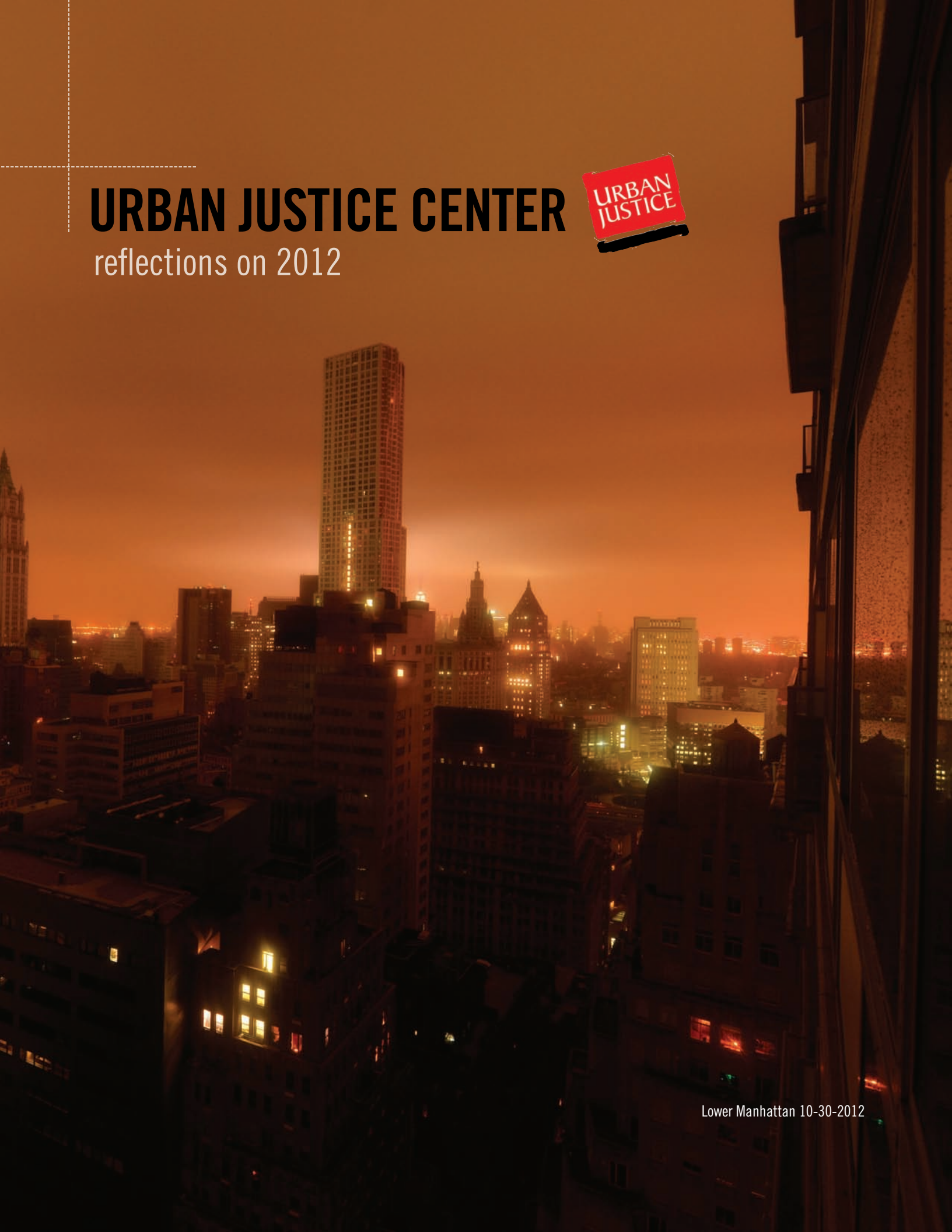


# URBAN JUSTICE CENTER

reflections on 2012



Lower Manhattan 10-30-2012

A Year of Success

DEAR FRIENDS,

We've weathered more storms this year than anyone could have imagined. Hurricane Sandy. The Nor'easter. The election. Time and again, New York City has emerged – a little bruised, a little battered, but still standing, still strong. And we here at the Urban Justice Center have been there, standing strong, every step of the way.

Indeed, this last year was one of tireless work and exceptional success for our Projects, and I'm proud to share with you some of the achievements they brought about in 2012.

As always, our biggest success is the number of poverty-stricken individuals and families we assist. In the last year alone, we closed more than 7,000 cases, and provided trainings to over 10,000 people.

IMPACT LITIGATION

But our work goes far beyond the individuals we rescue on a daily basis. In 2012, we worked on more than 70 impact cases & projects. Here are two of them;

**1** This April, our Mental Health Project finished more than five years of litigation on *Clark v. Astrue*, challenging the Social Security Administration's (SSA) use of a crude computer-matching system to take benefits from people who appeared to have failed to comply with probation or parole. The SSA did no actual verification of these results before summarily suspending desperately needed benefits. People with psychiatric disabilities were especially vulnerable to this policy because they have a harder time dealing with SSA bureaucracy

and are more likely to have had police interactions. On April 13, 2012, U.S. District Court Judge Sidney H. Stein ordered the SSA to restore benefits to as many as 140,000 Americans. **The benefits in question date back to October 2006 and may total \$1 billion.**

**2** Working together, our Homelessness Outreach & Prevention Project and our Mental Health Project brought a class action lawsuit against the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, representing hundreds of individuals who lost benefits because they were accused of misstating their marital status on their food stamps application. The lawsuit, *Robles v. Doar*, was settled this year by a federal judge, who not only restored the lost benefits, but also issued instructions to all social services districts in New York State, clarifying the criteria for accusing individuals of making misstatements regarding their marital status on their forms.

*...we closed more than 7,000 cases, and provided trainings to over 10,000 people.*

UJC CLIENTS



**Carlos Vasquez**

Carlos Vasquez, a 69-year-old disabled military veteran, had been selling fruits and vegetables from a pushcart in upper Manhattan for six years when the City refused to renew his mobile food vending permit in 2011. His application was rejected because of a computer error on the part of the City. Carlos sought assistance from various organizations, but could not find any relief until he joined the Street Vendor Project at UJC. We filed a proceeding in the State Supreme Court seeking to compel the City to renew Carlos's permit. The City settled, and Carlos is now happily back selling fruits and vegetables.

**KW**

When KW, a young transgender woman, came to a PCYP legal clinic, she had been kicked out by her parents because of her gender identity, and was facing imminent homelessness. While working with PCYP, KW found stable housing, completed her high school education, and, once we helped her obtain work authorization, she began working. KW is now happily employed and housed, and hopes to one day go to law school so that she can give back to those in need.

Success by the Numbers In 2012



Our **Community Development Project** assisted over 200 people experiencing workplace abuses, obtaining an extraordinary \$6.28 million in judgments and settlements.



Our **Homelessness Outreach & Prevention Project** won over \$2 million in public benefits for thousands of New Yorkers in need.



Our **Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project** provided pro bono legal representation to more than 200 families in emergency situations navigating the refugee resettlement process.

## NEW INITIATIVES

In the face of the complex arrays of issues our clients present, we are always looking for new ways to spread the word about our services. In this vein, we are excited to announce five new initiatives.

**1** Our Police Reform Organizing Project has created a Narratives Project, which has filmed over 50 interviews with individuals in the city who have experienced abusive police encounters. These video testimonials are available on PROP's YouTube channel (Username: PROPNY) and website ([www.PoliceReformOrganizingProject.org](http://www.PoliceReformOrganizingProject.org)). Several of these videos were recently featured in a MoveOn.org promotion.

**2** The Human Rights Project recently launched an exciting initiative to connect the national network of alumni from their human rights institutes. This listserv will share webinars, advocacy tool-

kits, resource guides, news in the human rights community, and more. In addition to providing dynamic content, they are encouraging regional and issue based partnerships between past participants from different years.

**3** For the last two years, our Domestic Violence Project has provided legal trainings and representation for clients of the Anti-Violence Project seeking assistance in the Bronx Family Court system. We have been able to provide desperately needed assistance to more than seventy-five new clients and their families through this partnership.

**4** In July, our Sex Workers Project supported sex workers in making their voices heard at the International AIDS Conference in Washington, DC. Our symposium, *A Call to Action: Global Sex Workers Recommend Policy Change for Better HIV Pre-*

*vention and Treatment*, featured prominent leaders from six global regions. As a follow up, we launched [www.SexWorkAndHIV.org](http://www.SexWorkAndHIV.org) to demand policy changes at the national level. Visit and make your voice heard!

**5** Our Community Development Project launched a new website, the Research for Organizing Toolkit, to provide resources for grassroots community-based organizations to conduct participatory action research (PAR). PAR is a people-centered, power-building, action-oriented method of research that helps communities analyze and document their own problems, generate data that strengthens their social justice work, and ensure that they are the experts about the issues in their communities. The toolkit is available for free at [www.ResearchForOrganizing.org](http://www.ResearchForOrganizing.org).

## RESEARCH REPORTS

One of the most difficult parts of our work at UJC is that many of our clients are stigmatized, oppressed, and ignored, making accurate information about their lives, concerns, and needs hard to come by. To remedy this, our Projects regularly issue groundbreaking reports that help to inform not only our work, but legal action and policy change on city, state, and national levels. Here are two we put out in 2012.



The **Sex Workers Project** co-authored a report, "Public Health Crisis: The Impact of Using Condoms as Evidence of Prostitution in New York City" in April. It reveals findings from two surveys of NYC sex workers, including a survey conducted in 2010 by the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOMH).

In the DOMH study, 57% of sex workers said they'd had condoms taken away by an NYC police officer. In the 2011 study, 42.8% of sex workers had had condoms taken away, and 50% of sex workers who'd had condoms taken away or destroyed by police engaged in sex work without condoms afterwards. 45.7% did not carry condoms at some point for fear of police repercussions.

SWP then brought 60 sex workers and allies to Albany, NY to present the findings of this report and lobby Assembly Members and Senators to pass the "No Condoms As Evidence Bill."



In May of 2012, our **Police Reform Organizing Project** published "In Their Own Words," which featured incriminating quotes and statements from former and current police officers, which illustrate the abusive police practices resulting from the NYPD's toxic culture, racially biased attitudes, and aggressively enforced quota system.

**"They are f\*\*\*ing animals. You make sure if you have to shoot, you shoot them in the head. That way there's one story...."** – NYPD Captain

**As you can see, it's been a busy year here at the Urban Justice Center. And none of this would be possible without your support. We hope you will be as generous this year as you have been in previous years.**

Sincerely,

**Doug Lasdon**

Executive Director, Urban Justice Center



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“I first met UJC’s Executive Director Doug Lasdon in 1986, when I was a new associate at Sullivan & Cromwell. I took on a pro-bono case with him, representing youth who had been abandoned by the foster care system. As I remember, when these kids turned eighteen, they were given a subway token and told ‘have a great life.’ Thanks to the suit we brought, the foster care system now requires transition plans for youth who are in danger of aging out and being left to fend for themselves. That’s why I support the Urban Justice Center.”

**Helena Lee**  
Attorney & UJC Supporter

WITHOUT SUPPORTERS LIKE HELENA, UJC WOULD NOT EXIST

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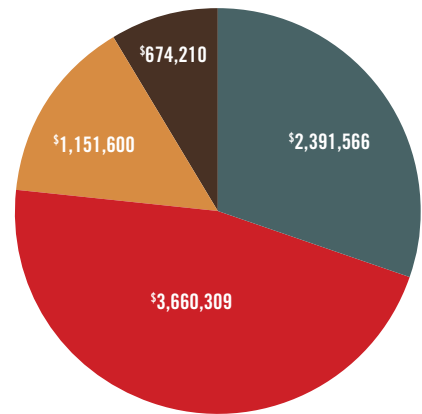
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Assistance HIP/SHIP  
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## Meet the Newest Additions to our Board



### Edward Turan

Edward Turan is Senior Deputy General Counsel and Managing Director of Citi's Institutional Clients Group and Head of the Litigation Department. Ed is responsible for the management of all aspects of litigation arising out of the business of the Institutional Clients Group, along with regulatory enforcement matters. He is a member of the National Arbitration and Mediation Committee of FINRA. He is a member and former chairman of the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association (SIFMA) Committee on Litigation and Arbitration and is a member of the SIFMA Committee on Amicus issues. Ed is also a member of the Clearinghouse Litigation Committee. Ed is a past president of the Compliance and Legal Society of SIFMA.

"I have had a great respect for the efforts of many pro bono organizations and I am proud to support their activities. I learned of the Urban Justice Center several years ago and was honored to receive its 2012 Community Leadership Award. What particularly impresses me about the UJC is the commitment and creativity of Doug and his team in meeting the needs of the underserved members of our community. It is an honor to be named to the UJC Board and I look forward to contributing to its worthy mission."

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*"What particularly impresses me about the UJC is the commitment and creativity of Doug and his team in meeting the needs of the underserved members of our community." – Edward Turan*

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### Fred Mwangaguhunga

Fred Mwangaguhunga is the founder of the media company behind the popular website MediaTakeOut.com.

Fred, a lifelong New Yorker and a former lawyer, has been a fan of the Urban Justice Center's work for many years.

He's a member of a subcommittee on Development and hopes to introduce more celebrity involvement in the UJC's future fundraising events.





Urban Justice Center  
123 William Street, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
New York, NY 10038

## A Night Out on the City with UJC

In June, the Urban Justice Center inaugurated a new summer celebration, A Night Out on the City with UJC. Hundreds of our supporters came to drink, dance, and enjoy exclusive nighttime access to The Museum of the City of New York (MCNY). Dinner was served by some of New York's most-celebrated food trucks, including previous winners of our own Street Vendor Project's Vandy Awards, while drinks were generously provided by Maker's Mark Bourbon, Svedka Vodka, and Brooklyn Brewery. Even a

few celebrities stopped by, like Real Housewives of Atlanta star Phaedra Parks.

Events like these are both the lifeblood of our organization, and a chance for us to thank people like you, who help us to continue providing critically needed services to poverty-stricken New Yorkers. We hope that you'll be able to attend next summer, when A Night Out on the City with UJC returns to MCNY. Sponsorship packages are available for organizations look-

ing to support our work and put their name in front of our highly engaged supporters.

And if you'd like to get more involved, A Night Out on the City with UJC could not happen without our tremendous Event Committee. We're always looking for more people to join this fun committee of young professionals who guarantee our event's success by ensuring it's an event they themselves enjoy. To find out more, contact Gretchen Wagner Nealon at [gwagnernealon@urbanjustice.org](mailto:gwagnernealon@urbanjustice.org).



## About the Urban Justice Center

For 28 years, the Urban Justice Center has served New York City's most vulnerable residents through a combination of direct legal service, systemic advocacy, community education and political organizing. We assist our clients on numerous levels, from one-on-one legal advice in soup kitchens, to helping individuals access housing and government assistance, to filing class action lawsuits to bring about systemic change. We represent an extraordinary array of the most deprived and abused people in our society, including members of the working poor, on issues related to discrimination and oppression. We serve our clients through the following projects:

- Community Development Project
- Domestic Violence Project
- Homelessness Outreach & Prevention Project
- Human Rights Project
- Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project
- Mental Health Project
- Peter Cicchino Youth Project
- Police Reform Organizing Project
- Sex Workers Project
- Street Vendor Project



### Eric Sontag

A Night Out Event Committee Member  
*COO Sontag Advisory*

I first learned about the Urban Justice Center through my sister, Melissa, who is a staff attorney for the Sex Workers Project. My interest in her project led me to learn more about UJC, and join the committee for A Night Out on the City. The event was highly successful, despite being on one of the hottest days of the year! Some non-profits fight for policy change, while others provide goods and services (like legal support) directly to clients. UJC does both, because both are critical. Public advocacy and direct legal service can restore an individual's dignity and voice, and act as a vehicle for systemic change. That's why I support the Urban Justice Center.