

# **Hillary Kane, Director of the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development**

Aurora Coon & Melissa Wright 26 March 2019

Hillary Kane is the second director of the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND). She began her tenure in this position in the fall of 1999 and has been in this role since. As someone who has been with the organization since its early beginning, she is proud of its continued existence and support to area colleges and universities over the last three decades. She looks forward to continuing to grow PHENND and to innovate in order to fulfill PHENND's mission of bringing to bear the resources of universities to improve quality of life for all Philadelphia residents.

## **Experience & Contributions**

Kane earned her undergraduate degree in Urban Studies from the University of Pennsylvania. She credits the program with helping provide her with an interdisciplinary understanding of the interconnected social issues that affect Philadelphia. Kane joined the PHENND team immediately after graduation in the role of assistant

director and assumed the role of director months later after the unexpected departure of the previous director.

Despite Kane's top-notch education, she wasn't fully prepared to lead the organization and honed many of the skills needed to lead a small nonprofit on the job. She says, "Running a nonprofit is like a small business, there's a lot of spreadsheets and procurement. My degree didn't prepare me for that." Thanks to mentorship from her colleague Joann Weeks at the Netter Center, and her strong desire to make a difference and get things done, Kane has been able to learn those financial management skills and acquire the other knowledge it takes to lead PHENND.

Under her leadership, PHENND has grown from its initial group of five colleges and universities to a consortium of 24 colleges and universities in the greater Philadelphia area. In addition to the growth in member campuses, Kane is responsible for bringing several new grants to PHENND that allow for signature programming including PHENND K-16 VISTA Project, Next Steps AmeriCorps Program, and GEAR UP College Readiness among others.

Kane sees the longevity and consistency of PHENND as her most important contribution: "keeping this thing alive through blood, sweat, and tears and hard years. We've survived and are growing and thriving." She is also proud of the PHENND newsletter, which has been going out weekly for 18 years. The newsletter has become a go-to

resource for events, news, research, and job postings related to higher education and neighborhood development in the Philadelphia region. The intersectional content of the newsletter attracts diverse stakeholders across sectors. There are almost 6,000 subscribers and the audience is still growing at a robust rate, with more than an 11 percent increase in 2017 from the previous year.

Not only has Kane sustained and grown PHENND and the newsletter over the years, she has also maintained an admirable work-life balance. She is the proud mom of two young children who attend Philadelphia public schools and is also proud to spend time with her family and be an activist outside of work. Kane says she admires Jane Jacobs - another urbanist, mom and activist!

## **Vision for the Future**

Kane continues to enjoy leading PHENND after all these years because of the breadth of PHENND's mission.

"Every year is different, but enough the same that I can knock out some things and then add new things and innovate," she says. PHENND recently did a year-long strategic alignment with Compass, during which they recommitted to the breadth of their approach. Many of PHENND's initiatives are in the K-16 education space, such as Next Steps AmeriCorps, a college completion strategy for low income sophomores and juniors in college, and GEAR UP, a tutoring and college readiness

program for high school students. Therefore, PHENND considered narrowing their focus to that area. However, through the strategic alignment, PHENND determined that the motivation behind these education projects was ultimately neighborhood development. Although much of PHENND's funding is for K-16 education projects, the goal is bigger than that, and Kane hopes to continue to pursue diverse, place-based initiatives to improve quality of life in underserved communities in Philadelphia. Kane also hopes to continue to increase staffing to support this broad mission and new projects. Last but not least, Kane aspires to get more involved in local government on a personal level to take her activism to the next level.