Patrice Smith Gillespie from the Miami Dade Office of Community Image (OCI) had read for years about the significant social, economic, and environmental benefits provided by tree canopy and sought to demonstrate the connection between increased tree canopy and healthier communities. She contacted the Health Foundation of South Florida (HFSF) because she knew HFSF was developing relationships and working with tree deprived and underserved communities. “The timing was perfect because HFSF was working with communities on a planning process that included increasing physical activity,” reports HFSF’s Lindsay Corrales. “The folks involved in the planning saw the link between tree canopy and health, specifically in South Florida, where it’s hot for so much of the year, and it’s hard to walk comfortably.”

All of this aligns perfectly with the Miami Dade Office of Sustainability’s (OOS) vision to promote sustainability in Miami. According to Susannah Troner from OOS, “From our perspective, sustainability is a broad thing—it encompasses tree canopy and physical activity.”

HFSF provided a 1:1 match for a $50,000 grant from Partners for Places (P4P) to initiate SHADE (Shaping Healthy Active Deep-rooted Environments), an effort to plant 200 trees in two underserved areas of Miami and engage community residents and local officials to decide where to plant the trees. “Typically, we get a grant, pick a spot, and then talk to the community. This time, we got to talk to the community first … Because they got to pick where trees went, they were invested in the outcomes.”

Residents sometimes see trees as a liability, particularly during hurricane season when trees sometimes fall and damage homes and cars, but SHADE has helped community stakeholders think about trees as beautification, shade, and a spark for physical activity. The project conducted a pre-assessment of exercise rates and levels before the trees were planted; when the canopies are fuller, project staff will conduct another assessment to determine if there has been a change. There already is anecdotal evidence: residents report that more people are walking as a result of SHADE trees, and these communities are looking for more opportunities to increase their canopy.

“We were the first pebble in the pond and we’re noticing the ripples go out now. We are definitely seeing communities step up to plant more trees and experience the value.”—Patrice Smith Gillespie, Miami Dade Office of Community Image

Beyond exercise and environmental benefits, SHADE helps residents understand other benefits of augmenting the tree canopy, such as increased property values, reduced heat and stormwater runoff, and an emotionally and physically healthier community. Tree planting activities also have contributed to building a sense of place and stewardship by bringing people outdoors and fostering social interaction. Through this collaboration, the Miami Dade OSI, OCI, and HFSF have mutually assisted and supported one another in a number of ways, laying a foundation for long-term relationships and for future partnerships. Through SHADE, partners also have created a model that can be used in other communities.

**Partners for Places** is a successful matching grant program that improves U.S. and Canadian communities by building partnerships between local government sustainability leaders and place-based foundations. National funders invest in local projects developed through these partnerships to promote a healthy environment, a strong economy, and well-being for all residents. Through these investments, Partners for Places fosters long-term relationships that make our urban areas more prosperous, livable, and vibrant. For more information, please visit [fundersonnetwork.org](http://fundersonnetwork.org).