

# The PHA Experience

Issue 39

A Community Newspaper For and About Residents

November 2017

## Vaux Big Picture HS Up and Running

A dream several years in the making is now reality in the Sharswood neighborhood. Vaux Big Picture High School opened in early September with a grand opening ceremony on the 19th of the month, featuring special guest HUD Secretary Ben Carson. 126 students are enrolled and taking classes at the school.

“I don’t think I’ve ever met somebody who is successful who couldn’t point to a teacher or an administrator who played a large role in their life,” Carson said. “This school is going to make such a big difference.”

“As we have said since our efforts toward this opening began two years ago, a high quality neighborhood school is critically important if Sharswood is to become a neighborhood of choice,” said PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah. “This school has the potential to significantly change the lives of its students and the community in which they live.”

PHA joined with the School District of Philadelphia to open Vaux Big Picture High School as the City’s newest college preparatory school and part of PHA’s Choice Neighborhood Transformation Plan for the Sharswood neighborhood. The school represents a unique partnership between PHA, nationally acclaimed education innovator Big Picture Learning, and the School District. It is a district-managed neighborhood high school, operated by Big Picture, with educators represented by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

Carson said the opening of a school represents the opportunity to pass knowledge to the next generation and a chance to influence the future. He thanked PHA for its investment in the school; the housing authority bought the school and will invest \$10-\$15 million renovating it. HUD, which provides PHA with most of its funding, approved the expenditure on the school renovation. In addition to its investment in the building, PHA will provide an annual subsidy of up to \$500 per student.



Mayor Jim Kenney, Council President Darrell Clarke, PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah, HUD Secretary Ben Carson, and School Supt. William Hite pose with Vaux Big Picture High School student Ilyasha Eiland who received a T-Mobile tablet at grand opening ceremonies for the school. Vaux Big Picture High School is the City’s newest college preparatory school and part of PHA’s Choice Neighborhood Transformation Plan for the Sharswood neighborhood.

“What we see here today with the opening of the new Vaux High School represents the kind of great thing we can accomplish when multiple entities work together with one goal,” said Mayor Jim Kenney.

“Vaux Big Picture represents our continued efforts to bring high quality schools close to where children live,” said Dr. William R. Hite, Superintendent of The School District of Philadelphia. “Students will truly receive a unique educational experience by learning through internships and engaging in project-based learning, ultimately better preparing them for college and career.”

“The hallmark of any successful school is a strong partnership between educators,

parents, administrators and community partners,” said Philadelphia Federation of Teachers president Jerry Jordan, “The PFT is proud to join PHA and Big Picture Learning to ensure that Vaux High School provides the Sharswood neighborhood’s students a top-notch education.”

Eventually, Vaux Big Picture High School will have just over 500 students total. Seventy-five percent of the students enrolled are PHA residents while 95% come from the school’s catchment area. The numbers indicate that the school is serving the families and students that it was intended to serve.

“Big Picture Philadelphia is honored to be a part of the School District of Philadelphia’s goal of providing a great school in every neighborhood and

the Philadelphia Housing Authority’s tremendous community development vision for Sharswood,” stated Big Picture Philadelphia executive director David Bromley. “We are excited to watch our student centered, real world learning educational approach take life at Vaux Big Picture High School and look forward to watching the growth of our founding 126 students as they take ownership of their learning and lives!”

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## Your Voices Do Make a Difference

More than ever, PHA needs the resident associations' help in a number of areas as we campaign, push, and press for adequate funding for housing and programs that are so very necessary for the country's neediest people.

In mid-September, as many of you may know, PHA hosted a very successful event celebrating the grand opening of Vaux Big Picture High School in Sharswood where redevelopment of the old Blumberg site and the surrounding neighborhood is taking place. HUD Secretary Ben Carson was our featured speaker and we met with him privately after the event at the Blumberg Community Center.

I emphasized to Secretary Carson the need for and importance of HUD assistance, letting him know that most of our housing stock was built in the '40's, '50's, and '60's, and has outlived its useful life. At the very least, PHA needs \$1 billion if we are to ensure the viability of our existing housing units for current and future residents. The Secretary listened carefully as I told him that we have insufficient capital funding for decades, not to mention operational funding.

Even as we work hard and effectively with private and nonprofit partners, HUD funding remains essential as we preserve PHA housing and transform neighborhoods. And that's where you come in.

We need your advocacy to our elected officials for the Choice Neighborhoods program and for the Rental Assistance Demonstration program, RAD, for stable, predictable, and adequate funding. The National Coalition to Preserve Public and Assisted Housing founded, in part, by Commissioner and R-A-B President Asia Coney is a great way to do this. The coalition's position paper notes that even moderate income families are suffering from regentrification. So, your help is very important for the funding and design of programs such as Moving to Work and RAD.

Let me remind you that PHA is indeed opening doors to opportunity for all residents. The latest example is the above mentioned opening of Vaux Big Picture High School that will have a powerful, long lasting effect on the Sharswood community.

PhillySEEDs, our nonprofit, has provided 272 young residents with over \$1 million in scholarship assistance since its founding in 2013. We are helping young scholars succeed in school by supporting afterschool programs at 12 family sites.

PHA is also opening doors to opportunity via Section 3, the Community Partners program, and the Jobs Plus Pilot program. Our latest Section 3 numbers show that PHA has exceeded HUD's minimum performance goals in every category, including hiring, construction, and nonconstruction contracts.

There is much more to do, however, and we'll need all of your energy and input. Your voices along with those of other resident groups involved in the new, national coalition matter. A lot.

# HUD Secretary Voices Support for Tax Credits, Reduced Regulation

HUD Secretary Ben Carson favors a simplification of regulations governing housing programs and is supportive of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit. The secretary expressed those views during a special listening session at the Blumberg Community Center with PHA's senior staff and several commissioners. He met with them following the grand opening ceremonies for Vaux Big Picture High School in the Sharswood neighborhood on September 19th.

Mr. Carson believes LIHTC is effective at increasing the amount of affordable housing. The tax credits are a major part of PHA's funding mix for housing development. Commissioner Herb Wetzel pointed out that a recent opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal called for the elimination of tax credits, saying they were a corporate tax loophole.

"That's how we really can create a real dent in the deficit (of affordable housing)," Carson said. "Because we have three to four times as many households in need of affordable housing than there is available."



PHA Commissioner Asia Coney (far right) draws a laugh from HUD Secretary Ben Carson (far left) during a special listening session at the Blumberg Community Center. Also shown are PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah, PHA Board Chair Lynette Brown-Sow, and PHA Commissioner Fred Purnell, Sr.

The HUD secretary also stated that there is money in the Community Block Grant Development (CDBG) pipeline that will continue to be used for building in cities like Philadelphia.

Those funds are an important source of money for PHA partners who build housing that is subsidized with project based vouchers.

The secretary said simplifying HUD regulations will take congressional

approval and that his staff has been up on Capitol Hill a lot. He believes that local governments can become much more efficient and effective if decisions are made locally, if they are given the flexibility to fix problems, and in the way funds are spent.

"We're going to be much more efficient and effective if people locally can make decisions," Carson said. "All we have to do is set appropriate guidelines to make

sure that people aren't, you know, going out and buying a yacht. Giving people the flexibility to really fix the problems, agreeing on what the problem is, and allowing people to go about using their innovation and create the utility to get it done, that's a major goal for us."

The secretary went on to say that HUD needs metrics that can easily be applied to see if programs are working.

PHA Commissioner Asia Coney, who also heads the Resident Advisory Board, presented the secretary with paperwork on the newly formed National Coalition to Preserve Public and Assisted Housing. Carson responded by saying he believes that the places with strong resident associations make the most progress in dealing with housing and related issues.

# Funding Sought for Renewal of Bartram Village Neighborhood



PHA has formally applied for \$1.3 million in Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI) Planning & Action Grant funds for Bartram Village. The housing authority collaborated with the City to identify the Bartram Village/Kingsessing neighborhood as the target area for this proposal.

PHA has taken another step toward revitalization of the Bartram Village development and adjacent neighborhood. The agency formally applied for \$1.3 million in Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI) Planning & Action Grant funds in late August. The housing authority collaborated with the City to identify Bartram Village/Kingsessing as the target area for this proposal.

If the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approves the request, the funding will support development of a comprehensive Transformation Plan, as well as implementation of related action activities for Bartram Village and the surrounding Kingsessing neighborhood.

The Choice Neighborhood funds, if granted, will be matched by \$1.1 million in local funds for planning and action activities. The funding would also support a broad-based, inclusive planning process to develop a community vision, goals, and implementation strategies that address

critical needs and build on existing neighborhood assets in the areas of housing, people, and neighborhood.

Bartram Village dates back to 1942 when it was built as housing for defense workers in southwest Philadelphia. The housing at the site lacks the amenities, layout, unit space, and energy efficiency needed in a 21st Century housing development. Revitalization of Bartram Village and the surrounding neighborhood is consistent with PHA's strategy to reinvent public housing through creation of viable, self-sustaining, mixed income communities.

Currently, Bartram Village contains approximately 500 units on a 22-acre site. The development is adjacent to Bartram's Garden, a destination and outdoor classroom that originally was the home of John Bartram who collected seeds and plant specimens and developed a successful international plant trade and nursery business.

Once a vibrant home to low and middle income workers, the Kingsessing neighborhood - which stretches along the western edge of the

Schuylkill River across from Center City Philadelphia - has experienced significant decline from relocation of industrial facilities and the resultant population losses and disinvestment in housing and commercial sectors.

Kingsessing has substantial assets that include two major publicly funded recreation centers, the University of the Sciences campus, a healthy commercial corridor along Woodland Avenue, frequent light rail service to Center City and planned fast rail service to the Philadelphia International Airport along Grays Avenue, directly across from Bartram Village.

PHA is committed to one-for-one replacement of the existing units at Bartram Village. The housing authority hopes to create a mixed-income development that includes additional affordable and market rate housing units, homeownership units, senior housing, and potentially supportive housing units, at the site and possibly offsite as well. If that occurred, the density of Bartram Village may be reduced.

# PHA Receives Grant for Security Improvements at Fairhill Apartments

The U-S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has awarded the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) a \$250,000 emergency safety and security grant for the Fairhill Apartments in North Philadelphia.

"We have made a serious commitment to all of our residents so that they can live safely and peacefully in their neighborhoods," said PHA President Kelvin Jeremiah. "We are grateful to HUD for funding security improvements at this site. Installation of security cameras, in combination with other ongoing and planned PHA and Philadelphia Police Department initiatives to improve public safety and reduce youth violence, will help improve the overall quality of life for Fairhill residents."

Residents at the Fairhill site at 2443 N. 11th Street, just north of the Temple University campus, have experienced threats related to drug dealing and gun violence. The funding will partially cover the costs of procuring and installing security cameras and related software on the exterior grounds in and around those areas where drug-related and other crime is occurring.

PHA intends to use the \$250,000 in grant funds, in combination with \$641,800 in existing funds, to install a comprehensive network of security cameras that will be strategically located throughout the Fairhill Apartments grounds. The housing authority will install a network of pan, tilt, and zoom security cameras along with facial recognition software in and around impacted playground areas, and throughout the exterior grounds of the site.

Over the past few years, two children were wounded by gunfire and a Philadelphia Police Officer was shot and killed near the development. These and other violent crime instances in and around the development are directly related to the continued street sales, proliferation and use of the drug "WET" - which has plagued the development and surrounding community.

Drug dealers have been seen on the development's playgrounds, blending



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in with normal playground activities so that they cannot be accused of loitering. A dog house brought to the development by a resident to feed stray cats was also used to store drugs. Upon investigation, a bag of bullets were also found in the dog/stash house.

"It is extremely challenging to catch dealers in the act of selling drugs without recorded evidence," said PHA Police Chief Joseph Marker. "Residents are reluctant to report and testify about crime because testimony is life threatening. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain an arrest and conviction."

Conviction is difficult, even when the drugs are found, Marker added, because in addition to the packaging for distribution, it has to be proven that the drugs were under the control of a dealer.

In addition to installation of security cameras and related equipment, PHA has taken other steps to address the situation at Fairhill Apartments, including operating mobile mini-stations, bike patrols, a Community Relations Team, a Crime Suppression Team, and an automated security system that allows for central control and monitoring.

# PhillySEEDs Gala is Smashing Success



Photo Credit: Timothy Shepherd

PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah told scholarship winners at the PhillySEEDs gala that he wanted badly for them to succeed and nothing is impossible with hard work.



Photo Credit: Timothy Shepherd

PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah presented the Community Advocate Award to Sandy and Stephen Sheller for their generous donations to PhillySEEDs and their tireless work for people in low income communities.

The first ever PhillySEEDs Scholarship Awards Gala lived up to its name through the good will of some of the region's prominent businesses and nonprofit groups.

PhillySEEDs, Inc., a PHA subsidiary, honored 66 PHA residents seeking higher education with \$258,000 in scholarships. A total of \$1,092,000 has now been awarded to 272 residents since the award-winning program began in 2013. Money for the scholarships comes from PHA's operating budget and funds donated by program supporters and vendors as part of their Section 3 commitments. The scholarship recipients represent PHA developments around the City, as well as the Housing Choice Voucher Program. A silent auction at the Gala raised \$1,475 for the scholarship fund.

PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah was emotional as he addressed the scholarship winners, telling them to use their talents and never give up. Mr. Jeremiah, who immigrated to the United States from Grenada, recalled that he was kid who wasn't supposed to make it. He learned quickly after coming here that people would give him money for doing what

he was supposed to do: go to school and advance himself through his education.

"I want so badly for you to be here, to achieve what I have achieved," Jeremiah said. "I want so badly for you to fulfill that God given talent, that God given gift that He has entrusted in all of you. I want you to know that you are special. I want you to know that you can do it. I want you to know that we believe in you and that nothing is impossible with hard work."

The event, which was hosted by Bill Anderson of Fox 29, honored Sandy and Stephen Sheller with the Community Advocate Award, for their generous donations to the program and tireless work for the social and economic advancement for people in low income communities.

"I feel like we've only hit the tip of the iceberg. There's so much more. Hopefully, we'll be around for a while and make the kind of impact that you've alluded to," Sandy Sheller remarked.

Stephen Sheller, an attorney who came from humble surroundings in Brooklyn and worked his way through the University of Pennsylvania, told the

audience that rapidly rising tuitions are unfair to students.

"The tuitions have gotten out of place completely," he said. "So, it's our goal to make it change back to the days when tuitions wouldn't stop kids from going to college."

The Industry Award went to HUD's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Housing Investments, Dominique Blom. She has overseen the start of some key initiatives that have benefited public housing residents here, including the Moving to Work, Choice Neighborhoods, and Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) programs. Ms. Blom has assisted PHA in removing barriers that might impede the housing authority's development program. The award was accepted on her behalf by Ron Ashford, Director of Public Housing Supportive Services at HUD.

Earlier in the evening, Dr. Lynnette Tannis of Harvard's graduate school of education, delivered the keynote speech, urging scholarship recipients to use their educations to serve as a resource to themselves, their families, and communities. She expressed the hope that they will use their educations to set others free.

## PHA Partners With Esperanza for Hunting Park Development

Construction of the Roberto Clemente Homes in the Hunting Park neighborhood of North Philadelphia has begun, thanks to a partnership between PHA and Esperanza, a nonprofit group with the goal of strengthening Hispanic communities in and around the city.

The former Roberto Clemente Middle School at North 5th and Luzerne will be converted to hold 38 new affordable housing units and 5,000 square feet of retail space, too. A commercial real estate market analysis confirmed the viability of the space. The site had sat vacant for more than a decade before the conversion work began in mid-October. PHA has committed itself to a long-term subsidy at Roberto Clemente Homes of over \$5 million, plus \$1.2 million in capital funds.

"We firmly believe that partnerships such as this one between PHA and Esperanza are critical to meeting the need for affordable housing in Philadelphia while transforming neighborhoods to become places that people choose to live," said PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah. "We are thrilled to help Esperanza turn a blighting influence in this neighborhood into a positive asset."

The Roberto Clemente Middle School was built more than a century ago and was the home of the Apex Hosiery Factory. It was later converted into the Pennsylvania Advancement Middle School, and eventually renamed after Roberto Clemente, the Hall of Fame baseball player with the Pittsburgh Pirates who died in a plane crash while on a humanitarian mission in December 1972. Esperanza

purchased the building from the School District of Philadelphia in the fall of 2016.

Rev. Luis Cortes, President of Esperanza, noted that the decrepit middle school building was known as "The Cage" for many years. "This cage will finally become a home," he said.

The Roberto Clemente Homes will serve a residential and densely populated part of the city, with a young, fast growing, and predominately Hispanic population. Since 2000, the Hunting Park population has grown at eight times the rate of the rest of the city. The development will meet a high demand for affordable rental housing for low income families.

Residents of the development are expected to be families with children. At the rear of the building, a secured



Photo Credit: Bryan Karl Lathrop from Esperanza

PHA Commissioner Bonnie Camarda and President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah (5th and 6th from left) took part in the groundbreaking for the Roberto Clemente Homes in Hunting Park. Esperanza President Rev. Luis Cortes stands to the right of Mr. Jeremiah.

open space will allow for a large play area for these children. Roberto Clemente Homes will be 100% visitable and include 4 fully accessible

units, plus 4 units for individuals with sensory impairments. The new homes are expected to be ready by the end of summer 2018.

# PHA Takes First Steps to Modernize Senior Tower at Blumberg

The next phase of redevelopment at Blumberg Apartments will begin this fall with the modernization of the senior tower at the site. The rehabilitation of the Blumberg Senior Apartments is a key component of the Choice Neighborhood Initiative transformation plan.

The Blumberg site originally contained three high rises and 15 low-rise buildings. In spring 2016, PHA demolished two of the high rises and all of the low-rise buildings. The remaining 13-story high rise will house seniors. Total development cost is estimated at approximately \$28,000,000, which will be funded by tax-exempt bonds, PHA funds, and

tax credit equity. The PHA Board took action at its September meeting to set in motion the financing needed for the redevelopment.

The remodeled senior building will hold 94 one-bedroom rental units. The renovations include a new community room, offices, elevators, kitchens, bathrooms, mechanical systems (heating, hot water, and central air conditioning), entrance and lobby, parking lot, and driveway. In addition, the revitalized high-rise will exceed federal, state, and local accessibility requirements.

All the former residents of the Blumberg senior building were

relocated before demolition took place at the site. After the renovation is completed, they will have the right to return.

All units at the Blumberg Senior Apartments will be converted from public housing to Project Based Vouchers under HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration Program (RAD). Under the Housing Assistance Payment contract covering the building, residents will not be responsible for utilities supplied to their unit.

PHA expects the modernization of the Blumberg senior tower to be completed next fall.



PHA expects the modernization of the Blumberg senior tower to be completed next fall. It is adjacent to Blumberg Phase I on 24th Street.

# PHA Joins with Presby's Inspired Life to Develop New Housing

PHA has joined with Presby's Inspired Life, a not-for-profit, faith-based ministry, toward the development of two new senior housing communities in South and Southwest Philadelphia.

Cantrell Place in South Philadelphia will be developed as a new construction project. The site of the new buildings will revitalize a city block by transforming 33 vacant lots into 61 units of affordable housing for seniors.

The Witherspoon Senior Apartments will be an adaptive reuse of a former nursing home into 60 apartments. The new residence will add on to Presby's 58th Street Campus in Southwest Philadelphia.

"These partnerships are critical because nonprofits like Presby serve our most vulnerable citizens and offer extensive services to meet the needs of its residents," said PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah. "Our statistics continue to show that senior housing



Witherspoon Senior Apartments

is in significant demand throughout the City."

PHA will subsidize 40 of the units at Cantrell Place over 20 years with Project Based Vouchers (PBV) worth over \$9.8 million. The agency will subsidize 40 units at Witherspoon Senior Apartments over 20 years with PBV valued at over \$9.3 million.

In 2013, PHA implemented an initiative to develop and preserve 6,000 affordable housing units in five years. Around this same time, HUD instituted

the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program. The RAD Program has enabled PHA to partner with more than 20 nonprofit organizations and developers, like Presby, to develop over 2,300 affordable housing units throughout the City.

Presby was awarded tax-credit funding from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) in July 2016 to develop these two new properties.



Cantrell Place

# Ceiling Rents Going Up



Jacqueline Sampson, Vice President of Property Management for Housing Operations at PHA, explains the changes in ceiling rent during a meeting with residents at the Greater Grays Ferry Estates office building in South Philadelphia.

PHA began a new schedule of ceiling rents starting October 1st. The higher ceiling rents reflect an increase in Area Median Incomes (AMI) in Philadelphia. Median income is the amount that divides income numbers into two equal groups, half having income above that amount, and half having income below that amount.

Ceiling rents at PHA are set at 40% of AMI rent levels that are published by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA). PHA is authorized to update the rents annually based on the PHFA published rents. PHA residents always have the option of choosing either an income-based rent or a ceiling rent.

PHA uses Moving to Work (MTW) authority to implement “ceiling rents” for the conventional and scattered site programs. The Board approved the Ceiling Rent policy in January 2013 as part of the MTW Annual Plan approval

process. Without MTW authority, PHA would be required to establish “flat rents” which are market based and likely to be higher than PHA’s ceiling rents.

Ceiling renters pay an average of 21% of adjusted income for rent. However, households with incomes of 80% AMI or higher paid an average of 15% of adjusted income for rent. In comparison, lower income PHA residents on income-based rents pay between 26-28% of adjusted income for rent. Currently, 559 residents pay ceiling rent, compared to over 11,700 residents who pay an income based rent.

With the change in ceiling rental rates, there will be an average monthly increase of \$17. The average tenant rent as a percent of adjusted income remains at 21%.

PHA began using ceiling rents in July 2013. Ceiling rents were last updated in 2015.

# Two PHA Developments Win Maintenance Awards



Queen Lane

The Pennsylvania Apartment Association has recognized Plymouth Hall and Queen Lane Apartments for Maintenance Excellence in the “Best in Apartment Living” awards run by the Association.

Queen Lane was honored with a Gold Award for Maintenance Excellence while Plymouth Hall received a Bronze Award in the same category. The Apartment Association contest includes many private sector developments.

Queen Lane Apartments received a maintenance score of 97% with the

judge who toured the site remarking that the unit toured was “spectacular.”

The new Queen Lane Apartments replaced an aging, obsolete 16-story high-rise built in the mid-1950s with a mix of two-story flats and walk-up apartments, and three-story townhouses. The redeveloped site was completed in December 2015 and is contributing to the continued revitalization of the Germantown area.

Plymouth Hall, a senior development in the Tioga-Nicetown neighborhood, scored 95% in the contest. The judge

who toured the building noted that it has a welcoming lobby area, was very organized when it comes to preventive maintenance, and a friendly staff.

Plymouth Hall has 53 modern apartments. It features a “green roof” that saves energy and prevents excess water runoff. Seniors can use the roof deck to relax and socialize. The original Plymouth Hall was destroyed by fire in October 2004. PHA decided to rebuild at the site to meet the growing demand for affordable senior housing and to further enhance the neighborhood.



Plymouth Hall

## 2017

### PHILADELPHIA HOUSING AUTHORITY

#### BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING CALENDAR

The third Thursday of every month at 3:00 pm

NOV 16 | DEC 21 | JAN 18 | FEB 15

All PHA board meetings are held at  
12 South 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19103

# Board Resolution Updates

## June 2017

- **Resolution 11940** – approved PHA to execute contracts for Small General Contractor Services for maintenance-related work with Townes Mechanical Contractors; DKJ Construction, Inc.; W & W Contractors, Inc.; VellNiece Construction; Smith Construction; Clark Roofing & Carpentry Company, Inc.; Cromedy Construction Corporation; Milestone contracts is not to exceed an aggregate amount of ten million dollars (\$10,000,000.00).
- **Resolution 11941** – authorized PHA to enter into Pre-Development Agreements with DEPG Ridge Avenue Associates, LP (aka Legend Properties, Inc.) and Mosaic Development, LLC, to complete a development plan for the Sharswood Blumberg Commercial Corridor.
- **Resolution 11942** – authorized PHA to contract with National Credit Reporting for Criminal, Credit and Background Check Services, in a total amount not to exceed three hundred seventy-five thousand dollars (\$375,000.00).
- **Resolution 11943** – authorized PHA to pay an amount not to exceed one hundred fifteen thousand dollars (\$115,000.00) in order to settle employment litigation in exchange for a full release.
- **Resolution 11944** – approved the submission of the Moving to Work Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2017 (“MTW Annual Report”) to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”); certify that PHA has met the three (3) MTW statutory requirements specified in the MTW Agreement; and authorize PHA’s President & CEO and/or his designee(s) to take all necessary steps to secure final HUD approval of the MTW Annual Report.
- **Resolution 11945** – approved of amendments to and amended and restated versions of the Public Housing Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (“ACOP”) and Housing Choice Voucher Program Administrative Plan (“Administrative Plan”). The amendments primarily address requirements of the HUD’s Final Rule, which Rule implements housing provisions under the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, and of HUD’s PIH Notice 2016-05, which relates to Streamlining

Administrative Regulations for Programs Administered by Public Housing Agencies.

## July 2017

- **Resolution 11946** – authorized PHA to contract with Lor-Mar Mechanical Services, Inc. for boiler and water heater preventive maintenance and repair services, in a total contract amount not to exceed four million three hundred eighty-nine thousand nine hundred sixty-six dollars (\$4,389,966.00).
- **Resolution 11947** – authorized PHA to contract with AM Electric, Inc., Major Electric Systems, Inc., and Rainbow Electric LLC for electrical maintenance and repair services. The contract amount is not to exceed five million dollars (\$5,000,000.00).
- **Resolution 11948** – authorized PHA to contract with AAA School of Trucking, Inc. for commercial driver’s license and forklift training for PHA residents. The contract amount is not to exceed one million four hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$1,425,000.00).
- **Resolution 11949** – authorized the President & CEO and/or his authorized designee(s) to request rescission from HUD of the disposition and demolition approvals for two units at 1614 N Marshall St., as those properties are occupied.
- **Resolution 11950** – authorized the President & CEO to approve awards to historic consultants under RFP#P-0047337 and to execute one or more contracts with the proposers subject to an aggregate amount not to exceed two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000.00). Further, within thirty (30) days of the award of any contract(s) under this resolution, PHA will provide the Board of Commissioners with a report, to include the amount of the contract, term, and awardee(s).
- **Resolution 11951** – authorized submission of an application for funding to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, pursuant to the Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant Program FY2017 Notice of Funding Availability that was published on June 28, 2017.

## September 2017

- **Resolution 11952** – authorized PHA to contract with Vacant Property

Services, LLC and Door and Window Guard Systems, Inc. for vacant property security services in a total aggregate amount not to exceed two million five hundred thousand dollars (\$2,500,000.00).

- **Resolution 11953** – authorized PHA to modify its contract with Brandywine Elevator Company for elevator preventive maintenance and repair and to increase the contract’s not-to-exceed amount to six million seven hundred thousand dollars (\$6,700,000.00) from the current amount of six million dollars (\$6,000,000.00).
- **Resolution 11954** – authorized PHA to take the necessary actions in connection with the rehabilitation of the existing Blumberg Senior Apartments to renovate the senior tower into ninety-four (94) one-bedroom apartments (“Development”), including authorizing PHA to provide a mortgage loan in an amount not to exceed nineteen million dollars (\$19,000,000.00), and to negotiate, execute and enter into all related contracts and documents necessary or appropriate to develop, finance, construct, and operate the Development, as detailed in the resolution.
- **Resolution 11955** – authorized PHA to execute the insurance policy for PHA’s workers’ compensation and employer’s liability insurance with Liberty Mutual for a maximum amount not to exceed thirteen million two hundred seventy-eight thousand five hundred eighty-seven dollars (\$13,278,587.00), for the period from October 15, 2017 to October 15, 2018.
- **Resolution 11956** – authorized PHA to separately contract with each of the following eighteen entities for architectural and engineering support services: Blackney Hayes Architects; BWA Architecture + Planning; HAKS LLC; Interface Studios Architects, LLC; Kelly/Maiello, Inc.; KSK Architects Planners Historians, Inc.; Wallace Roberts & Todd LLC; Kitchen & Associates; Lammey & Giorgio; Lothrop Associates LLP; LSEA Corporation; Remington, Vernick & Beach Engineers; The Sheward Partnership; BASE Architecture, Planning and Engineering; CICADA Architecture/Planning; LAN Associates; G.T. Clifton Architects; and Stantec Consulting Services. The eighteen entities are divided into three groups, with varied not-to-exceed contracting amounts, but with an aggregate

total not-to-exceed amount of seven million five hundred thousand dollars (\$7,500,000.00).

- **Resolution 11957** – authorized PHA to contract with Conner Strong & Buckelew for insurance brokerage and related services on a total amount not to exceed one million three hundred forty-five thousand dollars (\$1,345,000.00).

- **Resolution 11958** – authorized PHA to contract with both SVN - The Concordis Group and with CBRE, Inc. for full service real estate broker services for PHA, in a contract amount not to exceed seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$750,000.00), for consulting and appraisal fees, and six percent (6%) of the sale price or leasing revenues.

## Scattered Sites Auction a \$uccess!



PHA successfully sold 54 scattered site properties at an auction conducted by Barry S. Slosberg Inc., in mid-October at the company’s Northeast Philadelphia location. The auction drew an estimated 500 people with almost 300 bidders. The sale of the properties, some with homes on them and some empty parcels, raised well over \$2.8 million.

“While there weren’t as many properties being auctioned as in the past, the goal was the same; reducing the number of vacant buildings in disrepair in the City while giving private citizens an opportunity to buy a fixer-upper and local business people a chance to invest and possibly rehab a home and bring it back into productive use,” said PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah. “We’re glad that we could reach that goal.”

In November 2011, the agency auctioned over 400 properties. In July 2013, the housing authority put approximately 200 properties up for sale.

This latest auction did not offer “banks of properties” of 2 or more. Rather, each property was sold individually. This gave the homeowner and small time investor an opportunity to buy one property.

The sale of vacant scattered site properties by auction is just one part of PHA’s comprehensive plan to reconfigure its scattered site portfolio. PHA is also in process of rehabilitating hundreds of vacant scattered site properties for households on the authority’s waiting list, while transferring additional properties to the Philadelphia Land Bank for reuse as affordable rental and homeownership purposes, and partnering with other organizations to develop new units.

Funds raised from the auction will be used to rehabilitate or build units, or fund needed repairs at other PHA sites.

## Gala Winners



Popular Fox 29 reporter Bill Anderson (top) hosted the PhillySEEDs Scholarship Awards Gala in mid-August. 66 PHA residents seeking higher education won a total of \$258,000 in scholarships. The scholarship recipients represent PHA developments around the City, as well as the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Forty honorees (shown below) won scholarships of \$5,000 dollars for grade points ranging from 3.30 to 4.00 while the others won scholarships of \$1,000 or \$3,000.

## Spelling Bee



In early August, PHA hosted the 3rd Annual Spelling Bee for 120 young residents attending the summer camps in an effort to increase their vocabulary and literacy skills during the "summer melt". (Top) Lopa Kolluri, PHA's Senior Executive VP-Chief Development and Operations Officer, poses a challenging word to a contestant.

(Bottom) The winners in the 7th & 8th grade category were (l-r) Bree Johnson of Abbottsford (2nd place), John Winchester from Whitehall (1st place), and Stanley Harrington of Raymond Rosen (3rd place) joined by William Myles, Executive VP of Community Operations and Resident Development (CORD).



## Bookbag Giveaway



PHA provided 2,500 book bags to school age students at 20 sites during its 6th annual book bag giveaway in early August. The main festivities took place at the John F. Street Community Center. Volunteers from I Am A Role Model Youth Empowerment Program stuffed and handed out the bags. Break dancers from Raymond Rosen Manor provided entertainment.

## Unity in the Community



Gov. Wolf visited Wilson Park seniors at the Unity in the Community day celebration on Tuesday, August 1st. The governor also met with PHA Commissioner Ethel Wise and State Rep. Jordan Harris. Unity in the Community is a nonprofit group that is dedicated to preventing gun violence. The group wanted the governor to see a neighborhood that's affected by it.

# New National Resident Advocacy Group Incorporates in Philadelphia

PHA Commissioner and Resident Advisory Board President Asia Coney has announced the formation of the National Coalition to Preserve Public and Assisted Housing (NCCPAH). The group, which will become a voice for public housing residents on important issues, has been incorporated with offices in Center City Philadelphia. Commissioner Coney disclosed formation of NCCPAH during the national resident empowerment conference in mid-August.

At one time, the National Tenant Organization advocated for public housing residents, but it eventually went out of business after coming under intense scrutiny from the federal government. Commissioner Coney has worked with two other resident leaders from outside Philadelphia since 2006 to bring NCCPAH to life. She introduced conference attendees to the organization's new web site (<http://nccpah.com/>) following a luncheon on August 19th, the day that the site went live.

"It's been a long ride. It's been a long walk. For a while, we had to crawl. We don't have to crawl no more," Coney said.

Coney and the other incorporators, have recruited individuals to work on a steering committee to assist in the creation of NCCPAH's regional structure. The group will have four regions. Its web site states that the intent, purpose and focus of the group is to stand and be a voice that ensures one of the most basic needs (housing) is preserved, affordable and available for citizens as intended by the Housing Act of 1937.

NCCPAH has issued a position paper that openly questions why the federal government has done nothing to preserve affordable housing in urban neighborhoods that have benefited from private reinvestment and renewal, that raises rents and pushes out longtime, lower income residents.

"They're not even looking at their own statistics that the housing authority has to send (to HUD) which shows that



PHA Commissioner Asia Coney (far right) introduces members of her steering committee for the National Coalition to Preserve Public and Assisted Housing (NCCPAH) at the resident empowerment conference.

the majority of folks living in public housing are seniors and children," Coney said. "All they want to do is make sure that poor folks, folks that are of small means...actually they want us to disappear."

The group's position paper states that moderate income families are suffering from gentrification, too, and that they should have the right to take part in affordable housing programs. NCCPAH also believes that residents must have a say in the design

and development of programs such as Moving to Work (MTW) and Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) for them to positively improve lives and create opportunity. Without that input, the group believes that more families face the possibility of homelessness as housing authorities privatize their stock.

# Resident Finds Rewarding Work as Community Health Worker

Nickole Mingo, who is a scattered sites resident, had been looking for jobs on and off until she received a flyer in the mail in January 2016 inviting her to a meeting at PHA's Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) office. What happened after that would change her life for the better.

Ms. Mingo had been her mother's caregiver for two years until she passed away in 2015. Earlier, she had held positions with the I-R-S and in corrections, and then a number of temporary positions after a string of bad luck. Previous educational efforts did not produce results that benefited her. This time would be different.

Nickole completed the Community Health Worker program with Temple University and is now working for Temple University Hospital in their medical group practice. It took 7 weeks. She was able to earn college credits by completing the program. Today, Nickole

primarily services Health Partners' (one of the providers) Medicaid patients. Temple is a safety net hospital for about 750,000 people in North Philadelphia.

It's an important job. The goal is improved care, improved health and lower costs, saving doctors' time for the things that doctors are uniquely qualified to do.

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are lay people from the community, who function as a bridge between patients and the health care system. They are a link between high risk, high cost patients and their health care providers. CHWs advocate, facilitate, and organize access to health and social services for needy patients, including resources for housing, food, utilities, and education.

"We have a lot of patients who have chronic conditions and we're trying to get them not to use the E-R as their primary care doctor. We're trying to

get them back to see their specialists and their primary care doctor, but they have a lot of barriers," Mingo said. "It's just about helping people become self-sufficient as far as their health care and other aspects of their life."

People are afraid, she noted, because of the uncertain future of Medicaid funding or because they're simply afraid of the truth about whatever their medical condition is. One of the most rewarding things for her is when a patient calls to thank her for encouraging them to take action and see the doctor.

"If you have a passion for helping people, and you're patient with people, then I would definitely recommend this," Mingo said. "I work with a great community of health workers who go above and beyond. It's a great field to be in."

Now that she's established, Nickole's next goal is to get a degree in social work. We wish her luck.



PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah congratulated Nickole Mingo as Resident of the Month at the authority's July board meeting. Mingo has begun a career as a community health worker with Temple University Hospital in their medical group practice serving Medicaid patients.

# Resident Leaders Urged to Know and Use RAD

The Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program is here to stay and resident leaders need to use it to their advantage. That was the message coming out of a panel dedicated to RAD at the national resident empowerment conference held in Philadelphia in mid-August.

RAD is a HUD demonstration program that combines public housing operating and capital subsidies into payments under a RAD Section 8 Project-Based Housing Assistance Payment contract. The switch from the public housing to the RAD Section 8 Project-Based subsidy program will allow a housing authority to tap resources that don't exist, or would not work in traditional public housing.

In PHA's case, Moving to Work (MTW) flexibility combined with RAD attracts significant private funding, the ability to take on mortgages, and the use of tax credits. RAD developments remain heavily regulated, and tenants will have substantial protections similar to those of public housing residents.

Larry Redican, General Counsel for PHA, noted that the agency changed

its administrative plan and continued occupancy plan, using its Moving to Work (MTW) flexibility to allow residents to move from one program to another, thus allaying their fears of rent spikes.

"So, not only do we want to make sure that we protected the property for the long term, we wanted to make sure that we protected the residents and all the activities that they had done for self-sufficiency, that those just weren't going to be taken back," he said.

Redican added that goal of the conversion to RAD was so that a property would be adequately maintained by insuring a more stable and possibly higher level of federal subsidy, not suck more resident income from the property.

Erik Crawford, Executive Director of Can I Live CDC and a former public housing leader in New York, emphasized that resident leaders need to gain the trust of their administrators and work with them to get the best deal possible under RAD.

"RAD can work in our favor. We can actually come to the table and write that language," he said.

Courtney Hunter, an attorney with Ballard Spahr who works with housing authorities across the country on RAD, noted that residents have a right to organize after conversion to RAD. Even if no organization is formed, HUD wants a cooperative relationship between property owners and residents. Existing resident councils can stay in place after conversion with the residents' approval. She also urged resident leaders to look at the rights they have now and put them into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) following conversion.

Crawford also urged those present at the conference to hold members of Congress accountable on RAD. He also believes resident leaders can do a better job of educating their constituents on the program. Private developers are making money off the back of public housing's limited dollars, he said, but residents need to negotiate with those developers to get the most out of the program.

# Partnerships with Authorities Require Hard Work by Resident Leaders



*Fred Swan, Director of Resident Services for the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County (MD), told resident empowerment conference attendees that relationship building takes time and does not happen instantly*

Resident leaders who want a seat at the table with their housing authorities must be ready to devote their time, people skills, and effort to making those partnerships happen.

Panelists at the "Opening Doors to Opportunities" resident empowerment conference held in Philadelphia in mid-August believe that resident leaders must work actively on two fronts: with housing authority management, while training and developing their residents. They offered no easy solutions and made it clear that there is no substitute for time, people skills, and a great deal of effort.

Fred Swan, Director of Resident Services for the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County (MD), told conference attendees that relationship building takes time; it does not happen instantly. The trust, respect, and value necessary between housing authorities and resident leaders will come with transparency and active listening by both parties. Further, resident leaders must have a high functioning partnership.

"I've spent a lot of time trying to mediate issues between resident leaders," Swan recalled. "So, if you're not together as resident leadership, some of you are not going to have a good partnership. You have to put aside the conflicts you have to work for the greater good of residents."

Erik Crawford, Executive Director of Can I Live CDC, agreed with Swan's observation. Crawford also urged

resident leaders to be inquisitive and creative.

"We as resident councils have got to start tapping into resources that exist," he said. "Look through your budget of your housing authority and find the money they're giving to outside agencies. Those are the agencies you need to be knocking on the door to give back to us."

Crawford strongly believes in forming resident businesses that employ residents through the formation of 501(c)(3) charitable groups. (A good example is the Norris Afterschool Program at PHA.)

Ron Ashford, HUD's Director of Public Housing Supportive Services, thinks that resident groups are missing a golden opportunity. Not enough resident applications are coming in for the Resident Opportunities and Supportive Services (ROSS) grants offered by HUD. The grant pays for resident coordinators who connect residents with services they need. Ashford noted that there a number of groups that can and will assist them in writing the grant application which is admittedly complex.

Then, Ashford asked a telling question: how many people under 30 were in attendance. No one raised their hand.

"Where are they and why aren't they part of your resident council?" he asked. "Young people will help you fight back, but if they're not part of your association, you will lose."



*Erik Crawford, Executive Director of Can I Live CDC and a former resident leader in New York City, believes RAD can work in residents favor, but they must be ready to negotiate favorable terms under any conversion.*

# Veteran Officer Takes Helm as PHAPD Chief



PHA Police Chief Joseph Marker shakes hands with PHA President and CEO Kelvin Jeremiah after taking the oath of office at police headquarters.

A seasoned member of the law enforcement community has taken over the post of police chief at the Philadelphia Housing Authority Police Department (PHAPD). Joseph Marker replaces Branville Bard who left in mid-August to become the Chief of Police in Cambridge, Mass.

Chief Marker came to the PHA Police Department with 36 years of experience at the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD). Before being promoted to the PHAPD's top job, he served for two years as the department's second-in-command.

"Promoting Chief Marker was an easy decision for me. As an Inspector with the PPD for more than 12 years, Chief Marker commanded over 700 officers and protected millions of Philadelphians. With his decades of leadership experience, I have full confidence that he will lead PHA's Police Department with integrity, fairness, and accountability," said PHA President and CEO Kelvin A. Jeremiah.

Chief Marker has quite a legacy to follow. Under Chief Bard, crime at PHA developments declined 41% in 2016 alone. He upgraded various procedures in the department to bring the unit into best practices compliance with recognized police techniques and technology. One of the practices Chief Bard employed was the usage of police body cameras.

Following former Chief Bard from the city's police force to PHA and acting as his second-in-command, Marker played a large role in implementing the changes that contributed to the improved safety of PHA communities. His intent to keep Bard's momentum going.

"Branville and I had many conversations around the direction of the department, and we were in total agreement," Marker said. "The programs and procedures that we implemented have been successful, so I don't anticipate taking the department in a different direction. Instead, I'm

going to keep building on the strong foundation that Branville established."

The new Chief also greatly supports the notion to recruit, hire and train PHA residents to become sworn officers. There are currently nine on the force. A tenth resident is preparing to attend the police academy starting in late September.

"I think resident officers add credibility to the department," he says. "There's nothing like having our residents in the program interact with people who they know and who they can relate to. The officers also help the department better understand the community members we serve, which is crucial to creating safe places to live and work."

Under Kelvin Jeremiah's administration, the PHAPD has greatly increased its complement of sworn officers. The agency now has 77.



# Longtime Resident Activist Dies

Louise "Mommy" Hanible, 77, who was known for her fierce community activism over the course of her life, passed away on October 14th.

Ms. Hanible, who lived at the old Martin Luther King high-rise site before it was demolished and rebuilt, continued to occupy her apartment there along with several friends until new scattered site housing was completed for them nearby.

Just five years ago, Ms. Hanible realized a dream come true when PHA erected an historic marker at the rebuilt MLK site that commemorates a visit by the late civil rights leader in 1965. She lived in or around the development at 13th and Fitzwater streets all her life and

could remember the day King appeared like it was yesterday.

When the marker was unveiled, those gathered gave Ms. Hanible a standing ovation for her persistence. The unveiling of the marker took place on the 44th anniversary of King's assassination.

Ms. Hanible had a sense of humor, too, especially when she addressed the PHA Board of Commissioners. All who heard her couldn't help but be entertained.

"Mommy" was a kind and thoughtful person who cared deeply about her family, friends, neighbors, and PHA. Our condolences to her family and loved ones.

Rest in peace, Louise.

# Indego Now Serving Sharswood and Brewerytown

PHA residents in Sharswood and Brewerytown who are looking for a healthy, affordable way to get around the city now have it.

Indego, Philadelphia's bike share program, now has six stations serving those communities:

- 24th & Cecil B. Moore
- 22nd & Cecil B. Moore
- 19th & Girard
- 24th & Poplar
- 33rd & Girard
- 27th & Master

"It's definitely another form of public transportation. It's very affordable. It's good for health and fitness as well," said Waffiyah Murray, Indego Community Coordinator for the City's Office of Transportation and Infrastructure Systems.

Indego is a public program that is owned and managed by the City, but is maintained and operated by a local company, Bicycle Transit Systems. All revenue from bike rentals supports the operations and expansion of the system.

Riders need to be at least 16 years old to use Indego bikes. Minors will

need to be accompanied by a parent or guardian during the ride. Bikes are available on a first come, first served basis and they're available around the clock. Users can check a bike out at one location and check it back in at a different locale. The system also has apps that allow you to buy rides, see where nearest stations are located, check for bicycle availability, and contact customer service, too.

"One of the barriers that some people have to biking is safety. We offer a lot of free bike safety classes," Murray said.

Indego will also teach you how to map out your route and get acquainted with the City's bike laws. It also conducts group rides to help people become familiar with the service and build up their confidence.

Murray said that people wishing to use the system can use a credit or debit card at Indego's walk-up stations. They can go online if they prefer a cash payment option. The online form will generate a bar code that users can take to CVS, Family Dollar, or 7-11 and make a payment there. You can also make a payment online and Indego will send a pass in the mail. For more information, visit [www.rideindego.com](http://www.rideindego.com).



Indego, Philadelphia's bike share program, now has six stations serving Sharswood and Brewerytown. Bikes are available on a first come, first served basis and they're available around the clock.



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# Project SOAR Kicks Off at Wilson Park

PHA residents who need help filling out financial aid forms for college and other post-secondary educational opportunities can now do so through Project SOAR. This test program got under way in mid-October at Wilson Park. It will be offered at eleven sites altogether. They are:

- Oxford Village
- Champlost Homes
- Morton Homes
- Ludlow Phase
- Cambridge Plaza
- Haddington Homes
- West Park Apartments
- Westpark Plaza
- Wilson Park
- Bartram Village
- Paschall Village

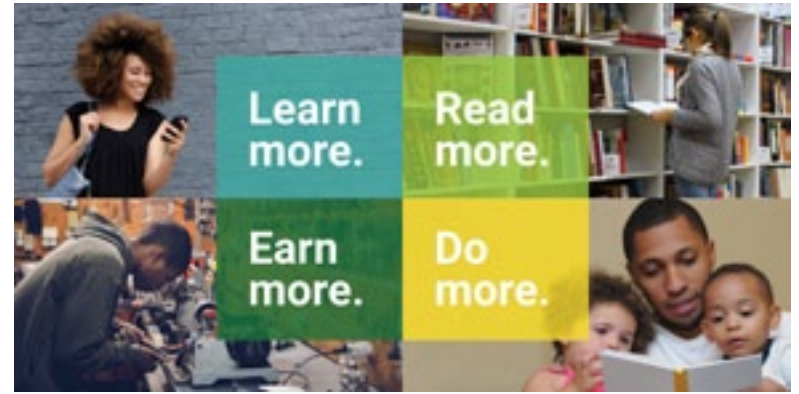
Times and dates for each site will be posted online.

PHA is employing two full-time education navigators to work with 250 public housing youth, ages 15-20 years old, per year. The navigators will devise strategies to address and prevent participants from dropping out of school, and encourage the goal of post-secondary education. They will also promote awareness and benefits of a college education and provide readiness and services to youth selected to take part in the program. The housing authority estimates that at least 90% of its youth ages 15-20 will be eligible for federal student aid based on socio-economic data collected by the authority.

The U-S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded over \$300,000 to PHA late last year to hire “education navigators”

to help low-income youth and their families fill out the forms. Project SOAR (Students + Opportunities + Achievements = Results) is a new pilot program that reflects the federal government’s commitment to expand educational services to youth living in public housing. The program will include one-on-one academic advising, completing the student aid form, and help with completing college and scholarship applications.

Guidance counselors, traditionally responsible for assisting students with college preparedness, including financial aid forms and related activities, have been cut significantly in recent years. Such conditions indicated a clear need for an education navigator initiative in Philadelphia. The ultimate goal of the program is to break the generational dependency on the public support system through academic improvement and college access.



## Learn to Read, When You Can, At Your Own Pace

PHA residents who need to upgrade their reading skills now have the opportunity to do so at their convenience on their smartphones. The City’s Office of Adult Education has joined with the XPrize Foundation to offer and test 8 different literacy apps. XPRIZE is a non-profit organization that designs and manages public competitions intended to encourage technological development that could benefit humanity.

An estimated 500,000 people in Philadelphia do not have the reading skills necessary to land jobs, even low skill jobs, in today’s work force.

Anne Gemmell, the Director of Family Learning for the City’s Office of Adult Education, believes the availability of literacy apps overcomes the barriers to adult literacy, including transportation. Apps also help adults avoid shame or humiliation.

“It’s private. A lot of adults don’t want to advertise the fact that they’re struggling to read. They’re too embarrassed to go to a face-to-face class,” she said. “So, the mobile app provides them privacy and discretion to learn at their own pace and make some progress without advertising that they’re struggling.”

Gladys Stokes, a 50-something Housing Choice recipient in West

Philadelphia, has been using one of the apps since April.

“The more you use the app, the more your reading level goes up,” Stokes said. “My reading level now is on the 9th grade. My (former) reading level was on a 6th grade reading level!”

Ms. Stokes dropped out of school in the 11th grade and has a goal of obtaining her GED by December. She really likes the convenience of the apps.

“It’s something to help me better my words, better my reading, and I can do it in my home. Or I can sit on a bus and I can pull my phone out and I can do some answers and questions. It builds your self-esteem up,” she said cheerfully.

Gladys has become a team leader in the program and is helping others learn how to use the app. She has a second goal of opening a center and teaching children how to read using the app.

If you’re interested in taking part in the program, call 866-566-5179. If chosen, you’ll receive an appointment for a face-to-face meeting where someone will help you download the app and teach you to use it. You’ll also receive a \$25 Amex Cash Card just for taking part in this effort!



Photo Credit: Odessa Blocker

Education navigators Robert Graves and Charles Ellis (l-r) confer with Wilson Park residents at the grand opening of the Project SOAR program in mid-October. The navigators help residents who need help filling out financial aid for college and other post-secondary educational opportunities.

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