



United Way of
Greater Philadelphia
and Southern New Jersey



Danea Langston-Banks Appointed J. Gordon Cooney Fellow in Criminal Justice

Danea Langston-Banks

The J. Gordon Cooney Fellow for 2022 is Danae Langston-Banks. A 2011 graduate of Temple University (BA in Communications), she is a small business owner with more than 14 years' experience in the fields of social service, construction, project management and land acquisition. Today, she leads The Baring Group LLC, a residential development business which she founded in 2010, where she has successfully completed several residential development projects and mentored many subcontractors working alongside her. Her energy, vision and passion to help others was demonstrated in 2000 when she created Unity Foundation Inc. a non-profit 501c3 organizations born out of the drug epidemic of the late 90's and early 2000. Early in her career, she is also someone who has suffered the life-altering implications of involvement with the criminal justice system. In 1992, she was charged and later convicted for mistakes she had made in using investor funds in expanding her non-profit. She successfully completed her sentence and fully repaid her investors. While that was her first and only encounter with the criminal justice system and 30 years ago, she remains unable to secure construction funding or loans for her real estate development business and is disqualified from serving as the attorney-in-fact either for her brother who requires care following a traumatic brain injury in 2020, or for her elderly mother. Helped by volunteer Pardon Coaches, she submitted her pardon application in March 2021. As she wrote there, "I am respectfully and humbly seeking a pardon so that others may judge me on the merits of who I am today rather than a singular event of my past." She has been an active member of the Pardon Project Steering Committee since 2021.

Why Not Prosper, Inc.

As a Cooney Fellow, Danae will be working with and hosted by [Why Not Prosper](#), a United Way agency in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. Why Not Prosper is a grassroots organization located in Germantown that was founded by a formerly incarcerated woman for formerly incarcerated women. Its mission is to help women from prison systems discover their own strength by providing them with the support and resources that will empower them to become responsible, economically self-sufficient, and contributing members of the community.

This is accomplished through several services ranging from a housing program to workforce development to mentoring to healthcare advocacy and medical care; the Women’s Advocacy Program that educates women as peer advocates; and SWAG – Sisters With a Goal – a group of formerly incarcerated women who got their lives in order and are helping others do the same. The organization was founded twenty years ago by Rev. Dr. Michelle Simmons, herself a recipient of a pardon, and it was one of the first nonprofits in the City of Philadelphia to become a Pardon Hub. Rev. Dr. Simmons chairs the Pardon Project Steering Committee and is a member of the PLSE Board of Directors.

J. Gordon Cooney, Jr. Fellowship in Criminal Justice

In 2019, the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey (UWGPSNJ) was the first funder in the country to identify erasing criminal records as a key strategy for ending inter-generational poverty. The Cooney Fellowship was created in September 2020 by UWGPSNJ in honor of Gordon Cooney, senior partner at Morgan Lewis & Bockius, and in recognition of his decade of passionate service to UWGPSNJ. It is a six-month fellowship presented to people who have lived experience with the criminal justice system in Philadelphia, who aspire to a career in Criminal justice or community organizing, and who have demonstrated an energetic commitment to community and to social equity. The Fellowship is designed to leverage the services provided by two United Way grantees: Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity, which has been providing record-clearing services to low-income Philadelphians since 2011, and two other United Way agencies per year whose services are focused on low-income Philadelphians. The intention is for the community agency host to use its established network and communications system to spread the good news about pardons in Pennsylvania throughout its service area, and, using a “train the trainer” model, have the Cooney Fellow provide information sessions about criminal records, help clients apply for pardons and train “Pardon Coaches” – individuals who live and work in the area who are willing to help their neighbors apply.