

**ANALYSIS OF SERVICE GAPS IN LITTLE- HAITI  
AND IN THE HAITIAN/HAITIAN-AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY IN MIAMI DADE COUNTY**

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE HAITIAN NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER, SANT LA'S MISSION AND OBJECTIVES**

**Our History:** The Haitian Neighborhood Center, Sant La, was founded in December 2000 by a group of community leaders and service providers that were concerned by the chronic gaps in the provision of services to the Haitian/Haitian-American community of South Florida. Sant La's goal is to address the chronic service gaps resulting from the community's social isolation and lack of awareness about available community resources.

**Our Funders:** Sant La launched its operations in June 2001 with start up grants from the Kennedy Foundation, The Knight-Leigh Foundation, the Fisher Island Philanthropic Fund, the North Dade Medical Foundation, the Roblee Foundation and the Department of Children and Families. To date, other funders include: the Dade Community Foundation, the Peacock Foundation, First Data Western Union Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida, Miami-Dade County Department of Human Services, The Miami-Dade County Department of Community Economic Development, United Way of Miami-Dade, The Alliance for Human Services, Coral Gables Congregational Church, the Department of Children and Families, the Juvenile Assessment Center among others.

**Our Board of Directors:** Sant La is led by a 21- member broad-based community board with representatives from the Haitian community, the business community, and key public and private agencies. Sant La's Board of Directors is chaired by the Honorable Fred Seraphin, County Court Judge.

**Our Mission:** Sant La's mission is to empower, strengthen and stabilize South Florida's Haitian community by providing free access to information and existing services to ensure its transition from a struggling immigrant community to a successful and stable one.

**Our Constituency:** Sant La serves members of the Little Haiti community, the Haitian community of South Florida, the community at large, other non-profit organizations and governmental and educational institutions.

**Our Objectives:** Sant La's objectives are to provide information and referral services in the areas of social services, education, homeownership opportunities, economic self-sufficiency, access to healthcare and legal services.

**Our Staff:** Sant La boasts a professional staff of academic, linguistic and cultural competence. Our staff is knowledgeable about the Haitian community and has earned its trust and respect because of our history of involvement in numerous community initiatives.

## II. GENESIS OF THE HAITIAN COMMUNITY OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

At the dawn of the formal Haitian emigration period, the first wave of immigrants who arrived in the United States between the 1950's and the early 60's, were the professional and highly skilled Haitians exiled by the Duvalier regime. The second wave of emigration to South Florida occurred in the 1970's, and consisted mainly of persons essentially from the middle and lower middle class, who settled primarily in the Northeastern states. During the 1970's, the socio-economic conditions in Haiti further deteriorated with widespread corruption, an increasingly repressive state, inadequate basic social and economic infrastructure and a total neglect of the peasant population. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, these problems were compounded by the inherent social inequalities in Haiti. This gave rise to a mass exodus consisting primarily of poor peasants and urban dwellers who became known as the "Haitian Boat People." Haitians fled deteriorating conditions in Haiti and traveled by boat to the Bahamas and Florida in hope of a better life. While some reunited with family members living in other U.S. regions, the great majority remained in Florida. They settled, for the most part, in the South Florida communities of Pompano Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Overtown, and Edison/Little River.

Today, the "Boat People" phenomenon persists more than ever, because the socio-economic conditions that engendered it also persist. In fact, today, a greater number of Haitians of all social origins are compelled to leave Haiti to seek safe haven and a better life in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Once inhabited mostly by middle-class whites, the City of Miami became the highest point of concentration of Haitian refugees in South Florida throughout the 1970's and 1980's. By the late 1970's, there was a solid presence of Haitians in the Edison/Little River area. Because massive groups of Haitian refugees settled throughout this enclave, the neighborhood was christened "Little Haiti".

Simultaneous to the influx of Haitian refugees directly from the island nation and the Bahamas, there was a continuous wave of Haitian migration to Florida from the Northeastern United States and Canada. The latter group consisted of first generation immigrants who had worked arduously for many years, were fleeing the cold weather and were seeking an alternative environment similar to Haiti's tropical climate and lifestyle. These groups established themselves in such neighborhoods as Kendall, Miami Shores, North Miami, El Portal, and Miami Gardens. As the financial condition of Haitians who established themselves in Little Haiti improved, they also moved further north of Miami-Dade County and have also settled in large numbers in neighboring Broward County.

Today, the estimated 400,000 Haitians and Haitian-Americans who inhabit the cities of North Miami, Miami Shores, El Portal, Opa Locka, North Miami Beach, Homestead, Florida City and various sections of unincorporated Dade County include both Haitian "boat people" and Haitians who relocated from the Northeastern States.

Over the years, the Haitian-American community of Miami-Dade County has increasingly affirmed its position as a growing, thriving and permanent element of Miami-Dade County's cultural mosaic. This group of recent refugees, turned immigrants, turned American citizens, has fought many battles and has endured many controversies. Haitians have come a long way since the 1970's. This past decade, eight Haitian-Americans were elected or appointed to office in various South Florida jurisdictions, including the State Legislature.

Although firmly on the path to the socio-economic and political mainstream, there still exist a number of socio-economic problems affecting the quality of life of a great number of Haitians.

### **III. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY NEEDS**

In Miami-Dade County, multiple needs assessments have been conducted to gain greater insight into critical issues affecting specific communities. While policy makers have become increasingly aware of the specificity of needs affecting Haitian-Americans residing in Miami-Dade County, the needs of the Haitian community have not always been identified and documented through a systematic process that directly engages community residents. In recognition of this gap, Sant La has, for the past two years, conducted surveys and focus group sessions gauging issues related to gaps in access and service delivery in the Haitian community. We have administered surveys and facilitated focus group discussions around issues related to youth crime, crime reporting, neighborhood services, child welfare needs, health access as well as elderly needs. We are currently preparing to conduct a series of such activities around issues related to the needs of the Haitian Workforce.

In addition, Sant La has systematically conferred with members of its Community-Based Organization Roundtable (the CBO Roundtable) in order to confirm emerging needs and trends such that a collective strategy could be developed. The CBO Roundtable members, who for the most part are neighborhood-based providers, are well positioned to articulate neighborhood needs as expressed by their respective clients.

The following description of issues affecting the community and the analysis of existing gaps in services are based on information collected in our continual efforts to assess community needs.

## IV. NEEDS, SERVICES AND GAPS

### A. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Needs:** The unemployment rate among low-skilled and limited-English-proficient Haitians is very high. In Little Haiti, it is estimated that 40% of the workforce is unemployed and increasingly unemployable. This problem stems from the job market's growing reliance on a skilled labor force as well as the absence of appropriate training opportunities to meet the needs of the present Haitian workforce.

#### **Agencies providing these services:**

- ? **Catholic Charities, Little Haiti One-Stop:** The Little Haiti One-Stop Career Center provides assistance with unemployment claims, job-search, placement, career-counseling and veteran's services.
- ? **Haitian American Foundation, Inc.:** provides assistance with job-search and placement as well job-preparedness counseling.
- ? **Jobs for Miami:** provides assistance with unemployment claims, job-search and placement, career counseling, veteran's services and job-training.

**Gap Analysis:** Most agencies providing job-placement services for the past 20 years have relied heavily on the hospitality industry (hotels and restaurants) to place a labor force, which was for the most part, barely English-proficient and functionally illiterate. While the demand for employment remains very high, especially among unskilled workers, the sectors which have traditionally supplied job opportunities are increasingly demanding a cadre of better skilled employees.

**Suburbanization of Job market:** Reflecting national trends, rapid suburbanization and population growth have created employment opportunities in areas away from the urban core where most low-income residents live. In heavily transit-dependent communities such as Little Haiti and North Miami, the absence of an adequate public transportation system makes access to these new job markets extremely difficult.

**Job Training/ Skill building programs:** While training programs abound, they target, for the most part, younger and relatively better-educated clients enrolled in federally funded programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). There is a presumption that trainees have had some educational experience, are proficient in English and are at least functionally literate. Many low-skilled Haitians who register for these programs are unable to keep up because of language and educational barriers. Haitian immigrants are heavily represented in programs such as nurses' assistant or day-care workers which destine them for low-paying jobs.

The Haitian workforce is one which has earned a reputation in Miami-Dade County for an unparalleled work-ethic. The challenge to keep that population gainfully employed or employable is to provide training programs tailored to its educational potential but that

also consider its literacy levels or alternatively, to create job-training and literacy programs that improve the skills of this important segment of the labor force.

## **B. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE**

**Needs:** Emergency assistance in Miami-Dade County is defined as the provision of immediate assistance for rent, food and utilities. The high rates of unemployment and underemployment in the Haitian community make access to emergency assistance extremely critical.

### **Agencies Providing Emergency Assistance:**

- ? **Catholic Charities, Pierre Toussaint Center:** Located in Little Haiti, offers an Emergency Food & Shelter Assistance Program including rent and utility assistance as well as food vouchers. These services are based upon the availability of funds.
- ? **Center for Information and Orientation:** Located in Little Haiti, offers an Emergency Food & Shelter Assistance Program including rent and utility assistance as well as food vouchers. These services are based upon the availability of funds.
- ? **Haitian Organization of Women:** Located in Homestead, offers an Emergency Food & Shelter Assistance Program including rent and utility assistance as well as food vouchers. These services are based-upon the availability of funds
- ? **Little Haiti/ Little River Community Action Agency:** A county agency located in Little Haiti, offers an Emergency Food & Shelter Assistance Program including rent and utility assistance. These services are based upon the availability of funds.
- ? **Camillus House:** Located in downtown Miami, Camillus House provides emergency rental assistance through its Homeless Prevention Program. Under this program individuals or families who are at imminent risk of homelessness may receive this one-time emergency rental assistance. In order to secure such assistance, clients are required to participate in a mandatory case management program for a minimum of six months and must prove that their rent went unpaid because of a temporary crisis. These services are provided based upon the availability of funds. There is no Creole-speaking staff at Camillus House's Emergency assistance program. The agency's eligibility requirements make it very difficult for Haitian clients to qualify for the Homeless Prevention Program.
- ? **Miami-Dade Community Action Agency:** A County agency located in Liberty City (near Little Haiti), offers Emergency Food & Shelter Assistance including rent and utility assistance. These services are provided upon the availability of funds.

**Gap Analysis:** Assistance provided is based on the availability of funds, which for the most part, run out pretty quickly. Although some agencies providing emergency assistance are able to secure funding throughout the year, there is no system of information sharing, which would keep other community based service providers aware of the availability of emergency assistance. Caseworkers must call emergency assistance providers on a weekly basis to find out whether these funds are obtainable. Under such circumstances, clients have to be referred to multiple agencies. Consequently, they find themselves going from one agency to another looking for the right fit between their needs, the agency's eligibility requirements as well as requests for documentation, hoping that they can access services before funds run out.

Most, if not all, emergency assistance programs require the following documentation: proof of income, a social security card, and a court-ordered eviction notice. The documents requested sometimes pose major barriers to access to emergency rental or utility assistance.

- ? **Proof of income:** Emergency funds will not be disbursed to individuals who cannot prove that they have the ability to make monthly payments. What is required is a pay stub or verifiable proof that the applicant is working. This requirement usually disqualifies persons such as street vendors, day laborers, housekeepers, seamstresses, tailors, cooks who are either self-employed or otherwise involved in the informal economy.
- ? **Court-ordered eviction notices:** Most of the agencies providing emergency assistance require a court-ordered eviction notice. Such notice is very different from a three-day notice, since it obligates the landlord to incur the court fees related to this procedure. This approach is obviously costly to both landlord and tenant. When a property owner is forced to go to court to obtain the court mandated eviction order, the relationship with the tenant is usually strained to a point of no return. Moreover, even if the tenant is allowed to remain, the court fees will most probably be added to the amount owed.

It must also be noted that rental arrangements are different in the Haitian community. In light of their financial realities, many Haitians sublet rooms or in-law quarters from other Haitians. These rental agreements are for the most part verbal, and do not involve any formal written contracts. When the tenant is experiencing difficulty in paying rent and seeks emergency assistance, the landlord is usually extremely reluctant to provide any written proof of their contractual relationship. Landlords rarely go to court to evict their tenants, as they are both ignorant of the laws which regulate landlord/ tenant relationships. The renter can thus be evicted when locks are changed and personal effects are removed from the property.

## C. HEALTH

**Needs:** Access to healthcare in the Haitian community is hindered by lack of health insurance, underenrollment in existing subsidized programs and lack of information about the need for preventive health care <sup>1</sup>.

The Florida Health Insurance Study (2000) indicated that Little Haiti has between 25% and 43% non-elderly uninsured residents. The University of Miami School of Medicine (UMSM) reports that 50% of Haitians under the age of 65 are uninsured, the highest rate of any other ethnic group<sup>2</sup>. The Health Policy Authority's Report entitled North Miami Dade Health Initiative of 2002 identified Little Haiti, particularly, zip code 33127, as one of the areas which exceeds the total Miami-Dade County rate for a majority of the ten leading causes of death. Low-income Haitian families have limited access to preventive care and are in need of supportive services to improve the quality of their lives.

Many low-income Haitian families who may qualify for existing federal and state subsidized programs such as Medicaid or KidCare (a state health insurance program for children in low-income households) fail to take advantage of these programs. Under-enrollment is due in part to the family's immigration status, lack of information about existing services and the fear of public charge issue as it relates to petitioning for relatives still in Haiti or future prospects for citizenship.

A great number of low-income Haitians come from areas of Haiti where preventive health care is not available and medical services are sought only in case of severe illness. This practice of seeking medical care in case of grave illness is one still deeply ingrained in this community's cultural practices. Consequently, many low-income Haitians who seek medical care in moments of crisis as well as those who do not have health coverage, access health services by going to the public hospitals' emergency rooms. Such uses of local hospitals' emergency facilities raise the costs associated with "indigent" health care and interfere with the hospitals' capacity to respond to other emergencies.

### **Agencies Providing Services:**

- ? **Center for Haitian Studies (CHS):** Located in Little Haiti, its mission is to improve health in the Haitian community. CHS offers multiple programs the majority of which focus on HIV/AIDS testing, education and outreach. CHS offers a community-based clinic where residents can get limited medical services.
  
- ? **Anna Pierre Health Education Center (APHEC):** Located in the city of North Miami, it provides HIV counseling and testing, diabetes screening, high blood pressure screening, health education via radio and television, health fairs, referrals to area primary care centers and hospitals for follow-up care.
  
- ? **Haitian American Association Against Cancer, Inc (HAAAC):** Its mission is to help save lives through education and early detection of cancer. HAAAC

offers workshops, seminars and forums on cancer awareness, emphasizing methods of prevention and early detection; referrals to clinical exams including breast examinations, mammograms, cervical exams and prostate examinations.

- ? **Haitian Neighborhood Center, Sant La:** Located in Little Haiti, Sant La, while not providing direct services, works with other neighborhood-based organizations to build community capacity around issues of health access. Sant La and community partners (the Little Haiti Community Collaborative) have begun formal relationships with safety-net providers serving the Haitian community and has provided cultural sensitivity training to improve staff interaction with their Haitian clients. The Collaborative has created health asset maps, where traditional and non-traditional providers (Voodoo healers) of health related services have been identified. Moreover, the Collaborative has conducted a series of focus group sessions as well as surveys gauging members of the community attitude about health care issues. The Collaborative has also compiled a comprehensive list of herbal remedies commonly used for specific ailments.

**Gap Analysis:** While the demand for health care is relatively high in the Haitian community, access to preventive health care is hampered by several factors which include:

- ? Deeply rooted cultural practices of residents who have not had access to health care in Haiti.
- ? Lack of full-service primary care centers in Haitian enclaves and/or lack of information regarding availability of services.
- ? Lack of cultural competency by most safety-net providers.
- ? Lack of programs to address the preventive health-care needs of the undocumented.
- ? Lack of information in the community (health literacy), about the importance of prevention and early detection.
- ? Lack of information by the safety-net providers about cultural issues and practices which may be critical to care and recovery.

Access to culturally sensitive information and services are key issues which must be addressed in dealing with access to healthcare in the Haitian community.

## D. HOUSING

**Needs:** The housing needs in the Haitian community are diverse. Both home purchasing and affordable rental units are become more difficult for the working poor.<sup>3</sup>

**Home Ownership:** Home ownership is extremely important to Haitians. It represents both security, and the ultimate symbol of having achieved success. While many working class Haitians have been able to attain their goals of owning a home, it is becoming more difficult for low-income individuals to realize that dream.

Little Haiti's average income of \$14,000 reflects the general earning patterns of the county's low-skilled and low-income Haitian population. These factors combined with other requirements of good credit and a steady employment history, render it very difficult for low-income residents to qualify for affordable home ownership opportunities. The boom in real estate prices in Miami, and more specifically in its urban core, makes the construction of affordable housing very costly for the not-for-profits which have traditionally offered home-ownership opportunities for low-income residents.

**Renters:** The renter-occupied rate is very high in low-income Haitian-American enclaves. For example, in Little Haiti, the rate of residents renting their units is over 60%, which leaves that particular community extremely vulnerable to gentrification. Such a trend has already transformed neighborhoods such as Buena Vista, which were formerly considered part of Little Haiti into more affluent and gentrified destinations.

The "Boarders" phenomenon is also very widespread in the Haitian community. In the boarding house setting, boarders renting a room pay an average of \$200 a month. If those rates are calculated on a square footage basis, the rates in the Little Haiti / North Miami areas represent some of the highest rates per square foot in the county.

One of the major issues associated with out-migration from those core neighborhoods is that families move into areas lacking the cultural and institutional infrastructure able and ready to understand their needs. This phenomenon is evident in the cities of North Miami and North Miami Beach, where schools and police departments have had to struggle to improve relations with the significant influx of Haitian residents migrating from Little Haiti.

### **Agencies Providing the Services:**

- ? **Little Haiti Housing Association (LHHA):** Located in Little Haiti, it provides an array of housing related services to residents of Little Haiti. LHHA offers programs which aim to move low-income residents into home-ownership by providing financial counseling, education and foreclosure prevention services. In order to qualify for LHHA's home-ownership program, applicants must show proof of eligibility which include:
  - U.S. citizenship or permanent residency

- At least two years in present job
- Annual income of at least \$13,500
- At least \$3,000 in savings in a financial institution
- Good credit history

**Gap Analysis:** The ability to purchase a home, especially for low-income families, hinges on issues related to financial literacy. Besides Little Haiti Housing Association, whose sphere of interest is somewhat limited to Little Haiti, there are no other agencies or programs which have taken on the task of providing the community-at-large with basic principles of financial literacy. Moreover, when homeowners or potential buyers have to deal with unscrupulous realtors, finance companies and home-improvement contractors, they are totally in the dark about their rights under the law.

Renters need access to information about their rights and responsibilities as well as available legal services, to protect themselves from unlawful evictions.

## **E. FAMILY SERVICES**

**Needs:** Haitian parents in need of support fit the general profile of the low-income, low-skilled immigrants who came to South Florida in massive numbers during the 1980's. In addition to bringing with them their "cultural baggage" which may be in conflict with local attitudes, these parents' lack of literacy and English language skills render them vulnerable to raising children who may potentially become ungovernable. These parents are trapped in low-paying occupations and sometimes work two or three jobs to make ends meet. The necessity to work does not give them the opportunity to spend time with their children, in "loco parentis". This unfortunate situation exacerbates parents' pre-existing attitudes and cultural constructs about parenting roles as well as the responsibility of schools and teachers vis-à-vis their children. Parents expect the school and more specifically the teacher, to both instruct and discipline their children. They are in general minimally involved with the schools, that is, with their children's teachers and counselors. Active engagement with the school usually means time taken away from work. Many parents also fear that frequent calls from their children's school may result in loss of employment<sup>4</sup>.

In the past, when youngsters developed problem behaviors, parents felt that they could send them to Haiti, because of the strict discipline and respect for authority figures. Haiti's situation has deteriorated to the point where parents no longer consider this option a viable alternative. Parents are now looking for local solutions. Very few are interested in attending parenting programs<sup>5</sup>. They feel powerless and strongly believe that only the "system" can exert control over their children. Generally, when asked about support or assistance, they will request that their children be enrolled in structured programs or be sent away to boot camp. Consequently Haitian parents have been known to jeopardize their children's chances of rehabilitation, hoping that they will be sent away to an institution, which will isolate them from negative "environmental" forces.

### **Agencies which provide Services:**

**Fann Aysisien Nan Myami (Haitian Women of Miami)** located in Little Haiti, FANM focuses on providing case management, mental health counseling, social service referrals for benefits and other economic assistance as well as parenting classes.

**Haitian American Foundation, Inc. (HAFI):** Located in Little Haiti, HAFI's, Project Kombit, provides workshops on issues such as parenting.

**Catholic Charities, Pierre Toussaint Center:** Also located in Little Haiti, the Center provides comprehensive services to refugee families. Families must however be categorically eligible to qualify for service.

**Cuban Haitian Refugee Family Program (County program):** All programs funded through the County's Cuban-Haitian programs are restricted to eligible refugee families.

**Gap Analysis:** Access to services usually occurs in times of crisis. Parents seek help when they are ordered to do so by the court system, or when their children run into problems with the juvenile justice system.

- ? The availability of parenting programs for Haitian parents is again subject to funding priorities. Agencies which have built the capacity to provide such programs may be unable to continue with their services for lack of funding.
- ? Parents are not aware of the services available to assist them in parenting their children.
- ? Parents rarely use resources available through the public school system.

While everyone agrees that Haitian families need help, the lack of political will to provide sustained and long-term support for working programs and the absence of comprehensive and culturally sensitive programs results in a lack of coordination in what is still a very piece-meal delivery of services. Access to information and education about the need for preventive intervention is also critical.

## F. YOUTH SERVICES

**Needs:** Haitian youth have now been identified as Miami-Dade County's most at-risk group (in terms of becoming juvenile delinquents, vulnerable to gun violence, performing poorly academically, at-risk of teen pregnancy and at-risk of contracting STDs)<sup>6</sup>. The proliferation of violent Haitian-dominated youth gangs has reached epidemic levels in most Haitian enclaves. In Little Haiti, for example, where it is estimated that two-thirds of the residents are Haitian, the number of minors (0-18) makes up about 30% (8,700) of the total population of about 29,000 residents<sup>7</sup>.

### **Agencies Providing Services:**

**Youth Expressions:** Offers programming centered on the expressive arts of young persons to develop positive communications skills and acquire vocational skills and workplace readiness.

**Center for Orientation and Information:** Offers after-school programs for boys and girls ages 7-15. Children receive homework assistance and take part in activities such as field trips, Haitian history classes and neighborhood clean-ups.

**Center for Haitian Studies:** Offers two youth oriented programs: a program for at-risk teenagers and psychological services to Haitian adolescents.

**Haitian Awareness and Cultural Foundation:** One of the newest organizations whose mission is to help the youth realize their potential. HACF aims to provide after-school programs through cultural activities for at-risk youth in the Edison/Little Haiti areas.

**Haitian American Youth of Tomorrow (HAYOT):** HAYOT's mission is to eliminate all barriers keeping youth from higher learning. HAYOT works with undocumented immigrant youth seeking access to an affordable college education.

**GALATA Inc.:** Located in Miami Dade County's southernmost city, offers social service assistance to Haitians residing in the Homestead/Florida City areas. GALATA offers a youth program and provides assistance with homework, counseling and youth activities.

**Catholic Charities, Pierre Toussaint Center:** offers after-school homework assistance, youth recreational activities and teenage pregnancy prevention.

**Little Haiti Housing Association:** Located in Little Haiti, LHHA offers a computer clubhouse for kids ages 8-18 to teach them how to create projects of their choice using state-of-the-art computers and software.

**Gap Analysis:** While the demand for structured and sustained programs for Haitian-American youth is extremely high, the availability of programs is very much dependent on funding opportunities. Although we have listed 8 agencies providing services, their

programs are limited and are not predictably available on a year-to-year basis. What may be available at one agency in a given year, may not be available the following year for lack of funding.

The needs of Haitian-American youth, as identified by the youth themselves<sup>8</sup> as well as professionals in the field, are as follows:

- ? After-school programs
- ? Skill building opportunities
- ? Employment opportunities
- ? Mental Health counseling
- ? Gang abatement programs

## **G. ELDERLY SERVICES**

**Needs:** The aging trend in Miami's Haitian community reflects Countywide demographic changes. The elderly represent a growing and most vulnerable sector of the population<sup>9</sup>. Isolation and physical frailty increase the level of vulnerability for elders. Although the community-at-large has a wide variety of resources for the elderly, many cannot use these services because of lack of transportation. Moreover, access to these services is made more difficult for Haitian elders because of the paucity of culturally and linguistically competent services.

Some Haitian elders who have immigrated to the U.S. at an advanced age, and have not worked the requisite numbers of quarters, cannot qualify for social security benefits. Others, who have been able to live and work in this country, in spite of their undocumented status, are now faced with the prospects of aging without the safety-net resources available to their documented counterparts.

The social isolation of Haitian elders is worsened by insufficient culturally-sensitive senior centers. The existing ones are as follows:

**Haitian Elderly Center:** Located in Little Haiti, the Haitian Senior Center is the only of its kind throughout the entire county. The center offers day care facilities for Creole speaking elders. It has the capacity to serve up to 70 clients. Transportation, meals and some recreational activities are provided.

**Catholic Charities, Pierre Toussaint Center:** Located in Little Haiti, the Pierre Toussaint Center offers an elderly refugee program to help elderly refugees become citizens.

**Haitian American Foundation, Inc. (HAFI):** Located in Little Haiti, HAFI provides assistance to about 200 Haitian elders. In addition to its case management, HAFI provides wrap around senior service referrals.

**Gap Analysis:** As the Haitian-American community ages, its needs must be reflected in the delivery of elder services. Although agencies serving the elderly county-wide are becoming increasingly aware of the Creole-speaking elderly community, Haitian elders are still considered very hard to reach. The need for information about available services and the lack of a central one-stop center where Haitian elders can access information and resources remains unmet. Increased attention will have to be paid to issues dealing with:

- Culturally competent staff
- Undocumented elders with medical and financial needs
- Social isolation (linguistic and cultural)
- Education and information about existing services
- Improved access to available services

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We have identified the gaps in services which impact upon our community's ability to access much needed assistance. We will draw upon our assessment of the issues to make recommendations addressing the gaps in services identified in this report.

### **Workforce Development:**

The issue of job placement and training in this community is a complex one. It involves multiple institutions in diverse jurisdictions. A comprehensive strategy to tackle this issue must involve Federal, State and local agencies. It also involves the commitment on the part of the following institutions, namely Workforce Florida, Miami Dade College and Miami Dade County Public Schools and Adult Education programs, to understand and address the specificity of needs, demonstrated by low-skilled and limited-English-proficient Haitian workers. Sant La is willing to convene a task force, composed of representatives from educational institutions, job training consortium and community agencies, whose sole purpose would be to address these needs and formulate practical and implementable sets of recommendations.

### **Emergency Assistance:**

As a community identified as one of the poorest in the country by the decennial Census, it is evident that agencies will inevitably run-out of emergency funds. However, what is not so clear, is whether all residents in need of these services are provided equal access. The models utilized to determine eligibility are based upon very different cultural norms from which Haitian immigrants operate. For instance, the practice of subletting space, the custom of entering into oral rental contracts, the avoidance of court involvement on the part of both landlords and tenants, clearly run counter to the requirements by agencies doling out emergency assistance based-upon the legal documentation of such relationships. They require court-ordered eviction notices and other formal documentation of landlord-tenant relationships. Our recommendation is that agencies, especially those receiving County and State funding, devise alternative methods of documenting needs. Such an effort would ensure fair access to emergency services by members of the Haitian community who, in spite of their needs for such services, have been considered categorically ineligible.

### **Health:**

As stated earlier, access to healthcare in the Haitian community has been hindered by lack of health insurance, underenrollment in existing programs and the lack of information about the need for preventive health-care. A few initiatives are underway to improve access to health-care by identifying barriers and by educating the community about existing opportunities such as United Way's, Community Voices' Health Access Initiative. We recommend that these efforts receive continued community support, investments and greater commitment from major health providers in order to remove, when possible, the institutional barriers to health access.

**Housing:**

The housing affordability problem is one which is felt Countywide. The solution is not an easy one, but one which requires greater attention from elected officials and policy-makers. In a market where informal housing relationships provide somewhat of a relief to a problem which has reached crisis proportions, municipalities need to take a second look at their zoning requirements and amend them to reflect the communities social and economic realities.

The promotion of homeownership programs which encourage entrepreneurship should be pursued. The addition of legally-permitted rental-units would alleviate affordability issues while creating affordable rental opportunities. On-going education efforts should be promoted to ensure that these transactions are conducted within legal parameters and should emphasize the rights and responsibilities of both renters and owners.

**Family Services:**

The need for Family services which include education as well as family intervention programs are well documented. Funders and policy-makers are paying attention to this issue and have committed funds and resources to address the problem. While we must advocate for increased resources to sustain and support existing family services programs, we must also advocate for the improved coordination of efforts and resources amongst agencies providing family services.

**Youth Services:**

As stated in the gap analysis, the needs of Haitian-American youth must be addressed through the provision of after-school programs, summer employment opportunities, skill-building programs, mental health counseling, gang-abatement programs and in the case of family services, family counseling programs. In order to generate sustainable outcomes, support for these programs must be provided on a long-term basis.

**Elderly Services:**

The Haitian elderly population of Miami-Dade County is growing. As its numbers increase, so do its needs. As stated in the gap analysis, such needs must be reflected in the range of services delivered to Miami-Dade County's elderly population. The reactivation of a Haitian Elders Task Force at the Alliance for Aging, an area agency on the elderly, should be encouraged. The Haitian Elderly Task Force was composed of representatives of different state and local agencies providing services to the elderly. Additionally, continued education and outreach efforts should be encouraged to inform aging Haitian and Haitian-Americans about available services.

## ENDNOTES

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