

PARK HILL COMMUNITY MARKET



**A COMMITMENT TO
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
EDUCATION, AND
U.S. CITIZENSHIP**



This case study is a project of Napela Inc and Staten Island Arts Folklife, in partnership with Creative Transformations: Arts, Culture and Public Housing Communities, a program of 21 citywide partners organized by Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY).

www.napelanyc.org | www.facebook.com/NapelaInc/

by Tom Oesau and Katie Aiken





ADAMA FASSAH (Figure 1)
**Founder and Executive Director,
Napela Inc and Park Hill
Community Market organizer**

This case study is made possible thanks to Adama Fassah, founder and Executive Director of Napela Inc and organizer of Park Hill Community Market. Adama also identifies as a wife, mother, grandmother, nurse’s assistant, caterer, and Liberian immigrant living in the Castleton section of Staten Island. If you have questions or resources to share with Adama, visit www.napelanyc.org or email her at adama@napelanyc.org.

STATEN ISLAND ARTS AND NATURALLY OCCURRING CULTURAL DISTRICTS NY (NOCD-NY)

Staten Island Arts is the borough’s arts council, cultivating a sustainable and diverse cultural community for the people of Staten Island. Staten Island Arts is a core member of Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY), a citywide alliance of cultural networks and community leaders that have joined together to revitalize New York City from the neighborhood up. Napela and Staten Island Arts have joined 19 citywide partners for NOCD-NY’s Creative Transformations: Arts, Culture and Public Housing Communities program to explore and strengthen ways that public housing residents are engaging with arts and culture to build civic engagement, participation, healing, and relationships with their neighbors.

Thank you to Bernadette Ludwig, PhD (Wagner College), Christopher Mulé (CityLore and Brooklyn Arts Council), Elizabeth Bennett (Staten Island Arts), Caron Atlas (NOCD-NY), and Danielle Jackson (writer and consultant) for their contributions.

Napela Inc, a non-profit organization on Staten Island’s North Shore, is comprised of West African and other immigrant and refugee women who are committed to American English language aptitude, improving knowledge around U.S. citizenship, and entrepreneurship. Several participants connect all of these pieces together on summer afternoons at Park Hill Community Market, where they set up vendor stalls and create an open-air cultural marketplace in a former parking lot at Park Hill Apartments, a HUD Section 8 development. They sell clothes, fabrics, specialty produce, prepared foods, traditional drinks, and secondhand items, preserving and passing on cultures and building social cohesion in the process.

Staten Island Arts and Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY) interviewed founder and Executive Director Adama Fassah to take inventory of the history, mission, and objectives of Napela Inc and Park Hill Community Market, both to share learnings and to develop strategies for the future. The story is organized by section:

- **Welcome to Park Hill**
- **Determining Needs Together**
- **A Place for Napela and Park Hill Community Market**
- **The Market: A Holistic Approach**
- **Organizing Structure**
- **Communicating Value**
- **Sustainability and Support**
- **New Strategies**

WELCOME TO PARK HILL

Adama Fassah (Figure 1) was introduced to the West African community of residents living in Park Hill through an assessment project she undertook in 2008. Through the International Rescue Committee (IRC) she interviewed parents about how their children could better benefit from their U.S.-earned incomes. In the community, it is common practice for earnings to be transferred to extended family members abroad, sometimes perceived as compromising their children’s opportunities at home. Communication is strained

between parents and children by ruptured intergenerational understanding, with parents referencing West African culture and customs and children embracing urban American culture, which is further compounded by families living in poor, high crime risk neighborhoods (Ludwig 2013).*

Adama focused on understanding the skills and resources needed by parents and grandparents. She reflects, “Coming from a cultural environment where it takes a village to raise a child, parents didn’t really understand that it was imperative to support their kids here, spending time with them and having dinner together.” Adults were also challenged with understanding American English and the manner of interacting with institutional structures, including parent-teacher dynamics in New York City schools. Youth had become the gatekeepers of information, so Adama was looking to break down parental inhibitions and restore a sense of leadership. She explains, “Not understanding the school system and not knowing how to work with report cards embattled me with my own son’s education. I didn’t want someone else going through the same thing.”

DETERMINING NEEDS “TOGETHER”

Growing out of the IRC project, collaborative groups brought outside resources to help Adama continue her organizing momentum. On Staten Island’s North Shore, she hosted planning workshops and a community dinner at the YMCA Counseling Service-North Shore Center and a local church, where upwards of 60 women voiced priorities for the Park Hill community, including the creation of a childcare cooperative and the need for a formalized, secure market space to minimize the risks of vending out of homes and on the streets. Soon, she was hired by [United Activities Unlimited \(UAU\)](#) to teach American English, U.S. citizenship preparation classes, and small business skills out of PS 18 in the neighborhood of New Brighton. But each meeting required complimentary Metro-card rides or shuttles for attendees. Adama recalls the obvious, “We need to move to Park Hill!”

The adult learning program eventually found its way home. [African Refuge](#) temporarily lent their Park Hill

Adama focused on understanding the skills and resources needed by parents and grandparents.

office space and education center for meetings. Local planning and programming grants—JP Morgan Chase ‘Arts in Our Communities’ (2012) and New York City Councilmember Debi Rose (CD 49)—were administered under fiscal sponsor Sauti Yetu. From its advent, the program was involved with a number of projects of the Staten Island Arts Folklife program, including the Cultural Feedback Project, Ethnic Foodways Project, Liberian Folktales project, and has benefitted from NYSCA, NEA and Con Edison grants that have funded Staten Island Arts’ Folklife program, including technical assistance services. Encouraged by former Staten Island Arts Directors of Folklife Christopher Mulé and Naomi Sturm, Adama established the group’s 501(c)(3) status. The members chose Napela Inc from a list of potential names. Adama clarifies, “Napela means ‘togetherness’ in Kissi, a language of Lofa County, Liberia. We came from nothing, but



Liberian Storytelling, photo: Staten Island Arts Folklife

Adama has been able to navigate a complicated public housing environment because she knows she has the backing of the West African community in Park Hill that wants to continue a market culture rooted in their ancestry.

in sticking together, we were able to make it work.” Napela’s mission was established: to improve and sustain the livelihood of immigrant women and families through increased aptitude in American English reading and writing, improved navigation around U.S. citizenship status, business and entrepreneurial skill building, and cultural and social empowerment. These goals help people adjust to life in the United States and strengthen their communities.

Napela’s organizing strategy is based in establishing common ground, earning trust, and reciprocating efforts. When Staten Island Liberian Community Association (SILCA) introduced Adama to local residents through the local food pantry, she would distribute food and help them clean up. She recalls, “We spoke the same language, so they understood, ‘She’s one of us. If we relate to her, something may come out of this.’” She has become ingrained in the community and considerate of the multiple, complex identities of its residents. For example, she asserts the importance of faith traditions in the community, scheduling around Sundays and holidays, and capitalizing on the church network to publicize Napela’s efforts.

The organization gains trust through reciprocity. When figuring out what the members needed to scale up the market structurally, such as tents, Adama asked, “They helped us with this project. How can we give back to them and to the community?”

Napela’s programs meet people where they are, strengthening existing cultural practices, responding to

needs and ensuring self-determination along the way. Adama has been able to navigate a complicated public housing environment because she knows she has the backing of the West African community in Park Hill that wants to continue a market culture rooted in their ancestry. Community buy-in is important for those interested in pursuing similar initiatives in their own neighborhoods. Adama states, “You have to know if it is something your community needs.” She identifies similar potential in the Bronx, where residents have emigrated from places like Ghana, Guinea, Togo, and Mali. She affirms, “They have markets in their home countries, too. If you’re working with these populations and they want to do it, it might work.” In Park Hill, it is not only about aligning program goals with needs, but finding practical utility. “If they say yes, they will follow through with the goals. If they don’t show a need for it, you’re wasting your time.” She has learned from examples like a mini-farm initiative brought to the neighborhood by the African Refuge. The project assumed that small scale farming in Staten Island would allow market merchants to grow their own raw materials, creating a self-generated supply chain. Someone started it and it lasted a week, because women preferred buying wholesale product. Adama explains, “It was a level of maintenance that they just didn’t need.”

A PLACE FOR NAPELA AND PARK HILL COMMUNITY MARKET

Napela and The Recreation Room

After African Refuge temporarily lent their space, Adama worked to secure a home for Napela’s adult education program in the community’s recreation room in at 160 Park Hill Avenue. In 2014, before Napela Inc was a 501(c)(3), Adama leveraged Staten Island Arts’ institutional stature to help legitimate the work and secure her initial lease with building management. In 2017, it added an after school program to further enhance American English learning for families. Adama states, “The people who need help are in Park Hill and the surrounding area. Therefore, this is where the space is. Community members can stroll down here and I don’t have to worry about how

they'll get here." The importance of having services right in the community is also supported by research (Ludwig 2016).*

The recreation room was secured through commitment and care. According to Adama, "Rain or snow, the program is here. The building manager sees that I'm consistently giving back to the community. If Napela struggles to pay the rent, I do projects here and there, such as cleaning with my personal supplies, and I bring the check to her as soon as the money is raised. If there's anything to be done, I do it." On occasion, funds are raised through initiatives by board members and Wagner College students.

Napela's social value also enhances the rental relationship, settling balances with reciprocal support or barter. For example, management sees how Napela's educational training can actually be of service to them. Adama explains, "If a tenant's apartment lease agreement expires, they may not be aware or know how to address it if they can't read. So the manager sees that our program helps keep people together and also meet their goals at the same time. American English readers can go to them, ask questions and understand the answers." Napela also attends and supports the property manager's own community-based program. Adama

asks, "You supported my program by allowing us to use the space, so how can I support yours?"

A Parking Lot Becomes a Market

In 2014, Park Hill Apartments' building management donated a section of the parking lot at 160-180 Park Hill Avenue, just outside the door from Napela's education room, to pilot a market space to formalize the longstanding practice in the community of selling produce, palm oil, prepared foods, clothes, and fabrics. Park Hill Community Market began converging Mondays through Saturdays over the summer. Consistent activation of the market made an immediate placemaking imprint. Building management put up bollards, eliminating the access of cars, generating a veritable public plaza. Adama explains, "When the market is going on all day in Park Hill, members of the community can see that. They get to know the space."

THE MARKET: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Much like the mission of Napela, Park Hill Community Market takes a comprehensive, holistic approach



Park Hill Community Market, photo: Staten Island Arts Folklife

to improving the lives of its participants. The market builds on an existing community of customers, increases economic development through vendor access and business skill building, improves health and safety in the community, and reinforces culture and social cohesion.

Economic Development

The market builds from an existing tradition of neighborhood trade through trusted relationships and reliable weekend patterns. According to Adama, “We don’t have to put out flyers or encourage people to come. Because of their background, women have histories with people here. For example, children send their friends to their moms’ businesses. And customers are committed, loyal people.” Coming together at the market space attracts each vendor’s customer base, amplifying the trade audience for everyone. Adama adds, “We also visit neighborhood churches and make announcements that ‘the market will be open at this time.’”

Focusing on economic empowerment for immigrants, especially female immigrants, the market prioritizes inclusion and eliminating barriers to access for vendors. The market operates without imposing a management or booth fee. Adama sees this as an unencumbered entry point to begin work toward other goals: “You can provide for yourself and your family, even save up some money while you’re taking American English literacy and U.S. citizenship classes.” This inclusive approach also means diversifying products for sale. Vendors have collected second-hand items and scoured yard sales, re-

HOLISTIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF NAPELA AND THE MARKET

The pillars of Napela’s adult education program come together holistically at Park Hill Community Market:

- **Small business development**
- **American English literacy**
- **U.S. Citizenship**
- **Health and Safety**
- **Culture**

“We don’t have to put out flyers or encourage people to come. Because of their background, women have histories with people here. For example, children send their friends to their moms’ businesses. And customers are committed, loyal people.”

selling items at the market. According to Adama, “Immigrants buy used things more than anything. Because durable, quality items are seen as valuable.”

Literacy and Math Education

Napela’s adult learning focus also enhances vendor savvy. As the market launched, Adama came to realize that people were taking advantage of vendors because they didn’t know how to read and write. Adama describes, “We operate from a loan system—what we call ‘credit’—and people would come to the ladies and say..., ‘Can I credit some pepper, chicken soup and bitter balls and pay you back in so and so much time?’ But people gave them false contact information. I told them, ‘We have to go to school. We have to learn basic mathematics, writing, and reading so that if someone tells you their name is Mary and provides their phone number, you can write it down and dial it from your cell phone right there at the market to make sure the phone rings! If you can count and calculate that it is \$50, you can write down the amount and know exactly how to get money from that person.’” Napela also began providing U.S. citizenship classes after observing that many of the women had been legal permanent residents in the U.S. for more than five years, and therefore eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship. Adama adds, “It is important because U.S. citizenship is a better status than a green card.”

Health and Safety

From the very beginning, centralizing the market was seen as an opportunity to improve health and safety, both for vendors and the broader community. Previ-

ously, the neighborhood's entrepreneurs were operating out of shopping carts around the corner on Bowen Street. Some still do. But Adama reflects, "No one would stand in one place in order to talk with me. It wasn't safe." They were vulnerable to harassment and theft, but also risked brushes with law enforcement. She adds, "When they were in the streets, there was always an issue with people calling the police." Moving businesses to the designated market space improved food preparation conditions and removed the vulnerability of vendors being targets. Adama reflects, "Since they arrived to the market space, we haven't had any incidents."

Reinforcing Community Culture

The market is a forum to exchange histories, strengthen intergenerational connections, and build social cohesion, shaping the community's story from their own point of view. Adama affirms, "Preserving our culture is important because our children are being born here. If we don't work on preserving our heritage now, it just gets lost." This is confirmed through research (Ludwig 2013). Efforts have been documented during programs in partnership with Staten Island Arts Folklife's Cultural Feedback Project, including song and dance performances, and a storytelling project named "Folktales

from Our Mothers." Each season's culminating festival—supported by Citizens Committee for New York City—continues the tradition of story-swapping, community news, and a place to showcase traditional and contemporary fashion. Adama describes, "It is a healthy process. If you come out to the festival, you have something you look forward to doing. You meet someone new and have fun." Despite just learning to read and write, elders remain a treasured resource for community knowledge. Adama affirms, "They will tell you everybody's history. They bring with them important traditional knowledge and values that need to be preserved."

ORGANIZING STRUCTURE

With Adama's hands full maintaining Napela's adult learning program, staffing and fundraising, market leadership is delegated within the network. Adama states, "While I was advocating out there, we decided we needed a president to represent the group and provide structure for the market. They chose a leader for themselves." As an elder leader, Ma Francis was a natu-



* Ludwig, B. (2013). Liberians: Struggles for refugee families. In N. Foner (Ed.), *One out of Three: Immigrant New York in the 21st Century* (pp. 200–222). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.



MA BETTIE ARKOI (Figure 2)
**Acting President, Park Hill
Community Market**

The successes of Ma Bettie Arkoi, the acting President of Park Hill Community Market, manifest the goals of Napela. According to Adama, “Everyone sees how far Ma Bettie has come. We just promoted her to the second grade. She reads, she writes, and she passed her U.S. citizenship exam a few years ago. For most of the students, once they get their U.S. citizenship, they don’t come back. Ma Bettie never stopped coming.” She is driven by the vision that she can return someday to her hometown in Lofa County, Liberia, open a book among her peers, read to them and say, “Look, this is what I benefited from when I went to America. I was able to achieve this.”

ral fit, but she is now challenged due to her age and health condition. Ma Bettie Arkoi, a longtime member of Napela’s adult learning program who has made tremendous strides, has become her successor (Figure 2). According to Adama, “She is a strong representative and leader that I can trust.” If Ma Bettie leaves her table at the market to head to the farm to buy wholesale produce for the group, a fellow vendor will run it for her. Adama explains, “She will keep that money for Ma Bettie because she expects Ma Bettie to do the same for her. The relationship is built.”

Farming and Produce

The vendors at Park Hill Community Market depend on two sources for fresh produce. According to Adama, “Chinese American merchants have studied everyone’s history. They know the kind of produce and vegetables that we eat more than anybody else.” For immediate access, vendors buy from Chinatown in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Shops sell harvested greens and, in sourcing and processing them, Park Hill’s vendors make their profit margin. Vendors also source their product directly from a Chinese American-run farm in New Jersey that grows bitter ball, okra, potato greens, cassava leaf, jute leaf, and Jamaican peppers that mimic a preferred spice factor. The market has also begun experimenting with other sources. A Long Island farmer has pitched his cassava leaf and Napela continues to explore whether local urban farms can source produce.

Expanding Vendors

The market is still figuring out how to collaborate with new audiences. This partly explains its evolving name, which has grown from Park Hill African Market to Immigrant Market to Community Market. Adama clarifies, “It is an immigrant market space. It is not a Liberian market space. It is not a West African market space.” Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean vendors have



Park Hill Community Market, photo: Staten Island Arts Folklife, Anna Mulé

been present at the market since its early days. And a couple of West Indian vendors joined the 2017 season. Adama adds, “If you live in Stapleton, Clifton, St. George, wherever in Staten Island, I think you can use the market space. It is what the space is for...to help people. And it is literally free, so why not make use of that?” Recently, Adama welcomed six devoted Spanish-speaking students to Napela’s adult learning program, referred through YMCA Counseling Service-North Shore Center, and is figuring out how to connect this new community to the market as well. She explains, “Instead of standing on the street, facing a hard day of labor where you may not even get paid...come to the market space! At least there you know that you get to keep what you make that day.”

A Model Learning From Other Models

The market is a rare and innovative opportunity for a community living in public housing. According to Christopher Mulé—Media Specialist at CityLore, Folk Arts Director at Brooklyn Arts Council and former Director of Folklife at Staten Island Arts—states, “Park Hill Community Market is a model for community building and cultural expression citywide. To make it stronger, it could use reinforcement with programming, agricultural practices and biodiversity, and underscoring the cultural aspects of goods sold.” The market is eager to learn from other creative and successful structures across the city. They will be trading information with ARTs East New York’s ReNew Lots initiative at NOCD-NY’s Peer Learning Exchange: Marketplaces and Entrepreneurship planned for November 2018. Like ReNew Lots’ use of shipping containers, Adama dreams of a scenario where physical shelter can extend opportunity. “If it is a container of shared ‘mini stores,’ the market could run rain or shine and for an extended season. And you can lock up your booth and avoid problems carting materials back home.”

COMMUNICATING VALUE

The value of the market resonates locally, but Napela continues to refine how it describes economic and social value to outside audiences. Staten Island Arts connected Napela to the Rotary Club of Staten Island in 2013, but

“If you live in Stapleton, Clifton, St. George, wherever in Staten Island, I think you can use the market space. It is what the space is for... to help people.”

emphasized a need for the women to formulate their own message about the market’s benefits. Adama affirmed, “You’re looking at the importance of the work, the safety and value that it brings to community, the way it changes people’s lives. Most of the women that sell at the market have never worked a conventional job in their life. Instead of looking for aid, they can provide for themselves.” And it has a ripple effect. “What the ladies do is hire young boys in the community to put the tents up and take them down for them. So someone who is unable to get hired or employed by other businesses around the community, they get opportunities from the ladies.”

Forming this language and promoting for themselves provides social recognition in the broader community and a climate of self- and civic advocacy. According to Christopher Mulé, “The most impactful part of Napela’s work has been creating an organization and series of public facing projects that put the narrative of Liberians on Staten Island in the hands of multiple generations of women. A classist and racist media narrative and a climate of politics surrounding this community had made it challenging for a diversity of activities, voices, and opportunities to exist. The market allows the West African women of Staten Island to share their culture with the community and provides a point of entry for the broader community.” Adama explains, “If the ladies had not met the business people from the Rotary Club, would they have known anything about us? People in our community were so happy to know that they could socialize and have lunch with people in the broader community who have money and power. They said that we made the room so colorful and nice.” Their meeting with the Rotary Club garnered a donation of \$3,000 for durable tents that the

“The most impactful part of Napela’s work has been ...[putting] the narrative of Liberians on Staten Island in the hands of multiple generations of women. A classist and racist media narrative and a climate of politics surrounding this community had made it challenging for a diversity of activities, voices, and opportunities to exist. The market allows the West African women of Staten Island to share their culture with the community and provides a point of entry for the broader community.”

- Christopher Mulé, CityLore and Brooklyn Arts Council

women use to this day. Adama recently spoke on a panel at St. John’s University and met Staten Island’s Community Board 1 District Manager Joseph Carroll. She states, “He was happy to meet me and hear our example of how other immigrants are making an impact. It reinforces that there are immigrants that give back to their communities. It is a gap that we’re trying to bridge.”

Napela is always brainstorming about ways to expand its audience. In 2017, it circulated its first press kit to announce the annual culminating festival that garnered attention from local Staten Island media. In 2018, they plan to start a social media campaign early and place signs throughout the neighborhood. They are also exploring the idea of recruiting outside performance groups, who tend to attract their own following.

Concerns Around Civic Advocacy

In the process of applying for U.S. citizenship and scaling up their businesses, the community walks a thin line in sharing their process outside of the community. In the early stages of the project, under Sauti Yetu, the group was connected with the Staten Island Borough President’s Office to see if they could help donate a space and build a market shelter. When the Borough President’s office asked for an accounting of the women involved, vendors backed off. Adama recalls, “The elders expressed fear to the others, saying ‘You’re going to allow Adama to mislead you. You’re trying to build something that you could lose.’”

SUSTAINABILITY AND SUPPORT

Commitment and Resourcefulness

The organization depends on the boundless energy of an altruistic, inspirational leader. And her commitment is contagious. She builds individualized relationships and figures out how to facilitate everything moving together as one unit. Adama says, “When you don’t have much or a lot of options, you learn to work with what you have. I just find all the reasons why you should help us achieve a goal and how you’re going to feel at the end of the day. People see that we’re committed to doing it and they get curious.” There is a small orchestra of people supporting programs, from dedicated board members to Adama’s husband managing tech at the festival. Wagner College students—including **Bonner Leaders**, especially **Abigail Dorcin**, and students in Wagner College’s First Year Learning Program—volunteer their time in the adult education program tutoring, creating lesson plans, and organizing book drives. The Park Hill community often operates on a barter and trade system, exchanging services and relying on social norms to maintain reciprocity, which is a reliable and resilient system that buttresses the local cash economy.

Restricted Funding and General Operating Support

Historically, Napela has relied on restricted funding for project-specific goals, ensuring financial transparency to

fundraising and community members. For example, money raised through the Tents for Culture campaign (through Gofundme.com) and the Rotary Club's donation went exclusively to purchasing tents. Because vendors store tents in their homes, donor logos affirm who contributed them. A vendor reiterates, "If they give Adama money for something, she likes to spend it on that."

Restricted funding can open up opportunities, but alters relationships when a project ends with the conclusion of funding. Staten Island Arts' institutional presence added legitimacy for property management when Napela's adult education program secured their lease for the recreation room, but Adama was left to renegotiate the premium lease when the grant ended. Staten Island Arts also functioned as an intermediary during Napela's introduction to the Rotary Club, but a key staff departure severed the connection. According to Adama, "I have to figure out how to rebuild that relationship."

Adama often fills general operating gaps through volunteers and soliciting board member and Wagner College student donations, thus would like to create a plan for more diverse and unrestricted funding. Adama explains, "To grow, we need a reliable source of income to pay the rent, carve out some office space, cover teacher fees, buy books, run cultural programs, get insurance, and adjust to needs. And when you come to a structure such as the market, it is not a classroom that is fiscally regular. The dance performance is different from year to year, so you always need new costumes. But we may be confined to a grant that says 'only buy tables.'"

Napela would like an office at 160 Park Hill to provide a sense of permanence that will allow Napela and the market to grow. Adama explains, "My office is on the phone. It is a serious problem and every day I think about that. If students and vendors knew that we had office hours, I would be able concentrate on talking to them. We could put up a bulletin board and students' pictures so that you could walk in and see that people here are achieving things."

NEW STRATEGIES

Fundraising

A key goal for Napela's fundraising is to gain support for building organizational capacity. NOCD-

NY's Creative Transformations program has learned the importance of flexible funding where support responds to community needs. In the case of Napela, some support originally allocated for physical infrastructure has shifted to help with insurance and secure space for a fundraising dinner. Napela also plans to return to past fundraising successes, rebuilding relationships that were formed when they were a project of other non-profits. They are working with partners to brainstorm crowdsourcing campaigns and direct donations to their website (Donate now! www.napelanyc.org/donate). Community generated fundraising will build on past successes in hosting dinners and parties.

Napela continues to gain savvy in navigating grant application processes. They are confident in their credentials to manage projects, but would like to build their strategy in targeting requests for proposals and writing grants. They recently worked on a joint grant proposal with a consultant, something they would like to continue in the future. Adama states, "To write a grant is difficult: the terms and the vocabulary. It is good to feed a person, but it is also good to teach a person to feed themselves." They are developing language that clarifies project-



Park Hill Community Market and Festival, photo: Staten Island Arts Folklife

LESSONS LEARNED

Align Your Mission with Existing Practices

- Don't reinvent the wheel...build from cultural assets and practices already present in your community
- Reduce barriers of access for vendors and patrons to maximize participation

Support Community

- Establish common ground, earn trust, and reciprocate efforts. It may take time, but it can be an effective organizing strategy to embed community ownership
- Create a place that is a consistent, active reminder of neighborhood culture
- Commitment and care, sometimes relying on informal exchange and barter, can increase the social value of the project and build in financial resilience

Design a Sustainable Structure

- Look for trusted leadership within the community that can help manage day-to-day issues among a network of project participants and foster leadership development
- Unrestricted financial support should pair with project-specific funding, strengthening administrative infrastructure and allowing flexibility for shifting program goals or needs
- Share stories that help the community connect, but also document narratives along the way to communicate value and compel outside audiences to support your project
- Seek out groups doing similar work in their communities to cross-market and learn from one another. Also seek sources, like farmers' groups and produce merchants, that can contribute existing infrastructure to your project

specific goals while supporting sustained management. With work straddling realms of adult education, immigration, economic development, arts and culture, and placemaking, new funding opportunities are promising.

Leadership

Napela's five board members bring diverse individual talents: building collaborations, executing projects, and leading fundraising efforts. Adama is looking for additional skills for future board members, partners, and volunteers. As a small organization, they appreciate a person who can wear many hats. According to Adama, "Besides one, our board members are all immigrants. I'm looking for someone who can share skills across the spectrum: video recording, taking pictures, assisting with our website, writing grants, raising funds, and helping us communicate with American English speakers." She is also looking for people with stature in the field and an established, citywide reputation who can connect the dots. She explains, "Someone who can open doors to places that wouldn't ordinarily invite us. That is how a lot of people get to know me."

Adama summarizes, "This is a full time job and I don't get paid. But I'm glad to see the program grow. I'm looking for anybody, anything, any organization that can help me achieve our goals, help me grow the organization to the highest level." In addition to building their board, Napela is focused on efforts to strengthen administrative funding and foster leadership development.

SUPPORT PARK HILL COMMUNITY MARKET

Share the story of Park Hill Community Market with others! Visit the market at 160-180 Park Hill Avenue Monday through Saturday in the summer. Don't miss the season's culminating festival of dance, music, and traditional food on September 8, 2018. For more information or to donate, visit www.napelanyc.org and www.facebook.com/NapelaIncl/. If you have questions or resources to share, email Adama Fassah at adama@napelanyc.org.