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Street Vendor Project Partners with Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Local Elected Officials, and Community Partners to Increase Food Distribution to Bronx and Brooklyn

On Wednesday, street vendors from the Bronx and Brooklyn who have been hard hit by the economic fallout of COVID-19 began a 7-week food distribution program in their neighborhoods

The Street Vendor Project of the Urban Justice Center is partnering with Council Member Vanessa Gibson and Council Member Carlos Menchaca, with support from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), to employ local street vendors to prepare and distribute 1,100 meals weekly through the end of September. The program is organized in collaboration with community-based food distribution programs in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, and with New York City Housing Authority developments across the Bronx. Through the program, thirty street vendors will be employed for the first time since the outset of the pandemic, allowing them the opportunity to return to the work of feeding their neighbors, working-class immigrant, Black, and Brown communities facing persistent economic devastation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Street vendors are an essential part of New York City's culture and economy, and in the past months, these small business owners have been hit hard by the COVID-19 outbreak. As primarily immigrant small business owners and workers, vendors are ineligible for government support such as paid sick leave, unemployment insurance, or even most loans and grants offered to small businesses, making an already dire situation critical. Vendors are also members of the communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including The Bronx and Brooklyn.

A recent report from Make the Road NY and Hester Street, "[150 Days Later: Unemployed and Excluded](#)," found that of 264 low-income immigrants and people of color surveyed, 66% were out of work, close to 60% had been unable to pay rent for the previous three months, and 85% were concerned about paying August rent. (The survey was conducted in late July.) In addition, 98% of undocumented respondents and 60% of US citizen respondents report receiving no state or federal assistance. The unemployment rate in the Bronx for the month of June was [nearly 25 percent](#), and the roughly one in four Bronx residents out of work account for about 355,000 people left jobless by this pandemic and the economic devastation it has wrought.

“Many of our street vendors are immigrant entrepreneurs that work each day to support their families even amid a global pandemic and economic instability. They are the lifeblood of our city, feeding millions of New Yorkers across the five boroughs, from the halal food truck to the ice cream truck that drives through our neighborhoods during the summer. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation COVID-19 Relief Initiative is an excellent way to give back to these extraordinary small business owners while combating food insecurity for our most vulnerable populations. I want to thank the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the Street Vendor Project for this fantastic partnership, and I look forward to working together on this important initiative,” **said Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson.**

"For working-class families, who have been hardest-hit by COVID-19, the food distribution program organized by New York City's street vendors is the pinnacle of what New Yorkers do best - looking out for one another and stepping up to help a neighbor in need. I am proud to support the Street Vendor Project and their partnership with organizations in my district, particularly the Chinese-American Planning Council and AMPHS. The pandemic has revealed many things, but nothing is more evident than how essential workers are really the glue that makes this City great” **said Council Member Carlos Menchaca.**

This program is the expansion of a successful initial program site in East Elmhurst, Queens with State Senator Jessica Ramos, conducted in partnership with the Hispanic Federation. The program distributed approximately [7,000 meals and thousands of pounds of produce](#). The meals created by local street vendors will offer a selection of high-nutrition-value meals, including halal options prepared by Egyptian and Bangladeshi street vendors, and culturally sensitive meals prepared by Latin American and Chinese street vendors.

"Chinese American Planning Council is excited to be able to partner with the Street Vendor Project to provide culturally sensitive meals to community members in Sunset Park. This opportunity will help address food insecurity, while supporting small businesses such as street food providers whom are part of the fabric and heartbeat of immigrant communities" said **Steve Mei, Director of Brooklyn Community Services of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.**

For the first week of the program, meals will be served by Yue-Huan Jian in Brooklyn, in collaboration with the Chinese-American Planning Council. In describing her last few months, **Yue-Huan Jian said**, “I had to stop vending when the pandemic suddenly hit in mid-March. I haven’t been able to go back out until a few days ago because I wanted to try and see how things are. There was barely anyone outside and the streets were virtually empty, which is so hard for me as a street vendor because we rely on pedestrians and tourists for our business. Nowadays,

I'm lucky if I can make \$70-\$80 a day and that's not even enough to cover the cost of gasoline. Another huge cost for me is garage fee and storage for my truck, which costs \$700 a month."

Ahmed Eltawil, a resident of the Bronx originally from Alexandria, Egypt, who has worked as a food vendor for the past 10 years, will make 570 halal chicken and rice meals, to be distributed at the **NYCHA Clay Avenue Consolidated Community Center** in collaboration with Tenant Association Leader Maria Forbes and Council Member Vanessa Gibson.

This program is supported by SNF as part of the Foundation's [global COVID-19 relief initiative](#).

"This initiative is essentially about neighbors helping neighbors," said **SNF Program Officer Alex Simon-Fox**. "As the economic crisis driven by the pandemic reaches a critical new stage, SNF is proud to support the Street Vendor Project in helping bring meals to people who need them while also giving street vendors, the smallest of small businesses who have been shut out of other forms of aid, the opportunity to practice their livelihood."

About the Street Vendor Project (SVP)

The Street Vendor Project (SVP) is a grassroots membership-based organization working to defend the rights and improve the working conditions of the approximately 20,000 people who sell food and merchandise on the streets of New York City. We believe in the importance of vending as a source of income for immigrants and other New Yorkers who may lack access to more formal employment opportunities. SVP, founded in 2001, strives to improve and expand vending as a viable, lawful employment option for immigrants and other entrepreneurs, and to increase public appreciation of how central vending is to our city's culture and economy. Through direct legal representation, small business training, organizing support, leadership development, and strategic legislative advocacy, SVP builds power and community among vendors. The Street Vendor Project is part of the Urban Justice Center, a non-profit organization that provides legal representation and advocacy to various marginalized groups of New Yorkers.

About the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) is one of the world's leading private, international philanthropic organizations, making grants to nonprofit organizations in the areas of arts and culture, education, health and sports and social welfare. SNF funds organizations and projects worldwide that aim to achieve a broad, lasting, and positive impact for society at large and exhibit strong leadership and sound management. The Foundation also supports projects that

facilitate the formation of public-private partnerships as an effective means for serving public welfare.

Since 1996, the Foundation has committed more than \$3.1 billion through more than 4,700 grants to nonprofit organizations in 132 nations around the world. See more at SNF.org.

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