



LOCAL LEADERS

A Community-Based Response to Crisis



Creating Change from Within

The RHI Model



Red Hook Initiative (RHI) believes that social change to overcome systemic inequities begins with empowered youth. In partnership with community adults, we nurture young people in Red Hook to be inspired, resilient, healthy, and envision themselves as co-creators of their lives, community and society.

www.rhicenter.org

History & Purpose



On October 29, 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit New York City, reminding coastal residents of the disproportionate effects of climate change. Red Hook, Brooklyn, a community where close to 70% of residents live in public housing, was one of the most affected neighborhoods. Red Hook is surrounded on three sides by water. Furthermore, many areas along the waterfront were historically marshland, leaving the community susceptible to flooding. Red Hook Initiative (RHI), an organization that had been active in the community for 10 years, opened its doors 14 hours a day for 24 consecutive days after the storm, serving thousands of Red Hook residents experiencing power, heat and running water outages that lasted up to three weeks.

RHI's immediate crisis response and recovery efforts, led by Red Hook residents, volunteers and staff, taught us the true power of community-led response to emergencies and the importance of social networks among neighbors in times of crisis. The trying days and weeks following the storm bore witness to the incredible resiliency of residents within New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Red Hook East and West public housing communities.

In 2014, RHI launched "Local Leaders," a training program designed for public housing residents to learn about emergency preparedness and community organizing; this program was developed through lessons learned in response to Hurricane Sandy.

To date, RHI has trained over 200 public housing residents to be Local Leaders. The program teaches skills that help prepare for and respond to emergencies, provides activities to deepen relationships among neighbors and offers opportunities for leadership development, community building and intergenerational learning.

The curriculum was developed in partnership with local residents; as of 2017, the English- and Spanish-speaking classes are now fully facilitated by graduates of the Local Leaders program. Due to its success, RHI is fully committed to the continued improvement and sustainability of the Local Leaders program.

The Model

The Local Leaders program was launched in July 2014. The new training series brought Red Hook residents together to improve individual and family preparedness and to strengthen social resiliency of public housing residents. Local Leaders meet once a week for two-hour sessions over the course of 10 weeks. Participants are compensated for their investment of time and dedication over 10 weeks with a stipend. As of 2017, RHI has trained over 200 Local Leaders through a curriculum offered in both English and Spanish.

"If I don't remember something, the other leaders help me."

"The information is interesting and different from anything I've learned."

Build Knowledge and Promote Mutual Learning

Local Leaders learn skills in how to prepare themselves, their family and the community for emergencies and how to respond if an emergency occurs. It is an intergenerational learning space where residents who have felt harmed by educational institutions, who may struggle with literacy, or speak English as a second language, are able to take risks to learn collectively. In addition to preparedness skills, Local Leaders learn principles of community organizing, mediation, and self-defense, and earn certifications in CPR and basic first aid.

Build Community

The program is accessible and culturally responsive. Trainings are intentionally held in the evenings to accommodate the majority of Local Leaders who work during the day. Additionally, local residents are hired to provide food and childcare during trainings. In hiring local cooks for the program, the food has the essence of "home" and creates cultural connectedness. Meetings offer space to build relationships with a foundation that validates cultural traditions and strength.



Deliver with Credible Messengers

Local Leaders was developed by and is facilitated in partnership with residents. We train former Local Leaders to lead future cohorts. The presence of neighbors who step into leadership goes beyond role modeling; it offers residents the opportunity to witness their peers leading and holding power while also providing the opportunity to envision themselves as future leaders.

Foster Self-Efficacy and Collective Power

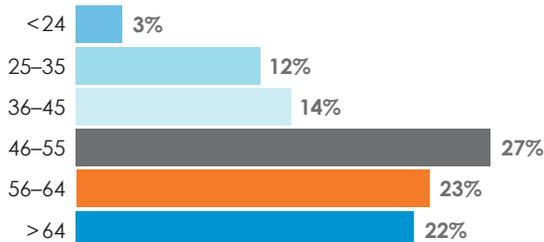
Rituals of the class foster unity and pride and lead to a feeling of collective power. These rituals include integrating roles for participants to lead activities, branded shirts featuring a slogan voted on by the group, and connection with community organizing and neighborhood events after the training concludes. There are opportunities throughout the training for participants to share their own knowledge or expertise on an issue.

"I think people really like to see their neighbors facilitating. This year was my first time facilitating by myself. I had a lot of responsibility for this class. I think this was really good practice, and it was good for people to know that where we're at is what they can also achieve. People want to learn more and tell me that they want to know everything I know."

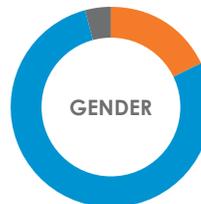
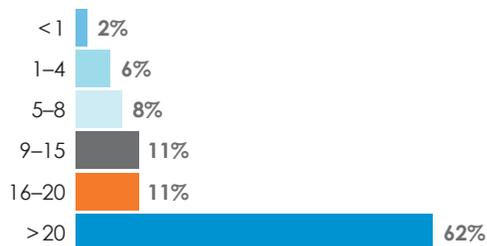


LOCAL LEADERS DEMOGRAPHICS

AGE



YEARS LIVED IN RED HOOK



Why is a community-based organization leading in emergency preparedness?

“Whether they come from governments or from civil society, the best techniques for safeguarding cities don’t just mitigate disaster damage; they also strengthen the networks that promote health and prosperity during ordinary times.”

—Eric Klinenberg, “Adaptation,” (The New Yorker, January 7, 2013) p. 35.

“The community members that make up Red Hook had comprehensive knowledge about its strengths and weaknesses during an extreme weather event. Future adaptation efforts should stem from this foundation”

—Schmeltz MT, Gonzalez SK, Fuentes L, Kwan A, Ortega-Williams A, Cowan LP. Lessons from hurricane sandy: a community response in Brooklyn, New York. J Urban Health. 2013;90:799–809.

“The capacity of a community residents’ ability to adapt, respond, and communicate in the face of environmental shocks is substantially based on their level of social connectedness. Building social cohesion in vulnerable communities is an essential strategy in maintaining the stability, health, resilience of communities before an emergency happens.”

—Williams, Eric. Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development. (2014). Social Resiliency and Superstorm Sandy [White Paper]. p. 3

City agencies who partner with the Local Leader program:

- Office of Emergency Management
- Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- New York City Housing Authority
- Mayor’s Office of Recovery and Resiliency



Local Leaders Training Outline

■ Overview of Local Leaders Program

An introduction to the course, history of the program, and getting to know each other.

■ Individual and Family Emergency Preparedness Planning

Learn the roles and responsibilities of government agencies, develop a preparedness plan, and discuss Local Leaders' role as community members in disaster preparedness and response.

■ Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Connect to Red Hook Community Justice Center's Peacemakers, learn about mediation practices and de-escalation.

■ Responding to Mental Health Emergencies

Learn and practice emotional first aid, increase self-awareness and ability to provide effective support during a crisis.

■ Community Organizing, Political Education & Climate Justice

Learn the components of a campaign, understand who makes decisions in Red Hook, and discuss the impact of climate change on Red Hook residents and how to take action.

■ CPR and First Aid

Local Leaders are certified in CPR and First Aid.

■ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Learn about heat and health risks in Red Hook, about the urban heat island, and how to prepare for and respond to heat emergencies.

■ Self-Defense and Defending Against Hateful Acts

Upstander workshops are designed to equip those facing hate and violence with de-escalation skills and basic self-defense techniques.

■ Planning Projects in Red Hook

What's Happening and How To Get Involved: gain updates from government agencies, including NYCHA, on emergency preparedness and future flood protections.

■ Local Leaders Next Steps and Graduation Ceremony

Celebrate success with a ceremony and plan for future opportunities to stay engaged.



Impact

RHI measures our impact through observations, surveys of Local Leaders upon completion and focus groups. We have evaluated each cohort annually and compiled the results below.

1 **Local Leaders Build Community** Residents are united, more connected with neighbors and to community resources.

Over 90% of respondents agree that they have stronger relationships with neighbors after completing the Local Leaders training.

More than three quarters of residents respond that after completing the class they have more knowledge of resources in Red Hook that can be of support to them.

Local Leaders expressed an increased sense of hope and responsibility for Red Hook's future. Over 95% of respondents report that they are capable of helping their neighbors in a future emergency.

2 **Local Leaders Are Prepared** Residents are better equipped for future emergencies and willing to help neighbors in an emergency.

After the training, 85% of Local Leaders report that they have the skills needed to make an emergency plan.

After completing the Local Leaders program, 95% of respondents consistently reported that they are more prepared for emergencies than before the class.

"People had lived together for years but didn't know each other before this program."

"We don't have to wait for anyone to act."

"I can help save a life."

"This program has made the community closer and more united. People are learning new things that they didn't know before."

3

Local Leaders Are Engaged

Residents are more involved in community organizing and decision-making in Red Hook.

Local Leaders participate in actions to create institutional change:

- After completing the program over 70% of respondents consistently reported that they believe that they can make a positive change in the community.
- Local Leaders have participated in three major marches in Washington DC (People's Climate March 2017, Cuts to Housing Protest 2017, Women's March 2017) and several actions in New York City. In 2014, following the launch of the program, 50 Local Leaders participated in the People's Climate March.
- Seven Local Leaders were hired by RHI to conduct a Participatory Action Research project about mold in public housing. The project resulted in a report released on the fourth anniversary of Hurricane Sandy.
- Two Local Leaders testified at a City Council hearing in 2017 to address mold in public housing.
- Local Leaders hosted a job fair on the first anniversary of Hurricane Sandy.

Local Leaders are more involved in decision making in Red Hook and advocating for others:

- Local Leaders are involved in NYC's Participatory Budgeting process.
- Local Leaders attend community meetings that influence decisions made in Red Hook.

4

Local Leaders Take Deep Pride in Their Role

Residents are committed to the community and to one another.

Upon completing the program, over 95% report that they are proud to be a Local Leader.

"We started small and we are growing. We hope to keep growing and to continue to keep helping more people."



"We can do what needs to be done."



Meet Red Hook Local Leaders



Shaquana Cooke

**Red Hook resident,
Local Leaders Co-Facilitator**

Shaquana participated in the first class of Local Leaders in 2014. Following the class, she was hired as an Outreach Worker at RHI. In 2016, Shaquana joined a team of Local Leaders for a Participatory Action Research project, surveying 280 residents and drafting recommendations to address the crisis of mold in public housing. The report drove media attention on the issue, influenced city legislation and led to changes in NYCHA's response protocol in Red Hook.

Juana Narvaez

**Red Hook resident,
Local Leaders Co-Facilitator**

Juana is a graduate of the first Spanish-speaking Local Leaders class. After graduating, she was trained as a co-facilitator of the program. Today, Juana has facilitated three cohorts of Local Leaders. Juana was recently hired as a Community Organizer at another organization. "Being in the program has brought me a lot of happiness and people are always asking me to advocate for them and I do. I go with people to court, and I help them with any problems they have. If anyone needs help, tell them to come to Red Hook; we'll help them."



Tevina Willis

**Red Hook resident,
Local Leaders Facilitator**

Tevina participated in the first cohort of Local Leaders and today runs the English-speaking program. In addition to facilitating Local Leaders, Tevina runs her own non-profit organization which trains residents in community organizing. Tevina partners with RHI to offer continuing education workshops to Local Leaders through an annual leadership development academy. "I really enjoyed working with my friends. I think people are more inclined to come when they see we're the ones leading. We see them out in the community and we can hold them accountable. People have a different level of respect when it's their neighbors up there."

Carmen Cantres

Red Hook resident

Carmen participated in the 2015 class of Local Leaders and now supports the group by cooking for all of the classes. "I make the food for the Local Leaders like it's my family I'm cooking for." After joining Local Leaders, Carmen became more involved in community meetings and participated in several marches in New York and Washington DC. "Being able to learn and to help my neighbors has made me more of a leader. I've become more connected with my neighbors. I put what I learn forward and help others."

Photos: Karens Bastien, former Red Hook Initiative youth participant

Our Vision of Resiliency

At RHI we have seen powerful evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Local Leaders program. We believe this model is one that will truly help prepare the community for future emergencies. Local Leaders creates a network of neighbors who will not only be more connected to each other and local resources in the event of an emergency, but who exercise that preparedness daily.

Five years after Hurricane Sandy we often hear resiliency conversations focused on storm-proofing buildings, massive infrastructure proposals or solutions that require millions of dollars worth of capital investment. We, however, will not forget

the power of community members in the days after Hurricane Sandy, who walked across the street to RHI and transformed from storm victims to storm responders. They were first on the scene and knew what their neighbors needed better than any expert.

It is our hope that others will start to see programs like Local Leaders as human investments in resiliency. These investments will be returned in the form of a strengthened neighborhood long before an emergency hits.



RHI BELIEVES that
SOCIAL CHANGE

to overcome systemic inequities begins with

EMPOWERED YOUTH.

In partnership with community adults, we nurture young people in Red Hook to be

INSPIRED

RESILIENT

and **HEALTHY**

and to envision themselves as co-creators of their

LIVES, COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY.



767 Hicks Street
Brooklyn, NY 11231

“We’re ready if there’s another hurricane. This program has united the community and made us more aware of what to do to help ourselves, our families and our neighbors.”

Current and Former Local Leader Facilitators

Leticia Cancel
Shaquana Cooke
Bonita Felix
Juana Narvaez
Alisa Pizarro
Tevina Willis

Director of Community Building Programs

Catherine McBride

CREATING CHANGE FROM WITHIN

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