

# **URBAN JUSTICE CENTER**

2022-2023

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Urban Justice Center (UJC) continues to provide extraordinary legal services all the while expanding our services to reflect current demands. During this year, UJC closed 5,322 cases; provided more than 9,600 people with direct legal services; conducted approximately 3,900 in-person intakes; presented community legal education through printed materials as well as in-person presentations to approximately 5,200 people in the community; assisted more than 22,000 people through pro se workshops, clinics, and materials; aided approximately 1,300 people through multiple UJC helplines; made approximately 4,700 referrals for services either not provided by UJC or to supplement UJC’s services; and, worked on 8 impact cases/projects, with over 3,000 beneficiaries. We are especially proud that through UJC’s exceptional work, over \$3.5 million dollars were awarded directly to clients.

During the 2022-2023 contract year, UJC has continued to strive in four major aspects: Fueling systemic change, building an inclusive community, defending individual rights, and providing exceptional legal services and advocacy. To fuel systemic change, for example, the Mental Health Project (MHP) continued their systemic advocacy efforts, including the lawsuit *Amin v. Berryhill*. The Amin case challenges the failure of Social Security Administration to process non-disability appeals correctly and to safeguard the right to continued benefits during an appeal.

Building an inclusive community remains at the heart of UJC’s work. The Street Vendors Projects’ (SVP) legal services continue to provide a membership-based model that works in conjunction with our community organizing. Trainings are provided, in 5 languages simultaneously, by vendors and for vendors, in conjunction with SVP lawyers, at monthly general membership meetings where vendors come together to talk about their individual and collective problems.



**Population Served:** General Low Income Population

**Total Funding:** \$28,086,468

**Total IOLA Grant:** \$700,000

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

- Total Staff: 145
- Paralegals: 32
- Lawyers: 59
- Other: 54

To advance and defend individual rights, for example, the Safety Net Project (SNP) benefits team provided direct legal assistance to New Yorkers experiencing problems accessing public assistance benefits and SNAP (Food Stamp) benefits, securing over \$1.3 million in retroactive and ongoing benefits for our clients. The Sex Workers Project (SWP) serves those who work in the sex trades, whether by choice, circumstance or coercion. This includes sex workers, survivors of human trafficking and people with criminal convictions related to sex work. As a result of SWP's work, 175 people benefitted because their clients were granted asylum status, lawful permanent residence, and/or citizenship.

Lastly, providing extraordinary legal services and advocacy is shown by the Domestic Violence Project (DVP) serving more than 3,600 survivors of intimate partner violence with varying matters. The overwhelming majority of clients served have a minimum of two children in their household. At DVP, assistance is provided on matters such as custody/visitation; child/spousal support; and orders of protection. Intimate partner violence is similarly as destructive to the survivor as it is to the children. Providing a survivor/parent with the resources to viable relief from violence and to assist in stabilizing an unstable home, provides fertile ground for the survivor and children to heal, thrive and succeed.

## DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

### *Housing*

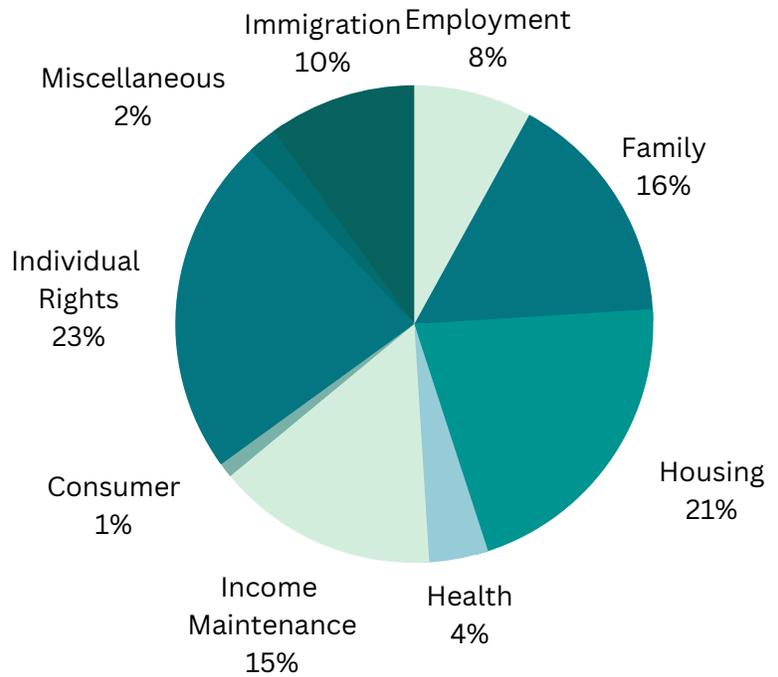
Client Ms. A suffered serious injury due to poor conditions in her building including chronic back problems. In retaliation for trying to hold the landlord accountable for their negligence, the landlord sued Client but Client was not notified. Client was unexpectedly evicted with their four small children. Client met a SNP attorney in the halls of housing court while trying to understand what to file in order to get their home back. SNP immediately stepped in to stop the landlord re-letting the apartment. Client spent several hours in SNP's new Bronx office a block from housing court, where they were able to get their affairs in order, work with SNP attorneys on court papers where they were able to get their affairs in order, work with SNP attorneys on court papers and even get some food. SNP's office was also able to secure material aid for

**9,628**  
people  
benefitted from  
**5,322**  
legal cases  
closed

the family so they could stay in a nearby hotel while we worked to get them back into their home. Within a week their rent arrears issues were resolved and Client, along with their family, was back in their home.

**Income Maintenance**

MHP assisted a 60-year-old SSI recipient with adjusting their Supplemental Security Income (SSI) rate after they were discharged from rehabilitation care at a nursing home. Client had secured supported housing after discharge, but the Social Security Administration was not acting on this change in living arrangement. Client’s symptoms from his mental health diagnoses meant they were unable to advocate successfully for themselves. With MHP’s advocacy, Client’s monthly SSI rate was increased from \$30 to \$941.

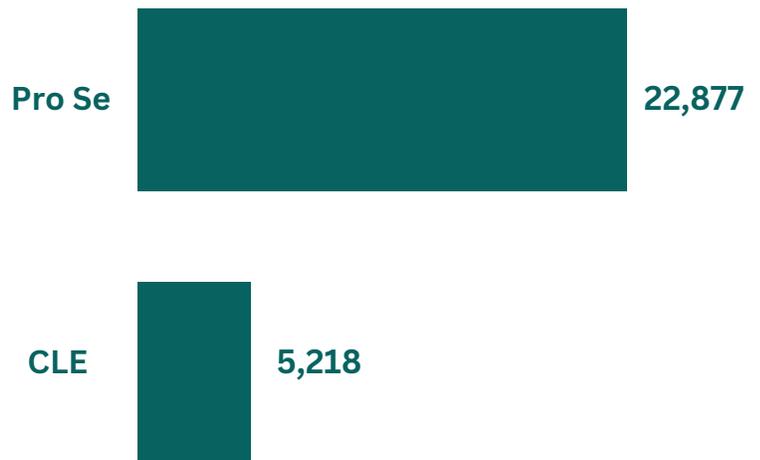


**Cases by Legal Problem Area**

**OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW**

UJC provides many forms of community legal education, pro se assistance, referrals, and Know Your Rights trainings/workshops. This includes community legal education for low-income New Yorkers on matters such as housing, employment, public benefits, identification documentation, consumer debt, and immigration; street vendor rights, licenses, and employment; and transactional legal assistance to community-based nonprofit organizations in low-income communities. MHP provides advocacy

**Number of People Benefitted from Other Services**



courses to community members who have mental health concerns and are experiencing poverty. The goal of these courses is to develop, improve, and practice oral advocacy skills to address both individual issues and to create systemic change on local and state levels. SNP conducts outreach clinics and building outreach to advise NYCHA tenants and to connect them with SNP's legal services to address housing issues. In March 2023, SNP held a successful town hall event to provide legal information about cash assistance and a legislative proposal that would increase cash assistance levels statewide. DVP provides online outreach, CLE, and pro se assistance as part of its grassroots organizing efforts. Online outreach includes materials and information posted on our website and social media platforms. For example, DVP launched a YouTube Channel after March of 2020 in order to provide free, on-demand Know Your Rights (KYR) trainings to survivors, advocates, and the community at large.

**28,095**  
people  
benefitted from  
Services Other  
Than Direct  
Legal Services

## **OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY**

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In March 2020, UJC closed their physical office due to the COVID-19 epidemic. UJC made significant improvements to deliver remote legal services via the internet. Some improvements to our technology include but not limited to: Migrated the phone system from in-office to cloud-based IP phone system, migrated file server to cloud-based Sharepoint environment, purchased new laptops for workforce and rolled out remote deployment and remote access software and configuration, Trained users to use tools such as Zoom to collaborate remotely and even conduct webinars. UJC attorneys appeared in court remotely and provided advice and counsel to clients via telephone and a variety of web-based platforms such as Zoom.

During 2023, UJC has been able to start reopening the physical office while continuing to provide remote services. SWP continued to use Slack for internal communications and Asana for remotely dividing labor. At the same time, SWP began meeting with clients in person, when safe to do so. The use of in-person and remote offering made UJC more accessible for clients.

## OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

UJC provides many training opportunities to staff, interns, and volunteers, through in-house training programs as well as programs offered by outside providers, in addition to countless training opportunities offered within each project, specific to their work. Staff are encouraged to attend external trainings on any related topic. MHP fosters professional development for its staff by funding participation in trainings, conferences, and workshops, which the staff member and/or the Managing Director identifies as being valuable to their work responsibilities. As a member of the LEAP coalition, SNP staff participate in receiving and providing trainings with the LEAP legal community. In this reporting period, SNP also provided Implicit Bias training to increase awareness and work towards justice and fairness in the workplace, a training on Legal Ethics training for all staff to ensure compliance, and SNP offered monthly resiliency groups for staff and managers separately, to address vicarious trauma.

## IMPACT CASES

### *Rafel Abelo et al vs.*

### *The City of New York et al*

In August 2022, SNP built on their homeless advocacy work to protect the rights of homeless New Yorkers during transfers by filing the case of Rafel Abelo et al vs. The City of New York et al, 452415/2022 on behalf of 39 homeless plaintiffs, seeking leave to file late notices of claim relating to various torts claims, including personal injury, unlawful seizure of property, deprivation of property without due process of law, trespass to chattels, property damage, conversion, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and negligent infliction of emotional distress. SNP's case is still pending, but since the filing of the case, NYC's Department of Homeless Services revised its shelter transfer policy to include specific protections and access to storage for the personal belongings of homeless New Yorkers during shelter transfers. This potentially impacts all of NYC's shelter population, which is over 68,000.

**3,000**  
beneficiaries  
were affected by  
**8**  
Impact Cases

***Brad H. v. City of New York***

MHP continues to monitor the Brad H. settlement agreement which requires New York City to provide discharge planning services, including referrals for continued mental health and substance use treatment, medication, and public benefits, to people who receive mental health treatment in jail. The size of the Brad H. class has increased. Now approximately half of the jail population are designated class members. MHP informs class members whom we interview or contact by mail of their discharge planning rights and advocate for those who have not received services.

***Ahmed v. City of NY***

SVP continues to litigate the Ahmed v. City of NY class action on behalf over 300 vendors for reimbursement for the carts and other vending property which were illegally seized and destroyed by City enforcement agents during “task force sweeps” of various neighborhoods in the City. The matter was settled in 2019. In August 2022, SVP, with pro bono assistance, filed additional documents to support out 2021 Cy Pres motion for the distribution of the remaining settlement funds. The motion is still pending.

**All Impact Cases*****Ahmed v. City of NY***

***117 West 141 LLC vs. Michelle Paer, Index No. LT 308389-21/NY***  
***Ana Galvez et. al. v. 249 E 149 LLC, LT 300171-22/BX***

***Brad H. v. City of New York******Amin v. Berryhill***

***Rafel Abelo et al vs. The City of New York et al, 452415/2022***  
***1193-1205***

***Eastern Parkway Tenant Association, et ano., v. STF 1193-1205 Eastern Pkwy Holding LLC, Phillips Nizer LLP, Barberry Rose Management Co., Inc., Silverman, DHPD***

***Barry Simon, Picture the Homeless, Inc. and Urban Justice Center – Safety Net Project v. Patrick J. Foye as Chairman and CEO of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Sarah E. Feinberg as the Interim President of the New York City Transit Authority, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, New York City Transit Authority, and Manhattan and Bronx Surface Transit Operating Authority***

# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

UJC significantly utilizes pro-bono attorneys, law students, social work interns, and other volunteers across several legal practice areas, while also offering appropriate trainings and supervision. SNP has an intern program coordinator who recruits interns for SNP’s programs via a range of channels to ensure diversity. These include, the PILC fair, CUNY Service Corps, Hunter College’s Public Service Scholar Program, the Pro Bono Scholar program, and more. All interns receive intentional training and are allocated a direct supervisor who ensure they have ongoing support, a strong educational experience, and varied work opportunities. In the reporting year, SNP continued hosting CUNY Law housing clinic students to work on eviction defense cases and also legal policy projects.

SVP uses pro bono attorneys for more complex cases. Brown Rudnick LLP provided litigation support for the Ahmed case. While Schulte, Roth, and Zabel LLP provided representation of vendor sued by a property owner and Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP reviewed contracts from a technology company interested in providing electrified food carts.

MHP has developed a partnership with a scholarship program at Hunter College that places undergraduate interns with MHP to for administrative and client service work. In the Spring of 2023, MHP hosted one undergraduate and four social work students.



**41 Attorneys volunteered 2,687 hours**

**30 Law Students volunteered 5,027 hours**

**12 Other Volunteers volunteered 1,920 hours**

Each  icon is equal to 8.3 volunteers.  
 Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.  
 Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.

MHP had one pro bono attorney assist on two individual cases and one pro bono attorney in the Attorney Emeritus program participate in our impact case Amin v. Commissioner of Social Security. Eight pro bono attorneys supported the Criminal Justice Advocacy team: six on the Article 78 against the Justice Center, and two on Brad H. case. The attorneys at Skadden who worked on the Article 78 report spent 133.28 hours on the case, and the attorneys at Debevoise spent 72.8 hours on Brad H. case.

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## SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

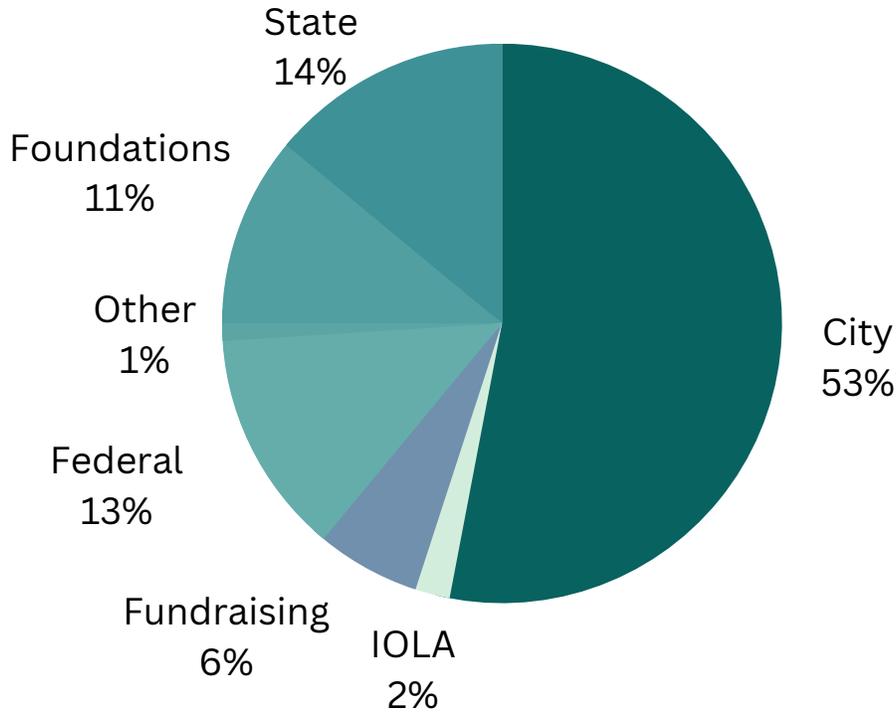
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Collaborations are a significant part of UJC's work. Collaborating with an agency can strengthen the reach an organization has with the community members. SVP joined the "Street Vendor Justice Coalition" comprised of Arab American Association, Community Service Society of New York, Council on American Islamic Relations, Jews For Racial & Economic Justice, New York Immigration Coalition, Open Plans, Riders Alliance, and Transportation Alternatives. The coalition has been pushing for reforms including Legislative bills at the NYC City Council for full formalization of the vending industry among other changes. DVP has forged strong relationships with agencies that focus on serving specific populations and sub-populations with critical expertise beyond DVP's scope. Notably this year, DVP has developed a strong partnership with ECHO Clinic and New York City Free Clinic to provide information and free medical services for uninsured survivors. SWP has relationships with the New York City Anti-Violence Project, Make the Road New York, Womankind, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, Brooklyn Defender Services, and Legal Aid Society. Notably, SWP continues to work with Red Canary Song to secure the rights of API workers in massage parlors through immigrations legal services and community outreach. MHP is part of the Treatment Not Jail campaign coordinated by New York County Defender Services. On behalf of the coalition, our staff testified at a state budget hearing regarding the Treatment Not Jail Act. MHP coordinates MHASC (Mental Health Alternatives to Solitary Confinement), a coalition of organizations and individuals concerned with treatment and conditions for people with mental health challenges incarcerated in NYS prisons.

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# SOURCES OF FUNDING

Urban Justice Center received  
**\$28,086,468**  
 in total funding this past year



<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$3,154,971</b>
<b>IOLA Grant</b>	<b>\$700,000</b>
<b>Federal</b>	<b>\$3,684,771</b>
<b>City and County Funding</b>	<b>\$14,887,591</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$1,651,507</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$3,808,632</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>\$198,947</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$28,086,468</b>