

News FROM HOME



NONE OF US ARE HOME UNTIL ALL OF US ARE HOME®

A Great and Endless Embrace



Photo by Jay Gorodetzer
Project HOME Community Organizer Helen Brown speaks at the 2015 Grand Opening of the Stephen Klein Wellness Center.

When Ms. Helen hugged you, you stayed hugged.

One of the pillars of the Project HOME community, Helen Brown passed away on September 2 at the age of 77. Over twenty years ago, Ms. Helen, as everyone called her, welcomed us into the neighborhood around the old St. Elizabeth's parish in north central Philadelphia. She soon became our Community Organizer and spent the past two decades overseeing a phenomenal transformation in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

A native of South Carolina, Brown moved to Philadelphia in 1960 at the age of eighteen. Over the decades, she witnessed the slow decline of the neighborhood, from a solid working-class community to an environment ravaged by economic disinvestment, with the attending crises of family breakdowns, abandonment, failing schools and social services, drugs, and crime. She would often speak of the time “when crack came” – a particularly devastating period in the mid- and late-1980s that greatly exacerbated violence and despair in low-income communities like hers all across the city.

Ms. Helen was deeply involved in her community throughout those tough years, organizing neighbors and working to protect and care for vulnerable kids. She continuously collaborated with block captains, local police and politicians, neighborhood schools, and civic associations to battle the blight and plant seeds of renewal in the St. E's neighborhood.

An answer to her prayers came in the early 1990s, when Project HOME came to the neighborhood. Ms. Helen was a key person in welcoming us and, in a few short years, was at the ground floor as ambitious plans emerged for neighborhood revitalization. (See “Stemming the Tide” on page 3 for more on the history of how we got involved in the neighborhood.)

One of her first initiatives was the genius idea of founding, along with fellow neighbor George Manigault, a neighborhood drill team, the North Philly Footstompers. She understood that the drill team (which donned uniforms featuring her favorite colors of red and white) would “give the kids something positive to do” by instilling teamwork and discipline. Even she didn't foresee the phenomenal success: Over the years, the Footstompers have won numerous local, state, and national awards, including multiple state championships. But Ms. Helen knew that the real success was not in all the gleaming trophies as much as in the sense of pride these children imbibed – and the sense of pride and unity which they in turn stirred in the whole neighborhood.

“Ms. Helen believed in everyone and brought the best out of everyone.”

The success of her precious young people was a forerunner of other amazing successes in the St. E's neighborhood. Ms. Helen's leadership, vision, and dogged persistence – along with other key Project HOME community members Chris Whaley and Priscilla “Ms. Tee” Bennett – were instrumental in cleaning up empty lots and creating green spaces, rehabbing abandoned shells into affordable homes for neighbors, clearing out drug-infested corners, and organizing neighbors and police against gun violence. Working with Project HOME and bringing together public and private partners with neighbors, she was pivotal in the development of the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs and the Stephen Klein Wellness Center.

All of this was possible because Ms. Helen believed in everyone and brought the best out of everyone. She saw the kids hanging out on the corner and knew that they had the potential to get educated and make something of themselves. She befriended many of the Project HOME residents, recovering men and formerly homeless mothers, and knew they had strength and gifts to contribute to the community. While she was shrewd about the realities of politics, she built relationships with elected officials, believing they could be challenged to act with decency and genuine concern for their constituents. She was there for families who lost loved ones to gun violence – and then organized buses to go to Harrisburg to advocate for more sane gun laws.

She made everyone feel special and important – expressed in her big, loving embrace and her naming everyone one of “my babies.” She knew how to celebrate and show appreciation for people. She held countless community gatherings, including dinners honoring first responders and the annual Mothers Day luncheon. She was always present to celebrate



Photo by Harvey Finkle
Ms. Helen welcomed Senator Bob Casey and his staff for a day of volunteering in the neighborhood in 2007.

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Roots and Branches: Reflections from Sister Mary

Helen Brown was a larger-than-life presence. Whether she enveloped you in her big, warm bear hug, or she was moving and shaking the powers in City Hall or Harrisburg, you knew this woman was a force of nature – but also a force of love and care for people. Her passing has left an enormous hole in the hearts of her North Philadelphia community. But it has also left an astonishing legacy of love, neighborhood empowerment, and transformation.

From her living room window at 1844 N. 23rd Street, her home for over 50 years, Ms. Helen kept a watchful eye over the entire neighborhood and everyone who lives in it. I first met Helen in 1992 when Project HOME was just getting started and we were looking to site our first recovery residence at St. Elizabeth's. She suggested we go out for ice cream. From that moment on, I knew I was working with a special woman. She was a wise and dynamic leader whose advice, guidance, and friendship would be among my most cherished gifts.

In her two decades of work as a community organizer with Project HOME, truly miraculous things happened (See "A Great and Endless Embrace" on page 1). Her impact on the community and even the city are truly astonishing. She touched so many lives, in small and personal ways as well as large and public ways.

The words of the prophet Isaiah have long been one of the most meaningful passages in the Bible for me, and they take on new meaning as we think of Ms. Helen's life. "If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. I your God will guide you continually, and satisfy your desires with good things and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters shall not fail. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations. You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets to dwell in."

Ms. Helen helped rebuild a neighborhood that had faced ruin. She repaired many breaches; she restored many streets for neighbors to dwell in. Her light truly rose in the darkness, and it continues to shine on all us. Our greatest tribute to this amazing woman is to walk in her light and her love, and continue to build on her legacy – a legacy that inspires us all to serve community and create a deep sense of home in our neighborhoods, where all are welcomed and loved.

Sister Mary Scullion



Sister Mary Scullion,
Co-founder and Executive
Director of Project HOME

Photo by Dave Hering

A Great and Endless Embrace

(continued from page 1)



Ms. Helen with City
Council representative
Darrell Clarke and Sister
Mary Scullion at the
groundbreaking for the
Stephen Klein Wellness
Center in 2014.

Photo by Joy Gorodetzer

the milestones and accomplishments of the young people in the neighborhood.

More than anything else, Ms. Helen stirred hope in the neighborhood. She was gifted in tapping leadership of both adults and youth. She was a bridge-builder. As she said a few years ago, "I was taught to take people where they are. I have met the richest people and the poorest people, and I treat them all the same. Trust people. This is how you build community." It was true: Ms. Helen brought so many different persons to the table and inspired them all with her boundless hope – and she was not shy in putting them to work.

Peak Johnson grew up in the St. E's neighborhood, and he personally experienced some of the crisis of the troubled community when he lost his father to gun violence. Encouraged and inspired by Ms. Helen Brown (who was also his cousin), he graduated from Temple University and works as a journalist. "She was strong willed and

fierce, all excellent qualities for the leader that she was in our shared community. Anything that needed to be done, Helen Brown was able to get done." Now 28, Peak still lives in Philadelphia, and focuses much of his writing on urban issues. "I will do my best to honor her in the years to come because I'm just not ready to let her go."

"Ms. Helen had remarkable courage and tenacity," said Joan McConnon, co-founder and Associate Executive Director of Project HOME. "She often said that her proudest achievement was getting drugs off the

corners in her neighborhood. And that required standing up in the face of dealers at serious risk to herself."

City Council President Darrell Clarke, whom Ms. Helen adopted as "her son," spoke at the funeral of her toughness – which, he said, was part of her love and concern for others. "She's the only person I ever met who could cuss you out and make you want to embrace her the next minute."

Ms. Helen will have a permanent presence in the neighborhood in so many ways, but one concrete way will be the Helen Brown Community Center, the new name of the former St. Elizabeth's rectory, which Project HOME has operated for twenty years as the hub of our neighborhood work.

Last August 25, the St. E's neighborhood held its 25th Annual Day – an annual celebration that Ms. Helen began as a way of highlighting neighborhood pride and progress. She always presided over the event, but this year it was from her wheelchair. While she was frail, she still emanated strength in her bright red dress. Many of the neighborhood youth, aware that this was a particularly special celebration, donned the same large hats that were part of Ms. Helen's trademark fashionable look. Taking in the drill teams and parades, the crowd enjoying good food and festivities, she managed a simple wave, like a blessing – to this amazing neighborhood that had been blessed for decades by her presence.

Like we say, when Ms. Helen hugged you, you stayed hugged. We all continue to live in her great and endless embrace.

You can honor the legacy of Ms. Helen, who cared so deeply for young people, by supporting our "Raise the Roof" capital campaign for the Gloria Casarez Residence. This project is Pennsylvania's first LGBTQ-friendly permanent supportive housing for young adults. Join us for the special fundraiser on November 14 – see details on page 5.

Stemming the Tide

It all started with ice cream.

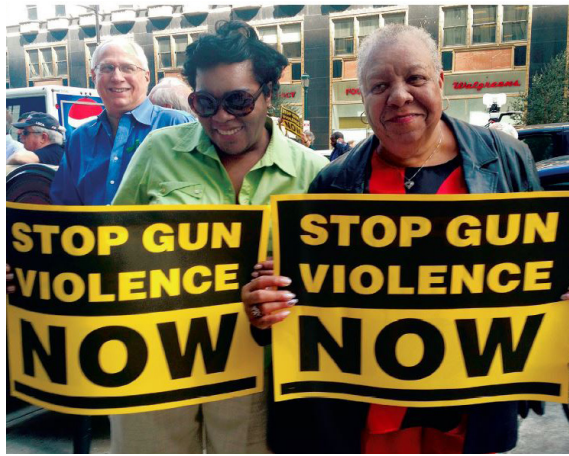
In 1995, Project HOME sought to open a recovery residence for men in the vacant convent of the old St. Elizabeth's parish, which had closed down years earlier. As part of the planning, we reached out to neighbors to solicit their support and find ways to work together. We were told that Helen Brown was the person we needed to talk to.

Helen brought together neighbors, and an agreement was worked out that if Sister Mary Scullion agreed to live in the recovery residence, then the community would support it. But, as Sister Mary recalls, "I had to take Helen out for ice cream three times to seal the deal."



Ms. Helen presides over the 2017 Annual Day, the neighborhood celebration that she organized for over twenty years.

Our presence in that neighborhood was significant. We were well aware of studies that showed that neighborhoods like this one – who had suffered economic disinvestment and devastation – were often the place of origin for persons who fell into chronic homelessness. While we were providing services to help those who were homeless, we understood that to stem the tide of homelessness, we had to work in communities like St. Elizabeth's.



Helen Brown (right) and fellow staff member Priscilla Bennett join a 2013 Ceasefire PA rally to call for gun safety laws.

We had already been working with Ms. Helen and neighbors to provide afterschool programs for kids and arts programs for seniors. Then a major opportunity came in 1995, when Crown Cork & Seal offered to partner with us through a state initiative called the Philadelphia Plan, which provided a company tax credits in exchange for financing community development work in a low-income neighborhood.

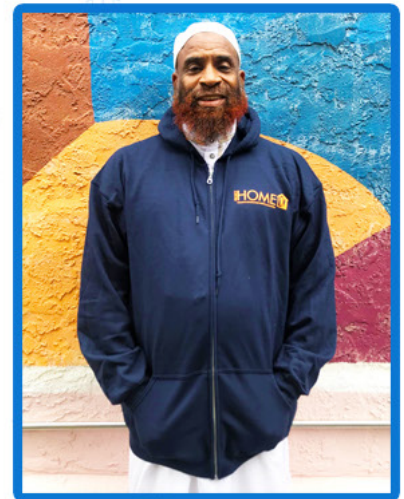
Thus began more than two decades of work to revitalize what was statistically the poorest zip code in the city. That work took the form of greening vacant and trashed lots; developing affordable homes for low-income families; strengthening local businesses; working with police to enhance neighborhood safety; and forming the North Philly Footstompers drill team for neighborhood youth. Those years saw the development of the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs (2004) and of the Stephen Klein Wellness Center (2015), both state-of-the-art facilities providing top-rate services of education, workforce development, and healthcare. The results include a whole generation of youth getting college education, neighborhood adults improving work skills and getting jobs; working poor families finding stability in new homes; neighbors coming together to solve problems and make improvements; and a sense of hope and pride.

At least in one neighborhood, together we are stemming the tide of homelessness.



Members of the North Philly Footstompers honor Ms. Helen on September 15, 2018, a day of celebrating her life.

Wish a loved one Happy Holidays with beautiful new HOME Warming Gifts!



We have a brand new candle collection, gift boxes, tee shirts/hoodies, coasters, mugs, tea towels, key chains and more!

All gifts feature resident artwork or are made by hand by residents.

You can purchase online at projecthome.org/store or in person at the HOME Spun Boutique 1523 Fairmount Avenue



HOME Happenings

Photo by John Ndiru, Mzizi Media



On September 15, the Project HOME community and neighbors held a dedication service of the newly named Helen Brown Community Center (see the article "A Great and Endless Embrace" on page 1). From left: Vice President of Real Estate Development Janet Stearns, Executive Director Sister Mary Scullion, Priscilla Bennett, Senator Sharif Street, Chief Financial Officer Joan McConnon.

◆ **As part of a continuing** response to the addiction crisis in Philadelphia, Project HOME will open a recovery residence for persons who are homeless and struggling with addiction and other mental or physical health issues. We will lease the recently closed Sacred Heart Home for the program, which will provide a safe, supportive program with a range of services to assist individuals on the path to recovery coupled with education, employment, and healthcare supports to enhance the likelihood of sustained housing stability upon transition to permanent housing. We expect the residence, which is planned to open in the next few months, to eventually house up to 60 men and women.

◆ **We are eagerly** anticipating the opening of our newest housing development, the Gloria Casarez Residence, permanent supportive housing for young adults (age 18-23) who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness. This is the first housing of its kind in Pennsylvania. Residents will start moving in this winter to this wonderful new LGBTQ-friendly home, which will provide 30 homes. Staff are working hard to support these young people as they make the transition to a new residence, and we look forward to welcoming them home. *You can help welcome the residents home by participating in the November 14 Raise the Roof event – see page 5.*

Photo by Emmanuel Sofolawe



Chris Hausman, Program Manager of the Personal Recovery Services program (right) works with Project HOME resident Stanley Edwards.

◆ **We are celebrating** five years of the Personal Recovery Services (PRS) program, an innovative dimension of our residential services. PRS is Project HOME's version of psychiatric rehabilitation services, a person-centered, strength-based program that emphasizes personal growth and empowerment. PRS

staff work one-on-one with residents on attaining individualized goals. Chris Hausman, PRS program manager, says the program has grown in the quality of services it is able to offer. Almost 200 residents, all of whom live in permanent supportive housing units, have participated in PRS since 2013, and the program will soon expand to include residents from our safe havens, Women of Change and St. Columba. *To see an interview with a resident about the experience of PRS, go to bit.ly/phomeprs.*

◆ **Once again, Project HOME** and the Vote for Homes coalition are working to engage persons experiencing homelessness and poverty in the political process during a major election year. After registering voters who are low-income, homeless, and formerly incarcerated, we are now focusing on mobilizing voters to get to the polls on Election Day. We are excited to be able to engage in this nonpartisan effort of political empowerment and engagement among communities who are often socially marginalized. *For more information, visit voteforhomes.org.*



Photo by Jennine Miller

Project HOME resident Casundra Pressley registers a voter at the 2018 Recovery Walk.

EVERY DOLLAR DONATED HELPS BRING SOMEONE HOME

When you support Project HOME every hard-earned dollar goes toward helping someone like Charles, a resident of Connelly House, come HOME. That's why we are thrilled to share with you that **Project HOME has earned its sixth consecutive 4-star rating from Charity Navigator**, the largest and most-utilized evaluator of charities in the United States. This is the highest possible rating and places us in the top 6% of charities reviewed, indicating that we adhere to sector best practices and carry out our mission in a financially efficient way.

To see our **Charity Navigator page**, visit: http://bit.ly/PH_CharNav



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because we want to make sure that you know exactly how your generous gift helps those in need find HOME.

To make a gift, please visit: projecthome.org/annual-gift

I Am Project HOME

JANET STEARNS



Photo by Shira Yudkoff

Janet Stearns speaks at the 2017 Groundbreaking for the Gloria Casarez Residence.

Like most Americans, Janet Stearns has her own personal recollections of September 11, 2001.

She was in a 25th floor office of a law firm in Boston watching the horrible news accounts of the attack on the Twin Towers. (She would later learn of friends connected to her family who lost their lives in the attack.) Janet had gone into law with the intent of working for justice – a passion nurtured by her faith and her recognition of the role of the legal community as advocates for those on the margins. As she looked down at the Boston harbor below, she wondered how she had ended up in a large law firm that represented mainly large-scale for-profit developers. The distance seemed symbolic. “I wanted to work on the ground floor, not on the 25th floor,” she says.

Janet began doing pro bono work and serving on boards of nonprofit groups building affordable housing. The nation was in the throes of the housing foreclosure crisis, and she saw firsthand the devastating impact on poor neighborhoods. So, she says, “I took a leap of faith,” leaving the legal world and working with a community development corporation, doing whatever she could to help stabilize neighborhoods.

Janet also remembers the same date ten years later. A job opportunity for her husband resulted in the family moving to Philadelphia. Janet had come with few connections and no idea what she wanted to do – except that she had heard about the great work of Project HOME and longed to work here. She didn’t know if she had anything to offer, but on that day, September 11, 2011, she checked on the Project HOME website and saw an opening for a position in real estate development.

“It was another leap of faith,” Janet says, as she took on the position of Vice President of Real Estate Development and Assets Management. The new position allowed her to finally express fully her lifelong “thirst for justice.” Since coming to Project HOME seven years ago, Janet and the whole team in our Real Estate Development department have paved the way for the opening of four new residences – with two more in the works – plus the Stephen Klein Wellness Center (all through the Middleton Partnership, a public/private initiative which Project HOME convened to end and prevent chronic street homelessness in Philadelphia).

“I work with amazing people at Project HOME – the staff, the residents, and the neighbors in our community,” Janet says. “It’s another experience of stepping out and not knowing where the path will lead.”

She is also humbled by the work. For all the progress of Project HOME, Janet is aware of the continuing immense need. She takes comfort in the phrase of the poet Mary Oliver: “May I be the tiniest nail in the house of the universe, tiny but useful.” We are grateful how Janet makes herself and her gifts useful in the mission of Project HOME.



Project HOME presents

Raise the ROOF

Project HOME needs your help to “Raise the Roof and complete the capital campaign for Gloria Casarez Residence. This project is Pennsylvania’s first LGBTQ-friendly permanent supportive housing for young adults. Join us on the construction site of the nearly-finished Gloria Casarez Residence for a fundraising party and hard hat tours.

November 14, 2018
6:00pm to 9:00pm

Gloria Casarez Residence
1315 N. 8th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122

For more info visit: <http://bit.ly/phraisetherooft>



1515 Fairmount Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19130

Our Mission

The mission of the Project HOME community is to empower adults, children, and families to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty, to alleviate the underlying causes of poverty, and to enable all of us to attain our fullest potential as individuals and as members of the broader society.

Our Residences

- 1515 and 1523 Fairmount Avenue
- Hope Haven I/II, 2827-28 Diamond Street
- Connelly House, 1212 Ludlow Street
- Francis House of Peace, 810 Arch Street
- Kairos House, 1440 N. Broad Street
- Kate's Place, 1929 Sansom Street
- James Widener Ray Homes, 2101 W. Venango
- JBJ Soul Homes, 1415 Fairmount Avenue
- Rowan I, 2729-A W. Diamond Street
- Rowan II, 1901 N. Judson Street
- Ruth Williams House at the Gene & Marlene Epstein Building, 2415 N. Broad St.
- St. Columba, 4133 Chestnut Street
- St. Elizabeth's Recovery, 1850 N. Croskey St.
- Women of Change, 2042 Arch Street

Support Services & Programs

- Adult Education, Employment & Arts
- Neighborhood Services
- Advocacy and Public Policy
- Healthcare Services
- Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs
- Hub of Hope
- Outreach Coordination Center
- Personal Recovery Services
- Resident Alumni Program
- Volunteer Program

Businesses

- HOME Spun Resale Boutique, 215-232-6322
- HOME Made Products, 215-232-7272, ext. 3083

Administration

215-232-7272

Homeless Outreach Hotline

215-232-1984

Human Resources Hotline

215-232-7219, ext. 5200

www.projecthome.org



Union
Bug

NONE OF US ARE HOME UNTIL ALL OF US ARE HOME®

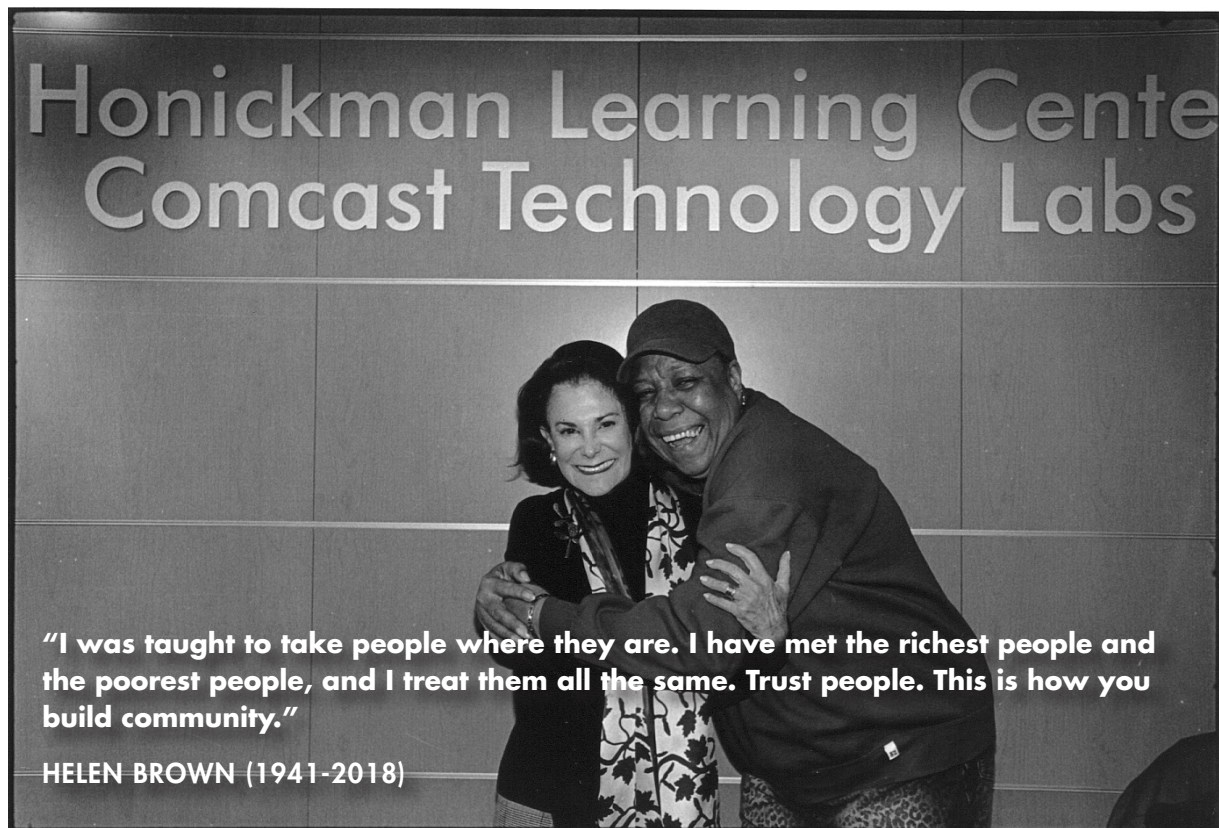


Photo by Harvey Finkle

Helen Brown embraces Lynne Honickman at the Grand Opening of the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs in 2004.

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.