



HIRAM CLARKE COMMUNITY RESILIENCY PROJECT

The Hiram Clarke Community Resiliency Project (HCCRP) was formed in 2019 to unite the broader Hiram Clarke neighborhood through community engagement, resource sharing, and capacity building. Initially formed under the Windsor Village United Methodist Church and Mental Health America of Greater Houston, HCCRP expanded their partnerships with Madison High feeder schools, faith-based institutions, non-profit organizations, and research institutions, including Texas Health Institute, through meaningful engagement to support their collaborative strategies and resident leaders.

These strategic and diverse partnerships with stakeholders provide HCCRP with a broad understanding of the landscape of challenges, strengths, and opportunities that youth and community members see in the neighborhood. Throughout the Communities of Care Initiative, the collaborative has emphasized the importance of having residents design and lead strategies that meet the unique needs of Hiram Clarke residents. HCCRP works closely with youth and residents through their Youth Advisory Council and Resident Workgroup, with each serving as a separate arm of the collaborative. As the work of the collaborative evolves, youth and resident leaders continue to gain experience and confidence in advocating for community initiatives that promote connection, healing, and safety.

ABOUT HIRAM CLARKE

The Hiram Clarke neighborhood, located in Southwest Houston, was incorporated into the city in the 1950s and developed rapidly as the area attracted working professionals from all walks of life, including entrepreneurs, civil servants, and business leaders. In the 1970s, the neighborhood experienced the phenomenon of White Flight as a large population of White residents moved to newly developed suburbs surrounding Houston, leaving behind a close-knit community of predominately Black professionals and families. Over the years, the neighborhood continues to become culturally diverse with its historically Black population and a growing number of Spanish-speaking residents moving in to seek opportunities for housing and education. With Hiram Clarke incorporated into the newly developed Five Corners District and recent implementation of Tax Incremental Reinvestment Zones to attract business investment, community-based organizations and residents are looking to bring attention back to the neighborhood to create opportunities and infrastructure that support community connection and unification on common goals.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS SHARE THEIR VISION FOR HIRAM CLARKE

To better understand the needs, priorities, and dreams of Hiram Clarke residents beyond existing Census and survey data, the HCCRP

collaborative convened a group of 20 long-term residents to design and facilitate interactive community assessment activities with the Hiram Clarke community. These activities were designed around the THRIVE assessment framework, which emphasizes the use of both quantitative and qualitative data to understand the community conditions that impact health and wellbeing.

The assessment activities, which included interactive posterboards and surveys inviting residents to share the strengths and opportunities they saw in their neighborhood, were carried out in schools throughout Hiram Clarke, including Lawson Middle School and Madison High School. The collaborative partnered with organizations like the YMCA to carry out assessment activities in existing community-based centers that were frequently used by residents to capture their broader perspective of the protective and risk factors they saw in their community.

As a result of the assessment process, Hiram Clarke residents identified four strong community priorities: education, parks and green space, community safety, and trust. As the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing barriers to student connection and extracurricular activities, such as access to online and in-person spaces, youth



trust and connection became an important factor to address and begin developing strategies to ensure their voices were prioritized in providing input for future programs and initiatives.

In 2020, as the racial justice movement gained traction with increased awareness towards systemic racism, there was a collective need to address racial injustice and promote solidarity between racial groups facing bias and discrimination. With this increased focus on racial justice, a desire for residents to connect despite cultural barriers, and increased attention towards youth mental health and wellbeing, there was a clear goal for HCCRP to establish safe and accessible spaces that brought all Hiram Clarke residents and youth together to create a shared vision for the neighborhood.



ZOË NJEMANZE, YOUTH PROGRAM SPECIALIST FOR HCCRP, comments on the impact of providing spaces for youth: “There is such power in being in community and having the ability to talk about the barriers and the stressors that we have in our lives... You can see the power dynamic playing out with these youth who feel like they do not have a voice, and so I feel like just being able to facilitate that space for them to be able to talk about our mental health openly, without stigma has been I think one of the most impactful things that that we’ve done.”



CREATING SPACES TO BUILD AWARENESS AND RESILIENCE

HCCRP worked to recruit community members to virtual focus groups in order to meaningfully engage residents while maintaining health and safety during the pandemic. Over 12 sessions offered in English and Spanish, these online groups provided community members with space to share what they saw as strengths and priorities in the neighborhood for HCCRP to act on. These virtual sessions were successful, with over 100 residents reached and a strong cohort of 37 residents who completed each session and remained engaged with the collaborative.

Building off of their online focus groups in 2020, HCCRP launched their “It’s a Vibe” Online Youth Conversations in 2021 to address the need for youth-led spaces that encourage connection and understanding. These conversations included students who are invested in the mental health and wellbeing of youth to share stories and strategies for lifting up their voice and power. The conversations and engagement of youth evolved, with the Online Youth conversations transitioning to a real-time virtual chat channel for Madison High School students with 86 students engaged, providing a youth-led space for peer connection, organizing, and leadership development.

JORNAE RIDEAUX, HCCRP PROGRAM MANAGER, shares why physical and social spaces are important for residents: “There’s not a lot of attention or existing organizations in the area. [We’re] building those relationships with community members where they truly do trust that we have their best interest in mind, and that we’re not just another organization that’s coming in trying to take advantage.”

In addition to youth online conversations, HCCRP coordinated a resident workgroup with a variety of stakeholders and community members to share input on collaborative strategies as they engaged in strategic planning. Initially starting as a quarterly advisory group, the workgroup evolved to regular monthly meetings coordinated by residents that prioritized resource sharing and relationship building between members. The workgroup has been a vital part of the collaborative’s structure, where a core group of residents has continued to lead workgroup strategy development and recruitment efforts. The group now works with families and organizations to provide training and capacity building opportunities, share their priorities and raise awareness of emerging community issues and advocacy efforts, and join the collaborative coordinators in leadership and decision-making.



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

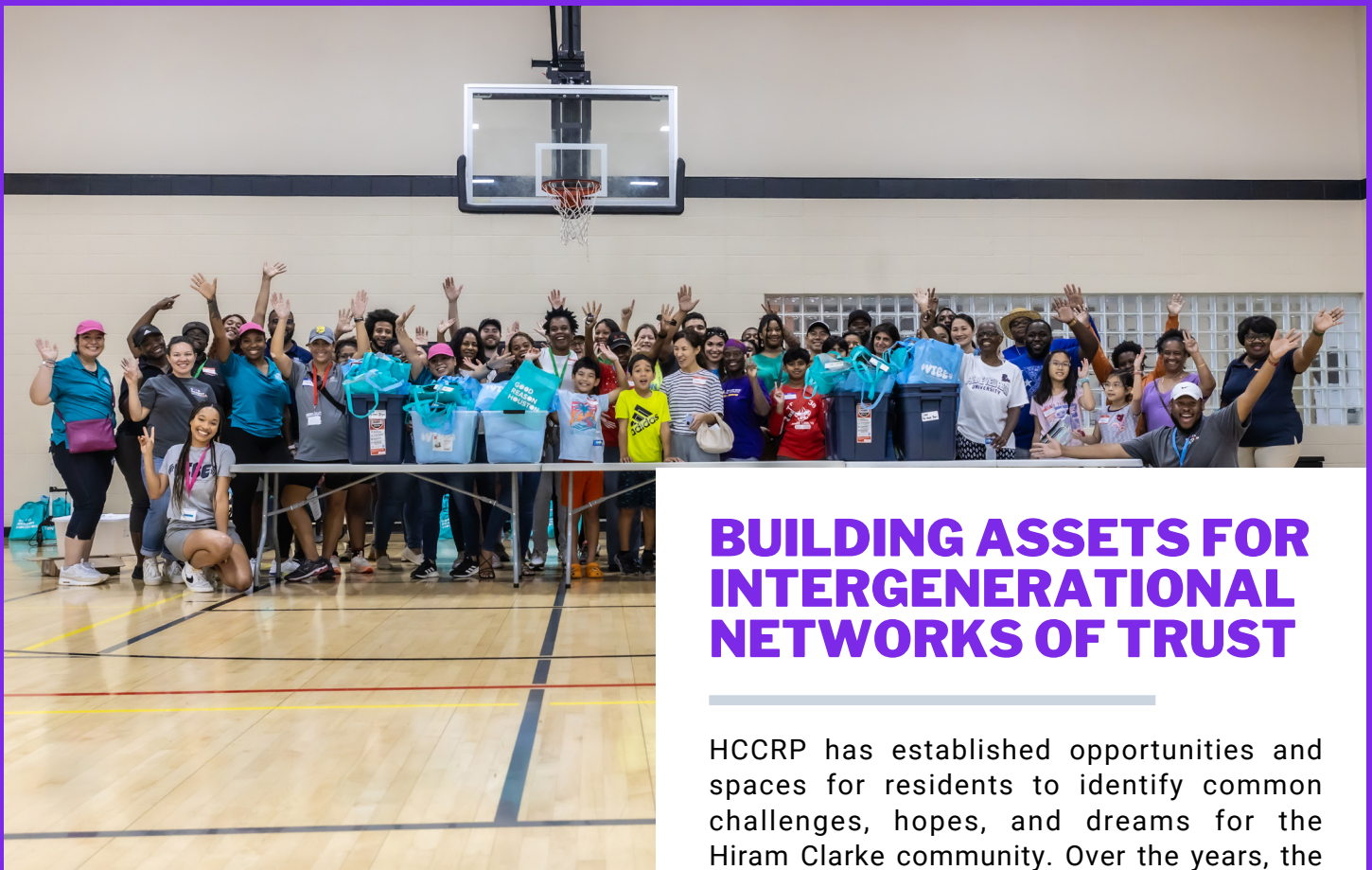
As the primary public high school serving the Hiram Clarke neighborhood, HCCRP saw the opportunity to work with the diverse population of Madison High School students and provided them with a platform to share their thoughts and dreams to inform broader community planning efforts. Through their online conversations with Madison High School students, HCCRP collaborative coordinators and the Youth Advisory Council worked to establish safe and authentic spaces for youth to show up and form connections with each other free of judgment or authoritative power structures. In these spaces, youth are invited to engage in difficult, yet important, conversations about topics like social media, cyberbullying, racial justice, and culture, establishing comfort with each other and opportunities to build shared resilience and common goals.

Through the Youth Advisory Council, the collaborative has identified opportunities for youth from Madison High School to use arts and culture to lift up their voices and share their stories. In 2022, HCCRP worked with the Hackett Center for Mental Health to create a powerful Photovoice project that engaged students in showcasing art pieces that tell the story of their community. Students were invited to share their projects at Mental Health America's Annual Center for School Behavioral Health Conference in 2022, where students discussed their art with stakeholders and organizations to inform the best ways to approach youth mental health. These students have continued to engage with the collaborative and have shared their work in a variety of ways, including through art showcases, advocacy events, and storytelling projects, to amplify student experiences and goals for changing conditions related to the education system.

UNIFYING THE COMMUNITY

In recognizing the need for organizations and resources that facilitate connection for youth and families throughout Hiram Clarke, HCCRP partnered with community groups like Good Reason Houston to convene residents and share resources related to the education priorities identified by students, including disciplinary policies and wraparound services. In partnering with other non-profits and research institutions, HCCRP has launched events and provided capacity building and resources that allow youth and their families to build connections and create common goals.

HCCRP has also worked with organizations to establish accessible physical spaces for connection. Throughout the assessment process, residents noted a lack of parks and green spaces designated for youth, families, and community members to play, gather, and work together. To address this need, HCCRP worked with the SPARK Park school program and faculty and leadership at the Billy Reagan K-8 Educational Center to design and implement a community park in the neighborhood. During the design process, HCCRP established a steering committee of youth and residents that provided input during the design process to ensure the final park reflected the vision of the Hiram Clarke community. The park now serves as a central location for youth and families to enjoy interactive playground equipment, an outdoor classroom, and other amenities like benches, picnic tables, and a walking trail that promotes physical activity.



BUILDING ASSETS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL NETWORKS OF TRUST

HCCRP has established opportunities and spaces for residents to identify common challenges, hopes, and dreams for the Hiram Clarke community. Over the years, the collaborative has worked deeply to connect older, long-term residents with youth that share their goals for improving community wellbeing and connection, but may not have been invited to the same conversations in the past.

As youth and families continue to navigate local and state-level policies that impact their wellbeing, HCCRP hopes to be a long-standing institution in the neighborhood that bridges the gap between residents despite differences in culture, language, and age. With the creation of virtual and in-person spaces that utilize arts and culture for communication and connection, HCCRP has built a strong foundation of resident and youth leaders supported by local institutions to continue developing intergenerational networks of trust across cultural barriers, ultimately unifying the Hiram Clarke community.

As the neighborhood population has evolved, residents working with the collaborative shared their desire for bringing communities together that wouldn't normally be invited to the same spaces due to differences in culture or age group. In recognizing the distinct language barrier between Black and Brown communities in Hiram Clarke, HCCRP works to provide resources, handouts, and surveys in both English and Spanish. The collaborative continues to identify and establish spaces where community members can convene in-person, helping to build richer relationships between leaders and civic organizations in the neighborhood. HCCRP supports local institutions like the public library, faith-based centers, and the YMCA to encourage the use of existing spaces for resource sharing and multi-cultural engagement.

COLLABORATIVE MEMBER AND YOUTH PROGRAM SPECIALIST ZOË NJEMANZE COMMENTS ON THE NEED FOR INCLUSION:

"[We're] looking for opportunities where we are promoting togetherness and oneness within our community. I think that is the beauty of community, and continuing to just kind of address these [differences]."

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