Miami Herald
HELPING PEOPLE

Can Miami close the digital divide? See what these groups are doing to narrow the gap

BY VINOD SREEHARSHA
OCTOBER 13, 2024 5:00 AM

BROWARD COUNTY

Ashton Fleureme takes a drone class at the Crockett Foundation on Friday, Sept. 20, 2024, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Sophia Bolivar *sbolivar@miamiherald.com*

In Fort Lauderdale inside an office building on a Friday afternoon in September, about 32 kids sat at round tables. Pizzas were served. One session was ending for a group of students from Margate Middle School and they were asked what they learned.

Initially, few students raised their hands. Then, cold feet turned to confidence.

"Oh, he's standing," remarked Tangy Frederick, program coordinator and leader of the session. "I see you."

The boy answered, "I learned how to make my own games and that's really fun." Applause broke out.

Frederick toyed with another kid: "Is your hand really, really up now?" She waited so he's certain and said, "We're ready for you."

The boy said, "Now I know how to fly drones."

After more questions, the MC asks them: "How many of you would be interested in potentially coming back to learn more?"

Nearly everyone raised their hands. Whoops and hollers carried through the entire office.

"All right, OK, guys, settle down," says Frederick.

This is the Crockett Foundation.

"We wanted to create a safe environment where these kids can come in and just geek out and have fun," said Henri Crockett, the group's president and co-founder.

Many participants live with single mothers, in areas rampant with drugs with limited upward mobility, he said. This is a chance for them to charge hard into animation, eSports, coding or other computer technology.

"We've got to prepare these kids for what they're going to walk into" as they get older, he said.

FORMER NFL PLAYERS COME TO THE AID

President and CEO of the Crockett Foundation Henri Crockett (left) and Vice President Zack Crockett (right) oversee a drone class on Friday, Sept. 20, 2024, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. at the Crockett Foundation. With the goal of inspiring Broward youth with innovative technologies, the two retired NFL brothers established the foundation in 2002. Sophia Bolivar *sbolivar@miamiherald.com*

Henri and his brother Zack Crockett both played in the NFL. But before that, they grew up in Pompano Beach and endured tough childhoods. But both attended Florida State University and were on its 1993 national championship team.

They started the Crockett Foundation together in 2002. Its focus has been middle school students. While it offersprograms including field trips, in recent years it expanded its program in Coding and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics, or STEAM.

The Community Foundation of Broward gave Crockett its first grant in 2010. They have since provided over $500,000 of support, said Angelica Rosa, the Community Foundation of Broward's director of community impact.

The Coding and STEAM initiative has 400 students, up from 50 in 2016 when it began this initiative.

For the 2024-25 school year, Crockett estimates having 475 students.

James Octavius, 12, has come every day after school. The seventh-grader said he loved learning coding and eSports the most.

"Without it, I think I'd be left a few steps behind," he said. Octavius wants to become a mechanical engineer and now thinks finding work at a large tech company is within reach.

Ava Richardson, also 12, loves learning coding, too.

Aiden Charles, 12, has already made a major life decision.

"I want to build robots. Building robots, yeah that's my thing," he said confidently.

Aiden is not only learning about technology. He's already an advocate. "Coding may sound boring but when you get to do it, I promise you it's not," he said.

Employers, donors and business leaders should pay attention to these kids' energy and drive, said Zack Crockett, vice president and co-founder

"These are your next employees," he said. "It would be wise to come in now and create a pathway."

HOW TO HELP

- **Crockett Foundation**

Website: https://crockettfoundation.org/programs/coding-in-academics/

To donate: https://crockettfoundation.org/get-involved/

- **Community Foundation of Broward**

Website: https://www.cfbroward.org

To donate: https://cfbroward.fcsuite.com/erp/donate/list

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