



EAST END COMMUNITIES

East End Communities (EEC) is a collaborative of local and trusted organizations that joined forces in 2019 in Magnolia Park, a vibrant and diverse Latino community located in Houston's historic East End.

MAGNOLIA PARK is one of Houston's oldest neighborhoods, established in 1890. Mexican families moved to the area in the early 1900s, often working in local factories, stores, the port industry, and more. By 1920, it was the largest Mexican-American community in Houston. Magnolia Park has a history of civic engagement and played an active role in the Chicano movement. Today, the neighborhood remains predominantly Latino and has a beautifully rich cultural landscape. The neighborhood is part of Houston's East End, a geographic area spanning east and southeast of Downtown Houston.

EEC's mission is to unite neighbors to share strengths and resources, bridge partnerships, and unite around the issues impacting the community's mental health and well-being. The collaborative comprises organizations such as Centro de Corazon, Community Family Centers, Sisters of Charity, Christus Foundation for Healthcare, and SER Jobs. EEC's extended network includes various civic associations, workgroups, and community partners.

DEFINING AN APPROACH

At the outset, EEC recognized the need to expand beyond a traditional service-delivery

model that addressed immediate mental health concerns to one that encompassed the broader social and environmental factors impacting community wellbeing.

Collaborative leaders discussed the importance of upstream prevention during a partner retreat, emphasizing that focusing solely on services such as emergency shelter or treatment would limit the potential for long-term, transformational change. The conversation highlighted the dual importance of addressing immediate service needs and developing systemic solutions to prevent future issues.

CENTERING COMMUNITY STRENGTHS THROUGH INVITING RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

Embracing a preventative approach has enabled EEC to adopt a community-wide perspective on health. Their goal is to enhance resident engagement—including among youth and immigrants—in collective action by creating spaces for dialogue and awareness, as well as building capacity for residents' self-expression, civic activism, and advocacy for neighborhood improvement.

The first step to engage the community was to conduct a community assessment. Utilizing Prevention Institute's [THRIVE Framework](#), one approach to describing what the public health

field calls the social determinants of health, EEC conducted a community assessment that asked residents to rate the quality and importance of these twelve factors in their neighborhood. This input yielded the five top priorities identified by residents: education; housing; look, feel & safety; social networks & trust; and arts & cultural expression.

Over the past several years, the collaborative has become a convener of community voices. In 2023, EEC's PhotoVoice project, "Through the Eyes of Our Community," emerged as a powerful tool for allowing residents to tell their shared story through photographs to share their pride, spotlight areas for improvement and bring attention to local issues.

Residents were invited to share photographs reflecting the five priorities identified in the community assessment. Ultimately, 80 local photographers, aged 14 to 72, submitted 106 photos that showcased elements of community pride and areas for improvement in Magnolia Park and the East End. During the nine-week submission period, EEC organized community pláticas (conversations), where residents discussed their responses to the images and categorized them under the previously identified five themes: education; housing; look, feel, & safety; social networks & trust; and arts & cultural expression. These conversations facilitated shared insights and spurred action around identified issues.

The project culminated in a photo exhibit held during Hispanic Heritage Month at Old Town Harrisburg in Magnolia Park in late September 2023. Residents showcased their work as local elected officials, business leaders, and neighbors joined to hear participants discuss the stories behind their photos.

Photo submissions included vibrant murals, people in the community, depictions of the environment, and more. This event was a tangible display of community pride and the desire for increased neighborhood investment.

EXAMPLES FROM THE PHOTOVOICE PROJECT:

		
Photographer: Amy	What do we see? Homes being built and a community being pushed out.	How does this relate to our lives? Growing up, I used to see stables, horses, and so many beautiful homes and a united community. These town homes are a loud reminder of what is to come and everyone is left with uncertainty.

		
Photographer: Sandy	What do we see in your picture? Happiness/pride. This is my Welo on his porch. He takes pride in his home. Loves sitting on the porch seeing the neighbors walk or drive by. He loves when his family visits and anxiously awaits speaking to the mail person daily.	How does this relate to our lives? Happiness is important for our health and longevity

"Our biggest contribution has been helping our community see that their concerns are shared. When people come together to speak up, they realize they're not alone—and when they raise their voices as one, leaders and decision-makers start to listen." **PATRICIA CABRERA, DIRECTOR**



the task forces has emerged organically, with residents taking on planning and facilitation roles.

Task forces have been instrumental in organizing a range of local events. For example, the Look, Feel & Safety task force has been hosting monthly wellness walks to foster health and community connection. Additionally, they initiated a community clean-up to encourage residents to discuss how the appearance of a community influences the perception of safety.

Meanwhile, the Housing task force has hosted multiple housing resource fairs in collaboration with local community partners, providing residents with essential information and resources on home repairs, storm damage recovery, and available housing options. These fairs have not only connected renters and homeowners with much-needed support but have also underscored the importance of housing stability as a determinant of health.

The Arts and Cultural Expression task force seeks to identify locations for and create more murals that express community pride and mobilize



EEC has also created resident-friendly, informal engagement opportunities through a texting platform and social media outreach that have built the collaborative's visibility and name recognition. With help from local artists and high school students, EEC used these avenues to inform the community about the PhotoVoice project and its significance. Speaking to residents in an inclusive and approachable manner online has attracted a larger community base of people who might not engage in traditional civic settings.

CENTERING RESIDENT LEADERSHIP

To extend the engagement sparked through the Photovoice project, EEC created a series of community action planning meetings. Between the fall of 2023 and the spring of 2024, EEC held five meetings, attended in person by an average of 75 youth and adult residents, which built on key priority issues identified through the needs assessment and further explored in the PhotoVoice project and community pláticas.

These meetings led to the formation of five community-led task forces based on the priority issue areas, which were focused on creating a community-wide action plan. Magnolia Park residents self-selected into these task forces based on their interests. Leadership within

communities with their messaging. The Education task force organized youth and parents to speak at a school board meeting regarding the effects of curriculum changes on students' mental health; plans to advocate during the Texas Legislative Session are underway. Additionally, the Social Media and Networks task force recognized the need for a centralized place for people to access updates and resources, so they identified platforms inclusive of the language diversity and generational differences EEC serves.

IMPACT OF THE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

In February 2025, EEC partnered with Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Magnolia Fund, and Magnolia Park Arts and Community to commission the first mural to grace a building down historic Harrisburg Boulevard. The theme of the mural is "Letters to Magnolia". An unveiling was held to celebrate with the community.

Community members, both past and present, shared their memories and aspirations of and for Magnolia Park by submitting letters to EEC prior to and during the event. These letters reflected the history, pride, and passion that all those connected to Magnolia Park continue to proclaim to this day. During the unveiling, Aztec dancers performed a traditional blessing for the mural. Local leaders, partner organizations, and community members shared a sense of history, unity, culture, and legacy.

This success of the mural unveiling is one of the promising indicators of the impact EEC's Community Action Plan is and will continue to have.



Pictured are Amaya, 5 years old, and her grandfather Enrique, 102 years old. Amaya is the child depicted in a newly created local mural and is also an Aztec dancer. Donde florecen las magnolias, también lo hace nuestra gente. Where the magnolias bloom, as do our people.

FUTURE GROWTH

As the collaborative looks toward its future, EEC is committed to expanding its capacity to sustain its mission and plans to obtain 501(c)(3) nonprofit status certification. It will also continue fostering resident-led community engagement in line with its unwavering dedication to actualizing resident priorities and ensuring that community voices shape initiatives to improve health.

Looking ahead, EEC envisions a vibrant future where cultural preservation and community empowerment thrive. Future programming priorities include elevating the annual Día de los Muertos festival, expanding efforts to celebrate and revitalize cultural heritage, and advancing long-term housing stability through anti-displacement advocacy and resource-sharing. By centering community leadership and addressing the broader determinants of health, EEC is building a powerful, sustainable model for community-driven transformation.

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