12,481 CASES CLOSED
24,042 PEOPLE IMPACTED
$2,017,780.67 RECOVERED

by our direct services.

in public benefits for clients in desperate need.

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Friends,

I can’t lie: this has been another difficult year. Lockdowns, disinformation, disease, economic insecurity – if a plague of locusts came next, I don’t think I’d be surprised.

But here at the Urban Justice Center, our work continues. Some of our court appearances might be telephonic; our staff meetings might be in a park; and I’m still not 100% sure how to use our company Zoom account. But those are just the details. Our work – protecting the rights of the vulnerable; organizing marginalized communities; fueling the future of social justice – continues unabated. If anything, the pandemic has shown how critical our services are, as you’ll see in these pages.

As we’ve all shared the challenges of this past year, I’m excited to get to share some of our successes with you now: our Street Vendor Project’s successful campaign to expand legal licenses for vendors in NYC for the first time in decades; our Sex Workers Project’s legislative wins around the country; our Safety Net Project’s tireless defense of the economically vulnerable who are simply trying to survive our strange new normal.

Next year, our fight for hope will continue – bolstered by a new cohort of brilliant, committed activists in our Social Justice Accelerator. None of their work – none of our work – would be possible, however, without your support. Thank you for sticking with us though 2021, and beyond.

Yours in hope,

Doug Lasdon
Executive Director
The Street Vendor Project has made historic wins in 2021, first with the passing of Intro 1116 and second with the launching of the Fund for Excluded Workers (FEW) Campaign, which called on the New York State Legislature to create funds for excluded workers. **We won the campaign when the NYS legislature and former Governor Cuomo agreed to a budget establishing a $2.1 billion excluded workers’ fund.**
Rarely are the impacts of a legislative campaign so directly and immediately felt as with the FEW campaign. Excluded workers who attended marches, rallies, and campaigned for victory themselves were unsure if they would be eligible for the fund, as years of system exclusion have conditioned them to believe they would always be excluded. Members of the Street Vendor Project have been encouraged by the power and speed of this campaign, and overall organizing potential and commitment among membership has grown throughout the campaign.

**An example of an emerging leader is Gabriela Almaraz**, a street vendor in Corona, Queens. She became a vendor at the beginning of the pandemic after losing her job as a domestic cleaner. Gabriela attended the first direct actions of her life during the FEW campaign, crossing the Brooklyn Bridge and calling for relief.

Afterwards, she joined the Street Vendor Project’s campaign committee to directly engage in planning for upcoming actions, phonebanking elected officials, and sharing her testimony with the Commissioner of the Department of Labor. Both she and her husband were direct beneficiaries of the fund, and she has stated her commitment to fighting for expanded funding so that her neighbors and friends who were unable to apply can receive the same relief.

For many street vendors across New York City, the COVID-19 pandemic devastated their families and their ability to make an income, and SVP’s advocacy and services have never been more in demand, with the two historic legislative wins. **We continue to champion for the rights of New York City’s smallest business owners, that make New York City what it is, beautiful and diverse.**
DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF NEW YORKERS IN NEED
Ms. W is a Bronx tenant who, like so many New York workers of color, lost her job as a data entry specialist at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. She then contracted and survived COVID, only to face eviction because she couldn’t keep up with her rent payments. Ms. W has lived in her apartment for 22 years and with no employment, her chances of securing a new apartment were next to none.

As part of the City’s Right to Counsel initiative, UJC’s Safety Net Project (SNP) took on Ms. W’s case. SNP represented Ms. W in housing court during the pandemic, appearing virtually. Through creative litigation practice, SNP were successful in getting the eviction case against Ms. W dismissed entirely and the decision in her case was even published in the New York Law Journal.

Without an eviction case hanging over her head, Ms. W went on to apply to New York’s Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), so she can clear any outstanding rental arrears and continue recovering from the impact of the pandemic.

*Image is an actor*
At the **Sex Workers Project**, we defend the human rights of sex workers through free legal services, education, research, and policy advocacy. Our clients are predominantly migrant workers who we assist in obtaining various forms of immigration relief.

*Me simply existing as who I am is criminalized, which means I can’t move in the world like a normal person would. I have had paranoia around... what if they do a background check? Is this apartment gonna do that?*

- Dominatrix Ashley Paige in *Sex(ual) Healing*

To differentiate between sex work and criminal abuses like human trafficking, we advocate for the FULL decriminalization of sex work, which is a critical human rights issue. This approach best protects the human rights of everyone involved in the sex trades, by choice, circumstance, or coercion.
Through our policy advocacy we are working to dismantle NYPD Vice, and support state level decriminalization legislation. **A few successes to date include the introduction of a decriminalization bill in Oregon and the repeal of the loitering for the purposes of prostitution law in New York (also known as the Walking Whiles Trans Ban).**

Also this year, we had the debut of Sex(ual) Healing, a mini-doc series that talks about the healing powers of sex work, from both the worker and client perspective. Sex(ual) Healing is on display now through February 2022 at the Museum of Sex.

Stay tuned for our next episode, which will focus on Sex Worker Families.
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In 2022, the Mental Health Project's dedicated staff will support our individual clients in navigating obstacles to their health and wellness while working to dismantle these obstacles for all New Yorkers with mental health concerns. MHP will fight for the humane treatment of our community members held in New York jails and prisons; help clients access SSI/SSD, Medicaid, and other crucial benefits; provide peer-led community workshops, and support clients in crisis. We will continue to lead advocacy for systems change in the areas of criminal justice, health justice and disability justice while bringing a client-centered harm reduction approach to our work.

In the year ahead, DVP will take the lessons learned during the pandemic and apply them to continuously improve the way we approach our work. When we pivoted services to the remote world, we noticed a greater ability to access survivors who would normally be unable to physically reach our offices. We reached 6X the number of people through outreach efforts this year than in the year previous. So, while the need remains, our services will adapt to our new way of living and offer hybrid access to survivors, allowing them to choose the path that works for them.

Our community of formerly incarcerated leaders, family members, and allies is knowledgeable and fierce, and we will continue supporting them to build power to decarcerate New York City and transform our criminal legal system. We'll hold elected officials to account, demanding the new mayor and City Council follow through on the plan to close Rikers Island, including implementing the recommendations of the Commission on Reinvestments in Communities Impacted by Rikers Island. We'll continue to elevate the narratives of the people and communities most impacted by the continuing crisis in New York City jails, and work together to redefine public safety and create a more just post-Rikers New York City.
CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE EVICTION MORATORIUM?
CONFUSED ABOUT WHY STREET VENDORS ARE SO OFTEN HARASSED BY THE POLICE?
UNSURE ABOUT WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE HAVING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS?

Join the Justice Initiators and get the answers to all of these questions, and more. Just scan this QR code with the camera on your smart phone to find out more, or visit: URBANJUSTICE.ORG/JOINJI
Through our Social Justice Accelerator, we incubate future social justice leaders who are organizing around some of our country’s most pressing issues. In 2021, we graduated our first SJA cohort, and we are currently recruiting the second. Being part of the SJA enables these projects to leap over the hurdles of being early-stage nonprofits and get directly to serving their constituencies. Within just the first year of the program, members of our initial SJA cohort:

- Expanded their capacity to bring critical services to people in need by an average of 150%
- Grew their fundraising base (the lifeblood of all nonprofits) by more than 166%
- Expanded their social media presence by 756%, and saw a massive 525% uptick in media coverage of their work

By supporting young organizers, and bringing them into the Urban Justice Center fold, we are able to stay nimble and respond to emerging issues - from the COVID-19 pandemic to the ongoing crisis of police brutality against Black and brown communities. To find out more, visit SJA.urbanjustice.org.

We are delighted to welcome Joan Chan (PwC) and Joshua W. Thompson (Sidley Austin LLP) to the Board of the Urban Justice Center! The UJC Board provides critical guidance and fundraising for UJC, and we are excited to have their decades of combined expertise on our side.

**Joan Chan**

Born and raised in Hong Kong and now living in NYC as a management consultant, I am in awe of the opportunities this country offers but at the same time recognize the inequities that we still need to overcome. I value the work UJC does, the lasting impact it makes, and the passion the team brings every day. I am honored to join the UJC board of directors and will do everything I can to support UJC’s mission and expand its reach.

**Joshua W. Thompson**

UJC’s leadership and forward momentum is strong and deep, and it is a privilege to have the opportunity to hopefully contribute in the coming years.
A MESSAGE FROM
OUR YOUNG PROFESSIONAL BOARD

Our Young Professional Board is a group of passionate supporters who volunteer their time to spread the word about our work, raise critically needed funding for our initiatives, organize UJC themed events, and have a good time while doing it! From running the NYC TCS Marathon in November, to organizing our virtual wine tasting for #GivingTuesday, they find all kinds of new and exciting ways to promote UJC.

Don’t just take our word for it, though. Meet two of our YPB leaders:

When Morgan's not working as the Business Development Director at OBERLAND, she's YPB's talented and tireless Fundraising Co-Chair.

"The past year on UJC's YPB has been an amazing experience and one of the silver linings of COVID. I'm excited to see how each project continues to evolve in 2022 + the new projects that come through the Social Justice Accelerator. I always look forward to connecting each month with Gretchen (our fearless leader) and the rest of the YPB team."

As a long-standing YPB member, Yasmin brings the vast communication expertise she’s gained as a Senior Account Executive at GCI Health.

“Since joining YPB, I have had incredible opportunities to leverage my professional skills and contribute to the UJC mission. I cherish the connections I have formed in a network of likeminded, passionate individuals who are committed to amplifying our great work benefitting marginalized communities. I am continuously inspired by the amazing people who make up the UJC family. This has been a truly rewarding experience and I look forward to continuing this important work!!”

If you’re interested in joining YPB in 2022, email Development@urbanjustice.org
Governor of New York Kathy Hochul
New York State Capital Building
Albany, NY 12224

TO: Governor Kathy Hochul

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic has placed – and continues to place – unprecedented economic stress on the State of New York, and, in particular, on the state’s most marginalized communities, including the homeless, survivors of domestic violence, BIPOC communities suffering from government disinvestment and environmental racism, undocumented frontline workers, street vendors, and those with mental health concerns;

WHEREAS, 800,000 New York City residents have been cut off from Federal pandemic benefits as of Labor Day, 2021 – a figure that represents 10% of all people cut from our national security net post-pandemic, at a loss of some $463 million per week to NYC residents;

WHEREAS, Candid, the leading nonprofit resource, estimates that up to 38% of all nonprofits may be forced to close their doors because of COVID-19, imperiling an incredible range of desperately needed services for the marginalized communities and low- and no-income people that comprise the Urban Justice Center’s clients,

THEREFORE, We, the undersigned, call upon you to provide urgently needed funding and visionary leadership as we recover from this pandemic, with an eye towards prioritizing marginalized communities and the organizations that serve them.

UJC 2021 PROJECTS

- Domestic Violence Project
- Freedom Agenda
- Human Rights Project
- Mental Health Project
- Safety Net Project
- Sex Workers Project
- Street Vendor Project