

People-Powered Strategies to Build Community Resilience

Case Studies

Collective Purchasing

Farragut Food Club: NYCHA Farragut Houses, Brooklyn, New York

In April 2019, the USDA enabled Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants to select and pay for their groceries online, during a two-year test initially launched in New York State. Through a six-month process with Enterprise Community Partners, the residents of the Farragut Houses in Fort Greene, Brooklyn designed a new model for affordable and convenient access to groceries for low-income families and negotiated community benefits such as waived membership fees, reduced order minimums, delivery, and additional promotions.

Enterprise, in partnership with the Fund for Public Housing and NYCHA, raised \$400,000 to start program design and site selection in 2019. The Farragut Houses in Dumbo, Brooklyn was selected, and by October 2018, recruitment of residents began to participate in the co-design of the project. The team negotiated with Amazon, Western Beef, and other fresh food delivery services for benefits agreements that gave Farragut Houses residents the ability to use their SNAP benefits online, have their groceries delivered at no cost, and save numerous hours per week that were previously dedicated to grocery shopping.

The residents themselves designed the process by which they would receive the bulk groceries and store them in an on-site community center. They also organized the process for grocery pick-up or delivery to residents who were participating in the program. The success of the pilot program rests in the ability of resident leadership to:

1. Enroll their neighbors in the SNAP online program. The more demand they are able to aggregate, the greater the benefits they can demand for fresh food provider
2. Secure extra staff to manage the logistics of food collection, delivery and distribution. Food delivery requires constant staff to be available to receive

food deliveries from companies throughout the day and arrange pickup or delivery to resident apartments within a quick time frame

While the program is still in the pilot phase, preliminary outcomes suggest that the greatest value currently experienced by residents is time saved (from a weekly total of 4-6 hours down to only 30 minutes each week), with average prices being equivalent to non-online purchases. Pilots are also taking place in Portland and Baltimore.

Sources:

Chloe Arnow, in conversation with Dorraine Duncan, January 30th, 2019, recording and transcript, Urban Design Forum: Turning the Heat

Ginsburg, Elizabeth. "Enterprise New York Presents Urban Food Access Pilot at Yale Food Symposium". Enterprisecommunity.org.
<https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/blog/food-access-affordability-pilot-yale-food-symposium> (accessed Feb 1, 2020)

Community Currency

Social Capital Credits: NYCHA's Polo Grounds Towers, Washington Heights, New York

In 2019, Asia Initiatives (AI), partnered with the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) at Columbia University and NYCHA to develop Social Capital Credits (SoCCs) at NYCHA's Polo Grounds Towers in Washington Heights, Manhattan. The NYCHA development has a reputation of being dangerous and unwelcoming due to crime and drug trafficking, low education attainment, dire poverty, lack of wayfinding, and lack of community cohesion.

To successfully implement SoCCs, AI suggested starting preliminary conversations with community members through local partners (individuals or organizations) that are well-known and trusted by residents. In the case of Polo Grounds, a strong partnership was established with the NYPD Department of Research and Innovation. A trusted police officer named Ramos became the main liaison between the organization and the community. Students from GSAPP, together with residents, started a list of potential items that the community would like to perform in order to improve the community's common spaces. These items included tasks to be performed to construct a playground for children, seats for the seniors, and more planters around the campus, all of which will be part of the Earnings Menu. While this planning step has been conducted, AI's work at Polo Grounds Towers has just begun, and the organization plans to continue to work with the community during 2020 to continue to explore the program implementation.

There are some challenges to continuing AI's work, as identified by AI President, Geeta Mehta. In an interview, Geeta highlighted that the next crucial step is to identify who can be the SoCCs manager and how he or she can be funded as a full staff. This is a big step towards implementing SoCCs, as the SoCCs manager is responsible for maintaining the program's day-to-day activities, such as filling the SoCCs passbooks and validating tasks performed by community members. To assist with the work, the AI created an app for Android, which will soon be released for IOS, where SoCCs participants, after conducting a work/service, can take a photo as proof of completion, and submit to the manager for approval so that the community member can receive his/her SoCCs points. The manager can also advise on menu changes based upon evolving community needs.

Polo Grounds Towers residents and stakeholders, with the assistance of community agencies and community-based organizations, are working to make the housing complex safer and more welcoming for residents and visitors. They realize that accomplishing this will involve a combination of environmental design and social programs to raise community engagement, particularly for youth and young adults.

Sources:

Asia Initiatives and Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) . *NYCHA Polo Grounds: Utilizing Social Capital for Uplifting the Community*. New York, NY, 2019.

Geeta Mehta, in conversation with Manuela Powidayko, December 10, 2019, transcript, Urban Design Forum: Turning the Heat

Resilience Hubs

LESReady!: Lower East Side, Manhattan, New York

After Hurricane Sandy hit the Lower East Side, community groups and institutions came together and formed a coalition to plan, prepare, and train in response to future disasters. Currently there are 25 groups in the LESReady! coalition. Some of their work includes:

- Conducting solar assessments of 41 low to moderate-income housing and developing a concept for a community micro-grid and organizational model as part of the Beyond the Grid initiative.
- Leading regular trainings and resource sharing, such as emergency preparedness discussions for senior housing residents, training for floor captains in a Mitchell-Lama housing complex to care for emergency response, a community emergency fair, etc.
- Developing and disseminating LESReady! Disaster Response Plan.

- Training Disaster Case Managers as single sources of information for those affected by disaster but do not have resources.
- Building an art and marketing campaign to spread awareness of resilience, climate change impacts, and preparedness actions.

Source:

LES Ready. hesterstreet.org

<https://hesterstreet.org/projects/les-ready/> (accessed Feb. 19, 2020)

Red Hook Hub: Red Hook, Brooklyn, New York

Red Hook Initiative, a Brooklyn-based community organization, has created the Red Hook Hub as “a public communication system” providing community information in both “crisis and non-crisis scenarios” to the Red Hook community. The Hub was created post-Hurricane Sandy as both a physical and virtual source of information. While it is managed and monitored by permanent staff at Red Hook Initiative, the Hub hosts participatory content from stakeholders and any resident can share to the message boards. Guidelines were developed in concert with residents, business owners, and those who work in Red Hook.

Hub bulletins can be found online at redhookhub.org or on bulletin boards in third places like the Brooklyn Public Library Red Hook Branch and the Miccio Community Center. Anyone interested in receiving information can sign up by email or check postings and a calendar of events on the website. Postings appear in both English and Spanish.

According to the website, the virtual space filters information that is most pressing. In March 2020, the Red Hook Hub contained information about the NYCHA Red Hook Tenant Association, as well as national emergency information on the spread of COVID-19.

Source:

Red Hook Initiative. “Red Hook Hub: Sharing Community Information.”

<http://redhookhub.org/> (accessed March 1, 2020)

POWER House Community Center: Perkins Homes, Baltimore, Maryland

POWER House Community Center is located within Perkin Homes, the largest public housing development in Baltimore. POWER is an acronym for Providing Opportunities to Work, Expand, and Rise. The community center is one of seven resilience hubs in Baltimore. It is currently housed in a rehabilitated firehouse and run by the Living Classrooms, a Washington, DC-/Maryland-based nonprofit that manages two solar resilience hubs in Baltimore. Living Classroom worked with Power 52, a solar installation NGO, to bring solar installations to both.

POWER House provides day-to-day programming in five core areas: education and career development, character and civic development, life skills, the arts and cultural enrichment, and wellness. During times of extreme events, POWER House is a place for Perkins Home residents to charge phones, store medicine, and escape the heat or cold. POWER House and other resilience hubs in Baltimore also work to identify other neighborhood partners to coordinate services with if they exceed their capacity to assist residents during extreme events.

In Baltimore, there is no one size fits all for community resilience hubs. Baltimore's hubs are situated in different neighborhoods, operated by different community organizations, and serve different needs. However, funding remains a challenge for all. In the case of POWER House, it was funded jointly by grants from the Maryland Energy Administration, the Institute for Sustainable Communities, the EARN Maryland Grant Program, and the Baltimore Office of Sustainability.

Sources:

Baja, Kristin. "Resilience Hubs: Shifting Power to Community and Increasing Community Capital." *resilience-hub.org*. June 2019.
http://resilience-hub.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/USDN_ResilienceHub.pdf
(accessed Jan. 31, 2020)

Curran, Colleen and Maya Pottiger. "'Resiliency Hubs' forming around Baltimore." *cnsmaryland.org*. Fall 2019.
<https://cnsmaryland.org/interactives/fall-2019/hubs/index.html> (accessed March 9, 2020)

Living Classrooms. "Programming at the POWER House Community Center"
<https://livingclassrooms.org/programs/power-house-community-center/> (accessed March 9, 2020)

Resident Power

Umbrella House: Precedent for Low Income Resident Management

In December 2018, the de Blasio administration unveiled NYCHA 2.0, a comprehensive plan to invest \$24 billion to preserve public housing over ten years of the total \$40 billion capital deficit. The plan includes four elements: PACT to Preserve, Build to Preserve, Transfer to Preserve, and Fix to Preserve. Through the sale of unutilized development rights (“air rights”), conversion of public housing to private management via public-private partnerships, including the Rental Assistance Demonstration program, and the leasing of public housing property for redevelopment, the City aims to generate new moneys for NYCHA campuses. However, residents are skeptical of the benefits of many of these programs, and there are existing precedents of resident ownership and management that are preferred by many citywide.

One such example is Umbrella House, a Housing Development Fund Corporation (HDFC) or a form of co-op housing intended for low income New Yorkers to own and manage their own buildings. Umbrella House is one of the most successful HDFC co-ops in the city and illustrates how democratic control and inclusive decision-making over all aspects of the building can result in success for the long-term benefit of residents. Residents elect board members, review applications from potential buyers, approve capital investments, and make discretionary choices such as when they decided to convert ground floor space into commercial storefronts to generate new income. Through these forms of participation, residents are identifying mechanisms to build their own power over the systems and buildings they rely on, and taking advantage of the tools of economic and real estate development to do so.

Source:

Umbrella House. “From Ruin to Renewal”.
www.umbrellahouse.nyc (accessed March 17, 2020)

ACCESSolar: Community Solar Gardens at NYCHA

NYCHA buildings and shared spaces often face poor quality environmental conditions, such as mold and lead, insufficient heating and cooling, which limit their usefulness for residents and on-site service providers. Existing service agreements on NYCHA campuses have not ensured that these issues are addressed quickly, and the agency’s capital deficit limits their ability to fund all necessary repairs.

In 2017, the de Blasio Administration announced its first large-scale solar program at NYCHA, which aims to provide low to moderate-income New Yorkers — including public housing residents who are subscribed to the program — access to clean, low-cost energy throughout the city and jobs in the growing solar industry. The program used profit-sharing agreements to govern new on-site revenues, from solar panels, on-site businesses. Through this program, a nonprofit organization or small business located in a NYCHA community may submit proposals to receive low or

no-cost rent for solar installation, along with access to start up funding and technical support. In return, the organization or business will operate and maintain the solar installation, lower subscribers' energy bills, and employ NYCHA residents to develop career pathways to green jobs. The program builds on NYCHA's Commercial Solar Program, and is consistent with NYCHA's Sustainability Agenda, and the city's goals to combat climate change by reducing greenhouse gases by at least 80 percent by 2050 through its goal to produce 1,000 megawatts of solar power by 2030.

There is potential for mechanisms such as this — or other co-op or small businesses operating on-site that generate revenue — to contribute some amount of profit to priority investments in community facilities. Benefits from the expansion of a program such as AccessSolar could include the lowering resident energy bill & pay for the program itself, as well as excess value going to the site.

Source:

NYCHA. "ACCESSolar: Community Solar Gardens at NYCHA"
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nycha/about/accessolar.page> (accessed January 14, 2020)