

URBAN JUSTICE CENTER

2022 ANNUAL REPORT





UJC IN 2022

7,023 CASES CLOSED

24,042 PEOPLE IMPACTED

by our direct services.

\$3,600,000 RECOVERED

in public benefits for clients in desperate need.

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LETTER FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Friends,

I never thought I'd write these words, but here we are in year three of a global pandemic, still struggling – as a society – with our response. This has been a year of trials and transitions for UJC, as I'm sure it has been for many of you. Carefully, while still maintaining the essential virtual services that allowed us to meet the needs of our clients during the pandemic, we have been re-establishing our in-person services: restarting our clinics at food pantries around the city; sending our organizers and advocates out to assist those working or living on the streets with winter on its way; and bringing our staff back into our offices (while maintaining the hybrid flexibility that is our new normal).

I want to be candid with you: I'm worried about the future. Already, so many of us and our institutions seem pushed nearly to the breaking point. There are days when our city reminds me of the depths of the chaos in the 1980s, when I founded UJC to help the unhoused, the abandoned, and the abused. *They need our help; we need your help.* Together, we can face the frightening times that are coming head on.

In the pages of this report, you'll read some of what we've been up to this year, including an introduction to Experience Justice (our newest anchor project), an update on our 2023 goals, and explorations of our work protecting the rights of immigrant small vendors, the unhoused, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, and more.

Think how much more we can do, with your help.

Yours in hope,



Doug Lasdon
Executive Director



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Street
Vendor
Project

FIGHTING FOR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS



For over a decade, Maria Falcon has sold mangos and churros to hungry NYC commuters: supporting her family, paying her taxes, and advocating for the rights of other vendors like her as a member of our Street Vendor Project (SVP) – which was how she knew it was legal to film the cops when they arrested her earlier this year for vending, even as they tried to force her daughter to turn off her camera so they could strip search Maria and confiscate her goods with no witnesses.

Like so many immigrant small business owners, Maria has a legal food vendor license, but has been unable to get a vending permit because of the city's arbitrary cap on permits. In 2021, after seven years of tireless advocacy, SVP succeeded in passing a bill in the NYC Council to increase the number of permits available to vendors for the first time in nearly 40 years. However, this legislation—which includes providing 4,000 new permits to street vendors over a decade (400 permits a year), starting in 2022—falls far short of providing safety and protection for NYC's ~20,000 street vendors. This year, SVP is launching a bold new campaign to formalize NYC's iconic street vending industry by removing the caps completely and decriminalizing vending once and for all. This bill would allow thousands of lawful, hard-working residents like Maria to support their families without fear.



**FUELING SYSTEMIC CHANGE FOR
UNHOUSED & EVICTED
NEW YORKERS**

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,

homelessness has been on the rise, as people lose their jobs and are evicted from their homes, or lose health care (and with it the ability to work), or as the frayed social safety net that once supported them gets torn apart by budget cuts. Night after night, instead of providing safety and care, the city has battered our unhoused residents with brutal police sweeps (more than 3,000 this year alone), destroying what little stability they have and trashing their belongings. Despite what city officials say, these sweeps are punitive, designed to punish and push out the homeless, and have a terrible 5% success rate at their supposed goal of connecting unhoused people to shelter.

At UJC, our Safety Net Project works to interrupt this vicious cycle: supporting homeless New Yorkers surviving on the streets, organizing for access to permanent housing, providing representation to tenants facing post-COVID eviction, and fighting to get NYC to respect the basic rights of shelter residents. We will continue this critical work in 2023.

“These sweeps are designed not to help people, but to break spirits. Mayor Adams and Commissioner Jenkins must stop these sweeps and offer people permanent homes,” Karim Walker said, Homeless Organizer and Outreach Worker, UJC’s Safety Net Project.

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Mental
Health
Project


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Freedom
Agenda

NO MORE
DEATHS !

#FREETH

**BUILDING
INCLUSIVE
COMMUNITY**



This year alone, eighteen people have died while incarcerated in New York City jails, prompting the question: what is the Department of Correction doing, if it can't even guarantee the survival of incarcerated New York City residents? In March of 2022, a federal monitor proclaimed that "the level of dysfunction within the Department's staffing framework is unmatched by any jurisdiction with which the Monitoring Team has had experience" – yet our jail population is once again skyrocketing upwards under Mayor Adams tenure, with nearly 6,000 people held in city jails right now. The number of people in City jails with a diagnosed serious mental health concern is up 20% since the Mayor took office.

What has the administration done to guarantee the safety of this community? Nothing. Instead, they are leaning on failed strategies like increasing the use of solitary confinement – going so far as to threaten a veto of City Council legislation to end solitary confinement that has gained supermajority support.

At UJC, our unique structure allows our Projects to band together on the critical issues that affect broad and vulnerable communities, the way our Freedom Agenda and Mental Health Project are working together in 2023 (and beyond) to shut down Rikers, decarcerate New York City, end solitary confinement, and protect the health and lives of all city residents.

"Everyone behind the wall deserves to be protected, respected, and have their safety, human rights, whether your staff or detained. But unfortunately the detainees have no one to fight for them. So, as a city, we've got to get it together."

– ***Dr. Victoria Phillips***, Community, Health & Justice Organizer, UJC's Mental Health Project/Member of the Jails Action Coalition

"Far too many people have been traumatized, tortured, and lost their lives in DOC custody, especially in solitary confinement."

– ***Darren Mack***, co-director, UJC's Freedom Agenda/Member of the Jails Action Coalition.

Photo by Johnny Perez - Member, UJC Board of Directors

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VJC IN 2023

FROM OUR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROJECT:

This year, the Domestic Violence Project (DVP) has seen skyrocketing needs for our services, as so many people have been left to shelter at home with their abusers, or face life on the streets.

In 2023, DVP will expand our holistic representation of immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV), with generous funding we were awarded from the Office of Victims of Services. Under this grant, DVP will expand our successful holistic model by funding cohesive dual representation and advocacy for family and immigration cases for immigrant survivors of IPV. Our legal strategy considers consequences and benefits for all possible legal relief, to produce the most beneficial outcome for an immigrant survivor.

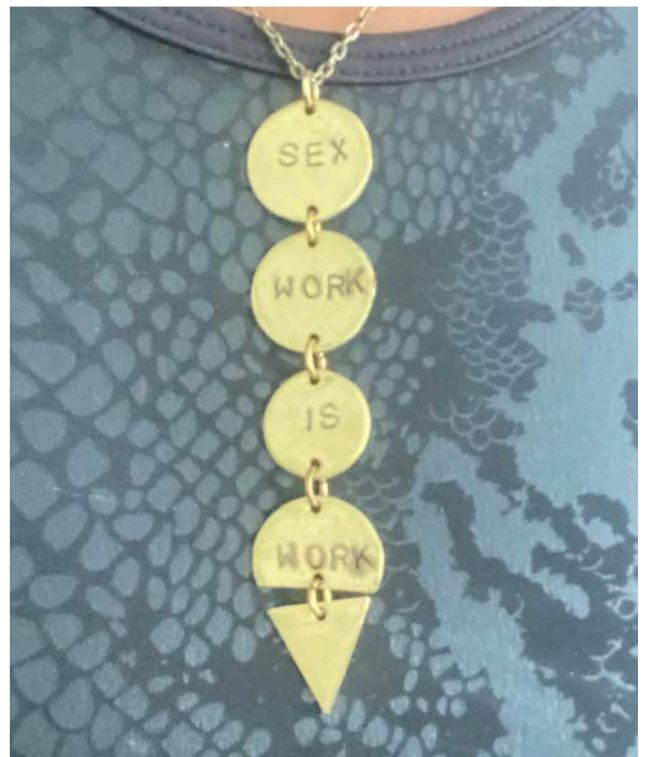
With this new funding *and your critical support* we enter 2023 prepared to help our clients, whatever their needs, wherever they are.

FROM OUR SEX WORKERS PROJECT:

Decriminalizing sex work is a human right.

We believe that sex workers' human rights cannot be fully realized with criminal laws that threaten their access to justice, health, and social services. Criminalization undermines sex workers' rights to labor and workplace protections, and exposes them to greater risk of violence, discrimination, and arrest. All people should be allowed to choose consensual adult sex work as viable employment.

In 2023, we'll continue to advocate for passage of the Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act to fully decriminalize adult consensual sex work in NY, and continue our urgent advocacy with the City of New Orleans (and other places across the country) to implement local non-prosecution policies until states protect human rights through full legislative decriminalization.



EXPERIENCE JUSTICE

EJ is a team of five lawyers with long careers in social justice now donating their expertise to address unmet social needs. A core value is to mentor younger and newer members of the progressive legal community. They worked with Democracy Forward on amicus briefs that successfully defended the right to take race and ethnicity into account in prescribing medications to COVID-19 patients.

In 2023, EJ is coordinating a non-partisan project to advocate for the adoption of a code of ethics binding Supreme Court justices, just as codes currently apply to every other state and federal judge. They are harnessing ethics experts, former federal judges, bar association presidents and other luminaries to try to convince them of the need for recusal and other guidelines. Post the Dobbs decision, EJ is also working with the Center for Reproductive Rights to assess the risks to providers in states that have banned abortion. In addition, they are assisting the Reproductive Health Access Project, which maintains a national network of physicians providing reproductive health services.



**MEET OUR
NEWEST
PROJECT!**

MEET OUR YOUNG PROFESSIONAL BOARD



“This year has been a year of tremendous growth for UJC and its Young Professional Board. Our YPB has grown by *10* members, all motivated by UJC’s mission for social justice and innovation in the non-profit sector. This year was our first “Night Out” post-COVID, an event which raised nearly \$60K for UJC’s work thanks to many individual and corporate donors. We love to encourage new members to join the YPB or to join our Justice Initiators (see p.13), an easy way to keep a pulse on grassroots social justice movements.”

– Cara Hall & Jack Lancaster, YPB Co-Chairs

WANT TO JOIN?

Scan this QR Code!

“As the son of a Queens-native, I have always felt a strong bond to the vibrant communities that make up New York City. The Young Professional Board is one way I am able to give back, by supporting UJC’s goal of fighting for social justice and fueling systemic change across all five boroughs of the city. Becoming a member has also given me the opportunity to collaborate with an incredibly dedicated group of individuals who share similar values and objectives as mine. New York city is what we make it. Join our YPB to give back to help create the city we want in 2023!”

– Manuel Pereira-Arias, YPB Engagement Co-Chair



Our Social Justice Accelerator incubates innovative projects working on our country's most pressing issues.

MEET THE PROJECTS IN THE 2022 SJA COHORT



Family Justice Law Center - A legal project using affirmative litigation to seek justice for families mistreated by the child welfare system. FJLC challenges systemic abuses of government power that lead to the illegal separation of children from their families. A major component of FJLC's mission is to provide low-income families with assistance bringing affirmative, impact litigation against government agencies that violate their civil rights connected to the child welfare system.

Family Policy Project - Organizers uniting researchers, parents/youth with lived expertise and advocates/allies working on the ground in impacted communities to develop research-driven transformative policy solutions for NYC families. Many families end up involved with the child welfare system because they lack legal representation. FPP works to ensure they have free, competent legal help.

Peer Defense Project - An intergenerational legal project that designs tools to respond to the legalized crises of segregation, resource inequity, and the criminalization of young people in New York City. Youth make up the largest constituency of low-income people in the United States. PDP builds legal tools with and for youth leaders for dignity and justice in schools and communities.

South Asian SOAR - A national collective of survivors, organizations, and allies building a movement for joy, healing, and justice among survivors of intimate partner violence in the South Asian diaspora.

The Remedy Project - A collective training students to serve as advocates for people incarcerated in the United States, by training them to utilize the power of the administrative remedy process from the outside to defend people on the inside.

JOIN OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR A VIRTUAL CONVERSATION ON UJC'S FUTURE

On January 24th, join UJC's Executive Director, Doug Lasdon, for an exciting conversation about 2023 at UJC - a chance to hear about our priorities for the year to come, and the successes of this year that we will be building off of.

This meeting will be the first in our revamped Justice Initiators series, a free, virtual monthly meet up where UJC staff discuss the urgent issues their Project is working on right now. Working in conjunction with our Young Professional Board, our Justice Initiators help spread the word about all we do here at UJC. For more information or to RSVP, scan this QR code!



UJC 2022 PROJECTS

*Domestic Violence Project
Experience Justice
Freedom Agenda
Human Rights Project
Mental Health Project*

*Peter Cicchino Youth Project
Safety Net Project
Sex Workers Project
Street Vendor Project*