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Environmental Education Through the Lenses of Minority Cultures and Interfaith Dialogue in Brownsville Proposal

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Today's environmental education has been developed from the lens of the upper-middle class, disconnected from the realities of low-income minority communities. Research has shown that climate change impacts the underserved disproportionately. Brownsville was a home for black Miami during segregation and once it ended, much of the middle-class left. Then, the drug and violence epidemic of the 1990s ravaged this community. Currently, Brownsville is a food desert with 0% job growth rate last year, a 5.5% incarceration rate (six times higher than the national average), a median household income of \$18,000, and is among the nation's lowest census districts in upward social mobility. Environmental challenges in this neighborhood are numerous including illegal dumping, inadequate waste collection and disposal, minimal tree canopy, no recycling, swale parking, and little water conservation. Here environmental degradation is a consequence of: (1) municipal and communal neglect, (2) lack of sustained environmental education in schools, and (3) disengagement from faith communities- the main organizers of civic society.

Brownsville is a primarily African-American area of Miami in unincorporated Miami-Dade. By the mid-1960s, Brownsville was a thriving community of black professionals. However, the end of segregation, race riots in 1968 and 1980, and drugs in the 1990s brought about the black flight of middle and upper-class families from this historic neighborhood. According to Opportunity Atlas, children born in this area are highly unlikely to move into a higher socioeconomic class in adulthood. 38% of families in this area are single-family households. Most of its schools are failing (F) or near failing (D) according to the Florida Department of Education's annual report card. In the Roosevelt Park neighborhood of Brownsville surrounding Glenwood Park, 96% of children are 'economically disadvantaged' as defined by federal guidelines.

We propose in coordination with three primary schools and houses of worship in Brownsville to: (1) Develop a culturally responsive early years and elementary environmental curricula focusing on water, forestry, and recycling highlighting Native and African-American: local history, religious ethos towards the environment, contributions to agriculture, cuisine, ecological entrepreneurship, and responses to climate change. (2) Create sustainable edible gardens at each school as hand-on curricula to help students increase knowledge about plant-based nutrition and improved environment (3) Engage local faith communities through interfaith dialogue and presentations to their congregations on water pollution, environmental preservation and solid waste reduction. As Brownsville changes through climate gentrification, it is important to encourage environmentalism through a local historically grounded environmental education and engage our faith communities to contribute to the discussion for solutions. The idea behind the initiative is that repairing the environment is an act of social justice that can create a safe and beautiful space for the community and spur ecological entrepreneurship. We believe that healthy, green living starts with children and families therefore we engage schools, families, and faith communities in our area to preserve the environment.