

Why Not Prosper Annual Report 2021-22

Why Not Prosper, Inc. is a nonprofit (501C3) grassroots organization located in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, PA. We are licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. We are the only provider in Philadelphia that offers a continuum of programs and services from prison to community that include Pre-release services to incarcerated women; transitional residential services at three Why Not Prosper Houses; community services at our Germantown Resource Center and Teleservices for women in Montgomery County; a Social Justice Program (which includes Health Care Advocacy) and a Workforce and Education Academy. Why Not Prosper was founded by a formerly incarcerated woman in recovery; our staff comprises 34 percent of graduates of our program and in the year 2021 we served 738 women in all of our programs.

A. Achievements

1. We Provided Pre-Release Programming and Mentoring to Women

Why Not Prosper continues to do a weekly pre-release group with the women as Alternative & Special Detention (ASD). These are conducted by either Rev. Michelle Simmons or Dr. Helena Fontes. Some of the topics that we cover in our group are life skills, nutrition, cooking, anger management, one-on-one assessments, coping strategies, and domestic violence and the WRAP program.

We have had approximately 57 different women that attended the sessions throughout the year. We have accepted fourteen (14) women into the program this year coming from ASD or MOD 3. Out of 14 women 9 graduated.

Once the formerly incarcerated women arrive at Why Not Prosper, we have been successful in supporting each one obtaining their identification, their benefits activated, and into outpatient treatment programs. They also have financial literacy classes offered by the University of Pennsylvania to help them get bank accounts, create personal budgets and perform credit repair.

We have also tested eight women the CASCA test, which determines their reading level. For those that test below the sixth-grade level, we connect with a tutor from the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, the women have completed their resumes and the ServSafe certification. A Home Health Aide certification is also available to the ladies. Eight women got Home Health Aide Certifications and one became a Home Health Aide. Twelve women got ServSafe Food Certifications and 3 got jobs in the food service industry.

We also have a peer-to-peer mentoring program where each participant is matched with a buddy. The ladies have also joined the Sisters With A Goal (SWAG) team. The SWAG team is advocating for access to quality healthcare and ending long-term and lifetime parole and probation and dignity rights for all women.

2. We Provided Increased Economic Self-Sufficiency to Women

The path to increase economic self-sufficiency, decrease substance abuse and to rebuild family responsibilities starts with employment training. Our Workforce Academy is the method we use to begin addressing these issues. All the following accomplishments occurred as part of the Workforce Academy.

We began a partnership with The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania to teach our women about entrepreneurship. Together, we created a 6-module curriculum, which started in January 2021. This program helped some of our women to get jobs at Amazon, PARRWorks and Always Best Care.

Additionally, 2 women started their own businesses -one has a Tee Shirt Business, and one has started an Eyelash Business.

We also partnered with The Transition Network, a national organization with women meeting regularly in each other's homes, collaborating on ways to ease and find joy in the transitions they are embarking on. Through the Philadelphia Chapter, we created a partnership to help teach women Adult Basic Education (ABE) and help our women to get their General Equivalency Diploma (GED).

The process all starts by ensuring that women have medical and psychiatric care first when they come into our program; then they go to the Workforce Academy where they are tested on their skill and education levels. Prior to this year, this testing was voluntarily. This year, we made it mandatory that they test and start schooling for every woman who comes into our program.

Making this testing and schooling mandatory turned out to be a good thing because mandatory participation revealed lower than expected levels of education which needed to be addressed before employment. We would not have known this otherwise.

All women have remained drug and alcohol free during their tenure at Why Not Prosper.

3. We Developed Leadership Skills in Our Women

In order to provide opportunities and training to help women develop and utilize their leadership skills, we held two trainings this year.

The first was called Color, developed by Carl Jung, who considered color as a vital tool in psychotherapy. He noted that each color symbolizes a particular state or condition, much like gold is an emblem of sovereignty, spirituality and intuition. Using this theory, we helped women recognize their own and other's personality traits. This then helped them to determine the type of leader they are, and how to work in a group with other leaders of differing or similar colors.

The second training was the Myers Briggs Personality Test which measures four dimensions of personality type, as well as 23 more detailed facets of type to personalize your results. For example, some people are introverts and some are extroverts. Knowing your own and others' personality types can help you understand why you make the decisions you do as well as help you make better decisions on how to interact with others.

All trainings were held at Why Not Prosper offices; each was a half day training and was facilitated by DragonFly Partners, and organization that helps changemakers - both inside and outside the political system - get "unstuck" and work through strategic, organizational or interpersonal challenges. 18 women participated in the two trainings.

One example of our success is Marquita Shaw, who came from ASD to Why Not Prosper in October. She was depressed, had to fight to get her children back from human services. She graduated from the program in March with a certification as a home health aide obtained from our workforce academy. She was able to get reunited with her children on January 31, 2022 and was able to obtain an apartment. She was also able to obtain employment at Always Best Care and complete her parole. She arrived at Why Not Prosper in late September, and this all happened within a few months.

4. We Gave Access to Additional Resources for Women

Why Not Prosper has been operating a hotline for formerly incarcerated women which averages 14-20 calls per month. The hotline provides access to resources for women, some of which have somewhere safe to sleep but require additional assistance obtaining identification, birth certificate, workforce development and/or counseling. We have been able to connect women to landlords, training programs, and job certifications from our workforce academy, and other resources.

On March 18, 2022, we held a Resource Fair for women at ASD and MOD 3, which was attended by approximately 211 women. The women received underwear, socks, legal pads, pencils, stamps, envelopes, and other resources on topics such as housing, jobs, obtaining clothing, and other issues pertaining to release. We served the participating women a hot lunch that consisted of fried chicken, soft Hawaiian rolls, macaroni and tuna salad, and chocolate-covered strawberries that were made by the residents and the SWAG team at Why Not Prosper. We served 16 staff members a hot meal for their service to us on the day of the fair. What an amazing day it was. Some of the partners that joined us in our Resource Fair were Career Wardrobe, PMHC, JEVS, Why Not Prosper, Department of Parole and Probation, Community Legal Services and the Defenders Association of Philadelphia.

The resource fair was a great success and we have received approximately 56 calls from incarcerated women looking for additional information and support since the fair. We are looking forward to conducting another fair on May 20, 2022.



Photos: Resource Fair

Another success in the past year was our partnership with LaSalle University. They will be coming to Why Not Prosper to provide a health needs assessment and also provide mentoring, and mental health education.

5. We Streamlined Our Operations

We interviewed seven candidates and have ultimately hired Marcus Green as the Operation Director. He is fitting in quite well with the team and his presence has already begun to reduce the day-to-day workload of our CEO.

Marcus comes from a background in Business Administration, Marketing, and Business Analysis, from Penn State University to Pierce College and Tufts School of Business At Dartmouth University. His work with The Enterprise Center, The African American Chamber of Commerce, and multi-million-dollar marketing firms; He brings a wealth of experience that will be utilized to fulfil the goals and vision of Why Not Prosper.

By adding an Operations Director, it immediately allowed the CEO to begin focusing more on growing the program and engaging the board and has already had an impact as we saw from our board recruitment effort. We believe it will have ripple effects which we have not yet begun to measure.

6. We Expanded Our Board of Directors

We are so happy to announce that we were able identify, interview and recruit five new influential board members this year, and that the process was much easier than expected. It turns out that there were a lot of good people who truly wanted to be on our board. All five were identified and/or stepped forward at our 20th Anniversary Gala celebration in August of 2021. One of them unexpectedly pledged to make a \$10,000 gift on the spot because he was so moved by the event, and this was before he was invited to be a board member!

The new members are Sam Staten, Jr., Business Manager, Laborer's Local 332; Nikki Jefferson; Julie Currie; Sanford D. Hull, Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church and Aretha Swift, Founder, Swift Advocate LLC.

As a result of these new board members, we were also able to create three new committees, each headed up by a new board member:

Governance Committee – Sam Staten, Chair
Nominating Committee - Aretha Swift, Chair
Education Committee – Julie Currie, Chair

Two goals related to board development and financial capacity which we can now begin to work on include the creation of an endowment and increasing our operational budget to \$1 million.

An unexpected accomplishment is that we were selected this year by Compass Philly for a \$60,000 pro bono consulting project related to the development and engagement of our board of directors. They will begin their work in 2022 and will be structuring a project that the board will work on together, although research and plans still need to be developed around what type of project this will be.

7. We Met With Key State Leaders

Why Not Prosper was excited to have First Lady Francis Wolf visit our program in March 2022 to take a tour and discuss the issues facing women in prison and formerly incarcerated women. See [press release](#). Members of the SWAG team discussed in detail the challenges and barriers they face with timely obtaining healthcare, accessing benefits, and other issues. This visit is part of the overall advocacy of Why Not Prosper and the SWAG team to raise awareness and improve the circumstances of women in prison and formerly incarcerated women.



Photo: First Lady Francis Wolf and State Rep. Morgan Cephas visit Why Not Prosper.

8. Additional Achievements

Our new year has been off to a great start and we are so excited to announce the opening of our Harrisburg location on June 6, 2022, where we will be having an open house. We already have eighteen people on the waiting list for that location.

The Why Not Prosper Recovery and Reentry App has secured 181 new users so far this year that have downloaded and used the app for resources. The app can be found at www.why-not-prosper.org/resource-app

During the holidays, we held a Christmas party where we partnered with Eastern State Penitentiary. We served 424 families, each including formerly incarcerated women.

Why Not Prosper recently applied to be a licensed recovery house in the City of Philadelphia. Our license was granted. See [Philadelphia Inquirer Article](#).

We are now offering the evidence-based training, *Thinking for a Change*, to the ladies in the house and will be starting our first cohort of women in prison using this training.



Photo: Christmas Party for formerly incarcerated women

B. What Have We Learned?

We learned that unexpected and sometimes difficult situations and circumstances only make us stronger. The pandemic is a perfect example. No one was truly prepared for the impact the pandemic would have. It caused us to change the way we operate, communicate and implement our programs. Many of these things involved social distancing and having a virtual presence as well as increased hygiene measures. However, we adapted quickly, and put tactics and processes in place to help make us pandemic proof in the future.

Overall, we learned that we are actually stronger and more resilient than we knew.

We also learned that we have a great reputation in the community. In the past six months we saw an unprecedented response from both funders and the public in favor of our programs. We received more unsolicited grants this year than ever in our history. Our 20th Year Anniversary Gala celebrated our reputation in the community and was met with an overwhelmingly positive response. And the board recruitment effort mentioned above shows how our good reputation continues to proceed us.

We learned that it sometimes takes longer to make changes in society and to do things than we hope, but that when we are persistent, great results often follow.

We learned the importance of having a digital presence rather than a physical one in certain circumstances, especially during a pandemic, and that there are lots of tools available to us to interact and engage people electronically.

We learned the importance of partnerships and that great partners always create a win-win scenario. Many partnerships were formed this year, from additional funders to educators, to social justice providers to digital media companies and more!

Finally, we learned that our weekly email update is a powerful communications tool and an important engagement mechanism. Many of our partners, community leaders and families have told us that they eagerly look forward our weekly updates. And, we see their responses, questions, and concerns almost immediately on social media, in telephone calls to us, and in emails sent to us. The year has definitely been a learning year so far and we are quickly becoming a learning organization, recognizing the importance of integrating learning into every aspect of our work.

C. How Will We Share What We Have Learned Inside and Outside Our Organisation?

We continue to share what we learn inside and outside our organization through word-of-mouth, social media, a weekly e-newsletter send to nearly 4,000 people, virtual meetings and a quarterly magazine called *Inspire Magazine* which is both printed and distributed electronically to thousands of interested partners and friends.

D. How Will We Use This Information to Change the Way We Work?

We will use what we have learned in several ways. First, we will make sure that we are taking more pictures and videos of our women in action, along with simply collecting primary data. We need to collect more stories of our women since we now know how moving and impactful those stories are to funders and others who want to partner with us. A picture is worth a thousand words and a video is worth a million! This was more than apparent during our 20th Anniversary Gala Celebration.

We are also taking the information we learned from residents during the pandemic and attempting to digitize our program further to serve more people and have a greater impact. We believe that by doing so, our stories in our own words will last longer and will be able to be replicated and shared by more outlets over a longer period of time. This will make us more effective and efficient while increasing our footprint in the community, state and hopefully across the country. Our motto is *Offering Women in Distress a Hand Up, Not a Hand Out*. Thanks to funders like you, we have been able to do exactly this and to exceed our expectations and goals.