

# Civic Innovation Hub Recap

October 2023

Written By: Mateo Baker · Urban Resilience



## Introduction

For the October Civic Innovation Hub Field Trip, CNT visited the [Space to Grow Schoolyard](#) at Niños Heros Elementary School and The [Urban Growers Collective Farm](#) in South Chicago. Following the site tours, residents from the cohort came together to discuss potential solutions for flooding in their neighborhoods. This recap will provide some background on each site and describe how the Space to Grow initiative and Urban Growers Collective use civic engagement and community space to mitigate urban flooding.

---

### Niños Heros Elementary: Space to Grow Schoolyard

The Space to Grow Schoolyard at Niños Heros Elementary is an entertaining and engaging outdoor space! Classes, recess, physical education, get-togethers with the community, athletic activities, and gardening are among the uses of the space.

Chicago Public Schools, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, and the [Chicago Department of Water Management](#) provided funds for the

construction of the schoolyard. It is supported by the Space to Grow initiative which is managed by [Healthy Schools Campaign](#) and [Openlands](#). Space to Grow turns Chicago schoolyards into attractive and usable outdoor areas for children to play, study, cultivate, and enjoy nature. Special design components are also included in the schoolyards to assist in decreasing neighborhood flooding.

Some of the school yard features include athletic courts, outdoor classroom, **perennial gardens**, track & field, **permeable play surface**, and **rain gardens**.

## Space to Grow Schoolyard: Continued



Pictures of Niños Heros Elementary perennial & rain gardens courtesy of Space to Grow Chicago.

### Perennial Garden

Perennial plants, as opposed to annuals and biennials, are plants that live year after year. Most of the plants in the schoolyard are prairie plants native to Illinois with thick, deep roots—they are designed to tolerate our temperature and soil types. These plants are excellent for pollinators and with proper care, they will thrive year after year. To learn more about perennial species native to Illinois visit [Plant Finder](#).

### Rain Garden

Rain gardens are landscaped spaces that are meant to slow down the water flow and decrease pollutants from water coming off impermeable urban surfaces such as roofs, roadways, walkways, and parking lots. The rain garden at Niños Heros Elementary schoolyard contains perennial native plants, but not just any native plant may be utilized in rain gardens—these gardens contain thirsty species that can live with their roots in damp soil for an extended period.



Photo of Niños Heros Play Equipment courtesy of Space to Grow Chicago.

### Permeable Play Surface

The play area in the school yard is made of permeable rubber material, which allows rainwater to pass directly through. A storage space is made up of layers of stones of varying sizes beneath the rubber surface. When it rains, water fills the storage space like a bathtub and remains there until it evaporates or is slowly discharged (released) into the sewage system once the rain event is over.

## Urban Growers Collective (UGC): South Chicago

Situated at 9001 S. Mackinaw Ave., Clara Schafer Park was created in 2015 to provide the South Chicago community with access to healthy food and green space. The Urban Growers Collective oversees the park's community garden and urban farm, which are accompanied by walking routes.

Food, education, mentorship, and land access are the four main purposes of the South Chicago farm. South Chicago, UGC's largest farm with seven acres of growing space, provides most of their harvests. Their South Chicago farm is home to a range of programs sponsored by UGC, including youth corps, farmer incubation, community gardens, workshops, farm stands, and other volunteer opportunities.

UGC raises a diverse range of crops, including fruits and vegetables, culinary and medicinal herbs, edible flowers, and ornamental plants for community beauty. The roots of the crops allow for the absorption and filtration of incoming rainwater, making USG's South Chicago farm the perfect location to brainstorm about stormwater management solutions.



Photos of Civic Innovation Hub cohort touring Urban Growers Collective's South Chicago farm captured by CNT-Urban Resilience Team

## Notes

- ❖ Space to Grow, "Ninos Heros Elementary: Space to Grow Tour."  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ea859676be424f71a77e4d0bfa7ef8d5>
- ❖ Urban Growers Collective, "Our Farms."  
<https://www.urbangrowerscollective.org/>
- ❖ Healthy Schools Campaign, "Space to Grow."  
<https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/programs/space-to-grow/>
- ❖ Openlands, "Home." <https://openlands.org/>
- ❖ Chicago Department of Water Management, "Water Management."  
<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/water.html>
- ❖ Illinois Ground Work, "Plant Finder."  
<https://illinoisgroundwork.org/resources/plant-finder/>