



# CASE STUDY | Strengthening the Role of Faith-Based Organizations to Support Emergency Preparedness

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## TORONTO, ON

Canadians hear progressively bad news about extreme weather conditions across Canada: flooding in New Brunswick, windstorms in Southern Ontario, wildfires in Alberta and British Columbia. Over the coming years, Canadian municipalities are bound to face a severe climate event. Emergency preparedness is increasingly important as communities plan their response to extreme events and the best path to recovery afterward. Ron Dwyer-Voss, who has written extensively about discovering the power in communities, says that the principle asset in a disaster is social capital. Ron states that “Your neighbours have everything to do with improving your immediate chances in a disaster.” Neighbours, and their collective extended connections, will determine how well and how quickly your community will recover.

All levels of government ask residents to create an emergency kit and a plan that ensures they can look after themselves for at least the first 72 hours of an emergency. Most Canadians, especially those who live in cities, have never made those preparations. There is an obvious need for robust messaging, education and action around local community response and recovery.

Faith groups can add great value to local emergency response structures and systems. Many of them already serve their most vulnerable neighbours through regular drop-in or meal programs. Others provide overnight shelter through initiatives such as *Out of the Cold*. Faith groups offer local community connections, volunteer mobilization, and locally relevant resources that can enhance response and recovery effectiveness.

Faith & the Common Good (FCG) is a national, non-sectarian charitable network dedicated to assist and inspire religious congregations and spiritual groups of all backgrounds to take collective action in creating more sustainable communities. Having previous experience working with diverse faith

### FAITH & THE COMMON GOOD

**Faith & the Common Good is a national, interfaith network founded in 2000 on the belief that Canada’s diverse faith congregations and spiritual communities can be powerful role models for the common good. The network is composed of people of faith, hope and spirit who, despite their differences in theology, dress and culture, share a calling to protect our ecosystem and a passion for community services**

groups to support climate mitigation, in 2017, FCG launched the Lighthouse Project. The project works to examine how community based assets, such as faith communities, could be harnessed more effectively to help vulnerable residents cope with climate impacts.

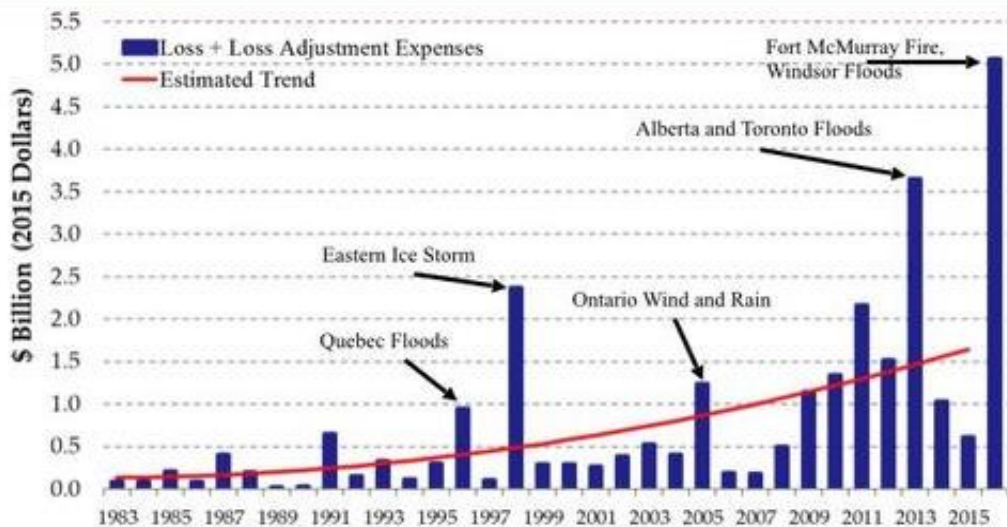
## HISTORY OF THE LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT

In 2015, FCG conducted a proof of concept study to understand how Toronto’s diverse faith communities could be better utilized during extreme weather emergencies. This year-long study looked at faith sites across Toronto, included public workshops, asset mapping, emergency preparation training and lots of collaboration.

The 2015 pilot identified the multiple benefits of faith sites as resilience hubs, along with some of the barriers to participation, such as the financial costs of providing safe refuge. A document with a detailed budget reflecting different levels of engagement by the faith organization is available from FCG’s [website](#).

This early work led to the development of the current Lighthouse Project which explores three different models of faith engagement that can build local climate resilience. In the Brampton model, the municipality’s commitment to faith-based partnerships provides the backbone of the work. In Toronto and Hamilton, the work is community led with faith sites as key collaborative partners.

## Catastrophic insured losses - Canada



Source: Insurance Bureau of Canada, Lapp Calamai



**THREE KEY IDEAS INFORM THIS PROJECT'S APPROACH TO LOCAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE:****IDEA #1**

Faith communities engage in both community service and care for the environment. As familiar landmarks in vulnerable neighbourhoods, they have the facilities and networks that make them the ideal sites or catalysts for 'resilience hubs.'

**IDEA #2**

Neighbourhoods are most resilient when residents know each other, have multiple active networks, care for their vulnerable neighbours, and have committed and tangible external supports.

**IDEA #3**

Every community is different; this pilot will first ask what concerns are central to each. The answers to that question will inform outreach strategies, processes and goals. Each community-led pilot will be distinct and relevant to its own needs.

**PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS**

The lead organization for the Lighthouse project is Faith & the Common Good. Its collaborative partners are::

- Sheila Murray, Community Resilience to Extreme weather (CREW), is the Lighthouse Project's manager and brings CREW's experience in communicating the need for local climate adaptation to diverse stakeholders
- The School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) is creating educational, experiential tools that deliver the experience of planning for a community response to an emergency
- City of Brampton's Office of Emergency Management is acting as the project animator for the Brampton site
- Environment Hamilton, a local ENGO dedicated to inspiring Hamiltonians to protect and enhance the environment, is the project lead in Hamilton
- St James Town Community Co-op is dedicated to enhancing food security and the climate resilience of St James Town residents is the key partner in Toronto
- Tamarack Institute's Citizens & Emergency Preparedness Community of Practice has been the project team's on-line learning community

The Lighthouse Project, a year-long pilot, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, will run until November 2018.

## THE PROCESS

Each pilot site has a Resilience Animator, whose task is to identify and engage local participation. In Hamilton and Toronto, the Animators work with community leaders, residents and faith organizations. Their work has established local Steering Committees made up of community members whose job is to create a local resilience and emergency response action plan.

Animators have also recruited outside stakeholders to their Advisory Committees which provide support to the local Steering Committees.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT HUBS

### PILOT HUBS – THE CITY OF BRAMPTON

**PARTNER:**

21 Faith-based organizations across the City of Brampton

**ABOUT THE HUB:**

Michelle Sullivan is Brampton Resilience Animator, who has led teams of volunteers for non-profit organizations, community service groups and faith-based organizations—responding to fires, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, evacuations and pandemics for well over a decade. Many of the 21 faith sites, representing a wide range of religions and already serving vulnerable populations, will become the point of rendezvous for people needing guidance and support during emergencies. At a minimum, site volunteers will check on the well-being of their vulnerable neighbours during an emergency. Volunteer outreach will be supported by a 2018 municipal campaign to make all Brampton residents aware of the Lighthouse Project.

The City of Brampton will benefit from the contributions of a great diversity of trained volunteers whose faith buildings are sited in some of the city's most vulnerable neighbourhoods. In the case of emergency these volunteers are ready to respond to the emergency manager's direction.



**PILOT HUBS – ST JAMES TOWN****PARTNER:**

St James Town Community Co-op and CREW

**ABOUT THE HUB:**

Lidia Ferreira is the Toronto Resilience Animator. In July 2017, Low Income Families Together, a founding member of the St James Town Co-op, asked CREW to help them build resilience to weather extremes in their downtown Toronto neighbourhood. St James Town's is home to one of the highest density and most diverse populations in North America. The St James Town Community Co-op had already begun to explore the possibility of a resilience hub and they enthusiastically agreed to work with their St James Town neighbours, CREW and FCG to explore the Lighthouse Project's Toronto pilot site. The goal of the project is to present a viable model for building community resilience and to co-produce a locally designed community action plan that will make a lasting contribution to St James Town.

**PILOT HUBS – BEASLEY, HAMILTON****PARTNER:**

Environment Hamilton

**ABOUT THE HUB:**

Beatrice Ekoko is Hamilton's Resilience Animator and works with Environment Hamilton's Lynda Lukasik to animate the Hamilton pilot. They both knew that they wanted to try their ideas in the neighbourhood where they worked. In 2008, Beasley was one of Canada's lowest income neighbourhoods and has great NGOs, community organizations, engaged faith groups and excellent city services. Its residents are proud of their neighbourhood but have created a host of community resources, including a Tool Lending Library and a Good Food Box program. Together with residents, faith communities and other community stakeholders, Beatrice is in the process of exploring the shape and form of their collective response to climate breakdown.

## THE INTENDED OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

- Each Animator has worked with existing local networks of community partners, interfaith stakeholders and municipal advisors to choose suitable hub sites, or to establish a resilience network.
- Each Animator has recruited diverse local stakeholders to participate by hosting fun and informative Resilientville role play simulations, or Resilientville asset mapping workshops.
- In Hamilton and Toronto, steering committees are in place at each hub site, where local stakeholders are designing and developing action plan recommendations that especially consider their most vulnerable neighbours.
- Brampton's Emergency Management Office has negotiated and signed contracts with its faith partners.
- Toronto's process of resident engagement has taken place in English as a Second Language classes, homework clubs, apartment lobbies, community gardens and much more. It has a strong network of residents. Faith groups and other stakeholders who are engaged in sustainable work on food security, local resilience, and emergency preparedness.
- Hamilton's stakeholder engagement points to a rich and broad network of faith groups and community leaders that reaches far beyond the pilot neighbourhood. Hamilton Public Health is a close partner and uses CREW tools and Lighthouse Project strategies to support its community climate adaptation strategy.
- Project evaluation is modelled on Allison Hendricks' Evaluation Framework. Evaluation Consultant is Katie Hayes, PhD Candidate

## SUSTAINABILITY

The Lighthouse Project's pilot sites will finish the term of the grant with a community structure that's either ready to implement, or has already begun to implement its Community Action Plan. This structure will represent an educated and growing network that has the support of external resilience stakeholders. New funding will be sought to support ongoing work as well as its replication across the community and beyond.

## CHALLENGES

- As of mid-2018, community projects that focus on climate mitigation have tended to attract significantly more funding than work that's focused on climate adaptation.
- Planning for an unidentified and unpredictable emergency requires a leap of imagination, as well as confidence in the multiple co-benefits of building neighbourhood resilience.
- Low income residents face many challenges that make life difficult. The work of planning for an unidentifiable and unpredictable emergency may seem unproductive.



- Some community agencies and organizations may find it difficult to collaborate with others who have traditionally competed with them for resources.
- Asset Based Community Development takes time. Funding realities often fail to allow for this.

## NEXT STEPS

Working together to leverage faith or community-based assets to develop hub networks of community serving organizations will provide an invaluable and cost-effective pathway for municipalities to serve our most vulnerable residents. A pathway that all municipalities can leverage regardless of size or location. The project will help municipalities determine the best methods for engaging and sustaining diverse community support around a "neighbour-helping-neighbour" extreme weather response infrastructure.

The project's community-based resilience framework will also help participating municipalities break down silos and leverage learning between climate adaptation, emergency response, sustainable development, and public health policy communities in order to better serve the most vulnerable residents. This work begins with a focus on extreme weather resilience and a special expertise in engaging faith-based organizations, but the framework will work with any neighbourhood-based, community-serving organizations (e.g. senior centres, boys and girls clubs) and could be applied to enhance local resilience to all hazards (e.g. terrorist attacks, health pandemics).



Global best practices show that recovery from extreme weather disasters does not depend on the amount of government relief or the size of the disaster – instead the bonds that tie residents together – social capital – function as the main engine of long term recovery. Neighbourhood relationships established long before any emergency occur are much more useful than trying to find the right person who you may not know during an emergency. Once established, this project's neighbourhood hub framework will work to leverage the assets of any neighbourhood-based, community-serving organizations and could be applied to enhance local resilience to all hazards.

## LEARN MORE

- Lighthouse Project website- <https://lighthouse-project.weebly.com/>
- Faith & the Common Good website- <http://www.faithcommongood.org/>
- CREW website-- <http://www.crewtoronto.ca/>