Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021
During this unprecedented time of COVID, the Urban Justice Center (UJC) continued to provide extraordinary legal services all the while expanding our services to reflect the demand that COVID-19 created. During this year, UJC closed 7,023 cases; provided more than 13,480 people with direct legal services; conducted approximately 4,900 intakes inperson, by telephone or online; presented community legal education through printed materials as well as in-person presentations to approximately 28,712 people in the community; assisted 7,428 people through pro se workshops, clinics, and materials; aided approximately 1,339 people through multiple UJC helplines; made approximately 2,265 referrals for services either not provided by UJC or to supplement UJC’s services; and, worked on 15 impact cases/projects, with over 637,300 beneficiaries. We are especially proud that through UJC’s exceptional work, over $3.6 million dollars were awarded directly to clients and a value of over $3.5 million of judgments or payments were avoided. During the 2020-2021 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.

Population Served: General Low Income Population
Area Served: Statewide
Total Funding: $28,076,724
Total IOLA Grant: $375,000
Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 149.50
- Lawyers: 70.00
- Paralegals: 11.50
- Other: 68.00
Primary Area of Law - Income Maintenance

Client SN is a benefits recipient who had resided in a care facility for people with disabilities until she moved into her own apartment in 2018. For more than a year after moving into her own apartment our client's benefits were being stolen by a staff member at the care facility she had formerly resided in. Our client had tried to address the issue and with HRA – including attending an appointment with its anti-fraud unit – but was unsuccessful. The client sought help from SNP and in early 2020 we filed a fair hearing request, arguing that HRA had been informed in an adequate and timely manner about the client’s change of residence and her non-receipt of benefits. Soon after intake HRA switched the benefits so that the client could access them. However, this did not resolve the matter of the client receiving more than a year’s worth of benefits that had been stolen by the staff member. Over the course of 2020, HRA repeatedly told our office that there was investigation in the works with the State, but they could not tell us when it would be resolved. The fair hearing was finally conducted in early 2021, where the judge found our client's testimony credible and our arguments compelling, issuing a decision in our client's favor. The judge ordered the City to reissue the client’s benefits that had been accessed without her authorization. The agency also escalated their investigation to address the theft of our client's benefits.
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 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. The fluctuating situation of the pandemic for tenants and benefits recipients created a significant need for community legal education from SNP during the reporting year. We regularly presented workshops to tenant groups to ensure that communities could keep up with the ever-shifting eviction moratoria and tenant protections during the pandemic. We also participated in radio programs reaching tens of thousands of tenants with this essential information. With every change in the law, we produced updated summary charts and KYR materials to explain changes to the status of evictions, court closures and moratoria. These were distributed through the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition and Housing Justice for All Coalition statewide, as well as used by attorneys and advocates. TRJ conducts several civil legal services other than the direct, impact and hotline services described previously. These include but not limited to: Community legal education for low-income New Yorkers on matters such as housing, employment, consumer debt, and immigration.
In Fall 2020, SNP conducted a series of workshops for Bronx NYCHA tenants in collaboration with Assembly Member Michael Blake’s office. The workshops were conducted via zoom, with an option for telephone participation. The topics covered included: the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program, succession rights in public housing, emergency transfers, and securing repairs. MHP conducts community workshops and trainings for community members with mental health concerns, families, legal services providers, students, and mental health providers, focusing on forensic and mental health peer resources and an introduction to benefits. In this past year, workshops have moved completely online and are offered via Zoom. TRJ offers grassroots community groups training and assistance related to their formation and operation as not-for-profit organizations. As part of this work, we help form worker-owned cooperatives in service industries such as childcare, housecleaning, construction and other industries. Additionally, TRJ aided on entity formation and governance, in addition to support with applying for tax exemption.
Significant Collaborations

Collaborations are a significant part of UJC’s work. Collaborating with an agency can strengthen the reach an organization has with the community members. TRJ’s primary method of providing civil legal services is to partner with community-based organizations throughout New York City so that the populations that are most in need of our services can access them. In the past year, TRJ has partnered with dozens of community organizations city-wide in order to reach clients in need of civil legal services related to housing, employment rights, immigrant rights, consumer debt and related services. Because these organizations are intimately familiar with the landscape of their communities, they know the central needs for civil legal services and can identify clients in their communities who need services. Through our partnerships with these organizations and their valuable input on our work, we can adapt and tailor our services to ensure they most effectively meet the needs of New York’s diverse low-income populations.

Furthermore, TRJ’s Equitable Neighborhoods team works with several coalitions around the city. In the past year, the team worked with the Community Land Trust Initiative (CLT Initiative) and its members to help establish new CLTs in the city; most significantly, we represented the East Harlem/El Barrio CLT in acquiring four residential buildings and establishing community control over them in a CLT model, creating 38 units of permanently affordable housing.

SNP operates free and easily accessible walk-in legal clinics at nonprofit organizations including, Neighbors Together, St. John’s Bread and Life, Westside Campaign Against Hunger, Broadway Community Inc., Yorkville Common Pantry, Part of the Solution, and Union Community Health Center. SNP also partners with Benefits Data Trust, Center for Urban Community Services, Center for Urban Pedagogy, Center for Independence of the Disabled, Community Action for Safe Apartments, CUNY Service Corps, CUNY Law Main Street Legal Clinic, Fair Chance for Housing, Flatbush Tenants Coalition, Just-Fix NYC, Housing Justice for All Coalition, Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, MetCouncil on Housing, Office of the Manhattan Borough President, Office of Council Members Diana Ayala, Office of Council Member Vanessa Gibson, Office of Council Member Stephen Levin, Office of Assembly Member Michael Blake, Picture the Homeless, Right to Counsel NYC Coalition, VOCAL Inc. SNP is also an active member of the LEAP Coalition, the NYS Legal Services Association, and the New York City All County Tenant Lawyers Network. SNP also partners with the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law and Movement Law Lab to deliver trainings nationally.
Impact Cases

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. The City also agreed to properly train enforcement agents including DOHMH inspectors on proper enforcement procedures. The City also agreed to pay up to $1000 for each class member. The settlement disbursements will be finalized in March 2021 and the remaining issue to be litigated will be the Cy Pres distribution of leftover funds.

MHP collaborated with the Social Security Administration as part of a national advocacy group to raise issues affecting our clients. We convinced the Social Security Administration that mail interruptions due to the pandemic were real and widespread, and SSA adjusted its practices to contact an applicant by phone before it denied a claim based on an applicant’s failure to respond to SSA. In response to our discussion of the high rate of hearing dismissals with SSA during the first few months of the pandemic, SSA halted all dismissals for several months and then in early in 2021 issued new, improved instructions to hearing offices providing guidance on when it is appropriate to dismiss a hearing request if an applicant does not appear. This is particularly important for unrepresented individuals who do not have an advocate that might appear instead and protect the right to proceed with a claim. MHP continues to expand our Access to Recovery Coalition, focused on increasing access to mental health recovery services through Medicaid. The goal of the project is to partner with other individuals and agencies to exponentially increase the number of people accessing these free recovery services, and to give Medicaid recipients a voice to guide policies and regulations that directly impact them. In the last year, the Coalition has successfully opened more direct lines of communication between the State Office of Mental Health and directly impacted community members who provide real feedback about their experiences and challenges with accessing services. MHP also continued our direct legal services to people with mental health concerns who are having trouble accessing Medicaid recovery services.
Trainings

UJC provides many training opportunities to staff, interns, and volunteers, through inhouse 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.

SNP provides its housing attorneys and advocates with one substantive in-house training each month. SNP hired 5 new staff attorneys who received a 2-week orientation that included a range of substantive and procedural trainings. As a member of the LEAP coalition, SNP staff also participate in receiving and providing trainings with the LEAP legal community. SNP staff also access trainings via the LSNYC Justice Learning Center, the AllCounty Tenant Lawyers Network, and the Community Services Society. SNP’s new managers all attended The Management Center’s 2-day Managing to Change the World training.

SWP legal staff attends Continuing Legal Education seminars almost every month focusing on the immigration consequences of criminal convictions. Furthermore, our legal staff conducts informational trainings periodically for the remainder of our staff to familiarize them with the terminology and process involved in our legal work. We also send our staff to relevant conferences and events to contribute to professional development and network building among our peer organizations. Finally, we bring in outside consultants to do general professional development of all staff.

As leaders of the SOAR Taskforce MHP invites social service providers to be trained to prepare SSI applications in our training cohorts throughout the year. This year we trained xxx service providers in using SOAR, the evidenced-based practice model, to prepare SSI applications. We also regularly provide trainings and workshops on Medicaid and HARP for providers and impacted community members.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

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.

SWP attorneys conduct recruitment of law students and volunteers through workshops and talks conducted at law schools like New York University and Columbia. Additionally, we have law students who volunteer with cases by gathering evidence and filing forms. We brief them on the issues and cases prior to their assistance. Furthermore, we have volunteers who remotely interpret for clients as part of their practice interviews for asylum and green card applications.

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, Prep for Prep, 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 began hosting CUNY Law housing clinic students to work on eviction defense cases and legal policy projects and SNP’s Managing Director is a guest lecturer in the clinic as part of this partnership.

DVP seeks and places legal and other interns in our program throughout the year. We have received 688 hours of assistance through interns, volunteers and pro bono.

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<th>Sources Of Funding</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<td>Foundations</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Pro Bono Statistics

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<th>Attorneys</th>
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<th>2,398 Hours</th>
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<tr>
<td>Law Students</td>
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<td>7,160 Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>29 Volunteers</td>
<td>3,800 Hours</td>
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