

TAKEROOT JUSTICE

2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

For over twenty years, TakeRoot has been supporting movements for change in NYC’s low-income and marginalized communities through civil legal services, participatory research and policy, and technical assistance. This past year, we served 3,175 people by closing 1,331 cases. 99 organizations directly benefitted from our services, and countless others indirectly benefitted from our movement-building work via our connections and relationships with over 70 grassroots partners and 20 coalitions.

Our major accomplishments include:

- Expanding the Participatory Defense Project, started in November 2021, to unite otherwise-isolated tenants for monthly gatherings centered around relationship-building, training, and leadership development. Participatory defense, a model of legal representation that mobilizes defendants’ communities and support networks “to impact the outcomes of cases and transform the landscape of power in the court system,” was originally developed for defendants in the criminal defense context. We adapted this model to civil eviction defense for many of our Right to Counsel (RTC) cases, the volume of which has skyrocketed now that the NYC eviction moratorium has expired.
- With our partners The Residents to Preserve Public Housing, we successfully advocated for legislative changes, which increased resident involvement in process of transforming public Section 9 housing to Section 8 housing, to be managed by the new “Preservation Trust,” as well as an increased participation threshold for an in-voting process designed by the New York City Public Housing Authority as a result of the Preservation Trust law in December 2022. These crucial interventions impact over 176,000 families living in NYC’s public housing.

[Press advocacy July 2022](#)



Population Served: Low Income Populations

Total Funding: \$6,777,273

Total IOLA Grant: \$150,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 52.26
- Paralegals: 6
- Lawyers: 31.33
- Other: 14.93

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

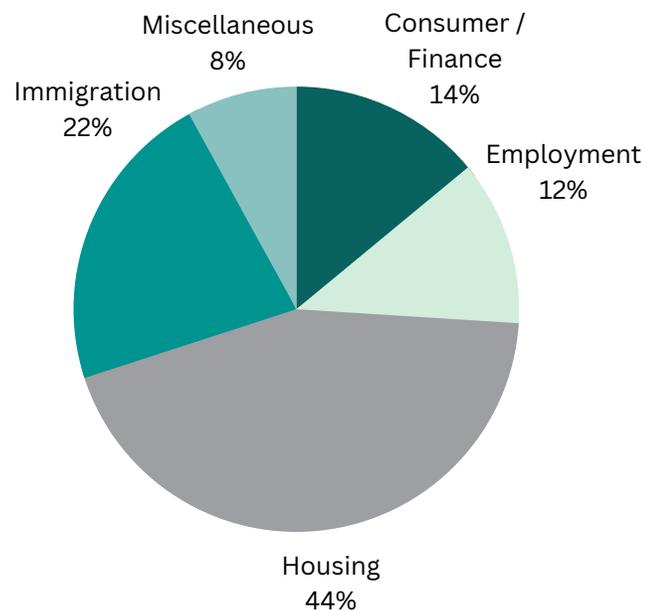
Housing:

The struggle for housing justice is long. In 2017, when residents in a Port Morris apartment learned that the new owner of their building wanted to overturn its rent-stabilized status, they began organizing in a bar down the street to challenge his effort. They formed a tenants’ association and connected with our Housing Rights practice area for legal representation. In 2018, they began a campaign to buy the building and turn it into a Housing Development Fund Corporation Coop.

In February of this year, five years after they began organizing, their partners at the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board bought the building on behalf of the residents. The victory is especially rare as the tenants did not receive any financial support from city or state government. While this group of tenants undertake training and establish their co-op, we will continue to support tenants’ organizing and advocate for legislation, like the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, to make this process easier.

Workers’ Rights: This year, we successfully settled two cases filed in the Eastern District of New York on behalf of M, a Queens-based Guyanese domestic worker in her 50s, against two of her former employers. In both cases, M provided 24-hour care for her employers’ elderly family members in Brooklyn. This resulted in a grueling schedule of between 120 and 168 hours per week over a three-year period. Because she was not given eight hours of sleep per night, nor given five hours of uninterrupted sleep per night nor given any meal breaks, M was required to be paid for all 24 hours of a 24-hour shift.

3,175 people benefitted from 1,331 legal cases closed



Cases by Legal Problem Area

Because M was not paid overtime or spread-of-hours wages, her hourly rate ranged between \$4.17 and \$8.33. Through our representation and advocacy on both cases, we were able to recover \$82,000 in unpaid wages and penalties.

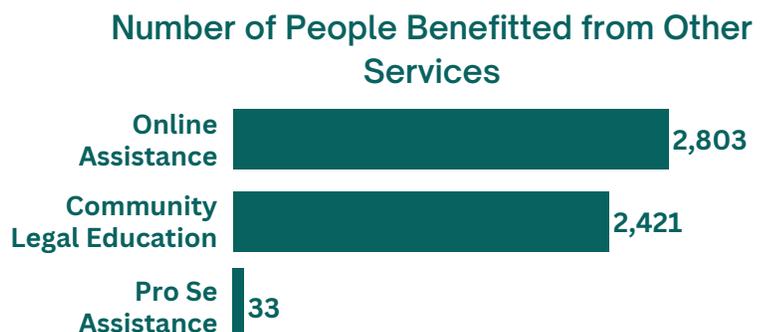
Consumer:

We represent a number of clients who were sued years ago by credit card companies, and have a default judgment against them because they were never served, and did not know to go to court. These clients frequently find out about the judgment only when their wages were garnished, or bank accounts are frozen. In one particular case, our client had to go to court a number of times because of constant adjournments, and a court finally ordered a hearing to determine if he was served properly. At the hearing, the judge pressured him to pay the judgment, even though the credit card company could not get the process server to appear to prove that proper service was made. With our guidance, the client refused to pay, and the judge ultimately decided the case in his favor, and he did not have to pay anything.

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

TakeRoot Justice serves marginalized communities across NYC, in every borough, across age, racial background, ethnicity, gender, and disability status. Our experience and deep connections in NYC communities help us understand that marginalized New Yorkers face intersecting forms of oppression in their workplaces, homes, neighborhoods, and as consumers and immigrants. We work with migrant communities across various points of immigration status, from countless home countries, serving a city with over 800 languages spoken. We provided: (1) legal and rights education for over 2,400 low-income New Yorkers on matters such as housing, employment, consumer debt, and immigration through more than 100 community-led workshops and meetings, (2) pro se assistance for 33 low-income individuals, (3) 60 referrals to a wide variety of services such as credit counseling, financial planning, public benefits access, banking resources, domestic violence resources, immigration, and other matters that are often causes of or have direct bearing on the legal issues experience by clients, and (4) 6 testimonies at public hearings.

**5,257 People
Benefitted from
Services Other Than
Direct Legal Services**



OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

The Technology Circle was launched to evaluate our needs and how tools and resources support our mission and model. Our hybrid in-person/virtual model of service provision utilized conferencing technologies for the protection of and/or for easier access for working clients, clients with accessibility issues, partners, and staff, while offering in-person or remote services based on partners' and clients' preferences. We used DocuSign and Adobe Sign for retainers, intakes, and other documents, saving time and money for clients traveling for in-person signatures. Coalitions met remotely, saving members commute and coordination. 250+ meetings, trainings, workshops, and clinics were conducted for 4,000+ people. Some trainings were recorded to broaden access for essential workers, NYC tenants and immigrants to better understand new and existing federal, state and city legislation and directives that provide relief.

We also created a tool that imports housing code violation updates issued by HPD. Notifications are sent to the appropriate parties, outlining the update and follow-up needed. This has improved the effectiveness of 311 complaints and is crucial for claims and defenses based on violations. The tool also maps occupants and their contact info for community partner tenant organizers to aid in their outreach. Our pilot has been successful, and we are preparing for a wider rollout.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

All of our staff are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities such as CLEs, skills building workshops, and trainings related to supporting community organizing and movements for justice. Within our organization, our Internship and Fellowship Circle provided a vicarious trauma training by Veronica Gonzalez of Her Justice and discussions with organizers from the Community Land Trust and Public Housing resident self-determination movements. Our Learning Circle also led staff-wide discussions and workshops around storytelling and its importance in organizing.

Last year, we created a Culture and Transitions taskforce to engage staff in a series of workshops and trainings aimed at cultivating an environment of equity and inclusion to enhance our workplace as well as our work as a racial justice organization. This work was led by our Anti-Oppression Circle, two of our board members, and AORTA (Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance), a worker-owned cooperative of facilitators and strategists devoted to helping movements renew a stronger sense of liberatory vision, values and purpose.

IMPACT CASES

We believe the people who live and work in NYC must have a voice in the future of their neighborhoods.

Supporting Community Land Trusts (CLTs) (estimated 19,978 beneficiaries):

We provided technical assistance for NYC-based CLTs in several complex matters regarding organizational governance, real estate transactions, and policy advocacy, as well as through coordinated efforts as part of the NYC Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI), an alliance of grassroots, affordable housing, environmental and economic justice organizations. We supported a newly established CLT in being selected to receive 119 city owned lots to develop as permanently affordable housing and community open space.

Supporting NYCHA resident leaders (estimated 1,030 beneficiaries):

We worked with public housing resident leaders to conduct educational workshops for NYCHA residents city-wide, advocated for major legislative victories that increased resident participation in decision-making about the future of public housing, and supported the creation and incorporation of a new, city-wide public housing residents-led organization. We represented a public housing Resident Association in negotiations with NYCHA and a neighboring developer to secure a multi-million dollar air-rights transfer, the proceeds from which will go exclusively toward renovations and repairs at the residents' development.

Abolish the Tax Lien Sale Campaign (estimated 11,000 beneficiaries):

Due to the Abolish the Tax Lien Sale Coalition, of which TakeRoot is a founding member and counsel, authorization for the sale of NYC liens to an investment-backed trust expired in 2022 and has not been renewed. The Coalition is now working with elected advocates and the administration to design and implement a new municipal debt collection system for NYC. On February 2, 2023, after over a year of study and feedback from various stakeholders, the Coalition released a municipal debt collection framework that prioritizes neighborhood stabilization and provides options for homeowners and tenants to remain in their neighborhoods. This framework has shaped conversations about the future of municipal debt collection that are ongoing within the City administration and Council.

32,008
Beneficiaries
were affected
by 3 Impact
Cases

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

We frequently work with and/or mentor over 30 firms, pro bono attorneys, law students and volunteers across our legal practice areas. We also partner regularly with a major firm to staff several monthly housing clinics, which includes training pro-bono attorneys on housing law and eviction prevention matters. Throughout the years and since the beginning of the pandemic, we have closely partnered with the law firm that coordinates the Small Business Legal Referral Assistance (SBLRA) consortium. We work diligently to field intakes from the community and help small businesses access legal resources provided by both the public and private sector. This referral network was launched as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on small businesses and demonstrates the enormous need for this access to justice to continue.

This year, our pro bono partners have provided incredible support to our Immigrants’ Rights team as the need for capacity to provide services to immigrant communities has increased enormously. Our partners have been quick to take on Immigration-related referrals ranging from full trial support to conducting intensely in-depth research on country conditions and the impacts on specific migrant populations in the U.S. Our Immigrants’ Rights team provided ongoing training and mentorship to pro bono attorneys to further expand their capacity to handle additional referrals.



66 Attorneys volunteered 1,718 hours

9 Other Volunteers volunteered 77 hours

Each  icon is equal to 7.5 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

TakeRoot Justice has a long history of partnering with dozens of grassroots and community-based organizations in areas such as housing, land use, immigration and workers' rights, that build leadership and power within NYC's low-income and under-resourced communities, particularly communities of color, immigrant communities and others who are traditionally excluded from policymaking. Close partnerships with these grassroots, neighborhood-based organizations and community coalitions are the foundation of our model of civil legal service provision with the goal that they will determine the priorities of our work. This model upends the traditional power dynamics between communities and service providers and advances our understanding of justice.

As one recent example, the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI) remains a significant area of our work. NYCCLI is an alliance of grassroots, affordable housing, environmental and economic justice organizations working to promote community land trusts (CLTs) and neighborhood-led development. NYCCLI members include CLTs organizing for deeply-affordable social housing, commercial and community spaces, and other needs in low income Black and brown neighborhoods across the five boroughs. We at TakeRoot support this growing movement for affordable community-controlled housing, commercial and community spaces through legal services to CLT members of the initiative and other groups exploring the CLT model. We provide everything from education on orientation and incorporation, to transactional representation in negotiating ground leases and joint venture agreements.

This year, TakeRoot partnered with Chhaya CDC, Cooper Square Committee, the League of Independent Theater of New York, NYC Artist Coalition, NYC Network of Worker Cooperatives and the Street Vendor Project on #FAIRRENT, a campaign to create a commercial rent stabilization system for NYC. TakeRoot's contributions to the campaign have been press advocacy, legislative drafting and strategic campaign support.

Another significant collaboration is our integral role in the formation of SHOUT (Supportive Housing Organized and United Tenants www.shoutnyc.org), a new union of supportive housing tenants. SHOUT is a supportive housing applicant and tenant-centered and directed organization that is also supported by Mobilization for Justice, Legal Services of New York, Bronx Defenders, the Safety Net Project of the Urban Justice Center and NAMI-NYC Metro. We provide facilitation and administrative support for SHOUT, individual counseling and referrals for SHOUT members, and direct support for tenant organizers working in buildings where supportive housing tenants reside.

We also currently work with a coalition of attorneys from other organizations and institutions across NYC to research the current structure of NYS worker cooperative incorporation with a goal of developing concrete policy recommendations. Ultimately, the goal is to create a comprehensive framework that will be shared directly with worker owners and worker cooperative developers.

TakeRoot also coordinates the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC), a collaborative of six legal service providers and seven base-building organizations that work throughout NYC to strengthen low-income immigrant communities through outreach, organizing, and the provision of immigration- and employment-related legal services. This past year, TakeRoot convened 14 coalition meetings, in addition to 10 meetings between the coalition and the city agency that provides funding for CILEC's work. Further, we convened 3 meetings amongst legal service providers across NYC who provide city-funded immigration and employment legal services, and coordinated advocacy within and beyond the coalition to restore funding for employment-related legal services that had been cut. Finally, we provided 2 substantive trainings for CILEC members on employment and housing issues.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

TakeRoot Justice received **\$6,777,273** in total funding this past year

City and County Funding	\$4,939,186
State Funding	\$938,688
Foundations	\$749,399
IOLA Grant	\$150,000

