



URBAN JUSTICE CENTER

2023
ANNUAL
REPORT

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YOUNG PROFESSIONAL BOARD

Meet the full YPB and learn why they support the UJC at: urbanjustice.org/get-involved/our-ypb/



Night Out, September 2022



UJC Sunset Social, June 2023



Night Out at the Circus, November 2023

“My connection to the UJC started years ago when I joined their Young Professional Board. For me, it’s not just about the work that they do reaching out to and assisting vulnerable populations, but it is the way they do that work. Whether it’s one of their core programs or their latest class in the Social Justice Accelerator, they lead with hope, ingenuity, and dedication. It is an honor to support them.”

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER JOELLEN VALENTINE

Friends,

As I type these words, the Urban Justice Center is a humming office filled with staff from thirteen different Projects working on hundreds of different ideas to improve life for the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Our virtual outreach, **pioneered during the darkest days** of the pandemic, has allowed us to work with clients and entire populations who were shut off from our services before. These virtual initiatives are the most recent evolution of our **commitment to meeting** our 10,000+ yearly **clients where they are**, in soup kitchens, on the streets – and now on Zoom.

Next month, we begin the exciting process of inviting five up-and-coming community leaders into our Social Justice Accelerator, where over the next two years we'll help them transform their early-stage nonprofit into a formidable force for justice, ready to stand on their own.

All of which is to say: **it's busy days here at UJC, and we have no plans for stopping any time soon.** In the pages of this report, you'll learn about the cases we're filing, the empowerment groups we're running, and our plans for the future. And you'll see photos of our fantastic community, from our FYP client fashion show to our #TeamUJC marathon runners!

Which is where you come in: **We could not do any of this, year in and year out, without your assistance.** Thanks to you – and our tremendous staff – we have navigated the tremendous changes of the last few years without cutting off services or turning away those in need. Now, as we have a moment to catch our breath and plan for our future – New York City's future – **I hope we can count on your continued support.**

On behalf of myself, and all the staff, clients, and board of the Urban Justice Center:

Thank you.



- Doug Lasdon
UJC Founder & Executive Director



A LETTER FROM DOUG





DEFENDING INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

We fight to ensure that every
person's rights and liberties are
protected.

FREE TO BE YOUTH PROJECT

URNS PASSION FOR FASHION INTO ACTION

When Davina Hayes, one of Free to Be Youth Project's new clients, walked the runway at our first ever Fashion Show Fundraiser this October, it was her "first glimpse" of "a lifelong dream - to be a model." For months, FYP had been assisting her with various housing issues (we've been doing various housing issues, but not health), giving her "a chance to have my life, because I just honestly didn't think that was going to be possible;" now, it was her turn to give back.

The money Davina helped raise that night went into our Client Emergency Fund, which provides small-scale financial assistance to FYP clients to address short-term emergency problems and ensure they don't become larger crises. Through the fund, we help a wide array of our clients, LGBTQ+ young people like Davina find the stability and support they need to reach their dreams.



On NYC's streets today, there are approximately 8,500 homeless LGBTQ+ youth that we know of, and statistics estimate up to 40% of homeless youth nationwide identify as LGBTQ+.

With events like our Fashion Show, we celebrate the beauty, strength, and resilience of our clients, and create a community where they can give and receive critical support.

Read more about Davina's experiences in the op-ed she co-wrote for [Teen Vogue](#) with FYP Director, [Amy Leipziger](#) at fyp.urbanjustice.org.

Muchísimas gracias estaré siempre
agradecido con usted por lo que hizo por



nosotros

Thank you for trusting me,
helping me & guiding me
through this journey

I'm finally divorced & free. Thank
you for everything.

me siento muy feliz....gracias por regalarme una luz de esperanza y libertad que
Dios la bendiga....usted es un Ángel para mi ..por primera vez
y me ayudó

thank you so much for your help. i
will appreciate it for ever. i will
come to you if i need anything.

DVP has been a n
time I dared to hope
my heart



It's finally over. Thank you
I couldn't have done it without you.
The work that you do is changing lives
of people like me.

BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

We organize and empower
groups to help them strengthen
their communities.

Nadie es como tú
Y ESE ES TU PODER

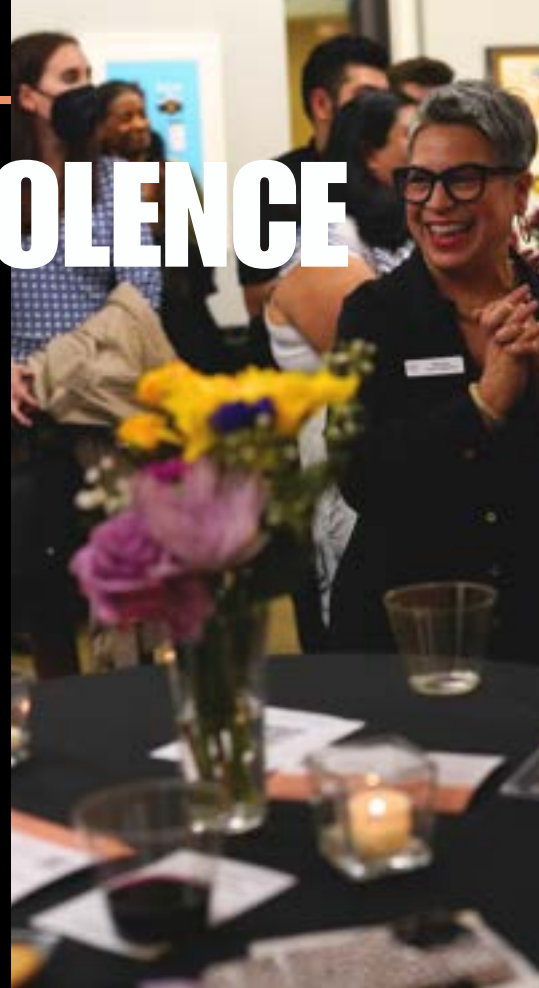


Photos courtesy the Domestic Violence Project

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROJECT

BE HEARD. BE FREE.

What does it take to thrive? This is one of the questions that our Domestic Violence Project centers in their work, which is as much about healing, connecting, and growing, as it is legal protections or financial education. Following the success of virtual support groups during the pandemic, we launched a new weekly Empowerment Group series early this year.

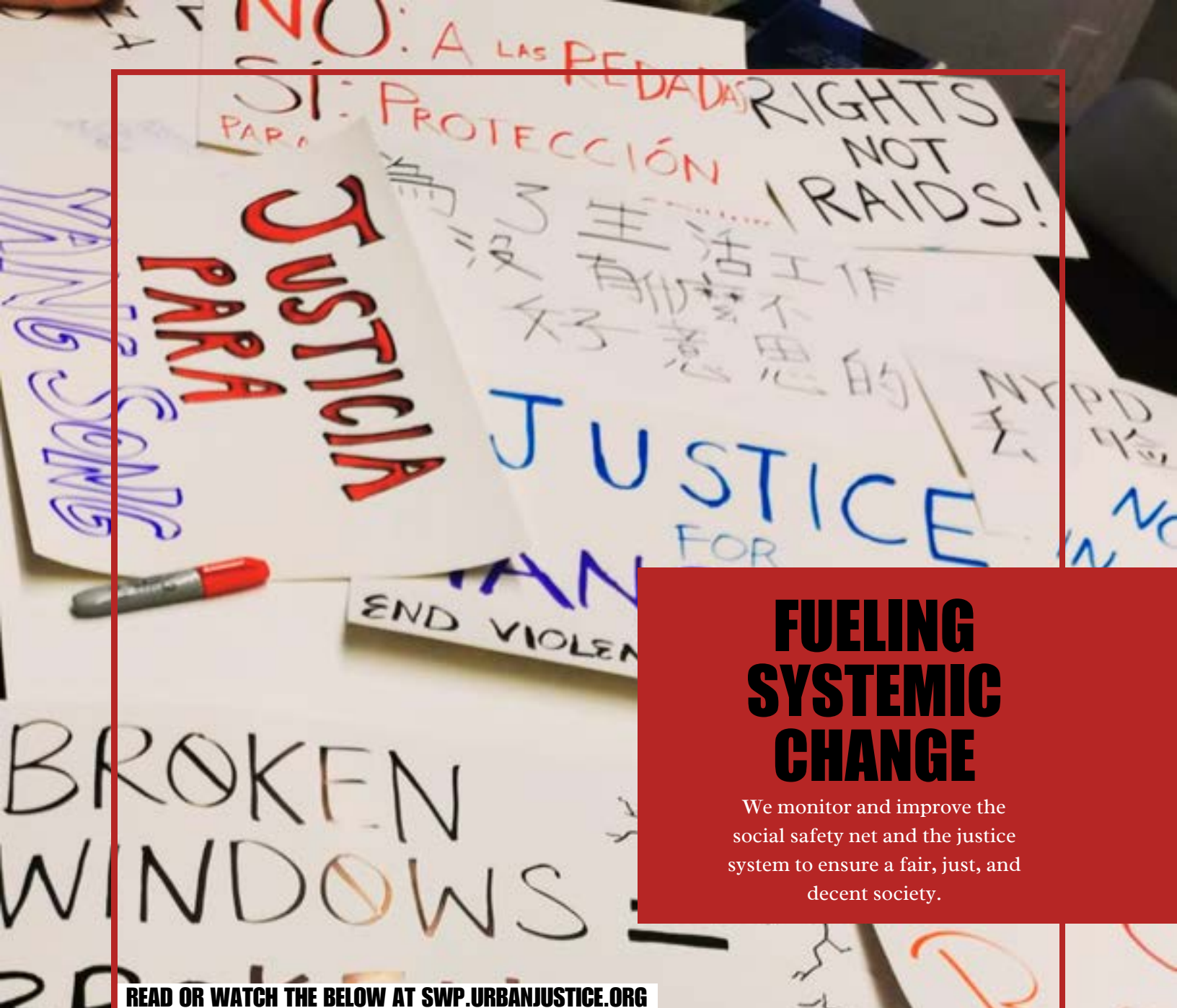


For six weeks, participants met regularly to share stories and practice strategies for self-love and self-care. This developed a crucial support system with fellow survivors, even leading to a group chat where they continue to help and hold each other accountable.

As one member told us afterwards, “El grupo me ayudó mucho. No sabía que otras estaban pasando cosas similares. Me siento entendida y apoyada.” (“The group helped me so much. I didn’t know others were experiencing similar things. I feel understood and supported.”)

That is what it means to thrive.

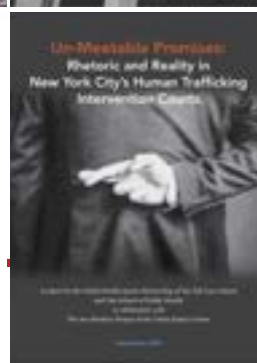
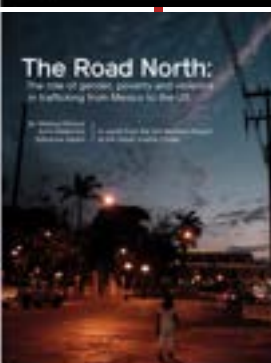
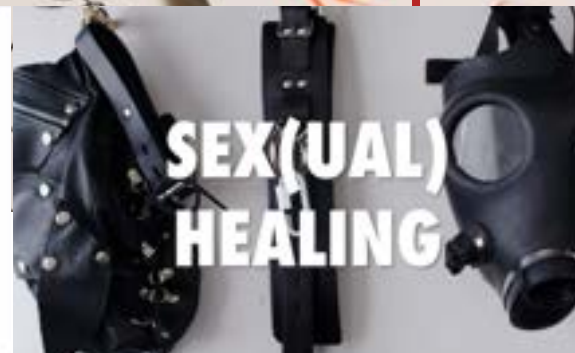




FUELING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

We monitor and improve the social safety net and the justice system to ensure a fair, just, and decent society.

READ OR WATCH THE BELOW AT SWP.URBANJUSTICE.ORG



SEX WORKERS PROJECT

DESTIGMATIZE AND DECRIMINALIZE SEX WORK

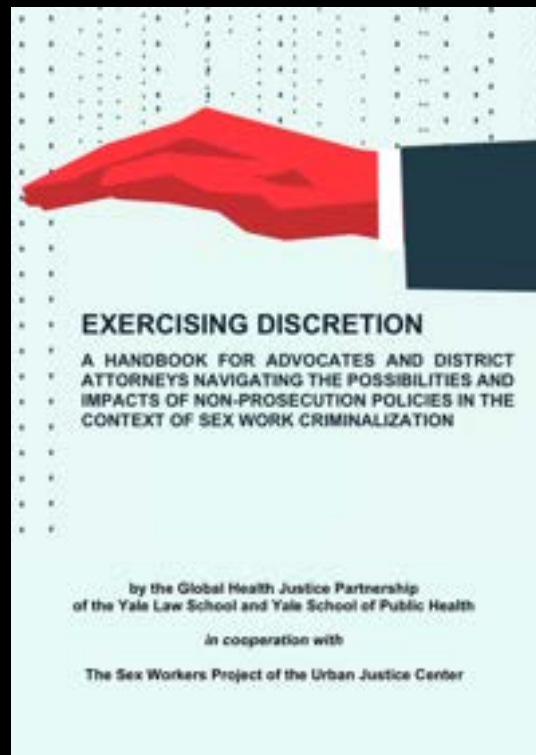


This year SWP released "Exercising Discretion: A Handbook for Advocates and District Attorneys Navigating the Possibilities and Impacts of Non-Prosecution Policies in the Context of Sex Work Criminalization," in collaboration with Yale School of Law's Global Health and Justice Partnership (GHJP).

The handbook outlines best practices for prosecutors across the country to utilize their broad discretion to not prosecute sex workers at the local level until states, including New York, have the political will to decriminalize all adult consensual buying and selling of sexual and erotic services. The DA Handbook has been disseminated widely across the country and former SWP Director of Research & Advocacy, Mariah Grant, continues to train on these best practices across multiple U.S. states, DC and Puerto Rico.



The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center works to destigmatize and decriminalize sex work nationwide, while providing direct immigration legal services to sex workers across New York City and beyond. SWP has conducted original research on the sex trades for 22 years, including community based participatory action research as well as academic research.



DA's offices from Ann Arbor, Michigan to Baltimore, Maryland, to New York City have chosen to do the right thing and stop prosecuting adults for working. SWP and Yale's handbook is helping many more jurisdictions to do the same, while we continue to educate and advocate for the full decriminalization of all adult sex work in every region of the U.S.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE GRADUATING COHORT OF OUR SOCIAL JUSTICE ACCELERATOR

DAVID SHALLECK-KLEIN

Family Justice Law Center

NORA MCCARTHY

Family Policy Project

SARAH MEDINA CAMISCOLI

Peer Defense Project

AMRITA DOSHI

South Asian SOAR

DAVID SIMPSON & ANNA SUGRUE

The Remedy Project



“The mentorship and support during this time was invaluable and transformative. As a new leader, these were some of the most isolating times and the UJC was always there to offer their collective years of wisdom or just a listening ear.”

AMRITA DOSHI, SOUTH ASIAN SOAR

“Our biggest result is that today my co-director and I operate like two season professionals in the space. Securing stable funding towards our budget. Conducting fruitful board meetings, operating using strategic planning, perfecting our services etc. We are actually very comfortable in our space today because we understand what we do, what our challenges are, and what it takes to be successful. This would not be the case for us without SJA’s coaching/guidance.”

DAVID SIMPSON, THE REMEDY PROJECT



“SJA helped me to identify and build foundational structures and skills... Our organization has transformed through the program. Best coaching I’ve ever had!”

SARAH MEDINA CAMISCOLI, PEER DEFENSE PROJECT



For the last two years, we have worked with an incredible class of up-and-coming social justice leaders, helping them transform their early-stage nonprofits into powerhouses for change. Thanks to their work, New York City is a better, safer, and more just place. We are honored to have had a role in their development, and we are so excited to see what they do next.

EXPERIENCE JUSTICE

has been in the forefront of the movement to force the Supreme Court to adhere to

a clear and enforceable Code of Ethics, including a critique of the recent long-overdue but inadequate code, promulgated by the Chief Justice. With the pro bono assistance of the law firm Schulte Roth & Zabel, we are coordinating the efforts of a number of groups including Accountability, Fix the Court, Alliance for Justice, United for Democracy, POGO (Project on Government Oversight), civil rights advocates and academics.

We are working with groups committed to keeping access to abortions safe and affordable even in states hostile to the rights of women to control their bodies. We are also collaborating with organizations on jail reform in New York and affirmative action issues nationwide, as we continue to mentor the next generation of progressive lawyers.

NEXT UP

Every year, the work of the Urban Justice Center is covered in hundreds of news stories around the world. Here, we've collected just a few of the pieces from 2023. If you'd like to hear about these stories as they happen, scan the QR code and sign up for our mailing list, where we share a weekly run down of all UJC-related news.



Freedom Agenda



Street Vendor Project



Mental Health Project



Safety Net Project

UJC IN THE NEWS

amNY

New York City street vendors call for reform to industry, end of police targeting

CITYLIMITS

Opinion: Will NYC's Budget Promote Mental Health or Preserve Mass Incarceration?

The New York Times

Vulnerable New Yorkers Suffer as Some Services Decline Under Mayor Adams

STREET VENDOR PROJECT

"New York City Street Vendors Call for Reform to Industry, End of Police Targeting"

FREEDOM AGENDA

"Four Year Countdown to Rikers' Closure Begins"

Before joining UJC, our Freedom Agenda was known as the Close Rikers campaign – the organizers who successfully brought the city to the table and secured an agreement to permanently close the infamously dangerous Rikers Island detention complex. As of 8/31/23, New York City has four years to meet this obligation, and while the Adams administration has put up roadblocks at every step, our Freedom Agenda has worked tirelessly to ensure Rikers is closed – and in the meantime, that those incarcerated there are not forgotten.

"We call on the mayor to take every necessary action to do what he said he would do, to do what is legally required, and to do what is right," Darren Mack, the co-director of Freedom Agenda, said during the rally. "We need to decarcerate now and spare people from the deadly environment of Rikers Island – and we need to move swiftly to shut it down for good."

Street vendors are New York City's smallest businesses, and a vital source of work for many new immigrants. Yet the early 1980s, the city has only allowed 853 legal street vendors in all 5 boroughs. In 2021, our Street Vendor Project won a successful, years-long campaign to create 4,500 new licenses – yet two years later, the city has yet to issue a single one. As a member organization serving thousands of vendors, SVP has marshalled their tremendous strength to bring pressure on city hall to let vendors vend safely and legally.

"Hundreds of street vendors descended on City Hall on Thursday to demand Big Apple leaders make significant reforms to the way the industry is regulated. The vendors, organized by the Street Vendor Project, say that New York's smallest small business owners are stymied by an outdated regulatory framework and preventing individual businesses, and the industry writ large, from reaching their fullest potential. They also are subject to ruinous enforcement by police, they say."

MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

“Will NYC’s Budget Promote Mental Health or Preserve Mass Incarceration?”

For decades, our Mental Health Project (and the group they cofounded, the Jails Action Coalition) have been fighting for the rights and survival of New Yorkers with mental health concerns, particularly those who are or have been incarcerated. Today, 52% of those incarcerated on Rikers Island have received a mental health diagnosis. Yet, the dire needs of this community continues to be ignored. Our Mental Health Project fights every day for the rights of incarcerated people with mental health concerns, from bringing law suits, to planning rallies, to writing op-eds like this one.

“Budgets show what we value. When the mayor announced his Mental Health Agenda in March, it touted \$20 million dollars in new funding commitments. That is wildly insufficient to meet the scale and depth of need. It is also less than what DOC spends on overtime in just one month... Despite the mayor’s repeated statements that he wants to fund more “upstream” services that address the city’s mental health crisis, his agenda, instead, focuses on post-crisis points and increased law enforcement. To effectively address the city’s mental health crisis, the mayor must invest in more preventive and evidenced-based supports.”

SAFETY NET PROJECT

“Vulnerable New Yorkers Suffer as Some Services Decline Under Mayor Adams”

For clients like Diana Ramos, the daily support of our Safety Net Project has been invaluable, particularly in our new post-pandemic world, where many aspects of the city’s safety net – from food stamps to sexual health clinics – have been underfunded or entirely dismantled. SNP works to ensure that individuals like Ramos get the support they deserve and need, while also holding the city administration to the fire to improve and fund these services.

Ms. Ramos, who was assisted by the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center, said she was relieved when her food stamps arrived last week... A confluence of factors has contributed to the recent decline in city services. The mayor has forced city agencies to curb spending, over the objections of Democrats on the City Council, citing an uncertain economic outlook and new labor deals. He has warned that additional budget cuts and a hiring freeze might be necessary as the city struggles to pay for housing thousands of migrants arriving from the southern border. The proposed cuts of up to 15 percent over the next year would be much deeper than past cuts and could prove even more harmful to poor New Yorkers.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

\$200.1k+

City Of New York
New York Community
Trust
NYC Council DoVE
NYC DOHMH
NYC DYCD
NYC HRA
NYC SBS
NYS IOLA
NYS OCA
NYS OTDA
Robin Hood Foundation
Trinity Church Wall Street

\$200k-\$50.1k

Brooklyn Community
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CT Charitable Foundation
Ford Foundation
Hakook Incorporated
Hunger Solutions Of New
York, Inc.
Jessie Smith Noyes
Foundation
Joel M. Frank
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Morgan Stanley
New York Foundation
New York Women's
Foundation
North Star Fund
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NYS DOH
NYS OCFS
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Wharton & Garrison LLP
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Development Corps

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Advisors

Stand Together
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Tow Foundation
Transform Justice
Initiative
Vera Institute of Justice
Walentas Foundation

\$50k-\$25.1k

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\$10k-\$5.1k

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Initiative
PwC
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Red Shuttles Fund

Donors from 7/1/22 - 6/30/23

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Insurance
Tides Foundation
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\$5k-\$2.1k

AEO Foundation
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Alliance Bernstein
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Frankel
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NEO Philanthropy
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Ugalde & Rzonca LLP
Urban Institute
William Terry
Winky Foundation
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Daniel Bergey
Daniel Leffell
David Bresnahan
Elena Feliciano
Francisco Partners
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Family Charitable Fund
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Susan B. Plum
Tess Adams
Tom Flaschen
Trey Peacock
United Snacks Inc.
Wet Noise
Yoojin Janice Lee

2023 RECAP

SUPPORT OUR CLIENTS



5,322

Cases Closed

9,628+

Individuals Impacted as a Result of Our Services

5,218

People Reached through Community Education Workshops

2,192

Clients Assisted with Housing Issues

1,540

Clients Enrolled in Public Benefits

1,393

Clients Assisted with Immigration Status Challenges

\$2,061,466

Won for Clients, Including SNAP, TANF, SSI, Social Security, Veterans Benefits, Housing Benefits, and More

NEW YEAR, NEW PODCAST

Our Executive Director, Doug Lasdon, is launching a new podcast next year, in which he interviews some of the incredible social justice leaders he's gotten to know.

The guests on "Beyond the Box" are working on some of the most critical and difficult issues of today, from combatting limitless government surveillance to protecting and empowering sex workers.

Sign up for our newsletter at urbanjustice.org/newsletter and look out for the announcement of the release coming in January!

COMING IN 2024:

Beyond

THE
BOX



URBAN
JUSTICE
CENTER

Hosted by Doug Lasdon

A special thank you to Andrés Piedrahita / @a.pie for capturing the majority of photos across this report.