

In Their Own Words . . .

Sharmain Matlock-Turner

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Sharmain Matlock-Turner is the President and CEO of the Urban Affairs Coalition (UAC), previously known as the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition. Sharmain, the first woman to lead the organization, has been at the helm since 1999. The UAC is a large nonprofit that works and partners with government, business, neighborhoods and individuals with the goals of improving the quality of life in the region, building wealth in urban communities, and solving emerging issues.

How did you come to be part of the leadership fabric of Philadelphia?

As far back as I recall, I was always engaged in organizations, church clubs, Girls Scouts and my church leaders and teachers encouraged me as a young black woman to get involved; I ran for office and, joined the NAACP youth movement. In college I joined the black power movement and quickly became the communications director. That job was all about organizing and mobilizing young people. I was effective and quickly joined the national black student union. I suppose I was always competitive, but the community organizing really resonated with

me to this day. You have to organize to lead. UAC is about organizing people and communities; connecting them to government and business through partnerships.

Who are your mentors?

I've got lots. John White, Jr Councilwoman Marian Tasco, and State Representative Dwight Evans all play important roles in my life even today. They took it upon themselves to grow leaders in Philadelphia, and I was one of the fortunate ones they all respectively took under their wings. The late State Senator Roxanne Jones of course played an important role in my development as a leader.

Do you consider Philadelphia a socially innovative city?

There are so many social innovations in the city, from large organizations like us to small community nonprofits. I think the *Philadelphia Social Innovations Journal* was invented just at the right time. We have an obligation to shine a light on these innovations and innovators. It is so important we do that for the region and for our future leaders.

There are so many exciting innovations in Philadelphia. Look at the charter school movement. Our children and next-generation leaders are getting opportunities to go to schools they would never have had before. UAC is a founder of the Arise Academy Charter High School, the first public charter high school for youth in foster care in the country, and I

am founder and chair the West Oak Lane Charter School. The vast majority of these schools do well, and they will improve our region and grow future leaders.

What is the largest challenge you see within the emerging leadership in Philadelphia?

The future is bright. Because I was mentored by some incredible Philadelphia iconic political leaders, I see it as my responsibility to support younger leaders whether at UAC or the overall community. For Philadelphia to prosper, we have an obligation to do that. Today's leaders all were mentored, and each generation has an obligation to do the same.