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Stepping up to make Philadelphia ACHIEVEable

By [Robin Bloom](#) · April 12, 2016



I am stepping up by creating a better, fairer Philadelphia for all of its residents, one of the inspirational challenges guests chose to hold as their photo was snapped during “Food for Thought,” ACHIEVEability’s annual signature fundraising event, Saturday, April 9 at Urban Outfitters at the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

Mayor Jim Kenney, Councilman Curtis Jones, Jr., and other corporate, civic, and non-profit leaders were among the more than 550 attendees gathered for an evening of sumptuous food and

cocktail samples by 25 popular Philadelphia chefs and restaurants, a silent auction, live music, and entertainment. The atmosphere was light and festive but the goal was serious – to raise the funds to continue ACHIEVEability’s mission of permanently breaking the generational cycle of poverty for low income, single parent, and homeless Philadelphia families.

Toward that end, “Food for Thought” raised \$250,000 with all proceeds supporting the pathway to independence for its participants.

For 35 years, ACHIEVEability has been transitioning families in West Philadelphia from welfare dependence to economic independence through its own successful model based on the belief that housing is a necessary first step to ending poverty. Qualified low-income, single-parent families living in homeless shelters are offered housing in renovated formerly abandoned homes supplied by the organization and are provided with education, financial, parenting, and personal development support and guidance through the Family Self-Sufficiency Program. Parents are then required to complete at least 5 classes per year toward a post-secondary degree or its equivalent and work at least 30 hours per week (to meet all necessary monthly expenses), and must attend regular workshops. Comprehensive support and coaching is provided with the goal of getting the parent a degree and job to make the family self-sufficient. Stability, confidence, discipline, and emotional support are also provided.

“24 hour support is critical,” said Harold Barrow, a graduate of ACHIEVEability’s program and now employed by the organization. In that role, Harold does “everything that is needed. I am a coach, a mentor. If someone relapses or in cases where there is domestic abuse, I am available at any hour and will go there to help take control back and tell them that there is a plan and help them to get there.”

Barrow knows because he has been there. 25 years ago, he was living with his small infant in an abandoned house in Germantown, addicted to heroin with only an 8th grade education. A hospital social worker recommended him to ACHIEVEability since Barrow met the criteria of being a single parent with a child. Through the program, he got his GED, his first job at Popeye’s, attended community college (with a 3.87 GPA), received a scholarship to Drexel University, and graduated with a degree in psychology. He was then hired by ACHIEVEability as a coach and now a Senior Fellow, addressing other institutions, conducting workshops, and working with those who have drug and alcohol issues.

In 2014, [ACHIEVEability](#) became a member organization of [Mission First Housing Group](#), an entity that has been providing housing to those with special needs in the Mid-Atlantic region for 25 years. Alfredo de la Peña, Chief Operating Officer for Mission First Housing Group, was “attracted to the mission of ACHIEVEability. By acting as the back office and concentrating on the housing aspect, it allows ACHIEVEability to focus on their mission. With both organizations combined, we will manage more than 2,500 homes for low-income populations.” In 2015, ACHIEVEability achieved 100% high school graduation rate by the children in the program. “The graduation rate is one of the jewels of the program,” says de la Peña. “The goal is to eventually expand beyond West Philadelphia into the region and be a model for others to follow.”

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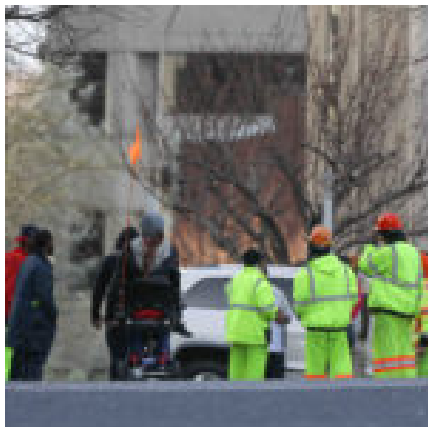
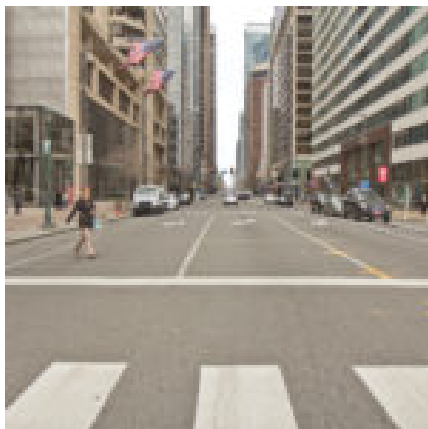
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