

Neighbourhood Heat Wave Response

Climate Communications Case Story



Intrinsic Value Framing



Social Norms and Prompts

PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

Project Title: Climate Resilience and High-Rise Communities: The Neighbourhood Heat Wave Response

Location: St. James Town, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Project Partners: Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW), Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), Local Volunteers, City of Toronto Collaborative Stakeholders, Community Organizations, Service Providers

Date: Launched in May, 2022

Climate Issue: Urban heat waves and climate resilience

Action Area: Community-led climate adaptation

Behavioural Theme(s): Intrinsic Value Framing, Social Norms and Prompts

Audience: Residents of high-rise buildings in St. James Town, particularly climate-vulnerable populations such as older adults, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions



This project is built on the idea that usually the first people we turn to for help in emergency situations are our neighbours, who can play an important role in supporting each other.

— CREW Toronto article on TEA Blog²²

IMPACT STORY

High-density urban areas like St. James Town in Toronto are particularly susceptible to the escalating severity and frequency of heat waves due to infrastructure that traps heat, such as pavement and tall buildings. Additionally, many older high-rise buildings in these areas are ill-equipped to cope with prolonged periods of extreme heat, thus posing significant health risks to residents. The Neighbourhood Heat Wave Response project was initiated in May 2022 to address these challenges. Through collaboration with local community partners and residents, a comprehensive protocol was developed to help mitigate the immediate impacts of heatwaves. Using community networks to drive and disseminate effective solutions among high-rise residents, the project builds on the idea that people turn to their neighbours as a first point of contact in emergency situations and recognizes the importance of these connections.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES INCLUDE...

- Developing a heatwave protocol tailored to the unique needs of vertical communities in high-density urban centres;
- Supporting community members to lead efforts around climate change adaptation and emergency response; and,
- Building community resilience through the reinforcement of preexisting community networks and the creation of new ones.

COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- **Community Engagement:** A wide array of local volunteers, community organizations, and service providers were engaged to co-create and disseminate an emergency preparedness and response model.
- **Knowledge-sharing:** Volunteers supported community members in telling their stories and engaged them in knowledge-sharing activities to help learn about and promote community climate resilience efforts.

BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES & TAKEAWAYS

- **Intrinsic Value Framing:** The importance of community care and collective action are emphasized in order to motivate participation and engagement.
- **Social Norms and Prompts:** Residents are encouraged to support each other during heat waves through neighbourly check-ins and community activities.

CO-BENEFITS

- **Enhanced Community Resilience:** The program equips residents with the knowledge and tools to better withstand and respond to heatwave conditions, thereby reducing heat-related health risks.
- **Community Led Adaptation:** As a resident-driven initiative, this project demonstrates the effectiveness of community-led approaches when it comes to developing practical solutions for increased climate resilience.
- **Strengthened Collaboration:** The collaboration between community members, local organizations, and governmental bodies fostered a stronger, more integrated approach to urban climate challenges.

CONCLUSION

The Neighbourhood Heatwave Response project in St. James Town exemplifies a successful community led initiative that enhances neighbourhood resilience to climate induced heat waves. Using a combination of values-based collaboration emphasizing community care in conjunction with social prompts designed to encourage residents to see themselves as a part of the solution, the project responds to the issue at hand while strengthening overall community resilience to climate change. As a result, it reflects the importance of centering community voices and local engagement to create tailored solutions that can effectively respond to climate change impacts.

SOURCES

Crew Toronto. (2023, July 6). Project overview: Community-led climate resilience in St James Town. *Toronto Environmental Alliance*. https://www.torontoenvironment.org/community_led_climate_resilience_st_james_town

Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW). (2023). Neighbourhood Heatwave Response Project. <https://crewresilience.ca/our-projects/neighbourhood-heatwaves-response-project/>

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MORE CASE STUDIES AND RESOURCES ONLINE

This case story was developed by ICLEI Canada through the Ontario Resource Centre for Climate Adaptation (ORCCA) as part of a Climate Communications Toolkit. Find more case stories and additional climate communications resources online at icleicanada.org/project/climate-communications-toolkit

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CLIMATE COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

