

### **Resilience Hubs Model: Original Vision**

Catalyst Miami (CM) is an anti-poverty non-profit organization based in Miami-Dade County. CM improves lives through free, innovative economic security programs, convenes high-impact networks, and achieves better policies through community engagement and advocacy. In 2018, Catalyst Miami launched our neighborhood-based resilience hubs initiative focused on the following communities:

Homestead/South Dade, Overtown, Northeast Corridor (Little Haiti/North Miami/North Miami Beach), Miami Gardens, and Hialeah. The objective is four-part: 1) build neighborhoods' civic infrastructure by connecting residents to the hubs through the provision of ongoing programming (weaving the hubs into communities' social fabric now, so that they can successfully serve as distribution points for information, supplies, and assistance in the immediate lead-up to and aftermath of storms), 2) build the resilience of low-wealth individuals/families, thereby improving not only their general well-being, but also their capacity to act as advocates and leaders within and on behalf of their communities, 3) improve the climate-related resilience of individuals/families by spurring them – not only through provision of direct hub programming but also through the cultivation of internal community leadership – to think about preparation now, before the next storm, and 4) enable, catalyze, and support community leadership at the local and state levels in order to achieve effective policies and improved government responsiveness to communities' climate-related needs. By integrating the work of Catalyst Miami into these neighborhoods, we're creating a mechanism to help residents better prepare for and recover from all of life's storms.

Originally, CM envisioned establishing resilience hubs embedded in County buildings located in low-wealth neighborhoods to implement this neighborhood-based initiative. During 2018, we negotiated an MOU with the County's Community Action and Human Services Department for use of their buildings in our target communities. Unfortunately, the partnership did not work out for this initiative and we had to consider other options. Throughout 2018 and 2019 we sought to establish resilience hubs at other well visited non-profit buildings and troubleshoot other potential avenues. Along the way we learned helpful lessons about what is needed to implement this type of model.

### **Lessons Learned:**

1. **The building itself matters:** While the county buildings are located in our target neighborhoods, we quickly learned that community members had mixed feelings about these buildings. Some were not frequently used and therefore not an ideal starting point. Due to the facade and construction, we received feedback that the buildings were generally not welcoming. Additionally, for our programming to work, we needed a space that could be open after hours and we were unable to come to an agreement. The lack of buildings does impact our ability to attract new clients and participants as we do not have space to meet needs immediately and directly.
2. **Rental space is limited and expensive:** Miami like many other cities has very expensive real estate. As we looked for other options such as co-working spaces and splitting floors with other non-profit partners, we realized that monetarily renting space would be difficult to accomplish and potentially unsustainable. While this is an obvious obstacle, it hindered our ability to move forward with implementation at a physical hub.

3. **Relationship building takes time:** When we started this process, we had various levels of engagement at the 5 target neighborhoods. We had the benefit of a satellite office in Homestead where we provide direct services and were two years into relationship building in Overtown. While our direct services team have worked with community members in Miami Gardens, deep community engagement in the Northeast Corridor and Hialeah for years was uncharted territory for us. To build visibility and start building ties to the communities, we began offering our leadership program, CLEAR (Community Leadership on the Environment, Advocacy, and Resilience) in the five hub areas. We partnered with an often visited recreation center in Miami Gardens to offer a subset of our direct services as well. We began moving to deep seeded forms of engagement in which some community members continued participation
4. **Preserve institutional knowledge:** As we began trying different forms of outreach and community engagement in established and new hub areas, we started tracking key partners, key institutions, and effective community outreach strategies by each area. This allowed us to track best practices as we went along and to also note strategies that were less effective. We now share these findings throughout the organization.

### **Resilience Hubs 2.0**

Given what we learned, we eventually landed on a new model called Community Champions. The Champions meet regularly with our support to implement projects that build community resilience by working with like-minded people in their community to improve its infrastructure, enhance the health and well-being of its residents, and reduce existing inequalities, all while earning \$15/hour. Instead of investing resources into a building, we are investing resources into people and relying on grassroots organizing to build resilience in our hub areas. So far we have established teams in Overtown, South Dade, and Miami Garden given our stronger relationships in these areas. The Champions work closely with our Community Engagement Team composed of a South Dade Community Engagement Coordinator, an Overtown Community Engagement Coordinator, and our Community Engagement Manager who oversees this work. Building these teams took several months and we experienced attrition at times as community members grappled with their own capacity to participate. Now we are at a point where the Champions are building capacity and inviting others into the teams.

### **South Dade Community Champions Spotlight:**

The South Dade Community Champions team started out in 2019 with just a few graduates from our CLEAR program brainstorming on how they could improve their communities. Over time the Champions brought in more community members to diversify the work and add capacity despite challenges brought on by COVID-19. The Champions discussed mental health, disaster preparedness, and civic engagement as top priorities for their communities. The team identified wanting to work with the farmworking community in South Dade and struggled at first to connect given the scattered work hours and significant language barrier. The Champions finally made a connection with two farmworker leaders and were able to donate 65 disaster kits to hand out to their members. This year, the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with hurricane season and the decennial Census. In response, the teams created and distributed disaster preparedness kits that included a face mask- with “You Count” in multiple languages, Census guide, non-perishable food, first aid kit, hurricane prep list, solar lamp, hand sanitizer, and portable cell-phone charger.

The team is currently providing support to students and teachers who are adjusting to schooling during the pandemic in South Dade. As is the case for many teachers, staff, and students, COVID-19 resources are

not always readily available. The team adopted a local elementary school to create COVID-19 kits for the 95 staff and teachers. The kits will include masks, kleenex, gloves, wipes, hand sanitizer, and possibly a face shield. This project came about because a South Dade Community Champion is a Special Needs teacher and identified the lack of resources as a pressing need. As she had to return to teaching in person, she did not receive sufficient items to keep herself and her students protected from the virus. With this project, the team hopes to partner with other organizations and expand their reach to be able to duplicate the same effort at more schools in-need.



\*Pictured above: Disaster Preparedness Kit Distribution in South Dade

### **Conclusion:**

When COVID-19 hit this year, we were quickly reminded of why resilience is important for our communities who face compounding risks every day. This year alone we broke temperature records during the summer and faced the threat of an abnormally active hurricane season. Our communities were already under stress and the pandemic further exacerbated existing inequities with skyrocketing unemployment. While we do not have physical hubs in each area, we have organized community leaders who have invaluable lived experiences to inform our resilience work. The Champions know their neighborhoods better than we ever could and through our partnership are receiving the added support needed to address their most pressing issues. While this work takes time, training, and added support, we have been able to address immediate needs in some of our most vulnerable communities. For those who are considering resilience hubs and are running into obstacles, this model could prove to be highly impactful for building and enhancing community resilience to man-made and weather-related disasters.

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