

How are Philadelphia's Children?

“And how are the children?” The traditional greeting of the African Masai tribe expresses concern for the health and well-being of its youngest members. It underscores the vital role that children play in Masai society, and the value placed on their safety.

And how are Philadelphia's children? Are our city's streets safe for them to play and walk on? Are our schools enabling them to learn and thrive? Are we doing all we can to ensure that they are born healthy and continue to develop through to adulthood? Are we, like the Masai, placing such a high value on their safety, security and well-being that we see them as inextricably linked with health and vitality of our city?

The answer to these questions is a resounding no. There are 400,000 children and youth in Philadelphia. Day in and day out, the media is saturated with images and instances of how we have failed our youngest citizens. Every issue that impacts our city – from violence to education to homelessness to community development – has a powerful effect on our children and youth. They are the victims of stray bullets that litter the streets during what has become an epidemic of violence. Their health is compromised by a lack of access to proper immunizations. And a dearth of community programs designed to engage young people in high-risk neighborhoods means no job training, volunteer opportunities or other strategies to help vulnerable teenagers make positive choices.

The Philadelphia Children's Commission is determined to ensure that all of the candidates for Mayor understand the importance of our city's youngest residents, and are committed to making progress on their behalf. We have put together a comprehensive series of policies and reforms designed improve the lives of, and outcomes for, Philadelphia's kids. Titled “And How are the Children: A Platform for Philadelphia's Future,” the document is designed to ensure that all mayoral candidates, regardless of party or ideology, pledge to work on behalf of our city's children and youth.

Specifically, we are asking mayoral hopefuls to commit to continuing efforts to develop and invest in critical early childhood initiatives like immunization and lead abatement programs; to recognize and support programs focused on out-of-school time as a way to ensure community safety, improve academic readiness and success for school children, and to re-engage older, at-risk youth; and to work to reduce youth violence and increase safety in Philadelphia schools and neighborhoods by investing in programs and partnerships that provide children, youth and families with much needed supports and services. In short, we challenge the candidates to make the welfare of our children central to their campaigns and governing strategies.

Formed in 2000, the Philadelphia Children's Commission is committed to improving the health, safety, well being and development of our city's children and youth. We are an independent body comprised of leaders from all walks of life and communities. We have offered recommendations to help improve the lives of our city's children, and implemented strategies – like the creation of the Children's Report Card and examining

the Children's Budget – to determine how are children are doing and what we can do to improve their lives.

Yet we realize that we cannot impact the lives of our city's children and youth without the assistance of others. Philadelphia's future is tied to the health and well-being of its children – their success or failure should not only be an issue of importance to child advocates, but to policymakers and police officers; doctors and parents; teachers and business owners; *all* of us.

For the sake of Philadelphia's children, the time to act is now. We must work together to affect real change on behalf of our children and young people. We challenge the Mayoral candidates to lead this charge, and make the Masai greeting "how are the children" a powerful refrain of their campaigns.

Bio lines about authors here.