



# HIGH FIVE

*Philadelphia Family recognizes and thanks five community leaders striving to make our city a better place for families.*

BY ERIC KARLAN AND DAWN E. WARDEN-REEDER

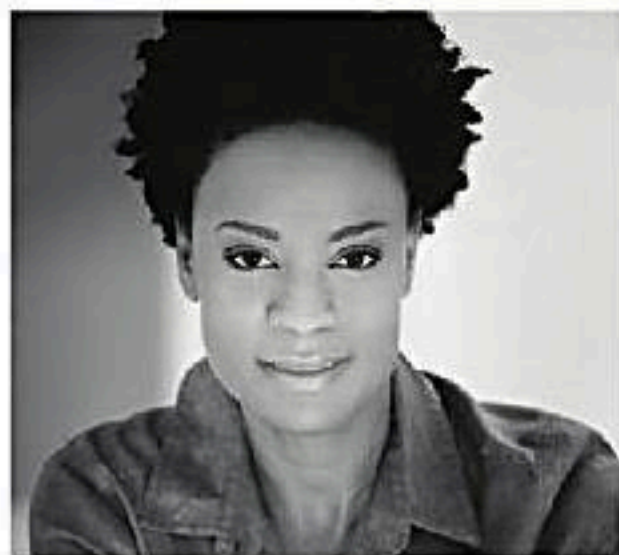
Philadelphia may be the City of Brotherly Love, but it doesn't always feel that way. Especially when outsiders and insiders go on the attack. We'd be naïve to disregard some of that criticism, but every so often it's a good idea to put on the rose-colored glasses and savor the good stuff—and the good people—happening in this city. On our hot list, a diverse handful of leaders who, in our humble opinion, have made Philadelphia a desirable place to raise healthy, happy, and engaged families.



I saw a chance to help," says Levin. "The Little Shul is an amazing resource for South Philadelphia, not only as a Jewish destination but as an urban destination. We need to revitalize the space and the community."

Since Levin discovered the historic synagogue, the congregation has hosted arts events, film screenings, holiday celebrations, and even launched a social media campaign. With a goal to raise \$50,000, Levin envisions a space that will serve community families for years to come.

"What does a row house synagogue community space look like in 2013?" asks Levin. "To me, it supports a sustainable congregation and while hosting community activities for the Jewish and wider South Philadelphia communities."



## KENYETTAOVERTON

Kenyetta Overton is a woman of many words, which is a good thing for Philadelphia's disadvantaged youth — and for city educators, who in the face of budget cuts can use an extra pair of hands teaching kids how to become better writers.

As project co-creator and facilitator at Murals of the Mind, and founder

of Overton Professional Services, this performance poet and mother of two has the ability to reach a broad range of young people in Philadelphia on an intimate level. Add in her partnership with Mighty Writers, an organization dedicated to teaching school-age students to think and write clearly, and her impact multiplies substantially. Along with its writing classes, camps, mentor programs, and SAT and college prep support in two locations — all provided for free — Mighty Writers provides job prep counseling to help older students write resumes and cover letters. With the help of Overton, the program also builds in interview training and role playing to help alleviate anxiety and help kids master self-composure under pressure. Internships are also encouraged, as well as volunteer work, something Overton says kids often neglect but is very "resume worthy." What she, and the team at Mighty Writers, has seen, is that students who participate in all three of these programs have a higher success rate in the classroom and outside, and greater self-esteem. Which, says Overton, is the key to continued academic and professional pursuits.

"My number one goal with these kids is to teach them that despite their circumstances, which unfortunately does include parents who are disengaged, they have the power to make positive changes in their lives. I'll never tire of telling them, 'You're not stuck.'"

*Encouraging inner city youth to craft their own story, Kenyetta Overton propels students upward through the written word.*

Overton doesn't just talk the talk. She was raised by a single mother who was not educated. When she was 15, she became pregnant with her first son. "But I put myself through school — it took me 20 years — but I didn't let what I didn't have hold me back. This is what I want our disadvantaged youth to understand."

"How we speak, write, read, and hear words broadens or limits us. What I am trying to do is remove those limitations. Knowing how to communicate honestly, whether on paper or in-person, and respecting the words of others, is the first step to making positive connections."

The hidden message, of course, is the importance of rewriting. In everything that Overton does, whether through Murals of the Mind, Overton Professional Services, or Mighty Writers, the lesson is clear: Rewrite the story in your own words.

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