Jonathan Ginsburg**

**Grounded in Philly**  
[groundedinphilly.org](http://groundedinphilly.org)

**Neighborhood Gardens Trust**  
[ngtrust.org](http://ngtrust.org)

**Pennsylvania Horticultural Society**  
[phsonline.org](http://phsonline.org)

# Get Money from the Government

Many Philadelphia seniors are eligible for property tax rebates even if they rent. People as young as 50 years old qualify if they are widowed, and disabled residents as young as 18 can also qualify. Otherwise, the age requirement is 65.

If someone meets the initial qualifications above, the next step is to look at household income.

Statewide guidelines give \$650 back to homeowners and renters making \$8,000 and year or less (half of Social Security income is excluded). For renters, the maximum income for eligibility is \$15,000. The requirement is \$35,000 annual household income or less for homeowners, which would net a \$250 return.

But Philadelphians qualify for even more.

Each senior household with a Philadelphia address and income less than \$30,000 sees the rebate increase by an additional 50 percent. That means a possible \$975 rebate at the top of the scale.

The state extended the deadline for the application from June 30 to December 31 this year.

- **Bob Stewart**

## To see if you qualify:

Go to [revenue.pa.gov](http://revenue.pa.gov).

Click on the prompt for "General Tax Information."

Then click on the link that reads "Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program."

If you qualify, click on the "Forms and Publications" prompt and fill out the PA-1000 -- 2016 Property Tax or Rent Rebate Claim.

Mail to the address on the form.

# Get a Tree for Free

Feeling a lack of green in your neighborhood? TreePhilly can fix that.

Since former Mayor Nutter's Office of Sustainability set the goal for each neighborhood in Philadelphia to receive 30 percent tree canopy coverage, TreePhilly has planted more than 18,000 trees throughout the city.

Residents have the option to get a tree planted in their yard or to help facilitate a tree being planted out on the sidewalk - all for free.

TreePhilly offers multiple options for getting a tree planted on public property, including filing a request with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation or participating in a volunteer planting.

Those ready to request a street tree be planted can follow the necessary steps listed online. Trees are typically planted within six to 18 months after the request is received.

Each spring and fall, TreePhilly holds giveaways for people to enter for the chance to take home a free tree to be planted on private property. Details for the giveaways is available at [treephilly.org](http://treephilly.org), where you can find further information about yard trees.

Since fall 2014, TreePhilly has given out multiple grants as part of its giveaway seasons. These grants are awarded to community organizations that are willing to help further the mission of creating a greener city.

More than 10 different types of trees were offered in the spring 2017 yard tree giveaway.

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation has compiled a list of trees approved to be planted on public property, along with which season(s) each type can be planted.

If you need some guidance in caring for your tree, TreePhilly provides plenty of maintenance resources, as well as services to provide assistance in helping your tree stay healthy.

**- Jonathan Ginsburg**

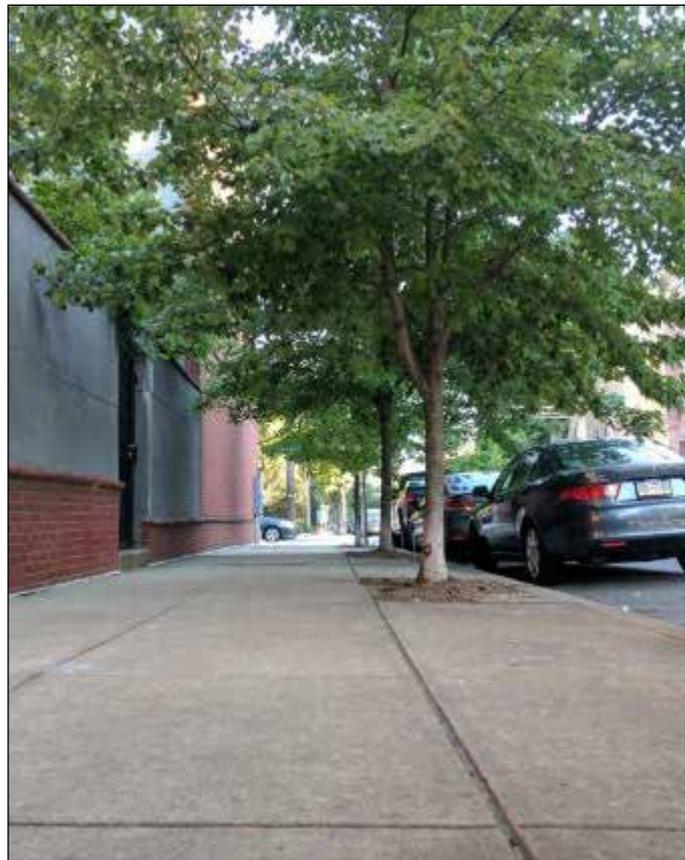


Photo by Bob Stewart.

# Fix a Pothole

Have a pothole in your neighborhood or affecting your daily commute? You've got options.

Operation Smooth Streets is the city's initiative to extend the life of roadways through service repair. According to the Philadelphia Streets Department, the city has filled more than 26,000 potholes in 2017 alone.

The Streets Department is responsible for the investigation and repair of city roads, but will forward any misguided requests to the appropriate service provider. Potholes on state-maintained roads are taken care of by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDot), and any reports found inside or within 18 inches of trolley



Photo by Brianna Spause.

tracks will be serviced by SEPTA.

For the Streets Department: dial 311 or fill out a request online at [potholes.phila.gov](http://potholes.phila.gov).

For PennDot: call 1-800-FIX-ROAD or tweet at them at [@511paphilly](https://twitter.com/@511paphilly).

For SEPTA: call 215-580-7852.

Not all potholes are the same and each requires

a different level of service. When reporting an issue, be prepared with the closest address to the problem and the type of hole you're dealing with.

A pothole is small, spherical and a maximum of 10 inches deep. The concrete base of the road will be exposed after the asphalt has worn away.

A cave-in, or sinkhole, is the older cousin of the pothole. The concrete base will have begun to crumble under the road, exposing dirt.

A cave-in isn't just a road problem anymore. Property owners and utility agencies will be contacted to investigate repairs.

Ditches are rectangular holes created by contractors, such as utility providers and plumbers, to run pipes and lines underground. When not filled properly, the hole can wash out completely or sink into the ground.

**- Brianna Spause**

# Recycle and Be Rewarded

Every month, Philadelphia throws out enough glass jars to fill the Municipal Services Building to the brim – you know the one, the 17-story building on 15th Street and JFK Boulevard. If not recycled properly, those glass jars will go to a landfill where they will take more than 4,000 years to decompose.

The city has made it easy to recycle properly, and even get rewarded for it.

## Where to get a recycling bin

The city offers free recycling bins to residents, which can be picked up at several locations in the city. You can also use any household container, smaller than 32 gallons, as long as it is marked as recycling. The Philadelphia Streets Department recommends not using cardboard to put out recycling because it falls apart when wet.

## When to recycle

Philadelphia offers single-stream recycling, meaning you can put out plastic, glass and paper products together in one recycling bin and set them out alongside household trash cans on your neighborhood's regular pickup day.

To find your trash pickup day, visit [property.phila.gov](http://property.phila.gov).

## How to earn rewards

Since 2010, the Philadelphia Recycling Rewards program has been offering redeemable discounts and deals through to neighbors for recycling properly. To sign up, go to [RecycleBank.com](http://RecycleBank.com) or call 1-888-727-2978 to sign up over the phone.

You will get a sticker in the mail with a scannable barcode that can be placed on any recycling bin. Participants earn points each week recycling is picked up.



Photo by Brianna Spause.

## Recycling do's

Make sure the items can be recycled through regular curbside pickup.

**Plastics:** Food and beverage containers, plastic cups and lids, detergent and shampoo bottles, pails, buckets, garden pots. Hard plastic takeout food containers are acceptable, but styrofoam should be put out with household trash.

**Paper:** Newspapers, magazines, brochures, cards, junk mail, envelopes, paper bags, paperback books, phone books and non-metallic gift wrap.

**Cartons:** Milk, juice, ice cream, wine, soup.

**Metals:** Aluminum, steel and tin cans, empty paint and aerosol cans, metal trays and baking dishes, clean aluminum foil, jar lids and bottle caps that have been separated from the container.

**Glass:** All bottles and jars.

**Cardboard:** All cardboard should be flattened and clean of grease and food. Shipping boxes, paper towel rolls, egg cartons, dry food boxes and clean pizza boxes. Pizza boxes soiled by food or grease should be put with household trash.

## Recycling don'ts

The following items should be placed in the household trash: plastic bags, food waste, electronics, styrofoam takeout containers and packing materials, wet or food-soiled paper, wax plates and cups, greasy pizza boxes, tissues,

paper towels, napkins, light bulbs, garden hoses, porcelain and non-container glass.

## Take the next step

Plastic bags should not be recycled curbside. The thin plastic can rip and get wrapped around machinery, which leads to increased maintenance costs and worker safety issues.

Find your closest plastic bags drop-off locations, which are most commonly found outside grocery stores on marked bins.

In Pennsylvania, it is illegal to put electronics - like computers, stereos and televisions - in the trash. This also includes batteries and cassette tapes.

The Salvation Army offers free, tax-deductible pickups you can schedule online.

To drop off in person, check with your local stores like Staples and Best Buy, or visit one of the six Philadelphia Sanitation Convenience Center locations in the city.

While food waste can be properly disposed of with trash pickup, check out the EPA's guide to composting, a process that creates nutrient rich soil and helps cut the emission of greenhouse gases in landfills.

**- Brianna Spause**

# Overturn A Wrongful Conviction (If You're Actually Innocent)

Innocent people get convicted for crimes they did not commit, but how often it happens is impossible to determine.

The Philadelphia District Attorney's office recently added to its Conviction Review Unit (CRU) in an effort to right the wrongful convictions of innocent people. This year it overturned the conviction of two people, including Shaurn Thomas who was imprisoned for 24 years.

"Justice means getting to the right result," explained CRU Assistant Director Andrew Wellbrock.

The claim of actual innocence is central to CRU. It does not look into technicalities or legal issues.

Being a department within the District Attorney's Office could lead some critics to question whether the unit can be objective.

"Where we have to admit we're wrong to get to the right result, we're not afraid of doing that," Wellbrock explained. "This is all about having legitimacy in the city. So that people know that they can trust our office. That our office will do the right thing and when we've found out we haven't done the right thing, we'll work to address it."

Philadelphia is not the only city doing this.

"It's been a national movement of prosecutors' offices to embed this function within the prosecutor's office," Wellbrock said. "We have a very unique role as attorneys in that ... we represent the community, not one specific party. I think it's just part of a more modern realization of what that means."

Given the local state of affairs of prosecutors' offices in the city and state, Wellbrock said more trust in the DA's office will help the community.

"I think the net effect on the community is a positive one," Wellbrock said. "Because it shows that we are open and that we will take an open and independent look at these cases rather than just defend a conviction."

For those convicted in the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas but innocent, there is a process.

The first step is to visit the CRU page on the city's website and locate the submission and consent forms. The forms must be filled out by the convicted individual, not a surrogate. If someone is currently imprisoned, the forms could be provided by a family member or attorney, but the individual must fill it out and the attorney file it.

"We only accept petitions directly from the person who is affected," Wellbrock explained. "We don't accept petitions from family members."

The unit only accepts submissions from the convicted person because it needs very specific details about the situation. Wellbrock had advice for those wishing to get help from the CRU based on his experience.

"One of the obvious ones is not misstating facts to us," he said. "You might have a very legitimate issue but you're losing credibility if you begin your



Photo by G.W. Miller III.

letter with something we know is not true."

Another situation to avoid is one of irrelevant information.

"If the evidence you are alleging will have no effect on your conviction, that would be frivolous," he said. "For example on a drug case someone wrote to us to say their block captain is willing to testify they never saw him with drugs. Well that doesn't mean you didn't have drugs. So, even if we 100 percent believe this witness, your claim is frivolous because it does not bear on your case."

Successful cases typically involve information that did not come to light during the trial. In the Thomas case, investigators found new information in a police file. Other information strengthened his alibi.

In terms of timeframe, Wellbrock said some petitioners can hear back in two to three weeks but other claims need a deeper look.

"[But] no one is waiting six months or a year," he said.

Utilizing the CRU is completely separate situation from the normal appellate court system. Someone convicted of a crime in Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas (First Judicial District) can appeal to Superior Court. If the appeal is denied there are further appeal methods available to the Supreme Court and via Pennsylvania's Post Conviction Relief Act (PCRA).

A person can request CRU review their case before, during or after any stage of their normal appeal process. When CRU identifies an issue with a conviction, it moves quickly.

"The idea is one more night in jail is too much for someone who shouldn't be there," Wellbrock explained.

**- Bob Stewart**

## Conviction Review Unit

[www.phila.gov/districtattorney/aboutus/Pages/CRU.aspx](http://www.phila.gov/districtattorney/aboutus/Pages/CRU.aspx)

## CRU Submission Form

[www.phila.gov/districtattorney/PDF/CRU%20Submission%20Form.pdf](http://www.phila.gov/districtattorney/PDF/CRU%20Submission%20Form.pdf)



# Select a High School

Finding the right fit for a student entering high school can be a complex task in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia has several options for high school students, that range in proximity to home and programming offered.

Here's a breakdown of the different options available in Philadelphia:

- **Neighborhood schools** serve students in their communities, and open admission is allotted within a location boundary set by the district. There is no cost associated with attendance. Guardians can apply for a voluntary transfer to any neighborhood school operated by the district, admission is based on available space.

- **Citywide access schools** offer additional programming inside neighborhood schools, like career and technical education, or academics. Citywide access schools are also free to attend, but are not limited to a location boundary. Admission isn't based on test scores but grades, attendance and discipline records. Those eligible are then entered into an admission lottery.

- **Citywide admission schools** and **special admission schools**, also known as magnet schools, accommodate middle and high school students. The schools offer advanced curriculum in special programming areas, like mathematics, natural sciences, engineering, humanities, social sciences or fine and performing arts. Magnet schools require school-specific criteria and application process, as well as transcripts. The competitive application process considers

attendance, behavior and grades.

- **Charter schools** are public, nonprofit organizations operated independently of the Philadelphia School District. They have more freedom to design curriculum, often have longer school days and require uniforms. Schools are free to attend and use a lottery system that does not require minimum grades or test scores. Renaissance charter schools are neighborhood schools that have been sold by the district and must accept all students living in the location boundary.
- There are options available for students outside of the Philadelphia School District as well. You can learn more about **home schooling**, **Catholic** and **independent private schools** online or at your local library.

All students applying to district schools must fill out an application online through the student's School Net Account. The district outlines the process with videos and instructions. The universal application is the end of the process for students intending to attend neighborhood schools.

For those applying to schools outside their neighborhood, schools make admission decisions and contact students with acceptance, rejection and wait-list information starting at the end of January. Students who do not make it into their school of choice are deferred to neighborhood schools. There is an appeal process set in place for selection decisions, which is outlined on the district website. According to FERPA regulations, student information cannot be discussed over the phone.

- **Brianna Spause**

## School District of Philadelphia

[www.philasd.org](http://www.philasd.org)

For general inquiries, call 215-400-4290 or email [schoolselect@philasd.org](mailto:schoolselect@philasd.org)

ESOL students can contact the Office of Multilingual Curriculum and Programs at 215-400-4240.

Students with IEP's and 504 Plans can contact the Office of Specialized Services by phone at 215-400-4170

## Find your neighborhood school

[webapps1.philasd.org/school\\_finder](http://webapps1.philasd.org/school_finder)

## Charter school information

[webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/c/charter\\_schools/](http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/c/charter_schools/)

## Home schooling information

[webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/h/homeschooling](http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/h/homeschooling)

## Archdiocese schools

[www.aop Catholicschools.org](http://www.aop Catholicschools.org)

## Association of Delaware Valley Independent Schools

[www.advis.org](http://www.advis.org)

## Alternative schools for at-risk youths

[webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/r/alternative](http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/r/alternative)

## Philly High School Fair

[highschoolfair.squarespace.com](http://highschoolfair.squarespace.com)

## Great Philly Schools

[greatphillyschools.org](http://greatphillyschools.org)



## Clean Up Vandalism Yourself (or Have the City Do It)

If a home, business, vehicle or other property has been subject to graffiti, the City of Philadelphia can assist.

The city provides a free service for all residents for the removal of vandalism from property. The Graffiti Abatement Team has cleaned graffiti from more than a million properties and street fixtures in the city in the past ten years.

According to the city code, the management of property damage is the responsibility of the owner. If the graffiti is not reported or removed within five days of the damage, the property owner is subject to a fine of up to \$100. So, it is best to call as soon as the vandalism has occurred.

Similar to requesting a pot hole repair, Philly311 is a good place to start for handling property

damage requests.

For homes, businesses, municipal buildings, street signs and traffic signals, dial 311 or fill out a request online on the city's Graffiti Removal page.

When contacting the agency, have the exact address and zip code of the graffiti. Be specific with the location of the issue on the property.

Depending on the exact issue, several removal options are available. Painted surfaces can be repainted, but be sure to specify what color. Brick, stone and metal can be power-washed. You can also handle this yourself.

For a painted surface, a few options exist. Marker can be easily removed with rubbing alcohol. If it proves difficult, tracing the tag with another marker will reactivate the ink, which can then

### Philly311

[www.phila.gov/311](http://www.phila.gov/311)  
[Philly311@phila.gov](mailto:Philly311@phila.gov)  
[@philly311](https://twitter.com/philly311)  
Dial 311

The maintenance of property in public spaces is managed by different agencies:

Public Schools: (215) 400-6434

Newsstands: (610) 800-6455

Newspaper Boxes: (610) 292-6312

Mailboxes: (215) 895-8610

Septa Bridges: (215) 580-7800

PGW Property: (215) 684-6288

PECO Property: (800) 494-4000, Press 0

Center City District: (215) 440-5500

be wiped clean with alcohol and water. When in doubt, it can be painted over.

Street signs can be given the same rubbing alcohol treatment as painted surfaces. The signs are protected by a UV coating that makes them resistant to weather and light chemical solvents.

Exposed wood absorbs ink easily, but is also sensitive to chemicals. The best bet is to do a light sanding of the affected area.

Metal surfaces are resilient. They can be cleaned with steel wool to remove ink and paint. Again, chemicals should be avoided.

Stickers are the easiest tags to remove. Use a damp sponge to wet the surface and the paper will start to dissolve. Straight edge tools, such as a razor blade, can help scrape the surface clean.

Stone and brick are among the most difficult surfaces to remove graffiti. Tags can only be removed with chemical cocktails that are dangerous to the user and damaging to the surface unless handled properly. Best to call the city on these situations.

**- Brianna Spause**



# Have a Mural Painted

Known as the “City of Murals,” Philadelphia is home to almost 4,000 murals that reach into neighborhoods and aim to connect communities. No permit or license is required to paint a mural, so long as the work does not serve as an advertisement.

Most of these artworks are the signature of the Mural Arts Program, which has been active in the city for more than 30 years.

Here’s a guide to applying for a mural through the Mural Arts Program.

## How it works

Mural Arts opens its application cycle to the public twice a year and is free to apply.

Each year, the deadlines for mural applications fall on March 15 and Nov. 15. Applicants can continue to submit proposals each cycle if not contacted upon the original request. The program makes it crystal clear, there is no waiting list.

## What to know

In order to submit an application, be prepared with the address of the proposed mural wall and the contact information of the property owner. Know if the wall is made of brick, cinder block or stucco.

The Mural Arts Program wants to get to know applicants and ensure research was done. In the application process, be prepared to discuss the

history of the community, if neighbors are on board and the project’s significance to the area.

On their website, Mural Arts recommends considering the following questions when submitting a proposal:

- Have I talked to my neighbors and/or community groups about a mural?
- Have I identified a wall that faces traffic and does not peel, crack or have leaks?
- Have I tried to speak with the wall owner and/or obtain permission for a mural on that wall?
- Do I have a fabulous idea for the mural that will be meaningful for the whole community?
- Am I able to work with Mural Arts Staff to have at least three to five (3-5) meetings about the mural?
- Have I made a firm commitment to maintain the area around the mural with my neighbors?

## Donate a wall

In order to create art, the Mural Arts Program needs the space to do it. Walls can be donated by property owners as potential sites, by filling out an online form at [muralarts.org](http://muralarts.org).

Donating a wall does not guarantee that it will be selected, but it will get on the list for inspection.

## Want to get involved in your neighborhood?

In an effort to engage the community in the artistic process, Mural Arts will host community paint days where neighbors are welcome to paint on the canvas panels to be pasted on the wall as a part of the final product. The canvases are open to all ages and sketched out in a paint-by-number formula. Check the Mural Arts events page for an opportunity near you.

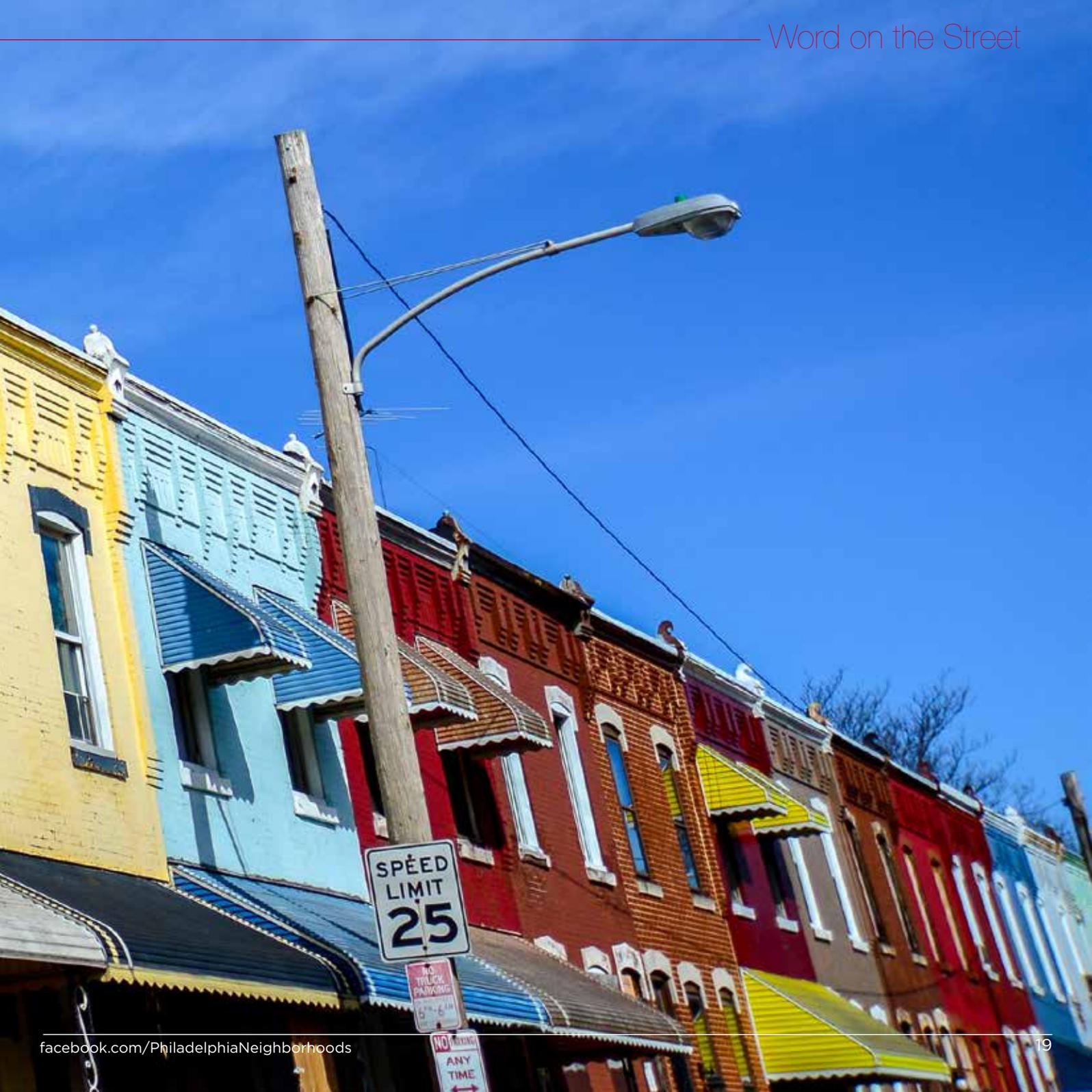
## Are you the artist?

The Mural Arts Program reviews applications for muralists twice a year, in February and September.

The application should be submitted online or delivered to the Lincoln Financial Mural Arts Center at the Thomas Eakins House, located at 1727 Mount Vernon St. **- Brianna Spause**



Photo by Brianna Spause





## A House to Call Home

The rate of owner occupied homes is lower in Philadelphia than the national average. There are programs to assist those who want to buy.

For many, owning a first home is a big part of the American Dream.

In Philadelphia, that dream is less of a reality than in other cities in the country.

According to a Pew Charitable Trusts report from

2014 that looked at census data, Philadelphia had a 7.1 percent drop in home ownership between 20012 and 2012, the second biggest decline in the 30 largest cities in the country. Only 52.6 percent of homes in Philadelphia were owner-occupied in 2015, more than 10 percent less than the national average of 63 percent.

The New Kensington Community Development Corporation (NKCDC) is looking to improve that statistic through the First-Time Homebuyer Workshops, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. These free workshops are designed to effectively educate first-time buyers. Topics include the steps to purchasing a first home, resources available and the potential

dangers of a large investment.

Joe Filipiski, who coordinates the program for the NKCDC, has worked in housing counseling since 1994. He believes in the benefits of the workshops.

“I think they’re very helpful,” said Filipiski, who has been with the organization since 2008. “I think it gives a great foundation.”

The workshops aim to provide not only valuable information regarding financing and maintaining that first home, but guest speakers are brought in to answer any questions that the attendees may have. In addition to the free workshops, the NKCDC also offers online workshops that can be used to qualify for Project Reinvest down payment

assistance loans and one-on-one counseling.

Darrell Hendricks and his wife bought their first home over the summer, near Temple University's North Philadelphia campus.

"To be able to have a home of my own that I can have my family in, that's quality-built, great pricing, it's affordable for us, it just brings a certain comfort, security, pride," said Hendricks. "Just a place I can call home, my own."

After going through some difficult renting experiences, Hendricks decided it was finally time to own his own place.

Hendricks went through the online workshop and received a grant through Project Reinvest while receiving assistance from Habitat for Humanity to help finance their future home.

He also met with housing counselors in NKCDC face-to-face through its one-on-one appointments.

"In the whole process, I would say the most helpful was the one-on-one with the counselor," Hendricks said. "I think just being able to go to the actual office down in Kensington, on Frankford Avenue, and just sit with someone and have them answer questions. I actually liked that a lot. My wife too."

The workshops often serve as a gateway to other services available to first-time home buyers.

"I think they're absolutely amazing," said Janet Krauss, a guest speaker and realtor with Realty Mark Associates who has worked with the NKCDC for 10 years. "Anytime you're a first home buyer, I think they should all go through one of these workshops."

The speakers provide not only valuable experience and information for the attendees, but also excitement.

"A lot of speakers come with a lot of passion," Filipski said.

The workshops are geared toward those looking to buy their first home, providing potential buyers with information, even if they are still in the beginning stages of the process, like Maura Adams.

"I received a lot of information here that I didn't know before," said Adams, a first-time buyer. "Now I know where to start."

For many of those looking to purchase their first house, it is the financial information that is so vitally important.

"I know what grants are available," Adams said. "I feel confident that I'll be able to start by the

deadline that I gave myself."

Sorting out the financing possibilities and options can be daunting.

"They come in with the idea that all lenders are the same," Krauss said. "They think it's the same across the board and it isn't."

Krauss believes these workshops, although geared to first-time homebuyers, provide great information even for those who already own.

"I don't care if you have good credit or you think you know what you're doing because there's so much information in these," Krauss said. "I think it helps you to become a better consumer. Even people who have bought houses don't know half this stuff."

Buying a house can be a big step in a person's life from an emotional standpoint, beyond the financials, which is something the NKCDC understands and addresses.

"Even for people who own homes and are going through it for a second time, it's a very emotional experience," Filipski said. "And this at least gives them some calmness, gives them some encouragement, gives them some inspiration that they can become homeowners."

One lesson taught during a recent workshop was about who to deal with in the home buying process, and how you should handle them.

"This is just the first step in a long journey," Filipski said. "It's very helpful and very important because there are individuals who can take advantage of individuals and we want to avoid them. So they're well armed and well educated, informed, so they can make the proper decisions so they don't find trouble when they finally get that house."

"I've been renting since I can remember, since I was 18," Hendricks said. "Just house to house and apartment to apartment."

He may have purchased a house, but he will make it his family's home.

"This is a place where I can just let family come and have a good time with meet ups and get together," he said. "It's awesome man. It's kind of what I always wished and hoped for. To see my family just enjoy it? It means the world to me."

Hendricks saw NKCDC as an important community resource overall, hoping others can find the same help that his family received.

"They're doing some great work down there," he said.

**- Jared Phillips**

## Housing information

### New Kensington Community Development Corporation

[www.nkcdc.org](http://www.nkcdc.org)

### Project Reinvest

[finanta.org/products/reinvest](http://finanta.org/products/reinvest)

### Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

[www.phfa.org](http://www.phfa.org)

### Philadelphia Homeownership Center

[www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/housing/sfh/sfhocs/phi\\_hoc](http://www.hud.gov/program_offices/housing/sfh/sfhocs/phi_hoc)

### Philadelphia Housing Authority

[www.pha.phila.gov](http://www.pha.phila.gov)

### Impact Services

Providing housing for formerly homeless veterans and their families  
[www.impactservices.org](http://www.impactservices.org)

### Tenant Union Representative Network

[rturn.net](http://rturn.net)

### Community Legal Services

[clsphila.org/get-help](http://clsphila.org/get-help)

### Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

[www.dhs.pa.gov/citizens/heatingassistance/eliheap/index.htm](http://www.dhs.pa.gov/citizens/heatingassistance/eliheap/index.htm)

# Life Lessons in The Kitchen

**Black Boyz Can Cook** provides job training, builds social skills and fosters business acumen.

A youth advocate, chef and lifelong North Philadelphia resident, Ariq Barrett saw a lack of role models in his community and wanted to reach youths on a different level. His solution?

Black Boyz Can Cook.

It is a program that creates a space where young black boys can learn the principles of healthy eating, entrepreneurship, community service and brotherhood ... through food.

"I believe it takes a village to raise a child and I feel like our community doesn't live by that anymore," Barrett said. "We're educating and empowering not only the kids that are here, but their families and their communities as well."

After he completed culinary school, Barrett spent years volunteering with youth at Education Works and Youth Build. In 2013, he launched the IAM HUMAN campaign to address stigma in the LGBTQ+ community. He knew there would be a way to connect his culinary skills to advocacy.

So Barrett founded Black Boyz Can Cook in 2016 on his own dime. For a year, the program was free for participants. This past summer, a \$30 per month fee was implemented to help fund community outreach projects.

Barrett said partnerships take time, but the need for youth advocacy can't wait.

"My passion is based in working with kids and giving back to people who are less fortunate," Barrett said. "But at the same time, it's blending the two."

The home base for Black Boyz Can Cook is a humble, rehabbed warehouse near Hunting Park Avenue in Nicetown. Truth and Life Empowerment Community Ministry donated its sanctuary space for Barrett and his young chefs to use in the mornings, Monday through Friday.

Previously, the group was meeting in the kitchen at Reign Events, where Barrett is the lead chef for the banquet service. Looking for a more convenient location for parents, Barrett approached Truth and Life's pastor, Clarence Hayes, in June for permission to use the ministry's space.

"I am for anything that is going to better the neighborhood and impact our youth," Hayes said. "When Ariq came to me, I was like yes, I'll do it. Whatever you need, we'll support it. Because that's the purpose of our ministry – to empower people."

The program separates the kids into two groups. Chef Juniors, from ages 4 to 13, learn their food groups, how to build a recipe and often school the older kids on the book etiquette of how to run a kitchen, Barrett said.

Chef Proteges, from ages 14 to 18, get more of a hands on experience while taking on a mentorship role that comes naturally when working side by side with younger children.

In July, Barrett officially opened up the program to girls on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, calling the additional program Girlz Can Cook Too.

"I'm happy that he's bringing girls," Jamirah Walker said with a laugh. "Now I won't have to be around all boys all the time."

Walker, 17, met Barrett when she began waitressing at Reign. She was the first girl to enter the program when she joined in April as a volunteer, but she has picked up a few lessons of her own along the way.

"[Barrett] teaches us everything we need to know," Walker said. "About manners, cooking, learning regular basic skills, anything. I had never worked with kids before. I didn't have the

patience. For them, I do. I see potential in them."

Not all of the young chefs in the program want to build a career in the kitchen, so Barrett makes the environment universal. On Fridays, they fundraise.

In July, each young chef was challenged to concoct their own style of lemonade. From Blueberry Blast to a peach twist on a classic Arnold Palmer, each participant created and sold their product at a lemonade stand on Broad Street at Allegheny Avenue – and made a personal profit while they were at it.

They sold out faster than expected.

"There are life skills here, teaching them to brand a product," Barrett said. "Whether they want to be a chef or a rapper or a hairdresser, they're still learning marketing and branding, and how to deal with people they are coming in contact with."

Community outreach is a core principle of Barrett's mentorship programs. Mixed in with weekly cooking lessons, trips to the movies and pool days at the local recreation centers, the young chefs engage in service activities.

Every Wednesday, the team embarked on a field trip to deliver food they prepared that morning to elderly members of the community on what Barrett called the Edible Express.

The Chef Juniors get excited to participate in community outreach activities because they feel a sense of inclusion. Barrett said no one is too young to give back, or to recognize that something as simple as a warm meal can go a long way for people in need – whether it's at home or in their communities.

"My mom put me in this program so I can cook for her when she's sick," said Saeed Thompson, 6.

The thing he wants to learn most from the program?

"I want to be in this program so I can help the homeless people and feed them and make them happy," he added.





Once a month, Black Boyz Can Cook hosts Breakin' Bread, where the young chefs utilize their new skills to prepare a large home cooked meal.

"We're helping people by breaking bread," Walker said. "This is for people who need help, who are hungry, the doors are open. He's doing this for a good cause, not for money, just out of his heart because that's how he is."

For their July event, the program partnered with Truth and Life Empowerment Community Ministry, as a thank you of sorts. The event drew a crowd of about 30 people on a Wednesday night.

On the menu was a summertime barbecue, complete with Caesar salad, chicken drumsticks, rice, corn, garlic bread. It took all morning for the chefs to prepare the food, fire up the grill and get



dinner in line. Chicken sizzled on the charcoal grill long after the younger chefs had gone home for the night. Overall, the event cost more than \$150, which Barrett paid for independently.

With pride, chefs took care of the service and the church brought the crowd.

Before dinner, Pastor Hayes said grace, with a special thanks to Barrett and the young chefs in Black Boyz Can Cook.

"What Brother Ariq is doing that is so unique is he's taking the time to let the black youth know that there is someone who cares for them," Hayes said, "and there's someone who wants to see them grow and be empowered to be who they can be."

With his hands folded, and head bowed, Cameron Davis, 15, grinned. It was Davis' first day in the program. He was the first to arrive and the last to leave.

"It feels good to know we made this food and it's helping people," Davis said. **- Brianna Spause**

# Cleaning Streets & Changing Lives

Point Breeze residents were tired of trash. So they hired **Ready, Willing & Able**, a program that gets people off the streets and preps them for jobs.

Philadelphia is a city laden with litter on its streets and sidewalks. While the Philadelphia Streets Department outlines its sanitation expectations online, including penalties for not complying with these expectations, residents continue to leave trash on the ground.

“There’s a lot of trash and it needs to be picked up,” said Christopher Lillis, director of operations for real estate developer LPMG Companies, based in South Philadelphia. “And there needs to be awareness about self-policing your communities in that regard.”

One of the bars owned by LPMG Companies, American Sardine Bar, is located right at the heart of the neighborhood, at 18th and Federal streets.

The bar, which has become a hub for the Point Breeze’s newer residents, has been the site of a fundraisers for Clean Point Breeze Streets, a grassroots litter removal program that began in August 2016.

Originally created as a pilot program, Clean Point Breeze Streets only covered the area between Alter and Federal streets, from 18th to 23rd streets. Ready, Willing & Able, an organization that focuses on workforce re-entry, was contracted to provide trash removal services.

A year after the project officially began, Clean Point Breeze Streets is getting ready to enter its second phase, which will extend from Alter to Reed streets and from 17th to 24th streets.

Angela Val works as the chief administration officer for the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau. She moved to Point Breeze in December 2014.

“I spent a lot of time sweeping my front stoop and it eventually extended to my street,” Val said. “After a while, I just felt overwhelmed by the amount of debris and litter and trash. I felt like I couldn’t keep it up, so I was trying to figure out how other neighborhoods dealt with it.”

Val decided that something had to be done about the neighborhood’s trash problem. So she founded Clean Point Breeze Streets.

She learned about Ready, Willing & Able, which provides job training, transitional work and housing for homeless people. They had been hired to for a similar clean up program in the Graduate Hospital neighborhood.

“So I reached out to their executive director, asked him if he would meet with me,” she explained. “I told him what my issue was and he said, ‘Let’s do it!’ We picked 10 blocks that I knew. That’s how it got started.”

Initially, Val needed to raise \$5,000 to pay for Ready, Willing & Able to clean the 10-block area. Many of the Ready, Willing & Able live in Point Breeze, so she was afforded a discounted rate for the first phase of the project.

Val knew that she could initially take her project to the next level after Ready, Willing & Able received grant money to work on Clean Point Breeze Streets and later, when people started to take notice of the clean-up being done.

In addition to the fundraisers held at American Sardine Bar, Val has also



Photo by Jonathan Ginsburg.

started a GoFundMe page which has raised more than \$5,000 in two months. The goal was to raise \$20,000 for the second phase.

While the project will focus directly on Point Breeze, Val hopes that the initiative will impact other neighborhoods throughout the city as well.

“What I hope to do is to create a model that other people can follow in their neighborhood,” Val said.

One of the most important impacts Val hopes her project makes is for people to hire the services of Ready, Willing & Able.

Javier Rivera is currently the director of community improvement projects and operations at Ready, Willing & Able. Rivera, who has worked for the organization in Philadelphia for 17 years, graduated from the program in Harlem in 1997. He has gone from being homeless due to addiction to raising two children with his wife.

He said it’s important to note that Ready, Willing & Able is not a treatment center. Rather, it is a program that allows those who have struggled with addiction, homelessness or crime to give back to the community and prepare to re-enter the workforce.

Rivera spoke at the American Sardine Bar fundraiser over the summer.

“I told them we could guarantee safe streets, and working with our partners at the Department of Sanitation, this thing about dumping would be addressed,” Rivera said. “Removing trash bags, pointing out nuisance, being the eyes and ears of the project itself are some of the ways we plan to improve the quality of life for people who live around there.”

Rivera hopes the neighbors of Point Breeze will follow the example being set by Ready, Willing & Able’s services, since they aren’t working in the neighborhood around the clock. He hopes that the visual difference made by the project’s restorative work, such as power washing, will inspire citizens to be more careful about leaving trash on the streets.

Mallory Fix Lopez, a resident of Point Breeze and owner of On Point Bistro, hopes to see a change in the neighborhood so that her two-year-old son can grow up to learn that trash doesn’t belong on the ground.

“I think it’s a huge concern,” Fix Lopez said. “It’s one of my biggest concerns because you do what you see. If he sees that trash is just there, then it’s a norm for him to think that every street has bottles and bottles and bottles up and down the street.”

**- Jonathan Ginsburg**

# Diverting From Homelessness

**Liz Hersh** is the director of the City of Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services. Prior to working for the city, Hersh ran the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania for 14 years. Her experience has given her insight into working with Philadelphia's homeless residents.

## What goals do you have at the Office of Homeless Services?

The mission is to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring in spite of tremendous obstacles in the environment.

What we do is provide the leadership, planning, coordination and funding to provide the network of emergency, temporary and long-term housing to help people address homelessness.

## How do you work with organizations in the city to fight against homelessness?

The city mostly works through a network of almost 70 not-for-profit providers. Some of them are faith-based. Some aren't. Mostly, that's how the work gets delivered. We do run intake centers where we do a centralized intake for our shelter system, and we run prevention and diversion services. And the city also does outreach.

## Can you talk about that?

It's actually funded through the Department of

Behavioral Health but obviously, we're all part of the same system of services. So there's, I think, eight teams out there now 24/7, 365 days a year reaching out to people who are actually on the streets and helping them access services.

## Have you noticed a change in homelessness in Philadelphia since you've been with this office?

It's interesting. The number of people experiencing homelessness has gone down, but the number of people on the streets has gone up. The reason for the increase on the streets seems to be the opioid crisis.

This is happening pretty much every city around the state. The numbers of unsheltered people are going up. Looking at the demographics and what people are telling us, it really looks like the opioid crisis is the culprit

The other problem we've seen, like most cities, is the rise in the number of people who are panhandling. Again, that goes back to the opioid crisis. The tentacles of that crisis are a big part of what we're grappling with.

## What steps have you been taking to battle or limit that crisis?

What we have been doing is funding different kinds of housing—first models that are designed for people who are homeless and have some kind of substance-use addiction.

We have increased outreach. There are three new outreach teams on the street, and we have one very strong program called Journey of Hope, for people who are chronically homeless and have a substance-use disorder.

This is with the intention of creating more low-barrier facilities, or safe havens, where people can come in. The old idea was that you had to be clean and sober before you could come in. The new thinking is to keep it low-barrier, so people can come in as they are.

We've also added daytime engagement programs

so people have a place to come in off the street.

## Are there any programs you're working toward piloting and potentially utilizing in the near future?

One thing that we're doing is piloting homelessness diversion. Right now, we're already diverting about half the people who come to our front doors, and what we're trying to do is target diversion so that we can help people who do have any kind of viable alternative. But sometimes that costs money.

For example, we just had someone in the last two weeks who showed up at the door, said they were homeless, needed to come into shelter and what they really had was utility debt. When we were able to satisfy the utility debt, they were able to move back into the apartment.

That is a case where a person really doesn't need to come into a \$40 a night shelter. What they really need is a small amount of money to solve the housing problem they have. We're looking more and more at how you do that.

Because we have high poverty and there's such need, it's a tricky balance. Everybody needs a little bit more money. So, how do you identify those people who will become virtually homeless if they don't receive that assistance?

## Do you have any other programs that you're looking into?

A secondary thing we're also looking into is shallow rent. This will apply when people have a very small income and maybe they can only afford like \$200 per month for rent. Can we subsidize it at a modest level and help them be stably housed, rather than cycling through the shelter system?

The third thing we're piloting is working with some partners to see if we can take a couple empty houses and fix them up and have them become actual places where people can live.

**-Jonathan Ginsburg**





## A Vision to Believe In?

**Helen Gym** is an at-large Philadelphia City Council member and vocal education advocate. Her goal in public office has been to tackle widespread poverty through creating a quality public education system - the same system she taught in and put her children through.

Philadelphia Neighborhoods discussed the intersection of income inequality, mobility and education in Philadelphia with Councilwoman Gym.

### **What are your beliefs about education and how were those formed?**

On a very personal level, my father came to this country with absolutely nothing, no family. He struggled, certainly, got his first job at age 39. He worked hard at his job, he retired and sent his kids to Ivy League and Stanford institutions. He is living a life that is sustainable and joyful. This is the country that helped him do that, and it still can be a country that does that.

The idea that you can start one place and end up another in this country is absolutely a vision of what it means to be an American and to have American ideals. Your path is not fixed in life.

We are increasingly in a country and in a global society where our economic situations are becoming fixed and we should stop that. We should resist that as much as possible because it's un-American, because it's inhumane and because it's bad economics and bad politics.

### **Where does income inequality come into play in the education system in Philadelphia?**

There are numerous studies including constitutional lawsuits that indicate educational funding, race and poverty are directly correlated. If a populous is poor, it is likely that their school is less funded.

That has a large part to do with the fact that the majority of funding for schools in the state of

Pennsylvania and across the country has largely functioned on the wealth of land in a particular locality.

In Philadelphia, where we are the poorest large city in the US, where we are a little more than two-thirds of capacity in terms of our housing, we have to come up with programs to help folks as they struggle to meet their utility and property tax bills. If our school funding system is reliant on the wealth of our tax base, we're going to suffer. There's just inequality upon inequality and of course it impacts our neediest children.

### **Where does funding fit in?**

We have a state that is the worst in the nation when it comes to inequities between the poorest and wealthiest school districts.

One of the biggest problems for the school district is around city funding and what the state is going to do to fund our schools. Clearly, there's enormous threats at the federal level as well. We probably have one of the most anti-education secretaries, certainly in public education. It's someone who is lowering the bar every single day on the right to a quality public school for all kids.

Threats at the federal level are already clearing out funding for education budgets. People should be frightened if they have kids, or are hoping to have one, or any college kids today that are hoping to pay off debt when they graduate.

### **How does this funding environment affect public school students?**

The reality is they're not working for the majority of young people. For a lot of our young people, especially when they get to the high school level, there needs to be a much more holistic assessment of their needs.

One of the things we focus on a lot in my time in office is to restore back some support services for young people in these schools. That includes insuring that they've got breakfast in the morning, that there's a social worker that is working at the school and helping families connect with services, that we're figuring out supports for young people

who experience homelessness. That we're working at putting nurses and counselors back in all the schools.

It's not a solution, but it is trying to move us away from starting at points that our young people aren't at.

### **What initiatives would drive schools in that direction?**

Expanding the kinds of measurements by which we can measure progress. If we take only a look at test data, and start to determine a school's quality based on that data, then we're really not going to get to the heart of what we need to do to stabilize and fix our neighborhood high schools.

I think we need to look at the high schools according to much broader metrics that take a look at student need and also the stability of the high school. We have to move away from the idea that schools should only be based on test data that only takes a picture of a child's learning one day at one moment in time, and absent of other concepts.

### **As a whole, what is your biggest concern about education in Philadelphia?**

My biggest concern is about a vision for a school district at this time. People really do have to have a sense of vision around what a school district should be able to do, who it serves amidst a complicated landscape. I am interested in people who have the belief that public schools matter, that they can do a lot of work, that there's a lot that they have to do. That includes a vision for neighborhood high schools, for GED programs, for immigrant families, for a lot of our people who are vulnerable.

Do people have a sense of public will, and commitment to making these goals happen? That has been one of my most important jobs I think, is to have people understand that struggling institutions are not permanent. They can change dramatically with investment and disinvestment. So, my job is to really get people to invest. I need a big vision for the school district that people believe in.

**- Brianna Spause**

# HELP YOURSELF

The education systems that exist in Philadelphia are enormous, and it can be tricky navigating the systems. However, if you are proactive and engaged, you can take advantage of a lot of services, many of which are free to the public.

### **School District of Philadelphia**

440 N. Broad St.  
215-400-4000  
[www.philasd.org](http://www.philasd.org)

### **Parent University**

A resource guide prepared by the School District for parents of children attending Philadelphia public schools  
[www.philasd-parentuniversity.org](http://www.philasd-parentuniversity.org)

### **The Children's Advocacy Project of America**

This online tool identifies local resources for families in regards to education, employment, nutrition, legal services, housing, health and many other areas  
[cap4kids.org/philadelphia](http://cap4kids.org/philadelphia)

### **Mighty Writers**

At four locations around the city, Mighty Writers offers free after school and weekend writing workshops, college prep courses and mentorship to Philadelphia youths  
1501 Christian St.  
1025 S. 9th St.  
3861 Lancaster Ave.  
2123 N. Gratz St.  
[mightywriters.org](http://mightywriters.org)

### **Tree House Books**

Based out of North Philadelphia, this organization offers literacy programs and ensures that children have access to books  
1430 W. Susquehanna Ave.  
215-236-1760  
[treehousebooks.org](http://treehousebooks.org)

### **Community College of Philadelphia**

1700 Spring Garden St.  
215-751-8000  
[www.ccp.edu](http://www.ccp.edu)

### **Education Works**

This nonprofit provides academic support and career readiness programs to reengage disconnected youth  
990 Spring Garden St.  
Suite 601  
215-221-6900  
[educationworks.org](http://educationworks.org)

### **Office of Adult Education**

Run by the City of Philadelphia, this office helps people develop workforce literacy skills  
990 Spring Garden Street  
Third Flor, Suite 300  
215-685-5250  
[philaliteracy.org](http://philaliteracy.org)

### **Fastweb**

This is a gigantic database full of scholarships or varying amounts, both local and national  
[fastweb.com/college-scholarships](http://fastweb.com/college-scholarships)

### **Federal Student Aid**

An office of the United States Department of Education, Federal Student Aid provides more than \$120 billion in grants and loans each year to help pay for college or career school  
1-800-433-324  
[fafsa.ed.gov](http://fafsa.ed.gov)



# Access Through Literacy

**Diane Inverso** has served as the executive director of the Office of Adult Education since 2016, after working for the recently renamed Mayor's Commission on Literacy for more than 25 years.

Though the OAE is not a direct services organization, the city government office develops partnerships and public policy, oversees the Philadelphia Adult Literacy Alliance and coordinates free adult education services. The office runs five myPLACE testing centers for placement in adult education classes and more than 50 KEYSPOTS, which are computer labs with free access and, unlike libraries, no time limit.

## **What need presented itself in Philadelphia that the Office of Adult Education created myPLACE?**

It has always been a little frustrating that we have multiple programs for adult education in the city but they are not linked in anyway shape or form.

It wasn't always very efficient and it certainly was putting adults in a constant state of being tested and evaluated and that's also not a good practice.

## **What is the state of adult literacy as you have seen it in Philadelphia?**

For the 17,000 folks who have come to us so far in the last three and a half years, 60 percent are reading between the fourth and eighth-grade level. Think about that. And these are just the folks that come in the door and ask for help.

I think it's one of the big factors of why we have the poverty rate that we have. It impacts many things in our community. It impacts our children receiving the right kind of services. It impacts our economy, our workforce system. People who are trying to get into apprentice programs, trying to get into community colleges, they are not reading at levels that are high enough. It impacts so many things. Some of it is very subtle.

Then there are adults who are looking to increase their English language capabilities. That is important as well. Some of them come to us with professional degrees but they don't speak English. Some of them come and they are not

even literate in their own language. So, they want to learn how to speak English and write English and understand how they can get the right kinds of credentials.

## **Do low literacy rates affect working adults as well?**

We are not just talking about adults who don't have high school diplomas. We are talking about adults who have high school diplomas who just haven't kept up their skills because they have a job. What if they lose their job?

For a lot of adults, it's stunning to them because they have been successful up to that point and they have been able to find jobs. Now, suddenly, this high school diploma - they still have it, but the skills they had when they graduated have gone away. So, they need to brush up or relearn skills.

## **What workplace skills need the most improvement among adults?**

When we talk about adult education, we are not just talking about the reading, writing and math. We are talking about digital literacy as well. We also want to talk about foundation skills. Those are the skills that make you successful in the workplace. Are you a critical thinker? Do you know how to work in teams? Do you show up on time? Do you know how to ask questions appropriately?

## **How does investment in adult education on behalf of the individual affect the city at large?**

There has been some research that has been done on the return on investment that individuals who engage in adult education. The research shows that they do get jobs, and if they get jobs, they pay taxes, they buy houses. All of these things are so interrelated.

I don't want to say having literacy is a panacea. But it gives you access. Just like getting on a computer gives you so much access to many things.

The people who need it the most are the ones who don't know how to get on a computer.

**- Brianna Spause**

# Nuestra Casa es Su Casa

For the past two years, **Christopher Gale** has served as the administrator of Casa del Carmen, a branch of Catholic Social Services. Founded to serve the Latino community in North Philadelphia, Casa del Carmen assisted more than 5,700 people last year. If a client can't come to Casa del Carmen's office on Fifth Street near Cayuga, the staff will come to the client.

## Can you give a brief background on Casa del Carmen?

Casa has been around since 1954. It was established at Seventh and Jefferson, specifically to help the growing Latino population in North Philadelphia. Now, we don't just help Latinos anymore but they're still our primary clientele. Most of our staff is bilingual.

## What do you do at Casa del Carmen?

I direct and manage the programs and the staff here at Casa. I've got six different programs between my family service center and my preschool. Between those two buildings, we have six programs and about 25 staff. We serve 73 kids everyday at the preschool.

## What are some of the programs?

I've got two food pantries - a traditional food bank and a green light market. The green light market is in partnership with the Coalition Against

Hunger. Then we have a clothing bank. We have foster care and adoption. And our BenePhilly program. And we have the helpline for all Catholic Social Services in this building, so I have two social workers who man phones five days per week and take calls for help.

All of our programs are geared toward low-income, poverty-stricken people.

## Can you explain what BenePhilly is?

BenePhilly is a great program! It's benefit access, so any local, state or federal entitlement program that somebody could qualify for. I've got two benefit access counselors, and their job is to work with clients to ascertain which benefits the clients qualify for and then take them through the application process.

It takes that intimidation factor out of it.

Our guys walk you through that process. They make sure you have the right paperwork, your proof of your income and birth certificate, all of that stuff that the local, state or federal government requires to apply for some benefits. Not only does it make it more personable but clients are more likely to receive that benefit because they have the right paperwork and it was filled out correctly.

## Do you hold community events to connect with the neighborhood?

Every day, we try to do stuff. Recently, we had our community baby shower. It was our second baby shower of the year. We do it here on site and it's free of charge. We invite community partners to come give out information or giveaways. Like, PECO comes in and gives out low energy lightbulbs. It's free for the vendors too. We don't charge them anything. At this recent baby shower, we had over 170 moms, either pregnant or had recently given birth, come. It was probably the best attended since I've been here.

## Do you have any stories that have stuck with you since you've been here?

We had one mom who I met whose husband had just passed away and she had four kids, all under the age of six, I believe. All of a sudden, she had become the primary caregiver for these kids. Her primary language was Spanish and she didn't have a college degree. I'm not sure if she even had a high school diploma. She's trying to figure out what's she's going to do.



She had spoken with one of our parent educators who had then introduced her to me. Christmas was coming up. The parent educator told me her whole backstory and asked how we could help her. So, we bought Christmas gifts for the kids - bikes and scooter, so we could make sure the kids had something to open up. She stayed in touch and kept coming to parenting classes. We were then able to step in and help her get clothes, diapers, baby food, formula. We were able to help her as much as we could, rather than just that one time.

## Does it seem like that's a theme with your clients? They come for assistance with one thing but end up getting help with multiple issues?

Absolutely. We had a gentleman a couple years ago who moved here from Florida. He basically had nothing. He came to us for clothes because he was getting ready to start work the next week. While he was here, we introduced him to one of our benefit access counselors and said, "Hey, you may qualify for additional benefits." The gentleman said, "Well, I just need clothes." We were like, "Yeah, but this might help you out."

We explained that, by applying and taking some of these benefits, it would help free up money in his budget. He did that and he came back to us later when all of his benefits went through and was in such a good spot. He was so happy, and he was in a stable situation where he could work because he was getting some of this extra assistance.

**-Jonathan Ginsburg**



# Tracking City Changes

**Larry Eichel** has been the head of the Philadelphia Research Initiative at the Pew Charitable Trust for nine years.

The nonprofit seeks to inform the conversation and highlight key issues to provide context for changes happening in Philadelphia.

In his time there, Eichel, a former journalist, has researched the city's issues and demographics for the benefit of policy makers and the public.

**What kind of trends have you seen in your research? Is income moving? Are lower socioeconomic areas getting pushed out? Is that actually happening to the extent that people believe it is?**

I'll answer that in a couple ways. We did a report last year on neighborhood change and gentrification. What we found there was that in some ways, the big story, the most interesting thing about that... the median household income from a period of 2000 to 2014 declined in 164 of the 372 residential census tracts. We classified

only 15 out of 372 as gentrifying over that period. For a lot of the city, the story is either no change in income or a slight decline. This is income controlled over time with inflation brought in.

There clearly has been change in some of the areas adjacent to Center City. And the best way I can show that to you, and it's not perfect, is if you compare our 2017 State of the City to our 2013 State of the City. There hasn't been tremendous change, but in some areas just north and south of Center City you see the higher income areas sort of moving out away from Center City to some degree. I would invite you to look at those two maps. They would give you some idea of what's going on.

**Is gentrification necessarily a bad thing? It's generally perceived as a negative term, but are there positive angles to take with it?**

We poll, and in 2015, we asked people two questions that to our mind were about

gentrification. I should tell you we did not use the word "gentrification" in either of the questions because we wanted to try to get people's views on it and not the sense of the word.

One of the questions we asked was, "I'm going to read you two statements, tell me which comes closest to your view." The first statement was, "The city should do more to attract middle and upper income people to struggling neighborhoods." The second was, "The city should do more to help long time residents stay in their neighborhoods when housing costs rise." Twenty-six percent chose the first option, the city should do more to attract people with higher incomes. Sixty-seven percent said the city should do more to keep people in their homes in those neighborhoods.

So that is one way to ask it.

Another way of asking the question: "In some parts of Philadelphia, higher income people are moving into what had been lower income neighborhoods. Is this more of a good thing or a bad thing in your view?" Sixty-three percent said good thing. Twenty-eight percent said bad thing. Eight percent said both or they couldn't choose. Six percent didn't know.

If you take that as sort of two of the pieces of it, you see. If you want to call that ambivalence you could, but obviously people think it's a good thing for higher income people to move in, but they also care about what happens to the people who have been living in those neighborhoods.

**What is the most startling change you've seen in your time researching here?**

I'm not sure I would call it startling, but the population of Philadelphia declined pretty steadily at varying rates, basically from 1950 to 2006. There were a couple years in the 1980s where maybe it gained a person or two. Now we've had 10 years of population increase. I came here in the 1970s in a period when Philadelphia lost 261,000 people in one decade. For me to see a ten-year period of constant population growth, that's a big deal.

It's not gigantic population growth. It seems to be



slowing a little bit. But in the historical context, that's a very big deal.

**In that growth, have you seen a rise in average income?**

The city is still, on the basis of median income and you can see this in our State of the City report and our census data, is still a relatively poor city. It has the highest poverty rate of the 10 largest cities in the country. It's not the highest poverty rate but of the 10 largest cities, it's the highest.

In the most recent census data, the median household income of the city was \$41,233. Over the last two years, Philadelphia's median household income has grown faster in percentage terms than those of all the comparison cities, with the exception of Washington.

A year or two of income data from the census may or may not mean a tremendous amount. But if we see that continuing, maybe that tells us something - that we are seeing income move into the city. We need probably one more data point to know.

**Have you done other work in examining the changes in Philadelphia neighborhoods?**

I urge you to look at our gentrification report. Not everyone would agree with our definition of

gentrification, but it was a pretty carefully thought out one and a precise one where we wanted to be able to get something that we could measure and not just say, "Well that looks like it's gentrified."

The point it made was very right on the money, which is that gentrification has been limited to specific parts of the city. It's different in different places.

We classify the gentrifying neighborhoods based on what they had been before gentrification came. We had Center City and adjacent, mixed-income white, old industrial and working class African-American. We found that gentrification looks very different in all of those places.

Obviously, if it's old industrial, there aren't a lot of people being displaced. In the mixed-income white areas, which are mainly in South Philadelphia, there hasn't been a tremendous amount of new construction. There's infill construction. That looks very different than a working class African-American district where gentrification happens.

**Your biggest qualifying factor is income. Do you look at any buying or selling of properties or new development?**

We did this based on the original definition, the original definition of gentrification. The term

was coined in the 1960s by a British sociologist. The underlying meaning is basically a shift in a neighborhood's population from predominantly low-income or working class to predominantly middle or upper class.

We decided that to us that meant income.

We thought about this a long time. We did a lot of work on it. We consulted with a lot of experts. Part of the reason why we like the income definition was there's no really good data on rents in Philadelphia. There's no government agency that tracks it. There's good information on housing prices, but there isn't good information on rents.

We thought income is what this is about. It's the cause.

The reason housing prices go up is because higher income people want to move in. Somebody is willing to pay the price. There are other people who look at it differently. We chose to look at it that way because of the original definition and because of the data was more robust on the income side. You can slice it down to a tract level.

Ultimately, it's about the change in population. It's about the change in population of who lives in the area. That's what gentrification is about. Certainly we've seen that in some areas.

**- Jared Phillips**

Photo by Bob Stewart.



## Problem Solving, as a Team

**María Quiñones-Sánchez** took office 10 years ago, representing District 7 in Philadelphia City Council. Long considered a party outsider, it is not uncommon to find her battling politically with Latino leaders in her own neighborhood, as well as other council members. Her sprawling council district is comprised of a wide area, covering all or parts of 12 of the city's 66 wards.

During a visit to Hissey Playground in Kensington, Sanchez talked about income inequality and how it affects her constituents. She made the case that what affects her constituents affects the city as a whole.

**In your district, there are some folks in deep poverty right now. They're living in or near concentrated drug havens, yet they're not far from the wealth of Center City.**

But they still survive. They still survive.

**How do you fight income inequality?**

One of the things we're acutely aware of is that we have to have quality, affordable housing. How do we take some of these blocks and create affordable

opportunities? We'll have some stuff coming up, a pilot that we're looking to launch in the Kensington neighborhood, around affordability.

How do we better leverage the capacity of the private sector along with our public partners, for example the Play Streets and all of the other stuff, and have a better coordinated strategy? Take SEPTA, for instance. We brought the SEPTA general manager out a couple months ago and said to him, "These SEPTA stops are your business fronts and they look a mess."

He rode the train up here and agreed. And they have increased not only the SEPTA police presence through Chief Nestel, but they've done enhanced cleaning and working with Impact Services on the corridor.

I think everybody wants to help but city government isn't always the best for coordination. One of the things we've proven through the Conrail clean-up and this other stuff is that we can be better coordinated.

So I think you're going to see a lot more of that.

**What causes income inequality?**

There's never the political will to talk about inequality. The haves are better organized, have louder voices. The have-nots manage to do a whole lot with very little. How do we articulate how important it is that a major city with such deep poverty, with major segregation, how do we say to folks, "mixed income neighborhoods are the best neighborhoods, culturally diverse neighborhoods are the best neighborhoods?" So that when we do these public infrastructure investments, the long-term residents don't feel like, "Oh you're gonna push us out. Is this the beginning of us getting pushed out?"

Every time I've done an improvement since I got elected it's like, "Is this for us or is this for the people coming in?"

And I'm like, "What are you talking about? You deserve this."

So how do you create that political space to say what happens at C Street and Indiana Avenue is important to downtown? That big corporations and those jobs are never going to come if there isn't an articulation of mixed neighborhoods as opposed to concentrated poverty, which is what our housing policy has created right now.

We have high value land and we want to sell it for short-term gain as opposed to thinking, "How do you create affordability there so that you can create that mix? How do we use our asset base to do that?"

Center City, at its core, is almost developed. So, as you develop in the neighborhoods, what's going on in Fishtown and even in my own community of Norris Square should not be about gentrification. How do you keep those long-term residents there and then bring in some of the folks who are clearly buying there because of its locale close to public transportation? How do we make sure that its long-term residents can afford to live there?

**What can be done about it? And what are some example of how to do it?**

For the last 20 years, there have been people in

here doing great work. We want to make sure we recognize that and give them better tools. I mean, they've done it despite us. So how do you give them better tools? How do you facilitate Jim Hardy, who is a teacher at Kensington, to be able to expand his services? He brings what he brings through the game of soccer to the facilities.

When I got elected, I came up with a 10 year parks plan. So, clearly when Kenney starts talking about Rebuild, for me that's a no brainer. Because I know that for many of these young people, these green spaces are what they have. They are what they know.

Hissey Playground was closed for the first three years that I was elected. The fourth year, we decided to do a clean-up as a staff. We came out here and folks were like, "You're gonna clean it and folks from the outside are gonna come and dirty it." That was during the first phase of people just shooting up. But the neighbors now have a friends crew.

We're trying to tie in the Indiana Corridor to McPherson here. Then we're looking at the park at A [Street] and Indiana [Avenue] and saying, "How do we connect these parks with active play and passive play?" The first phase we planned in the neighborhoods was the playground, which we're looking at the field.

What else do we do here to encourage more active use? It's literally a day-to-day situation.

**So, improving the neighborhood is a big component, but what about directly to individuals?**

One of the things I'm acutely aware of as an elected official is that I represent a lot of people at the bottom of the pay scale. One of the things that I do is that I look at my data sets. The data tells the story of what's going on, what's happening and if we're hitting a cliff.

When I got elected, 20 percent of the water debt from unpaid household bills was in my district, even though I'm a tenth of the city.

We started chipping away at utilities, PECO issues.

The water one was like, this is crazy. This is a government-owned utility, how did people get into this debt?

Now, some of us think water is a right. We coupled that with our 25-year stormwater plan. We worked with the administration to come up with the most progressive plan that recognizes our high rate of homeownership. For one, we stopped all property foreclosures related to water. Ain't nobody losing their house because of the water bill. Then we looked at what is the most progressive way to do it. We got the water department to hire an expert and we looked at all the plans across the country. Now we're known for having the plan.

I mean I've been talking to folks in Detroit and folks in California and everyone is like, well how did you get this done? And it's like, the data tells the story, folks. If you look at your data sets you're going to see that you have a problem.

Now we have a program that 60,000 people are going to be eligible for. It's going to be based on their income and there's a water conservation component to it. We're going to be able to monitor people's water and know if they have a leaky toilet or if they have a leaky faucet and say, "Hey, your water utilization based on the number of people in your house don't match up." We can do all of that stuff now. This program is going to be huge. I had people with \$10,000 [past due] accounts.

**How do else can the city help those on a fixed income? What about the elderly?**

That's where having a comprehensive affordable housing strategy becomes important. It's better for people to age in place as opposed to putting them in these facilities.

I just did an inclusionary housing bill and the development community is like, "You're gonna stop development, Maria." What is wrong with creating a couple affordable units within a new building? Wouldn't it be nice to have two senior people be able to live downtown and have access to quality? That's not an intrusive request.

When we do space we try to do it intergenerational.

Look at Collazo at Mascher and Allegheny. So I have 500 seniors that live nearby. We did a walking track. We did some seating areas for them. Why? Because they come out and they walk and they breathe good air and all those things become healthy. They're going to have a supermarket across the street. We have a life center there for them. When we fix Rivera, we're giving them an entire first floor for senior programming. Those are quality of life issues

When seniors come to the park, it makes it safer.

**What are some of the obstacles?**

The uniformity clause kills us. I think there is a move around the bifurcation of property taxes. There's a discussion. It's obviously being led by some of the big business folks. Part of the problem with the current legislation as it passed is that it ties City Council's hands about how much we can move the needle either way. We really got to articulate a long term strategy for this.

Many of these departments operate in silos, as opposed to, "OK, we have Kensington. Who has money coming into here and how do we leverage that with private development?"

Those conversations are still really complicated to have. The water department does their thing.

We try, through our office, when I'm aware of all of these moving parts, to get people around the table and say how we're going to maximize it.

I got a couple million dollars for Kensington and Allegheny [avenues]. For three years, we've been struggling with what are we going to do with it. I had to bring everyone around the table and say, "How do we invest this money?" That's why we brought SEPTA to the table.

We're going to do some branding of Kensington and Allegheny. But you literally have to force those discussions and have Impact Services there, and Kensington CDC there, so everyone is on the same page.

And that doesn't happen naturally. It really doesn't.

**- Bob Stewart**





WHO

RUNS

THE

CITY?

Strapped for cash and in need of services, the city has found new ways to generate revenue and offer amenities. But are we giving away the city when we let private organizations control public property?

Story by **Bob Stewart**.  
Photo by **Brianna Spause**.

“I was amazed at how big it was, how gorgeous it was, even then,” said Amy Needle of Franklin Square in 2003.

At the time, she was working at the National Constitution Center on its opening festivities. One of the events took place nearby at Franklin Square, somewhere she had never been.

But the scene wasn't exactly what the city's founder likely thought it should be. There were no paved pathways for Needle to walk. Instead she found gravel, broken lights and a lack of anything visually appealing.

“There were no flowers or landscaping,” Needle said. “Most of the trees were really overgrown and many of them were dead.”

Just a block away from the newly dedicated institution was one of Philadelphia's original public spaces, first laid out in the 1680s. When visitors to the Constitution Center finished learning about amendments, they could walk to Franklin Square and relax. There they might wander the eight acres of space, admire dead trees or pick up used drug paraphernalia at a run-down playground on the west side of the square.

While America boasted its freedoms at Fifth and Arch streets, Philadelphia neglected its heritage at Sixth and Race streets.

Politicians and philosophers alike know power and nature abhors a vacuum. Across the nation, when a government fails in the public space it is not unusual to receive help in the form of partnerships with private entities such as nonprofit foundations, philanthropists and groups of caring neighbors.

Whether no one complained enough about its condition or the city had trouble finding a partner willing to do the work, Philadelphia neglected its responsibility at Franklin Square late in the 20th century.

But then Needle came along.

Today, she serves as the president and CEO of Historic Philadelphia, a nonprofit, privately-funded organization that operates several public spaces in Philadelphia including Franklin Square.

At the time, Needle saw opportunity for improvement.

Former Mayor Ed Rendell created Historic Philadelphia by executive order in 1994. The city authorized the organization to take over care of Franklin Square in 2006, officially subleasing the park through the Philadelphia Authority for Industrial Development (PAID) in 2007 for \$1 rent. The City, in its agreement with Historic Philadelphia, essentially waived its liabilities for the property and agreed to “to refer applicants who wish to use portions of the premises ... to seek approval for such use from subtenant.”

Needle and her team began conversations with the local community. One portion of the square folks used regularly was the playground.

“When we started talking to community people and the daycare center that used it every day,” she recalled. “The teachers told us that they literally came over in the mornings, before the kids got there, to clean the playgrounds out from all of the drug paraphernalia that was there.”

It wasn't a great playground, but it was the only one the neighborhood had. And locals had heard about various groups with intentions to fix up the park many times.

“We'll believe it if we see it,” Needle remembered people in the community telling her.

When William Penn's surveyor Thomas Holme laid out the city of Philadelphia, it included only 1,200 acres. Penn set 42 of those aside for public space in the form of five “squares.” They're still here today, for the most part. In addition to Franklin Square there's Rittenhouse, Washington, Logan and Centre Squares. Now, Logan is a traffic circle integrated into the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Centre Square is the home of City Hall.

Various entities exert control over Penn's squares today. Aside from Historic Philadelphia operating Franklin Square, Center City District (CCD) manages Dilworth Park at City Hall. Various “friends of” groups take care of others.

Due in part to old-school tax methodologies and de-industrialization, many big cities run low on money. The goal of a private-public partnership is to have an interested or concerned private entity fill a gap from a stressed government.

“Where things are privatized, you find that the main reason behind it is that the same function could be done equally well for less money,” said Rendell.

As more affluent people move out of the city, they take tax dollars with them. Many stay, but decreasing job opportunities lead to economic stagnation. As demand for homes in a city drop, so do prices. And with that, tax revenue.

As funding dries up, city leaders make tough calls on cuts. Often they send dollars to public safety and education instead of parks and open space.

This has been a common operating procedure among city leaders in the past few decades. Raising taxes becomes problematic around re-election time, so city leaders find other ways to move dollars around. The way Philadelphia did it in the 1980s caused Center City to be neglected.

“Center City was just filled with litter, graffiti and had a reputation of being a totally dangerous place,” said Paul Levy, president and CEO of Center City District.

When business owners griped to City Council members, their calls did not find receptive ears.

“Forty percent of the jobs were downtown but only four percent or five percent of the total population of the city lived downtown,” Levy said. “If you're a City Council person doing your job of representing districts and there's limited money, it's very logical, very rational and very appropriate to make sure police services, cleaning services, recreation and all of the other services are allocated to cover where the people live and vote.”

The city simply didn't have the resources. In the early 1990s, CCD, now a highly successful business improvement district (BID), took shape.

The city describes a BID as “a legal mechanism for property owners and businesses in a defined geographic area to jointly plan and put in place a sustainable funding source that can pay for a set of services to improve their area.”

Operating under a 1945 law called the Pennsylvania Municipal Services Act, CCD formed and began collecting assessments from Center City property owners based on property value. With that, an army of street sweepers and power washers began picking up trash and removing graffiti.

“It started off as just ‘clean and safe,’” Levy said.

Commercial properties are assessed higher than residences and the Pennsylvania Municipal Services Act was amended in 2012 to address conflicts with Pennsylvania's uniformity clause.



That clause, found in Article VIII, Section 1 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, states: “all taxes shall be uniform, upon the same class of subjects, within the territorial limits of the authority levying the tax, and shall be collected under general laws.”

Part of what made that course of action necessary was that business owners downtown and across the city have a problem: they are not just competing with each other.

“Whether it was Germantown Avenue or Frankford Avenue or Passyunk Avenue or Center City, they’re not simply competing within the city,” Levy said. “They’re competing against suburban shopping centers, which have a maintenance mechanism, which are clean and safe with free parking.”

CCD started moving beyond just cleaning. Free parking nights and more lighting also became a focus.

“Business areas were competing with one hand tied behind their back,” Levy explained. “So the whole genesis of the CCD and the subsequent ones: Alright, if you want additional services we’re gonna authorize you and give you the ability to assess yourself to have additional funds for cleaning, safety, marketing so you can be more competitive and generate jobs. It’s a win-win situation for the city.”

City Council members not only see private-public partnerships as a good thing, but as essential. Some have even helped constituent groups form BIDs in their districts.

District 6 Councilman Bobby Henon represents the eastern side of Northeast Philly, including neighborhoods such as Torresdale, Bridesburg and Mayfair. In 2015, he introduced legislation to create the Mayfair Business

District, centered around Frankford Avenue. The total annual revenue is around \$270,000. Not enough to pay for a full-time staff of street cleaners but locals can augment city services they feel necessary.

When the residents or businesses in the immediate area of a public space pitch in, the help it contributes offsets the need to vie for scarce public resources. But there’s potential for an imperfect marriage.

**O**ne fear critics have of partnering with private entities is the public losing control of the public space. Last year, Historic Philadelphia received criticism for fencing off Franklin Square during the Chinese Lantern Festival. Needle heard criticism from the public and addressed the problems.

“We’d never done that before,” she said, of hosting an event of that size for that timeframe. “We learned from it.”

The City also compels the organization to allow protesters to demonstrate or assemble on the premises, which is what happened when Occupy left Dilworth Plaza and relocated to Franklin Square in 2011.

Dilworth may not have Occupy anymore, but it is often occupied for special events. The city does reserve the right to utilize Dilworth Park, with notice, for memorial services for police or firefighters.

Henon looks at what CCD did with Dilworth and sees mostly positives. He said private events are not terribly intrusive and pointed out those are fundraising opportunities for those groups alone.

“They get permit fees for that,” Henon said of the cost private entities pay to CCD to hold events at Dilworth. “That money goes back and pays for their

services.”

Councilman Mark Squilla, who represents much of South Philly and some of Center City through the River Wards, understands people’s fears too. But he pointed to examples of where the neighborhood benefits despite the minimal loss.

“Look at the situation in the Northeast with Father Judge and Ramp [Playground],” he said of the high school’s renovation of the public playground, the result of a partnership between the school and the city.

In return for maintaining it, Father Judge’s sports teams get use of the fields. However, this means neighbors don’t get access 100 percent of the time, something Squilla believes is still worthwhile.

“That’s a good trade off,” he said.

But not everyone agrees with Squilla’s assessment.

“People were concerned when it happened because there was not sufficient discourse and it appeared the fields were going to only be used by Father Judge because they donated \$1 million towards the renovations,” said Holmesburg Civic zoning chair David Dlugosz, via email. “Several people have concerns with its use. However, the fields are open to anyone if they have a permit.”

One specific concern was how the neighborhood use changed. Previously, residents had a flea market at the location.

“I think that nowadays, there are still mixed feelings,” Dlugosz explained. “People who used to use it for various purposes can no longer use it for those purposes -- the flea market for example -- because it is fields now and not just a big open area.”

**S**quilla also used Franklin Square as a good example of private funding benefiting public spaces. Historic Philadelphia operates differently from CCD in that it does not assess any local property owners. Instead, it finances maintenance of the park through funds generated by operating a mini-golf course, a burger stand and a carousel in Franklin Square. It also receives donations via major benefactors such as Parx Casino, PECO, William Penn Foundation, Fox Rothschild, the City of Philadelphia and others. Smaller donors can make tax-deductible gifts or have a specially engraved brick placed in the park for \$100.

“[Historic Philadelphia] spruced up our open space for use of the public,” Squilla said. “They have events here.”

But events don’t just happen and Historic Philadelphia didn’t just appear.

While CCD was forming in 1991, a mayoral election was also taking place. Ed Rendell won the Democratic Primary and was set to face Republican winner Frank Rizzo. But when Rizzo suffered a heart attack while campaigning and died, the Republicans put up Joseph J. Egan.

One of Rizzo’s issues of the campaign Egan picked up was to “bring better management to government without turning over city services to private companies,” according to a New York Times article from 1991. Ironically, prior to joining the mayor’s race, at one time Egan was the president of the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation, a quasi-public economic development agency.

Rendell won easily.

A decade later, Needle found an ally in Rendell for getting Historic Philadelphia started in revitalizing Franklin Square.

“For me it was amazing that this park was sitting there and had so much

potential,” she said. “I think once I brought it to the attention of Rendell and others, it was, ‘Let’s try to do something and make it a place where people could come,’ because it was so close to the Constitution Center.”

Places like Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia have other nearby attractions, such as Busch Gardens, a fact then-Mayor Rendell was aware of and a fan of. He knew there needed to be more to the Philadelphia experience than just the museums and history.

“It was the right time at the right place,” said Needle. “And the right people were involved for sure to make it all happen.”

**R**endell was a proponent of partnerships with non-government entities, be it for public spaces or public services.

“We privatized 47 functions when I was mayor,” he said. “I don’t think any of them turned out bad. None that I can think of.”

For Rendell, these arrangements are unequivocally a win.

“These things generally on this level, where a nonprofit has to work for the city ... is 100 percent upside,” he said. “There’s no downside.”

But as with any deal, having a well-structured contract is paramount.

“When we proposed the Pennsylvania Turnpike [privatization] we were going to to control the rate of tolls and the maintenance schedule,” Rendell said, citing the Indiana Toll Road privatization as an example of a public private partnership that imploded due to a poor contract and lack of controls.

When it comes to private use of public property, Rendell pointed out even without private or nonprofit partners, government can allow uses of its assets.

“When I was mayor, I used the mayor’s reception room for official events, but we also rented that out,” he said, mentioning people used it for weddings and bar mitzvahs. “There’s no downside to that at all.”

Both Squilla and Henon agree with Rendell on the lack of a downside for partnerships between the city and private organizations when it comes to public property. Each councilman pointed out that the city retains ownership of public space and the public can bring concerns to them. Further checks and balances include the need for City Council to approve a service district’s board members.

He further said BIDs, like the one in Mayfair, involve conversations that last more than a year before the legislation is introduced.

“It ultimately comes in front of City Council and City Council gets the opportunity to ask a lot of questions based on what’s presented,” Henon said. “The public gets to show up and ask a lot of questions.”

CCD has its own method of assuring public input.

“What we do every single year is a major customer satisfaction survey,” Levy said. “We send surveys to property owners, retailers, residents and then we set up all over Center City with tables and just interview pedestrians. Is it clean? Is it safe? What are the two things we could do to make it safer? If you wanted to make Center City look more attractive, what would you want?”

**T**he renovation of Dilworth Plaza into Dilworth Park was largely funded by the William Penn Foundation. The philanthropic organization also funded the transformation of the Schuylkill River Trail and the Delaware River waterfront, amongst many, many other parks and projects around the city.

In 2016, they made their largest donation in the foundation’s history --

\$100 million pledged to the city's Rebuild Philadelphia effort. The money will essentially kick-start Mayor Jim Kenney's plan to revitalize 400 parks, playgrounds, libraries and recreation centers around the city.

"We expect Rebuild to be a \$500 million initiative, \$300 million of which will come from bonds, to be issued on behalf of the city, which will be repaid using revenue from the Philadelphia beverage tax," said David Gould, Rebuild's deputy director of community engagement and communications. "We also have \$48 million in the city's capital budget and hope to fundraise the balance from state, federal and philanthropic grants."

For the William Penn Foundation, funding Rebuild is a way to have a larger impact on the entire city. Founded by the Haas family in 1945, the foundation has made grants to small organizations, like art space Vox Populi, and to major institutions, like the Philadelphia Museum of Art. They now focus on making grants revolving around watershed protection, education and creative communities.

"We're also interested in ensuring that all neighborhoods in Philadelphia -- not just downtown -- but all neighborhoods in the city have access to high quality amenities," said executive director Shawn McCaney, "like parks, public spaces and trails."

Without the William Penn grant, the city probably would not be able to make the repairs and renovations to the parks and centers, many of which have gone without updates for years, maybe even decades.

And that gives the foundation great power. The vetting process before the grant was awarded was rigorous. The actual \$100 million is being delivered in segments, after established goals are met.

For the William Penn Foundation to make such an impact, the city of Philadelphia needs to be a willing partner.

"They are the landowner, the landlord of most of the public assets, even when they're operated privately," McCaney said. "The city is an essential partner."

But the reality is that this private-public partnership is not a pairing of two equals. One side has all the power, and the ability to influence the way the city operates.

**T**he Delaware River City Corporation (DRCC), a nonprofit started by former U.S. Congressman Bob Borski, serves as an example of a nonprofit connecting city residents to the waterfront.

The organization, which also receives funding from the William Penn Foundation, covers the riverfront on the Delaware River, from Allegheny Avenue up to the Poquessing Creek. It also works inward along the creeks such as Pennypack.

While it does the same kind of community outreach Historic Philadelphia does, the public is a bit more essential to it.

DRCC executive director Tom Branigan said his organization fills a gap for the land they cover. Removing things like invasive species won't happen with a city government tasked with looking out for 142 square miles. DRCC, which Branigan called a lean organization, does that with the help of community members. For DRCC, the community is a de facto labor force.

"We've got our 11 miles," he said. "We're the eyes on the greenway. We can only do it by connecting with volunteers. Once you get people involved, they take ownership of it."



The group seeks out volunteers from the community via social media and contact with civic leaders. But it is also partnering with companies that seek public service opportunities for their employees. One company recently assisted in planting trees.

As far as nonprofits being more effective than government agencies, Branigan said there are still difficulties.

"We're not totally independent," Branigan said. "There's still state and federal dollars that flow through the city. The bureaucracy is still there."

But being more nimble has advantages.

"We can do the smaller projects more easily," Branigan said. "We go directly to community meetings and find out what

they want."

**H**istoric Philadelphia recently celebrated the 11th anniversary of the Franklin Square project. The park hosts 89,000 visitors per year, 45,000 of which are from out of state.

"When we started thinking about what we could do to animate the historic district, we thought of reclaiming the square, not only for the residents but for visitors," Needle said. "After a day of going through the history, everybody needs a place to unwind. When we started the process, we worked really closely with the city ... to make sure that not only were we taking out dead trees, but we've continually added more trees every year."

It developed the miniature-golf course since Philadelphia didn't have one. It also installed the carousel, inspired by Race Street which was named for the horse races held there long ago. That angle helped get Parx Casino to sponsor the carousel. The centerpiece of the park is an old fountain.

"The fountain hadn't worked for 30 years," Needle said. "We now know that it's one of the oldest, if not the oldest, working fountains in the country."

Rendell believes the number of these types of partnerships will increase in the future, not decrease.

"As government money becomes less and less available, and with the federal government and the state government giving less money to cities and counties," Rendell said, "they're going to be forced to find ways to save money." 

# FINDING SANCTUARY IN THE CITY

More than 600 refugees have arrived in the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection over the past year. They fled wars, religious and ethnic persecution and other horrors. Here, there are services to assist them to build prosperous lives.

Story and photos by **Jonathan Ginsburg**.

**B**urmese refugee Noor Azizah arrived in Philadelphia by way of Indonesia in early 2017. After fleeing Burma, Azizah spent time in an Indonesian refugee camp.

"I cannot stay in Burma," Azizah said. "They kill. They shoot."

Burma, better known today as Myanmar, has endured one of the world's most persistent civil wars, dating back to 1949. The Karen people, an ethnic group living in Myanmar, have continued to fight for an independent state for almost 70 years.

Most recently, the religious and ethnic persecution of the Rohingya people, natives of the Rakhine State in Myanmar, has continued to make Myanmar a difficult place for citizens to live their lives. While the majority of people in Myanmar practice Buddhism, the Rohingyas are a predominantly Muslim population.

Moving to a new country requires significant adjustment, but refugees don't have much choice if they want to live safe lives. While immigrants choose to resettle in another country, refugees are forced to leave their home country because their lives are in jeopardy every day.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also known as the UN Refugee Agency, sent Azizah at the age of 22 to Philadelphia with her husband and daughter. The UNHCR works to safeguard refugees' rights and aid in the resettlement process. According to the Pew Research Center, Pennsylvania resettled the ninth most refugees of any state in the United States during fiscal year 2016.

"In Myanmar, we cannot do anything," Azizah said. "We must stay in the home, we cannot study. I have a daughter. My daughter can study here. She'll have a good life here, so I am happy to stay here."

The family currently resides in South Philadelphia. Azizah's daughter attends pre-school and her husband works in New Jersey. Azizah has her sights set on becoming a licensed henna artist so she can continue to make henna creations after earning her General Education Diploma (GED).



**W**hile immigrants may come to the U.S. and some remain or become undocumented, meaning they entered the country without inspection or stayed past the length of their visa, refugees are here legally having followed the process necessary to enter the U.S.

Those seeking refugee status must contact the UNHCR or an international nonprofit volunteer agency. If neither is accessible, they can contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. The next step is to complete a series of forms, free of charge. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) evaluates these forms and interviews potential refugees to determine whether or not to grant refugee status.

"Refugee is a legal status," said Miriam Enriquez, director of Philadelphia's Office of Immigrant Affairs, which focuses on Philadelphia's immigrant communities through policy and program development. Making sure immigrants have access to city services is key. It also convenes stakeholders, bringing invested parties to the table to discuss issues.

"When you come here as a refugee, you are not undocumented," said Enriquez. "You are here legally. You have one year to adjust your status, which means that you go from refugee to legal permanent resident, to getting that green card. Then, once you have your green card, you can wait five years and fulfill the requirements it would take to become a citizen."

Although the Office of Immigrant Affairs is not a direct service office, its main goal is to act as a connector and a convener. Other agencies, and people, in the city fill a similar role.

**M**eera Siddharth is a pediatrician at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). For the past six years, Siddharth has worked with refugees at CHOP. Some are from areas that afforded them medical care, while others have never been to a physician before.

"That's what makes it challenging," Siddharth said. "It's not like someone who was born in the U.S. who's had regular medical care their whole life."

Siddharth, who has worked in Bhutan, Uganda, Haiti, India, Laos and Cambodia, chose to work with refugees in Philadelphia because of her desire to practice global health in her community.

Although they are able to see a doctor upon arrival, it isn't easy for adult refugees in Philadelphia to obtain medical insurance. According to Siddharth, children are able to stay insured by the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), but adults lose insurance after eight months unless they have a job that provides insurance.

"Even if they have insurance, it's hard for them to kind of deal with the very complicated medical system that we have," Siddharth said. "A lot of them need help getting to appointments, understanding where to go next, along

with billing and referrals. It can be a very intimidating process for them."

For many immigrants and refugees there are also barriers to working in one's chosen profession. Mohammed Mohammed, an Iraqi refugee, came to Philadelphia four years ago at the age of 19. Like Azizah, Mohammed was also relocated to Philadelphia through UNHCR.

He lives in Oxford Circle in Northeast Philadelphia, a neighborhood where more than a quarter of its residents are foreign born.

"I feel like it's the best place in Philadelphia to live in because other people are immigrants like me," Mohammed said. "I feel more comfortable to talk to them and know about them. I feel it's the place that I belong to."

Upon arriving, Mohammed was able to attend and later graduate from Northeast High School. With his improved English skills and knowledge of American school subjects, he has pursued a college degree and work in his field. Mohammed's father, however, was forced to step away from a career in microbiology.

"He's retired," Mohammed said. "His English didn't allow him to continue working in the profession in science that he worked in in Iraq. He found that the best thing for him to do is his artwork because he can get out his emotions and his feelings without speaking."

Now 24 years old, Mohammed is attending Community College of Philadelphia in pursuit of a degree in international studies. Although he and his father have struggled financially since coming to Philadelphia, especially in their first few years, Mohammed has gained a firm grasp on the English language, putting him in a position to find work to help support his family after college.

**A**lthough the types of jobs refugees could be hired in may be limited upon arrival due to language barriers, they are eligible to begin working immediately upon completing the necessary paperwork. This includes a Form I-94, containing a refugee admission stamp, and Form I-765, application for employment authorization, which is then filed in order to receive an employment authorization document (EAD), according to the Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program.

Out of the five primary regions where refugees settle in Pennsylvania, Region 3, which includes Philadelphia, has taken in the second most refugees from October 2016 to September 2017 according to the Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program.

The Philadelphia region--which also includes Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties--has become the new home to 711 refugees, 643 of whom landed within the city itself, during this period. Since October of last year, more than 100 refugees have come to the Philadelphia region from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine each, while Iraq





and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have yielded 66 and 65 refugees, respectively, as the top five countries of origin for immigrants.

Throughout the city, organizations such as HIAS and the Nationality Services Center (NSC) focus on refugee resettlement. These entities help refugees adjust to life in the U.S. by assisting with housing, employment and language classes, as well as providing legal services at low or no fees.

The Office of Immigrant Affairs will refer refugees to these services for resettlement and immigrants for citizenship purposes. It also strives to aid immigrants with language accommodation services.

“Language access is a program that we run out of our office,” Enriquez said. “Language access requires that all city departments, commissions and offices provide language services to our limited English proficient population. People who do not speak English very well or at all should be able to receive those same services that you or I would receive in the city.”

**A**zizah received minimal education before coming to the United States, and it was in that Indonesian refugee camp where she learned some English. She has received guidance to pursue her GED from Shira Walinsky, co-founder of the Mural Arts Porch Light program’s Southeast by Southeast initiative.

At Southeast by Southeast, which is funded by the City of Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, art

projects and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are offered often.

“We have a host of classes happening -- ESL classes and other kinds of classes that help people to adjust,” Walinsky said. “The other thing that’s been really wonderful is that Mural Arts has hired case aids from within the community to be able to tell us what their community needs. I’m not a social worker but I also think education and art can be ways to help new communities adjust to life in the U.S.”

Southeast by Southeast is currently based in South Philadelphia but the organization will be opening a new location on Castor Avenue near Solis-Cohen Elementary School. While Southeast by Southeast currently primarily serves the Burmese, Bhutanese and Nepali communities, its new location in the Northeast will enable work with Philadelphia’s Sudanese, Iraqi and Syrian communities.

Mohammed and his father have attended events at Southeast by Southeast and the organization’s new location will provide more opportunities for the two to take part in its programs. Having had time to adjust to life in Philadelphia, Mohammed now considers himself grateful to have been placed here.

“After this long time being here, I feel that I’m lucky,” Mohammed said. “It’s a big population. A lot of people come here from different countries, speak different languages, so I feel more comfortable here.” 

# EDUCATION

ALLOWS

THE INDIVIDUAL

TO

# BLOSSOM

Not having a high school diploma can perpetuate the cycle of poverty. There are a lot of options for people to earn their degree, which will bring greater freedom, help them earn more money and end the cycle of despair.

Story and photos by **Brianna Spause**.

**K**elly Moore dropped out of school before she ever entered ninth grade at Bartram High School. She was 14 years old and pregnant with her first child.

When she watched her youngest daughter graduate eighth grade with honors in 2016, five children and almost 30 years later, something clicked.

“I thought, I really can do something with myself,” said Moore, a 43-year-old from West Philadelphia. “I can’t just let it all go. After doing all of this with my kids, I can’t just let it all go.”

In September 2016, Moore signed up for high school equivalency (HSE) classes at Community Learning Center in West Philadelphia. She eventually wants to get her degree and be a business owner.

**T**here are two tests learners can take to earn a high school equivalency in Pennsylvania. The traditional GED is offered online only, and the HiSET exam can be taken with pencil and paper and is offered to learners that lack digital literacy skills.

Both exams test the same skills and levels of adult learners but are administered based on an individual’s ability to use the computer.

Community Learning Center (CLC), founded in 1987, is a state-funded adult education provider with two locations, one in North Philadelphia at Broad Street and Lehigh Avenue and the other in West Philadelphia, on 63rd Street near Vine. The Center offers classes for low-income adults working toward gaining their HSE through the GED or HiSET test, citizenship classes for new Philadelphia residents, English as a Second Language and career training workshops and classes.

In 2016, CLC achieved the highest passing rates for the high school equivalency exam of any state-funded adult education provider in Philadelphia, with a 91 percent pass rate.

Though CLC is the most successful HSE program in the city, it is just one of more than 80 adult education programs available in Philadelphia advised by the city’s Office of Adult Education (OAE).

Under former Mayor Michael Nutter’s administration, the Mayor’s Commission on Literacy (renamed the Office of Adult Education by Mayor Jim Kenney in 2016) started myPLACE, the first adult education program in the nation to offer free, online courses to develop literacy and math skills in adults.

Since its launch in 2014, myPLACE--which stands for Philadelphia Literacy and Career Education--has assessed more than 17,000 learners, starting them on a path to classes in basic education, HSE preparation, English as a Second Language and career development.

Adult learners are given an assessment to determine reading, math and digital literacy levels. From there they are eligible for a two-week session of free online skill building classes. Learners can re-visit the myPLACE campus to take their classes with the assistance of a coach or complete classes online on their own.

The five myPLACE campuses are located around the city – at the Community Learning Center in West Philadelphia, Congreso de Latinos Unidos in Fairhill, Southwest Community Development Center in Southwest and two locations in Center City.

CLC, in addition to hosting a myPLACE center, is a direct services organization that provides free classes in basic adult education, high school equivalency training, workforce development, English as a Second Language



and individualized tutoring. The organization provides services for career and academic advancement and preparation to its client base, which executive director Carrie Kitchen-Santiago said is 83 percent low-income.

“CLC addresses a major challenge that’s facing Philadelphia,” Kitchen-Santiago said.

Moore is just one of the almost 800 people who will be served by the CLC this year, one of the more than 210,000 people above the age of 18 living in Philadelphia without a high school equivalency degree, and one of half a million people in Philadelphia who need workforce development skills to move forward.

**O**n a national level, the stakes are even higher. Of the 11.6 million jobs created nationwide since the great recession, 11.5 million have gone to people with more than a high school diploma.

“All of this lack of education really contributes to the high

Kelly Moore is now studying to earn her high school equivalency degree. “Every little bit of knowledge, and every little bit of education you get, it frees you even more,” she said. “To do bigger things... to blossom.”

poverty rate that’s in Philadelphia,” Kitchen-Santiago said.

Currently, a family with four people in the household is considered under the federal poverty level when the total income is \$24,000 or less a year and in deep poverty when making 50 percent or less of that poverty level, or \$12,000 a year or less. The city’s poverty rate is 26 percent, or about 400,000 people. Philadelphia also has the highest deep poverty rate of the nation’s top 10 largest cities, with approximately 120,000 people whose income falls below half the federal poverty level.

“Philadelphia has double the national average in terms of its poverty rate, and it’s the poorest city among the top ten largest cities,” Kitchen-Santiago said. “Our goal really is to help make Philadelphia a city where everybody has the education and employment necessary to thrive.”

Workforce literacy skills are becoming a necessity to compete, Kitchen-Santiago said.

According to the city agency the Office of Adult Education, the definition of literacy in Philadelphia has expanded. The OAE now not only considers reading writing and numeracy--which fall under the federal definition of literacy--but also basic skills such as English proficiency, critical thinking, workplace skills and digital literacy. The expanded definition of literacy is used in city programs to help create a well rounded curriculum for adult learners.

In Philadelphia, the pressure is on. According to Philadelphia Works, a nonprofit that connects employers with training services and new talent, the city has become a knowledge-based economy with a large portion of jobs requiring a degree and advanced skills in fields like science and technology. Thirty percent of adults in Philadelphia work in education, health or social services, all private sector industries that require advanced skills, abilities and knowledge.

Jeffrey Abramowitz, the director of student services at CLC, said the organization recognizes this growing national trend and said it has a commitment to developing career pathways with its learners.

"For us as an adult literacy agency, it's not just putting somebody into a job," Abramowitz said. "We can put somebody at McDonald's or Dunkin' Donuts tomorrow but the reality is that in a few weeks, they might be back to us. We need to find that perfect match."

Abramowitz said that match means decent wages, vacation time, a 401(k) and a sustainable pathway which will really change lives.

**M**oore has worked more than 25 jobs in her life. When she started working at the age of 16, she might only keep a job for two weeks, a month - whatever she could do to support her children. She often lied about having her high school diploma on job applications.

"That's not something I'm proud of but you do whatever you need to do when you're in survival mode," Moore said. "I could pass the interview with my eyes closed. But when you tell people you don't have your [high school] diploma, they think you are a failure."

She prides herself on hard work, attention to detail and being able to train a team. When she inherited a cleaning business 14 years ago, Moore started working for herself.

Slowly, managing the finances of her business began to become more than she could handle. She lost clients, lost her workers and ultimately lost the business.

"I didn't build this business myself and didn't know how to handle the finances," Moore

said. "You can put money in the bank but you need to manage it. You have to pay your taxes, get a business license. I didn't know these things."

At CLC, Moore is working to attain her high school equivalency but also



hopes to learn business management skills to rebuild her cleaning business or possibly find a new industry. Moore has a passion for animals and dreams of working with her youngest daughter, also named Kelly, to start a veterinary clinic.

First she needs to increase her digital literacy skills, such as typing and navigating the Internet. Learning new words to build her vocabulary is something she's working on every day.

"We are going to do this," Moore said. "Me and Kelly. Even if she is the veterinarian and I have to be the assistant because I'm too old. We can do this."

**D**iane Inverso, the executive director of OAE, said before the initiation of the myPLACE program, it was frustrating to have a disconnect between so many adult education agencies in the city that were all tackling the same problem. Adults would bounce around between service centers and would have to start the process over.

"It always wasn't very efficient and it certainly always was putting adults in a constant state of being tested and evaluated," Inverso said. "And that's also not a good practice."

myPLACE campuses created a link, serving as a one-stop shop for adult education services. Upon entering a campus, a learner is given an intake exam to test proficiency levels. They can be immediately connected with the best learning center to address their needs. Their information is entered into a citywide database, which follows them like a transcript.

Jennifer Kobrin, director of myPLACE and digital initiatives with OAE, said the streamlined process lowers the barrier for accessing service, especially for learners with low literacy skills.

The free, online two week courses offered by myPLACE after the assessment serve as a pre-HSE program.

"We are providing them with some digital literacy skills, some skills to help them with time management and other things that we really truly believe will help them be really successful," Kobrin said. "But it's also a way to say, 'Are you ready to come to school every day? Are you ready to show up and follow a schedule and get somewhere and have this commitment?'"

**C**larice Hicks, a myPLACE instructor, asks the same questions to learners who walk into the myPLACE center at the Community Learning Center in West Philadelphia.

"I tell people to come to school every day," Hicks said. "Don't miss a day. Missing one day of school is like a week's worth of work. You have a lot of support here."

Hicks works with myPLACE students at CLC, where she achieved her HSE in 2016. She passed her exam and was hired at CLC the next day.

The myPLACE assessment and subsequent two-week course are an opportunity for her to share her experiences navigating adult education, assist in the enhancement of basic skills and watch learners grow.

She loves working with learners who come in the door because they are nervous at first. Maybe their reading skills aren't up to par or they don't know how to use a computer.

"I encourage people to stay encouraged and be persistent, no matter what you go through," Hicks said. "You have things that you're going to go through. There's no limit."

The five myPLACE campuses are spread throughout the city to increase access for adult learners close to their homes. Individuals with low literacy levels may not be able to read street signs or navigate subway maps, Kobrin said, so requiring extensive travel to access adult education programs would not be a possibility for some learners, given their reading levels.

“Philly is a city of neighborhoods and I think there is a fear factor for people getting out of their communities,” Kobrin said. “They feel very comfortable in their own space. They don’t necessarily travel to Center City all the time or in a different neighborhood in Philly, so I think the idea of having a place-based program where people can go and receive help in their own community is really powerful.”

**A**ccording to studies by the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education, obtaining a HSE opens the door for a better job. In Philadelphia, the average earnings for an

individual with less than a high school diploma is \$19,000. The pay rate for an individual with a high school diploma or equivalency jumps almost \$8,000 in Philadelphia and an average of \$10,000 nationally.

Abramowitz said it’s a reality some people will never achieve their HSE due to personal barriers - intellectual disability, family, illness, children. There are many reasons why not everyone can achieve that goal. But that isn’t the end of the road.

“There are employers out there who will hire people,” Abramowitz said. “They are starting to recognize there is value in those students. They may have tremendous skills but they just don’t have that one piece of paper.”

Education impacts not only the individual, but has a resounding effect in communities, Kitchen-Santiago said. She cited research that shows how a mother’s reading level is the most important factor in her child’s academic success.

“It’s not even just helpful for the parent and their income, which affects the kids, but it also helps the kids academic success going forward,” Moore said. “It addresses generational issues.”

A high school equivalency certification might not be the golden ticket but education is a universal pathway to economic mobility.

For Moore, it means freedom.

“Education to me is almost along the lines of freedom,” Moore said. “Every little bit of knowledge, and every little bit of education you get, it frees you even more. To do bigger things... to blossom.” 



There are more than 80 adult education programs available in Philadelphia advised by the city’s Office of Adult Education.





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