

TOMPKINSVILLE AFRO-CARIBBEAN AND LATIN FOOD & SPICE MARKET



A Letter from our founder



There is a tale of two cities and it exists clearly in the borough of Staten Island. Ana sells tamales outside the fence of the local farmers' market. She is an undocumented immigrant from Oaxaca, Mexico, seeking ways to support her family. A stone's throw away is the storefront where New York City Police Officer Panteleo killed Eric Garner over illegal cigarette sales in Staten Island's most diverse urban neighborhood of Tompkinsville.

While Staten Island's school district ranks as one of the best in NYC, students from our community rank towards the bottom amongst NYC schools in reading and math, according to the NYC Citizens Committee for Children.

Our community is a food desert with few supermarket options and limited transportation. These facts worsen when you look at how Staten Islanders often travel to other boroughs to access culturally rich fresh produce relevant to African, Caribbean and Latino communities. It is not easy to come by yuca, malanga, jackfruit or callaloo on Staten Island.

As a diverse Afro-Caribbean Latinx town with many social justice needs, Staten Island also lacks a cultural-social hub to represent the many cultures, traditions, recipes, and holistic healing lores of this community. We created the Tompkinsville Afro Caribbean & Latin Food and Spice Market to not only feed the food desert but to lift local pride, combat cultural erasure and provide a space and place filled with food, spice, art, music and learning. It's the catalyst for bringing our diverse community together, lifting ancestral tradition, improving access to traditional ingredients and responding to the needs of food sovereignty.

The market is anchored by the Abuelita Masala, a multifunctional art kiosk shaped like a casita making our park a new town square where ingredients for sofrito, sounds of salsa and samba and colorful masala of art abound.

Tompkinsville is a centrifuge for social injustice and grounded in its philosophy of community development through community involvement, Staten Island Urban Center is prepared and rolls up its sleeves to run the afro caribbean market as a lab for youth workforce development; an incubator for exploring opportunities among vendors for local residents and consumers.

Alongside neighborhood folk, we are addressing social problems spearheading a campaign for peace, justice, and healing. The market is part of the healing. And vendors like Ana are welcome... no longer sitting on the outside of the fence.

Kelly Vilar
CEO and Founder
Staten Island Urban Center

Who is behind the Market?



Kelly Vilar
CEO
Staten Island Urban Center.

A dedicated advocate for community empowerment, Kelly Vilar is the founder and CEO of SI Urban Center. Passionate about social and economic justice, Vilar inspires individuals to take charge of their lives and become agents of change. With a strong commitment to youth development, she has been instrumental in shaping Staten Island's community landscape. As a member of Community Board 1, she chaired the Youth Committee and spearheaded initiatives such as the borough's first YouthBuild Staten Island program.



Sara Blas
Director
SI Therapeutic Gardens

As a mother of six and a seasoned nonprofit professional, Sarah brings a wealth of experience to her work. She currently serves as Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at SIWWM and Founder and Executive Director of Staten Island Therapeutic Gardens, an organization addressing health disparities through sustainable practices and food sovereignty. Additionally, she works for the Child Wellness Initiative at the Staten Island Partnership for Community Wellness, focusing on reducing childhood chronic diseases.



Jamilah La Salle
Executive Director
Bait UI Jamaat
House of Community

Jamilah LaSalle is a seasoned nonprofit leader with over 24 years of experience addressing community wellness on Staten Island. She has held leadership positions at Richmond Senior Services and the September 11th Families Association. As the Executive Director of House of Community, Baitul Jamaat, she works to provide food security, educational programs, mental health support, and community advocacy to underserved families throughout Staten Island.



**We bring
Visibility
Belonging
and Pride
to our
community**



Project Background

Staten Island Urban Center (SIUC), Staten Island Therapeutic Gardens, Bait-ul Jamaat, and design studio A+A+A are collaborating to revitalize Tompkinsville Park as a vibrant community asset. The project honors the memories of ancestors and uplifts the rich heritage of Afro-Caribbean and Latin communities through cultural programming, food, art, dance, and music.

The Tompkinsville Afro-Caribbean and Latin Market serves the Tompkinsville community and celebrate Afro-Caribbean and Latinx culture in Staten Island. The market features Abuelita Masala, a bright blue functional art piece that provides essential storage for the market and serves as a focal point for cultural events and art programming in the park. The piece is named after the Latinx word Abuela, meaning grandmother, to recall a powerful ancestral figure of kindness, versatility, and strength, and the word Masala, a spice mix used in Afro-Caribbean food, as a metaphor for diversity and inclusivity.

By reinforcing Tompkinsville Park as a welcoming and inclusive community hub, the initiative fosters a stronger sense of belonging and connection among residents, addressing pressing issues such as cultural food deserts, public safety, lack of multicultural representation in public spaces, and inadequate maintenance. The project is part of the Local Center's Rooted Cultures initiative aimed to uplift neighborhood histories and diverse cultural identities through reclaiming public space across New York.



Mission and Goals

1
**A Safe
And Active
Town Square**

2
**Increase
Cultural
Food Access**

3
**Afro-Caribbean And
Latin Representation**





Abuelita Masala at Tompkinsville Park



Abuelita Masala is a functional art piece measuring 9'-4" Wide x 5'-7" Deep x 9'-3" Tall and weighing approximately 750 lbs, to be fabricated off-site and assembled in the southern paved area of Tompkinsville park. The small A-frame structure holds space for the future Afro-Caribbean and Latin Food and Spice Market. The piece, which transforms from a closed position to a semi-open and fully open position, is made of 2" HSS Steel frame and infilled with extruded steel frames holding marine plywood canvases. A small storage space incorporated in the back holds market tables and tents, and a clear polycarbonate roof lets natural light in while passively collecting water for the nearby pollinator garden.

During market days, Abuelita Masala serves as an information center for the market. The rest of the days, the piece which was co-designed with Staten Island Urban Center's volunteer youth, can open and unfold in several positions to support arts and culture programming inspired by SIUC's past activations at the park. Its versatile doors and cabinets can be opened in multiple configurations to host diverse activities such as: food drives + community pantry, movie night, karaoke, free library for spices and books, arts + photography shows, etc.

Ultimately, Abuelita Masala acts as an open invitation to the community to discover and engage with local cultural programming as well as artists that represent the Afro-Caribbean and Latin heritage on site. Cultural events and seasonal art murals will be hosted as ongoing programming through the Staten Island Urban Center and Friends of Tompkinsville Park.

Market Structure



Illustrations of the mural by Urechi Oguguo

The versatile Art structure was designed by design studio A+A+A through a community first approach that included design workshops with youth from Staten Island Urban Center's summer program.

The ignagural murals for Abuelita Masala were designed by Brooklyn based Nigerian artist Urechi Oguguo.

Murals were painted through a community event in a paint by number process led by the artist.

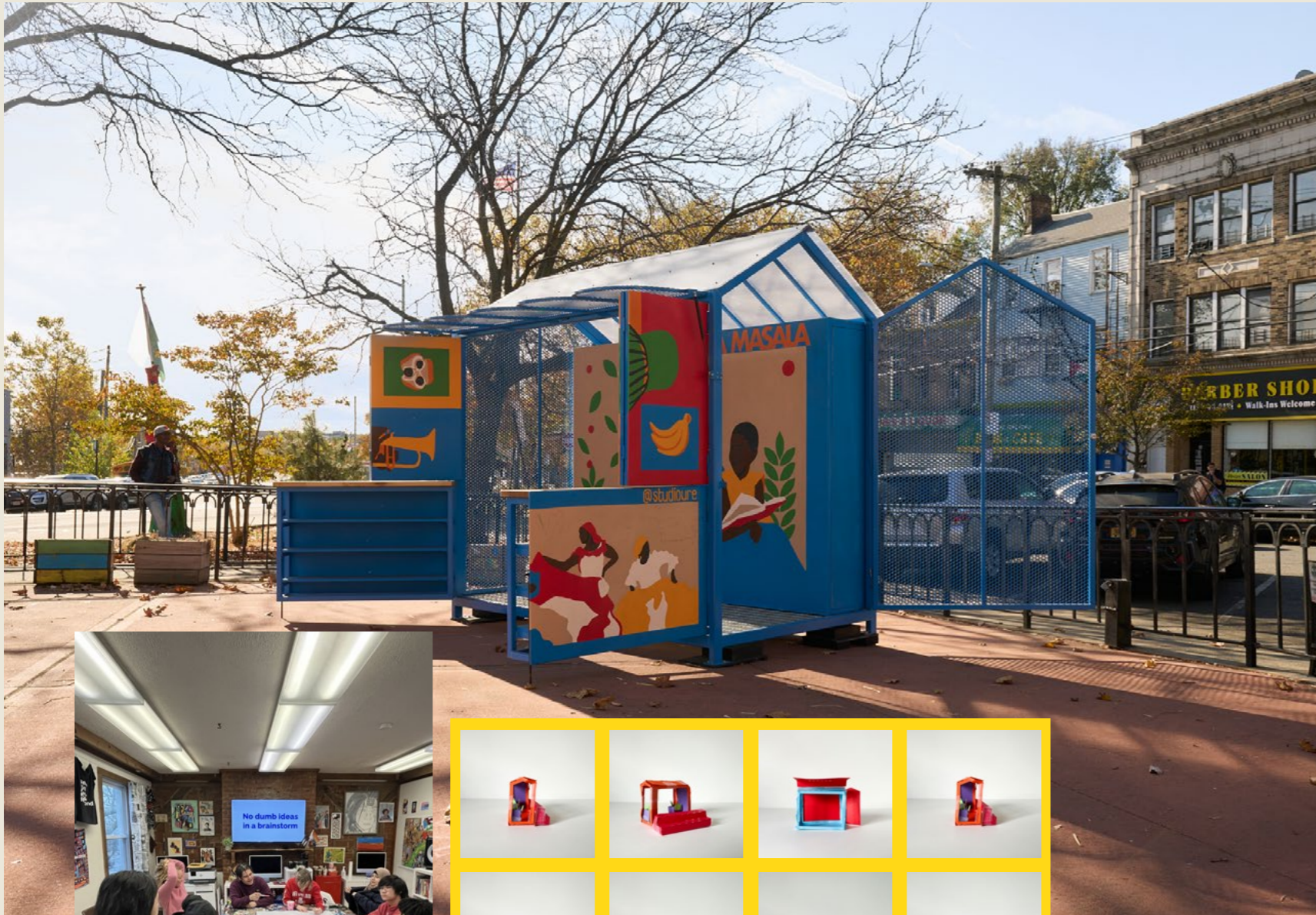
Abuelita Masala designed by design studio A+A+A



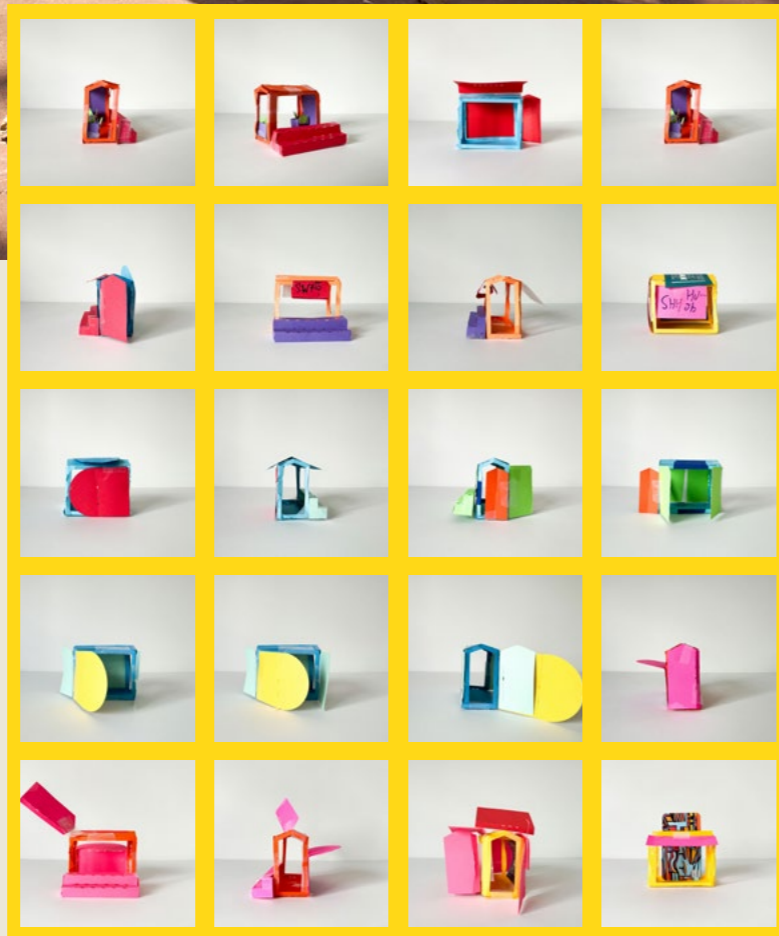
Abuelita Masala is an open invitation to discover local Afro-Caribbean and Latinx culture and artists

Process

Abuelita Masala October 2024



Design workshop with A+A+A.



Paper models by SIUC Youth.



Young community member expertly paints the mural.



Urechi Oguguo paints mural with community help.



Design workshop, SIUC Youth create versatile structures.



Community painting session.

Programming



Costume Contest
Harvest Fest and Dia de los Muertos



Photo Booth
Harvest Fest and Dia de los Muertos



Pumpkin Patch
Harvest Fest and Dia de los Muertos



Drum Circle
Afro-Caribbean and Latin Market



DJ Lena Outdoor set
Latinx Heritage Month Celebration



Leopoldo F. Fleming &
The Afro Caribbean Jazz Ensemble



Painting and art crafts



Painting and art crafts



Drum exhibition



Soap Box & Poetry Open Mic



Salsa Dancing
Salsa Sunday



Holiday Celebration at Tompkinsville Park

2024 Small Businesses



Olga Ayala, Olga Ayala's Handicraft



Olga Ayala, Olga Ayala's Handicraft



Jonathan Padro, Padro's Kitchen



Anona Designs



Monica, Moni's Kitchen



A's Perfections Knafeh Parfaits



Alex Sabataer, Dabbie Quinonez Sofrito



SI Therapeutic Gardens



Marie Gemrose Art



Jah American Kitchen BBQ



Clorophyll and Chill



Saul Porter, Market Manager



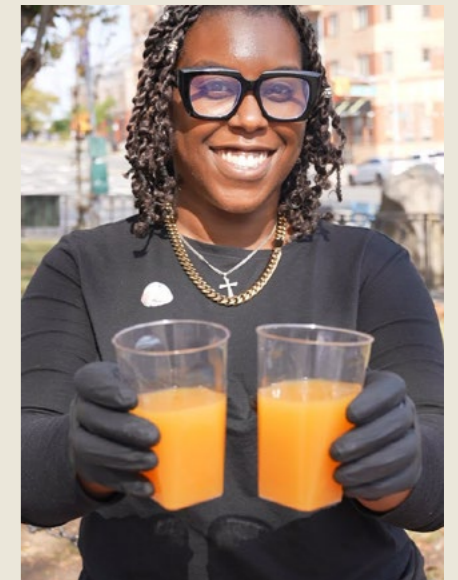
Maria, Mami Taco



Saul Porter, Market Manager



Anona Designs



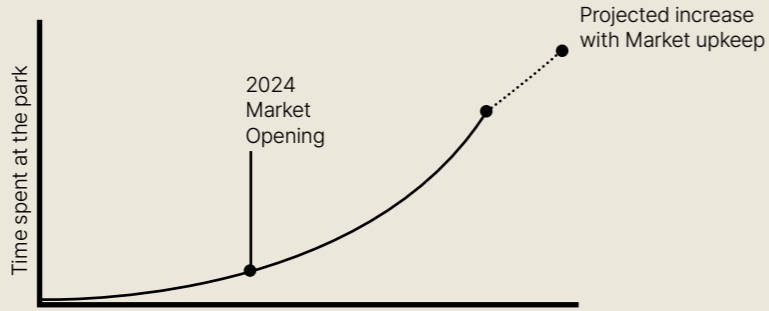
Clarissa, Liquify

Impact

Park Usage

250%

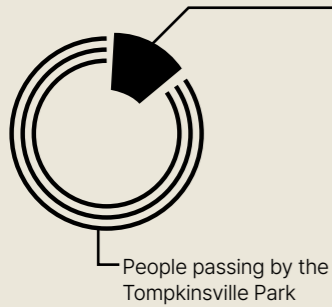
Increase in likelihood of spending time in Tompkinsville Park reported via surveys after Abuelita Masala was installed and activated versus before.



Small Business Support

15%

Increase in likelihood of visting small businesses and vendors in the neighborhood after Abuelita Masala was installed.



Sense of Safety



"It feels nice now that more events and people [are] coming here. With more people coming there's less drug use."



"Seeing other residents here enjoying the space makes it feel safe."



"It's better after SIUC starting holding free events in the park that are family and neighborhood friendly."

* All data was collected by SIUC through post occupancy surveys before, during and after the opening of the market. Icons by Noun-Project.

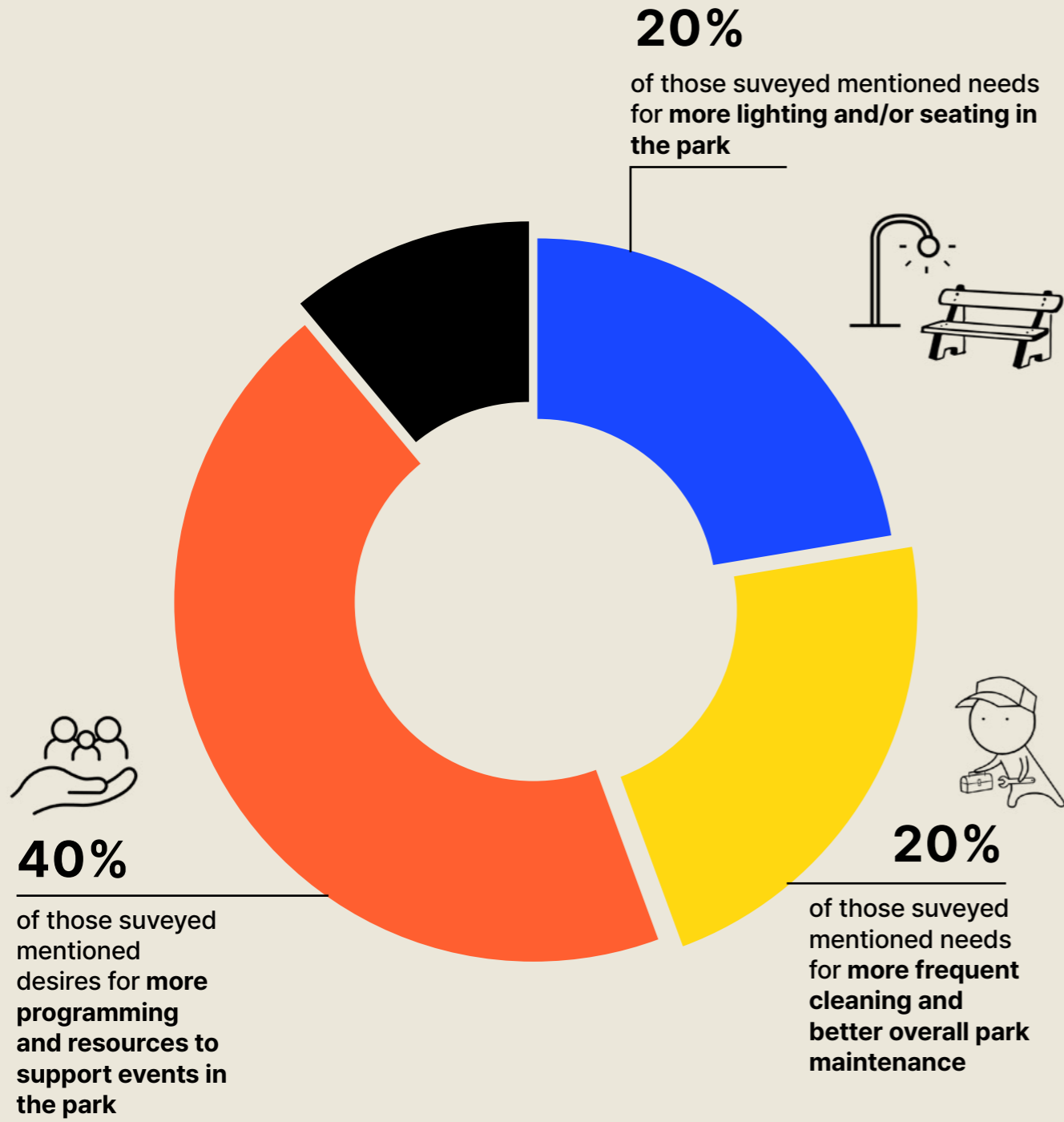
"The Abuelita Masala installation, created with the design team A+A+A, is a powerful example of how a little infrastructure can support spaces like Tompkinsville Park come alive with music, culture, food, and art. We can't wait to see what's next!"

Daniel McPhee, Executive Director Urban Design Forum



Impact

Opportunities for Continued Park Improvement



"The market embodies holistic community development so beautifully, with joyful cultural representation, access to fresh food, support for local vendors, community healing and so much more. We are grateful to support SIUC and their partners in bringing their vision to life."

Barika Williams, Executive Director, Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD).

Today

Since the opening of the Afro Caribbean and Latin Food & Spice Market on Sept 15th

2024 Tompkinsville Park

has been home to **15 Community Events**

Including

6 Sunday Market Activations

9 Arts and Cultural engagements

3 Musical performances

Providing

200% Increased Access to cultural foods.

supported

10 Diverse Vendors & Small Business

Empowered

12 Youth members



Future Vision

Tomorrow

Looking towards the future

2025 - 2030 Tompkinsville Park

30 More Community Events, yearly.

Including

20 Sunday Market Activations

During the Spring, Summer and Fall.

20

Arts and Cultural engagements

Establish

New Farm to Market fresh food providers

Empower

25 Youth members

Through Food Industry Work-force Training





"I grew up here, learned to cook and built a small business to serve my community. This is beautiful."

Jonathan Padro of Padro's Kitchen

"Even though I have been a long time resident, artist and entrepreneur in this community, my business grew in other areas of the city. Bringing a quality culturally based market to this neighborhood finally gives me an opportunity to grow my business here."

Olga Ayla of Olga Ayala's Handicraft



"Working at the market was a great opportunity. I got to learn about a little bit of everything. I learned about set up, food, working with customers, vendors and my teammates."

Poetry Williams (age 16)



"This was a cool opportunity. I not only worked hard helping people, I got to sing. I love performing and the crowd was encouraging"

Jordan Clerk (age 16)



Collaborators



Lead Designers / Architects

A+A+A is a design studio led by Andrea Chiney, Arianna Deane, and Ashely Kuo. Founded in 2018 with the belief that design impacts all people, everywhere (for better or worse) we strive to make the process more inclusive, collaborative, and joyful. Working at all scales, we create thoughtfully-designed objects, experiences, and spaces.



Fabricators

T J Set Design and Fabrication LLC is a company specializing in set design, props, and custom fabrications. Their work has graced the pages of top-tier fashion magazines like Harper's Bazaar, Town & Country, and GQ, and has been featured in campaigns for brands such as Tommy Hilfiger and Frederic Malle.



Mural Artist

Urechi Oguguo is a Brooklyn-based artist, illustrator, architectural designer, and storyteller whose work reimagines rest, care, and connection within the vibrant expressions of Black identity and other marginalized voices. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, Urechi draws on a rich tapestry of experiences, creating across digital illustration, textile crafts, spatial design, and user-centered digital design. Her work celebrates art as a joyful exploration, amplifying themes of community, contemplation, and celebration.



Engineer

Hubert Chang is a senior engineer at Silman Engineering. He is passionate about the intersection between architecture and engineering, and stays active in various professional organizations, building interdisciplinary ties in the built environment community and engaging with the public.



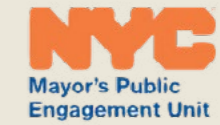
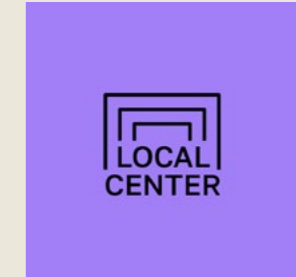
Videographer

Shani Mitchell is an Artist and photographer based in Staten Island. graduate from the SIUC youth program and current youth leader, she expertly documented the first season of Tompkinsville Afro Caribbean and Latin Market.

Videographer

DaeQuan Alexander Collier is a Bronx-born filmmaker and writer whose work aims to document, respond, and reimagine the complexities of the human experience. Through his practice, Collier hopes to create engaging work that facilitates conversations about identity and its implications.

Supporters



**THANK
YOU**

To learn more about the Market contact
Kelly Vilar : kelly@siurbancenter.org

Graphic Desingn: Studio A+A+A
2025