About Hope CommUnity Center

Apopka is located 12 miles northwest of Orlando and has a population of about 41,000 residents. Apopka got its name from the Seminole Indians who lived there before white settlers invaded the area. The Native peoples called the area Ahapopka: Aha, meaning "Potato," and papka, meaning "eating place." By an act of Congress—the Armed Occupation Act of 1842—all surviving natives at Ahapopka were forced to abandon their village and seek refuge deeper in the wilderness of the Florida peninsula. In 1882 white settlers officially incorporated the village as ‘Apopka.’

Surrounded by resource-rich land, Apopka became a center for agriculture—most notably its multi million dollar foliage industry. Much of the land outside of commercial and residential area is still used for agriculture. This industry depends on the labor of farm workers, most of whom are immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean.

The HOPE CommUnity Center was founded in 1971, when four Catholic nuns responded to an urgent call from the bishop to address the needs of farmworkers in the area. Before their arrival in Apopka, the nuns spent time in California with the United Farm Workers (UFW) and Cesar Chavez, learning how to work with the farmworker community. At the time, Apopka was the epicenter of an extensive orange grove operation run by Minute Maid/Coca-Cola.

Though Apopka was still very racially segregated, the four sisters—who are all white--moved into the African-American side of town where the farm workers lived, and began organizing community meetings. Most of the city funds went into the infrastructure on the white side of town; on the African-American side there were no sidewalks and very few paved roads, virtually no access to health care, and really noticeable inequalities that often violated human rights, if not, dignity. It was the birthplace of what the founding Sisters lovingly refer to as the Mother organization (originally the Office for Farmworker Ministry, and now called HCC) that would go on to give birth to a Clinic, the Farmworker Association of Florida, a Farmworker Credit Union, Legal Services Program, and community development housing project. These organizations have all survived throughout the years because they were deliberately created for the people, by the people. The Sisters truly emphasize the empowerment of the community through the education of its individuals.