



WHAT WE CARRY TOGETHER

A SOUTH FLORIDA STORY ABOUT STRESS, SURVIVAL, AND HEALING

Communities feel pain. Communities can heal too.

CREATED BY GANG ALTERNATIVE, INC. THROUGH THE COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR ADDRESSING TRAUMA AND STRESS (CAATS) INITIATIVE SERVING MIAMI-DADE, BROWARD, AND PALM BEACH COUNTIES



ABOUT CAATS



The Collective Action for Addressing Trauma and Stress (CAATS) initiative was created to raise awareness about collective trauma, strengthen community healing, and encourage honest conversations surrounding stress, violence exposure, grief, emotional wellness, and resilience throughout South Florida communities.

Gang Alternative, Inc. believes healing happens best when communities are connected to trusted relationships, safe spaces, positive alternatives, and holistic support systems.

Some names, images, and scenarios in this book are illustrative representations inspired by common community experiences throughout **Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties.**

“SOMETIMES COMMUNITIES HURT TOO”

People often think trauma only affects one person.
But communities can experience trauma together.

When neighborhoods experience violence, loss, stress, fear, instability, poverty, displacement, or constant pressure over time, people begin carrying emotional weight collectively.

Some people become anxious.

Some become angry.

Some stop sleeping well.

Some shut down emotionally.

Some learn to survive without realizing how much stress they carry.

This story is about South Florida communities carrying heavy things while still finding ways to heal.



“THE SIRENS”

Sophia lives in Miami-Dade County.

Some nights she hears sirens so often that she barely notices them anymore.

Her grandmother notices.

Every time loud noises echo outside, Sophia pauses and looks toward the window.

“You alright?” she asks softly.

“I’m good,” she replies.

But long after the noise disappears, her shoulders remain tense.

Sometimes stress stays in the body even when people try to ignore it.

“PRESSURE”

In Broward County, Malik balances school, work, and helping raise his younger brothers.

Teachers call him responsible.

Friends say he is strong.

What they do not always see:

- the exhaustion
- the anxiety
- the pressure
- the fear of bills increasing
- the responsibility he quietly carries every day

Sometimes survival looks successful from the outside.



“ON MY OWN”

Marcus is 12 years old and lives in Miami-Dade County.

Most days, he gets home before anyone else.

He makes dinner. He puts his little sister to bed.

His mom works two jobs. His dad is not around.

Nobody told Marcus he had to grow up fast.

He just did.

Sometimes the quietest children are carrying the heaviest things.



“EVERYBODY FELT IT”

When violence happens in a community,
people nearby feel it too.

Even if they did not know the person.
Even if they never saw what happened.

Stress can spread through:

- conversations
- schools
- social media
- families
- neighborhoods
- workplaces
- churches
- friend groups

People may become more anxious.

More alert.

More disconnected.

More emotionally tired.

Communities can carry trauma together.



“STORM SEASON”



In South Florida, people prepare carefully when storms are coming.

Boarded windows.

Long lines at stores.

Watching the news constantly.

Checking on family members.

But many people also carry emotional storms every day that nobody else can see.

Stress from:

- violence
- grief
- unstable housing
- financial pressure
- loss
- family conflict
- discrimination
- loneliness
- fear

Invisible stress can feel just as heavy.

“STRONG”



Mr. Raymond from Palm Beach County tells everyone he is “fine.”
He says it often.

But after years of stress, loss, long workdays, and carrying responsibility
for others, he feels emotionally exhausted.

Sometimes people think being strong means staying silent.
But healing often begins when people finally feel safe enough to talk.

“HEALING HAPPENS HERE”



Sometimes healing looks like:

- music
- art
- prayer
- laughter
- movement
- community conversations
- trusted adults
- family dinners
- support groups
- safe spaces
- checking on one another

Healing can begin anywhere people feel seen, heard, respected, and supported.



“THE ART WALL”

At a community event, youth were asked one question:
“What does healing look like to you?”

Some drew beaches.
Some drew music.
Some drew families eating together.
Some drew basketball courts.
Some drew hearts.

One youth simply wrote:
“Feeling safe.”



“THE THINGS WE CARRY”

People sometimes carry:

- grief
- stress
- violence exposure
- fear
- pressure
- anxiety
- loneliness
- anger
- disappointment
- hopelessness

But people also carry:

- resilience
- faith
- love
- creativity
- community
- determination
- hope

Hope often begins when communities stop carrying everything alone.



“CHECKING ON EACH OTHER”

A text message.

A mentor.

A conversation after school.

A neighbor asking “Are you okay?”

A support group.

A trusted adult.

A friend who listens without judgment.

Small moments of connection can matter more than people realize.
Healing often begins when people feel less alone.



“SOUTH FLORIDA HEALS TOGETHER”

Across Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties, people continue finding ways to heal together.

Every safe space matters.

Every supportive relationship matters.

Every honest conversation matters.

Communities become stronger when people do not carry everything alone.



FINAL REFLECTIONS

What is something your community carries?

What helps people feel supported?

What does healing look like to you?

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

You Are Not Alone

If you or someone you know needs support, help is available.

Gang Alternative, Inc.

Holistic services for youth, adults, and families across South Florida.

Services include:

- mentoring
- youth programs
- family strengthening
- workforce development
- violence prevention
- behavioral health support
- trauma-informed services
- community support initiatives

“HEALING STARTS WITH HONEST CONVERSATIONS”



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 Instagram



 Podcasts



 MyGA.org



 TikTok



 CAATS



 YouTube

Suggested Campaign Hashtags

#WhatWeCarryTogether #HealingSouthFlorida. #CAATSCommunityHealing
#HealingHappensTogether. #SouthFloridaHeals