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Who's Next community leaders and activists: 17 people changing Philly

They're civic association leaders; they're organizing protests; they're helping the city's youth navigate their lives.



PHOTOS: DANYA HENNINGER, ILLUSTRATION: JAYNA WALLACE

[Anna Orso](#)
Mar. 28, 2017, 10:00 a.m.

It's the community and neighborhood leaders who make this city work. So for the third time, we're featuring the city's top young people bringing communities together throughout the city of Philadelphia as part of our "Who's Next" series. (<https://billypenn.com/stories/whos-next/>).

But this time is a little different. We're also including activists and advocates this year – people who have stepped up to organize, whether it's a neighborhood meeting, a protest or a community service project.

Every month, *Billy Penn* publishes an edition of *Who's Next* (<https://billypenn.com/stories/whos-next/>), presented by the Knight Foundation, that focuses on a different industry or field. Over the last two and a half years, we've written about more than 400 of the city's up-and-coming leaders through the *Who's Next* feature, from teachers to artists to musicians to chefs.


This time around, these young community leaders and activists are the young people who help drive this city forward. Below are this year's 17 winners, in alphabetical order.


Honorees' hair and makeup by House of Clarity (<http://www.houseofclarity.com/>).



DANYA HENNINGER

DAVE BRINDLEY

 Founder of Not In Philly

 40 years old


 [@NotinPhilly](https://twitter.com/NotinPhilly) (<https://twitter.com/NotinPhilly>).


For the last seven years, Dave Brindley has gone out once or twice a week and picked up whatever litter had accumulated in and around his West Philly community. It was from those experiences when he started thinking about a web-enabled "adopt-a-block" program. He teamed up with Code for Philly, an activist coder group, and local design firm Think Company to build Not In Philly, the first map-enabled, adopt-a-block site in the country. Once the site was completed, the initiative came under the 75-year-old environmental nonprofit, the Pennsylvania Resource Council. (<http://prc.org>). In return for a six-month commitment of going out to clean a block once a week, Not In Philly provides citizens with resources and incentives to clean up their blocks and then spread from there. Not In Philly launched in Walnut Hill last October and Spruce Hill in February. So far, more than 200 people have signed up across the city. Brindley has also been a campus minister at Penn since 2009 and, before Not In Philly, his "best" contribution to the city, he says, was installing an unofficial protected bike lane at 38th and Spruce streets. (<http://www.philly.com/philly/living/How-a-Philly-guy-fed-up-with-crashes-built-his-own-bike-lane.html>).



DANYA HENNINGER

KELLI CALDWELL

 Executive Director at The Hope Bag Mission

 38 years old


 [@msloubelle \(https://twitter.com/msloubelle\)](https://twitter.com/msloubelle)


Kelli Caldwell is the executive director at The Hope Bag Mission, an initiative that supports non-profits and other institutions that work with survivors of human trafficking. The organization does this by filling and distributing "Hope Bags," so women and children who are rescued receive a bag filled with personal care items, a book of inspiration and a handwritten note of encouragement from the woman (or man) who volunteered to fill the personal bag. Caldwell works to develop strategic partnerships with governmental and non-profit agencies to support the Hope Bag initiative. Since 2014, the organization has raised more than \$100,00 and distributed more than 3,000 Hope Bags to organizations that serve victims of human trafficking nationwide. In 2015, Caldwell organized Philadelphia's inaugural "Walk for Freedom," which raised over \$10,000 for the global event that takes place in 200 cities around the world for Human Trafficking awareness. And in 2016, she expanded the Hope Bag Mission outreach initiative to include refugee resettlement families in the greater Philadelphia area. Caldwell is also a volunteer with Salvation Army's New Day Drop-in Center, Chosen 300 ministries and the Planned Parenthood Action Forum. She's also a member of the [Women's March on Washington Diversity and Inclusion Conversations Facebook group. \(https://www.facebook.com/groups/WomensMarchDiversityInclusion/\)](https://www.facebook.com/groups/WomensMarchDiversityInclusion/)



DANYA HENNINGER

KELLY CG EDWARDS

 Community Relations at Arts + Crafts Holdings

 32 years old

 [@KGsmindgrapes \(https://twitter.com/KGsmindgrapes\)](https://twitter.com/KGsmindgrapes)

 [LinkedIn \(https://www.linkedin.com/in/kellycgedwards/\)](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kellycgedwards/)


Kelly CG Edwards spearheads programming, event planning and special projects coordination for tenants and residents throughout Spring Arts District in her job with Arts + Crafts Holdings, a leading developer in the Spring Garden area promoting a community for artists and craftspeople. Edwards' approach to relationship management is from a sociological standpoint, with an understanding of city planning and people's interactions with each other. Edwards lends her technical background in urban planning to the team through grant writing, community development and government relations efforts. She's also co-chair of CANstruction Philadelphia, a design and build competition to help end hunger, and is a grant writer for Friends of George W. Nebinger School. Edwards is a board member at Charter High School for Architecture + Design and also served on Mayor Kenney's Transition Team for Planning, Housing and Development.



DANYA HENNINGER

CHARLIE ELISON

 Program Coordinator, Northeast Region for Travis Manion Foundation


 36 years old


After 14 years in the Army bouncing back and forth between Iraq and Afghanistan, Charlie Elison started getting involved in community service here at home in Philly. His day job is working as the Northeast Region Program Coordinator for the Travis Manion Foundation, which works with recently transitioned veterans looking to get involved in their communities. Elison oversees veteran-youth mentorship programs throughout the region and connects veterans with schools and youth groups who could use a little mentoring in leadership and character development. He also heads up quarterly Veteran Transition Workshops, working with fellow service members as they kick off their transition to civilian life. Elison is highly involved in neighborhood activities in Point Breeze, where he's the planning and zoning chair and a board member with Point Breeze Community Development Corporation, a job one of his neighbors said Elison treats as a "full-time" gig. Elison's an executive committee member on the 17th Police District Advisory Council and a board member on the East Point Breeze Neighbors Association. In addition, he's the outreach coordinator for Miriam Medical Clinics, helping build South Philly's first and only volunteer-powered, non-profit, completely free community health clinic from the ground up. Elison is also a Sergeant First Class in the United States Army, currently in a part time status with a New Jersey based light infantry battalion.





DANYA HENNINGER

LAUREN J. FOOTMAN

 President, NAACP PA State Conference Youth and College Division

 28 years old

 [@LaurenJanelle_](https://twitter.com/LaurenJanelle_) (https://twitter.com/LaurenJanelle_)

 [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/laurenfootman/%20) (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/laurenfootman/%20>)


Lauren Footman is president of the NAACP PA State Conference Youth and College Division, where she coordinates efforts of the NAACP Youth and College Chapters across the state. She's tasked specifically with developing civil rights initiatives based on Pennsylvania's climate and concerns, while also implementing national initiatives. She works to ensure officers and members are receiving necessary resources, including training, to be effective leaders in their respective communities. Formerly, Footman served as the Mid Atlantic Regional Organizer and then Campaign Lead for Generation Progress' Gun Violence Prevention Network, where she created campaigns that advocated for passage of comprehensive gun violence prevention legislation and criminal justice reform. Now, she's working with fellow organizers to launch an human rights organization that works to elevate millennials, women and other communities in the context of criminal justice reform and gun violence prevention. Footman is also the Community Relations Chair for New Leaders Council of Philadelphia and co-founder of Bryn Mawr SCOPE, a mentoring program for undergraduate students of the African and Latinx Diasporas at Bryn Mawr College.



DANYA HENNINGER

JAMILA HARRIS-MORRISON

 Executive Director of ACHIEVEability

 36 years old


 [LinkedIn \(https://www.linkedin.com/in/jamilahm\)](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jamilahm)

In 2006, lifelong Philadelphian Jamila Harris-Morrison joined ACHIEVEability, (<https://www.achieveability.org/about-us.html>) a West Philly nonprofit working to break the cycle of poverty by helping low-income, single parent and homeless families to achieve self-sufficiency. This year, she was promoted to serve as the organization's executive director. In this capacity, Harris-Morrison works with a team of 15 and oversees the administration, programming and strategic plan of the organization, as well as fundraising, marketing and community outreach. Harris-Morrison -- who has 13 years of experience as a counselor and coach for youth, adults and families -- has dedicated her career to helping homeless families become independent contributors to a healthy community. In addition to her work with ACHIEVEability, Harris-Morrison mentors high school girls and first-generation college students and is a member of organizations including the National Association of Black Social Workers, Family Service Provider Network, United Way Project Next and the Young Women's Initiative and Women's Way.




DANYA HENNINGER

PELE IRGANGLADEN

 Community Organizer/ Movement Trainer

 27 years old

 [@Pele_PHL \(https://twitter.com/Pele_PHL\)](https://twitter.com/Pele_PHL)

Pele IrgangLaden has been organizing in Philadelphia for years -- especially as a student at Temple University -- and has worked most recently on organizing protests, demonstrations and other actions as part of the #JewishResistance. IrgangLaden sees his role as working with communities seeking to make change or empower themselves to build powerful organizations and movements. For example, IrgangLaden is a national coordinator with IfNotNow, a movement that seeks to end American Jewish support for what they consider to be an occupation of Palestine. He's also an organizer with 15 Now Philadelphia, a group fighting for a \$15 minimum wage, and Stadium Stompers, a group opposed to the construction of a Temple football stadium in North Philadelphia. In February, IrgangLaden co-organized a Muslim and Jewish Youth Solidarity Rally "in response to the rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism." One of the people who nominated IrgangLaden described him with one important word: "Tireless."



DANYA HENNINGER

TIERRA JONES

 Founder/ Director of Community Outreach at A.T.T.R.A.C.T Philly

 31 years old

 [@ATTRACTPhilly](https://twitter.com/ATTRACTPhilly) (<https://twitter.com/ATTRACTPhilly>)

Before graduating from Penn State in 2010, Tierra Jones founded ATTRACT (A Team Taking Responsive Actions with Conscious Thought) Philly, a group of young people who wanted to give back to youth in Philadelphia. Today, ATTRACT Philly is a non-profit based in the city that promotes the importance of education through free cultural, health and outreach programming, much of which aims to provide resources to underprivileged kids and foster education about entrepreneurship. Since it was founded, ATTRACT Philly has served more than 2,000 people in the Philly area, including through a "Sky is the Limit" community day in North Philly last year. The person who nominated Jones wrote: "She works tirelessly to make positive change in every community she has the opportunity to operate in" and that she "has a unique connection with children, who are one of her primary focuses."




DANYA HENNINGER

TARIK S. KHAN

 Family Nurse Practitioner/ Activist

 41 years old

 [@InclusionPhilly \(https://twitter.com/InclusionPhilly\)](https://twitter.com/InclusionPhilly)


 [LinkedIn \(https://www.linkedin.com/in/tariknp\)](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tariknp)


Tarik S. Khan isn't your average medical professional. He's a family nurse practitioner at a community health clinic located in Germantown where he works to diagnose, manage and treat medical issues in patients of all ages. But he sees it as part of his duties as a nurse to be an educator and an advocate. He spends part of his week teaching graduate students at Penn and most notably has spent a significant portion of his life in the political sphere fighting in Philly, Harrisburg and D.C. for nurses and the patients they serve. Khan is a member and organizer with the Healthcare Defenders Coalition, a group that works in defense of affordable healthcare, specifically Medicare, Medicaid and Medicaid expansion, and the Children's Health Insurance Program. He's lobbied with the National Association of Community Health Centers and chaired the Government Relations Committee of the Pennsylvania State Nurses Association. Khan is a special adviser to District Attorney candidate Joe Khan, a lead organizer of Multi-Faith PA Victory Ground Game Team to register voters in Philadelphia, a committeeperson in the 63rd ward and a volunteer with a number of other political campaigns. The person who nominated Khan described him as the "epitome of service and dedication."




DANYA HENNINGER

RYAN KUCK

 Chief Motivation Officer at Greensgrow

 38 years old

 [LinkedIn \(https://www.linkedin.com/in/ryan-kuck-6a693148/\)](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ryan-kuck-6a693148/)

Ryan Kuck calls himself the Chief Motivation Officer -- but he's really the executive director (<http://www.greensgrow.org/about-us/staff/greensgrow-announces-new-executive-director/>) at Greensgrow, a nationally-recognized urban farm based in Kensington. Kuck joined Greensgrow in 2006, and has also dedicated years to the Urban Nutrition Initiative, a program at the University of Pennsylvania that works to promote healthy lifestyles and sustainable food systems. Kuck has been involved in his neighborhood in West Philadelphia, and has also worked with other organizations like Philadelphia Orchard Project, Mill Creek Farm and Preston's Paradise. Said the person who nominated Kuck: "He has so many irons in the fire and is very reticent and humble about his many contributions to the city."




DANYA HENNINGER

MUBARAK "MU LAW" LAWRENCE

 Co-Founder at Rising Sons/ Ones Up

 31 years old

 [@Mu_Law \(https://twitter.com/Mu_Law\)](https://twitter.com/Mu_Law)

 [LinkedIn \(https://www.linkedin.com/in/mubarak-i-m-lawrence-1a937223\)](https://www.linkedin.com/in/mubarak-i-m-lawrence-1a937223)

Mubarak "Mu Law" Lawrence is co-founder and chief operations officer at Rising Sons/ Ones Up, a Philly-based nonprofit that works to foster economic growth in disadvantaged communities through harnessing skills and passions of the young people who live there. He's also in the "early development" phase of a Community Investment Fund that will provide investors returns based on a portfolio's ability to increase and benefit social responsibility and impact in a community. Lawrence is the CEO of Rising Community Enterprises LLC, a start-up business firm that provides direct and indirect services addressing capital acquisition and media production to re-purpose economic resources within the public and private sectors. Lawrence also offers advice to start-ups and grassroots social enterprises through mentoring, workshops, motivational speaking, and video production. The person who nominated Mubarak wrote: "This person is a community leader and activist that spends most days uplifting others and impacting change in low-income neighborhoods."



Dan Martino is the secretary of the Olde Richmond Civic Association. DANNY HENNINGER / BILLY PENN

DAN MARTINO

 Organizer, Olde Richmond Town Watch

 35 years old

 [@dmartino19125 \(https://twitter.com/dmartino19125\)](https://twitter.com/dmartino19125)

 [LinkedIn \(https://www.linkedin.com/in/daniel-martino-52754743/\)](https://www.linkedin.com/in/daniel-martino-52754743/)


Dan Martino sees his job simply: Make Olde Richmond a "safer, cleaner and happier place to live and raise a family." Martino is the Secretary of the Olde Richmond Civic Association, but it was his work organizing a town watch that caught the interest of many of his neighbors. Martino headed up a program called Safe Streets, an in-home security camera program, that encouraged the use of security cameras throughout the neighborhood to foster better safety programs. He also helped form Clean Streets, a weekly street sweeping initiative where each week volunteers come out on Saturday to clean up a blighted block in the neighborhood. To date, Martino says the group has filled over 120 bags of trash and found about 60 used needles. Martino is working on coordinating a monthly outdoor movie night at Cione Recreation and is working with state representatives to light up the tunnels on Lehigh Avenue between the Fishtown and Port Richmond Neighborhoods to encourage foot traffic between the communities. He's also working with civic leaders and activists to combat the city's opioid epidemic, and he created [a petition to encourage the mayor's task force \(https://www.change.org/p/mayor-kenney-s-opioid-task-force-open-a-safe-injection-clinic-in-philadelphia\)](https://www.change.org/p/mayor-kenney-s-opioid-task-force-open-a-safe-injection-clinic-in-philadelphia) to suggest supervised, safe injection clinics in Philadelphia. During the day, Martino works as the creative director for Table 95 Hospitality. But the simple reason why Martino is Who's Next? Said the person who nominated him: "Dan has donated many hours to benefit the safety and well-being of our neighborhood."



DANYA HENNINGER

MICHAEL O'BRYAN

 Humanitarian Artist

 34 years old

 [@MisticQuest \(https://twitter.com/MisticQuest\)](https://twitter.com/MisticQuest)


Michael O'Bryan works with The Village of Arts and Humanities, a North Philly nonprofit focused on artist-facilitated community building. O'Bryan is the senior manager of youth arts education, meaning he manages Creative Impact studios, arts/media education, advocacy and leadership programming that's offered for free to kids aged 9 to 19. O'Bryan is tasked with recruiting, hiring, evaluating and managing The Village's teaching artist team and developing the quarterly program budget. But O'Bryan has another job -- he's also the project manager on SMASH, a public health initiative of the U.S. Attorney's Office Eastern PA District and the ANDRUS Sanctuary Institute, funded by the Department of Justice. In this role, O'Bryan helps lead the U.S. Attorney's Office's "Trauma Informed Care Initiative" and is responsible for the integration of the Sanctuary Model into all aspects of the project, including the facilitation of community education and trainings for organizations and institutions. O'Bryan is involved with a handful of other organizations, many of them focused on issues impacting the homeless, including Project HOME, SELF Group, Need-In-Deed, the Philadelphia ACE Task Force, Project 440, the Campaign for Trauma Informed Policy and Practice, Continuum of Care - The City of Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services, the Victim Community Support Committee and the Philadelphia Children's Foundation.



DANYA HENNINGER

JAMES OWK

 Program Manager at Mighty Writers

 37 years old

 [@onlywithkings \(https://www.instagram.com/onlywithkings/\)](https://www.instagram.com/onlywithkings/)


James Owk works to cultivate the writers of tomorrow and set up young people of color for academic and emotional success in high school, post-high school, college and after. He does this through his work as a program manager with Mighty Writers, a Philly-based nonprofit that aims to teach students writing skills so they can achieve success in school and other areas of their lives. Owk works directly with middle school students and the weekly Teen Scholars program, teaching young people of Philadelphia how to think and write clearly. Said the person who nominated Owk: "These are life-changing skills for the students he mentors."



DANYA HENNINGER

ROSALIND PICHARDO

 Founder, Operation Save Our City

 42 years old


Rosalind Pichardo's brother was murdered in Philadelphia in January 2012 and, by the end of the year, she'd already found a way to remember him: Fight back against gun violence. Pichardo, of Kensington, founded Operation Save Our City, a non-profit that aims to work at the street level to empower families to speak out against gun violence and domestic violence. The group is also connected to the Healing Blanket Project, an initiative that puts "healing blankets" at the site where homicides take place so that families can think of healing -- as opposed to grief -- when they visit the site where their loved one was killed. In its next project, Pichardo said Operation Save Our City is working with other local officials and community leaders to identify drug dealers and push gun safety initiatives like gun locks and gun buy-back programs.



DANYA HENNINGER

HANNAH JANE SASSAMAN

 Policy Director, Media Mobilizing Project

 40 years old

 [@hannahsassaman \(https://twitter.com/hannahsassaman\)](https://twitter.com/hannahsassaman)

Hannah Sassaman is a recognized organizer in Philly, working as the policy director at Media Mobilizing Project, a group that's focused for the last 10 years on building movements in the city based on shared stories, whether they're from taxi drivers struggling for basic wage protections, Head Start parents working for a say in their kids' schools or public school students fighting "forced charterization." As the policy director, Sassaman helps communities Media Mobilizing works with build and win campaigns that help them tell their stories and protect and expand the right to communicate. Media Mobilizing was highly involved in Comcast's once-in-a-generation franchise renegotiation, and is now focused largely on the new technologies being introduced into criminal justice decision-making. Sassaman's a member of the [Digital Literacy Alliance](http://www.mayorsfundphila.org/initiatives/digital-literacy-alliance/) (<http://www.mayorsfundphila.org/initiatives/digital-literacy-alliance/>), a coalition working on funding communities that are working to break the digital divide in Philly. She's also a trustee at the Valentine Foundation, which works on grassroots grant-making focused on building the power of women and girls in this region and nationwide. On Sassaman's watch, Valentine funded its first trans-focused organizing through the Trans Oral History Project. She also sits on the board of Allied Media Projects in Detroit and Fight for the Future.




DANYA HENNINGER

JEAN STROUT

 Child Advocate / Support Center for Child Advocates

 31 years old

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Jean Strout runs a project called "Representing Youth Transitioning to Adulthood," which provides legal services to older youth who have been in the foster care system. She's the Equal Justice Works Fellow Sponsored By Greenberg Traurig LLP at the Support Center For Child Advocates, where she works mainly with youth between ages 18 and 21. Strout has a particular focus on those who have "aged out" of the system and are largely on their own, and her job is to give these youth legal services to help them become healthy and independent. Often, that's in the form of helping them "resume jurisdiction," or re-enter the foster care system to get additional support up to age 21. It also involves hosting walk-in legal clinics for current and former foster youth and helping them get the documents they need, like birth certificates and IDs; deal with public benefits, immigration, and housing issues; and support them in accessing mental health and medical treatment. Prior to working at the Support Center For Child Advocates, Strout was a fellow at the Juvenile Law Center, where she worked with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth and youth involved in the foster care system.

