



Students at Project Lift continue to learn skilled trades during the pandemic. CONTRIBUTED BY PROJECT LIFT

Adapting in real time

Project Lift increases capacity during COVID crisis

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PALM CITY -- The youth at Project Lift in Palm City and Belle Glade are no strangers to adversity. In fact, the program is designed to build their resilience and help them adjust their sails when a

storm hits.

But what happens when a storm hits the entire community, or in the case of COVID-19, the entire country? Project Lift took a cue from the kids it serves, and adjusted its sails to not only stay open, but to actually increase services and model resilience for its young participants.

While many organizations have

struggled or failed to stay open during the COVID-19 crisis, Project Lift has seen increases in almost every area of operations. Rather than decrease programming, it did the opposite, increasing youth participation in the program from twice per week to four times, in recognition that during a crisis, at risk youth need expanded, not decreased, services.

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A Project Lift participant assists with Hobe Sound flood relief. CONTRIBUTED BY PROJECT LIFT

Lift

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This increase in services was made possible through the generous support of several funders including the Sailfish Point Foundation, The Community Foundation Martin-St. Lucie, and Children's Services Council of Martin County, who contributed a combined \$70,000 to ensure that youth at Project Lift would have access to enhanced programming during this crisis.

"On March 12th we made a decision to stay open and follow strict CDC guidelines as an essential health care business," said Bob Zacheo, Project Lift CEO. "We know that during times like this, economic stability, social interactions and resilience are key drivers to mental health functioning. Further, we knew that we would see an uptick in teenage drug overdose and suicide attempts, which drove our team to make the easy decision to stay open and adapt to a new way of life in real time in order to model resilience to the teens in our program."

Since March 12, when the coronavirus essentially shut down the world as we know it, Project Lift, a non-profit organization, has had a 33% increase in

daily capacity and has had 13 students graduate from Pathway Academy of Innovation, an in-house high school diploma program.

It facilitated getting 14 teens gainfully employed outside of Project Lift, four of whom now work for local HVAC and construction companies. Four youth have enrolled in college. And the organization intervened in five suicidal ideation events that required Baker Acts, and interceded in four teen drug overdoses.

Community service and giving back is at the heart of Project Lift's mission, and this, too, has continued during COVID. Project Lift students in the auto mechanic program repaired two vehicles which were then donated, reaching a milestone of more than 125 cars repaired and given away to needy families.

Additionally, when local disaster relief organization 25 UNITED put out the call for community partners to assist with flooded homes in Hobe Sound, Project Lift showed up with 25 individuals to help repair and clean the devastated neighborhood.

For more information about Project Lift or to learn how to partner with the organization to empower local youth, visit projectliftmc.com or call 772-221-2244.

Sailfish Point

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