

It's True: One Man Can Make a Difference

Justin Harlem 23 January 2018

The Urban Affairs Coalition's (UAC) mission is to help ensure that every individual has the opportunity for educational and economic success as part of a secure and healthy life. They work to improve the quality of life in the Greater Philadelphia region by uniting public, private, community, and individual initiatives in order to build wealth and solve emerging issues in urban neighborhoods. The Coalition strengthens nonprofit organizations through fiscal sponsorship, capacity building, and program evaluation; improves life chances for youth and young adults; and provides economic opportunity to low-income households, working families, and disadvantaged businesses.

The Urban Affairs Coalition's Community and Economic Development (CED) department brings capital to communities by building bridges between low- to moderate-income areas and mainstream financial institutions. CED works to inject capital in underserved communities to enhance regional stability, growth, and vitality; economically empower low- to moderate-income individuals through informed personal financial management; help residents, businesses, and institutions in urban areas protect and build assets; and develop

strategies to address community and economic development concerns in the region. The Community and Economic Development is run by Executive Director, Jojy Varghese. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Jojy recently to discuss his role and vision at the Urban Affairs Coalition.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Jojy has dedicated himself to bettering his hometown through the implementation of innovative policies and initiatives. Jojy spent most of his professional career in management consulting, focusing on program support for large-scale transformational projects, serving both public sector and commercial clients in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. As a former senior consultant with Booz Allen, Jojy provided analytical services on the development of strategies for federal government clients that have been instrumental in reforming healthcare and IT governance. Jojy's transformation from D.C. consultant to Philadelphia not-for-profit leader can be traced to an internship at the Mayor of Philadelphia's Office while a student at Central High School. After studying information technology at Penn State University, Jojy embarked on a successful analytic analysis and consultant career. Despite tremendous success, and rapid promotion, he still felt something was missing. The passion and fervor he felt during that internship from being in a position to make a tangible difference in the city he grew up in, was simply not there. Propelled by a desire to work for the city and for

Philadelphians, he moved back to Philadelphia to pursue a Masters of Public Administration from the University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute of Government.

After graduating from Fels, he worked as chief of staff for Pennsylvania State Representative Tony Payton Jr., then for Mayor Vaughn Spencer of Reading, Pennsylvania, as the city's first-ever Director of Housing and Real Estate. After Mayor Spencer lost his re-election bid, Jojoy accepted his current position with the Urban Affairs Coalition. Since joining the UAC in December 2015, Jojoy has concentrated CED's work in four areas -- Foreclosure Prevention, Financial Education, Philadelphia HomeBuyNow, and Home Improvement Loans. He is currently working to include an Employment Assistance Loaning program that would provide matching grants for employees of the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. From a more than 40-member Board of Directors, he manages four subcommittees, each meeting four times a year, as well as an Impact Development Roundtable to explore issues such as affordable housing.

With a background as an analyst and consultant, Jojoy sees his work through S.M.A.R.T. goals. That is, he sets professional objectives through specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound goals. A data-driven individual, he believes it is only through setting and tracking concrete numbers, that you can know whether you are truly on the right track. It is a method he consistently applies to obtainable and stretch-goals alike.

It is this project and performance management style that exemplifies Jojy's capacity to utilize his private-sector experience in setting public-sector targets and leadership practices.

At UAC, Jojy is motivated by the expansive reach he is able to have into communities. For him, the most important opportunities CED offers are the financial education workshops. These workshops equip low-income youth and individuals with the knowledge necessary to make sound financial decisions. Prior to becoming executive director, CED held a total of eight workshops. This year, Jojy has set a target goal of 35 workshops. The goal for next year is to hold 50. In 2016, UAC held one Financial Advancement Network (FAN) workshop. During 2017, they expanded this number to eight workshops, and seek to expand to 15 workshops in 2018. According to Jojy, it is in something as simple as being able to provide credit score information to those who would otherwise not have access to it, that you can have a tremendous impact on a person's life. A natural storyteller, one cannot help from being inspired by the pride Jojy exudes as he recounts a story of a young man who was only able to obtain his first credit card after attending a financial education workshop.

If you walk around the city with Jojy, it does not take long for someone who once attended a UAC program or workshop to approach him extolling the positive benefits they experienced. One of Jojy's favorite stories is about

attending a community development conference run by a young man from Philadelphia. After speaking, the gentleman tore his way through the crowd in search of UAC's representative. Despite growing up in a neighborhood rife with the all-too-common plague of poverty and a crippling lack of opportunity, this gentleman thrived as an intern in UAC's Student Summer Program. Eight years later, he needed Jojoy to know that it was that internship that directly influenced where he was that day.

Jojoy is a fast talker driven by a desire to enact tangible change in Philadelphia (warning- providing him with caffeine can increase his rate of speech right to ludicrous speed). His professional mission is to apply all of that private sector energy into the public sector. Despite having been approached about running for city council, Jojoy continues to enjoy his position behind the scenes, at least for now. It is both humbling and awe-inspiring to see someone reach so far into the community and help make significant transformations in others' professional, financial, and personal lives. Philadelphia is better place with Jojoy on our side.