Overview of Achievements

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 6,138 cases; provided more than 11,900 people with direct legal services; conducted approximately 4,160 intakes in-person, by telephone or online; presented community legal education through printed materials as well as in-person presentations to approximately 4,313 people in the community; assisted 4,811 people through pro se workshops, clinics, and materials; aided approximately 600 people through multiple UJC helplines; made approximately 2,765 referrals for services either not provided by UJC or to supplement UJC’s services; and, worked on 5 impact cases/projects, with over beneficiaries. We are especially proud that through UJC’s exceptional work, over $2 million dollars were awarded directly to clients and a value of over $20,000 of judgments or payments were avoided.

During the 2021-2022 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.

Building an inclusive community remains at the heart of UJC’s work, Street Vendors Projects’ (SVP) legal services continue to provide a membership-based model that works in conjunction with our community organizing. They provide trainings to vendors on how to obtain licenses and permit, how to comply with the city’s complex vending rules & regulations, and how to handle encounters with police officers and health inspectors.

Population Served: General Low Income Population

Area Served: Statewide

Total IOLA Grant: $330,318

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 125
- Lawyers: 39
- Paralegals: 40
- Other: 46
Overview of Achievements

During the pandemic, SVP enlarged their curriculum to include topics such as unemployment assistance and small business grants/loans. Trainings are provided 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. These meetings and training sessions, which are conducted in 5 languages simultaneously, include skits and other popular education devices.

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 $400,000 in retroactive and ongoing benefits for our clients. Additionally, SNP’s homeless advocacy program assisted homeless New Yorkers living in the shelter system and on the streets, in cases to ensure safe shelter and defend their rights, and to assist with applications and advocate to secure permanent housing. Through advocacy and legal representation, SNP’s housing practice represented tenants facing eviction or seeking to return to their homes post-eviction, including in illegal lockout cases. SNP also represented tenants, individually and in groups.

Lastly, providing extraordinary legal services and advocacy is shown by the Domestic Violence Project (DVP) serving over 2,000 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

Primary Area of Law - Income Maintenance

Client M is a benefits recipient who contacted SNP in January 2022 because her Public Assistance and SNAP had been discontinued in September 2021. Client lives in the Bronx with client’s child. SNP immediately requested a fair hearing and began advocating with HRA about client’s case. Despite the Client changing their address with HRA in 2021, HRA sent all of the recertification paperwork to Client’s old address, causing Client to lose all of their benefits. Through vigorous advocacy with HRA, SNP quickly secured the restoration of client’s benefits going back to September, including $1836.00 in SNAP benefits, $1000.00 in back rent, and $764.00 in missing cash benefits.
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Primary Area of Law – Other:
Benefits Advocacy Client who has depression asked MHP to help request and obtain a NYC FHEPS transfer voucher so Client could move to a new apartment. Client’s young disabled child was having severe allergic reactions to various odors and vapors in the apartment and the building management would not take the necessary steps to address the issue. Client’s child had to be hospitalized several times. To get approved for a transfer voucher, we had to collect proof that there was an issue with their apartment. In September 2021, Client's request for a new voucher was approved, however, the Homebase office sent Client a voucher shopping letter for a one bedroom, despite the fact that Client had been approved for a 2 bedroom in the past due to child's need for a medical bed and around the clock support from a home health aide.

We advocated with Homebase staff to issue a new shopping letter for a 2-bedroom apartment, but they refused to do so. We continued our advocacy, eventually reaching out to a Deputy Commissioner at HRA to advocate to get a 2-bedroom voucher. MHP’s advocacy eventually paid off and Homebase provided Client with a new voucher for a 2 bedroom so Client and child could move into a safe, healthy apartment that matched their need.
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 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.

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Community Legal Education        | 4,313 |
| Pro Se Assistance                | 4,811 |

9,124 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

Since March 2020 when the COVID-19 epidemic led to the closure of UJC’s physical office and remote work for all its staff, significant improvements were made in its capacity 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, install e-signature software to avoid mail delivery delays, and trained users to use tools such as Zoom to collaborate remotely and even conduct webinars. UJC is currently appearing in court remotely and providing advice and counsel to clients via telephone and a variety of web-based platforms such as Zoom and have implemented technology that enables clients to sign forms using their cell phones. We have conducted over a large number of virtual tenant meetings, trainings, workshops, and clinics involving more than hundreds people, and record these trainings so that clients can view them later and learn about their legal rights while staying safe and socially distanced at home. We also launched a new COVID-19 Response Hotline which fields questions about evictions, public and unemployment benefits, commercial rent for small businesses, COVID19 related issues about court and agency closures and the law, housing court cases and consumer debt issues.

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.

SNP provides its housing attorneys and advocates with one substantive in-house training each month. SNP’s new staff attorneys received a 2-week orientation that included a range of substantive and procedural trainings. SNP attorneys were also provided with two days of trial training during this grant year. 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 All County 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. Recently, all SNP engaged in two days of Anti-Oppression Training to increase awareness and work towards justice and fairness in the workplace.
Impact Cases

In the case 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, SNP represented a group of seven tenants and the Tenant Association across three buildings in a joint housing repairs and harassment action that was combined with a lawful rent strike. Through those actions SNP achieved numerous repairs across all buildings, including in individual apartments and the common areas, three month rent credits for all tenants involved, and building-wide assessments to upgrade the electrics and building wide extermination to eliminate vermin.

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. Our Access to Recovery Coalition (A2R) focuses on increasing access to mental health recovery services through Medicaid. Through A2R we partner with other individuals and agencies to try to increase the number of people accessing these free recovery services, and push to center the voices of Medicaid recipients in guiding the policies and regulations that directly impact them.

Other Services: Trainings

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 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 1,660 hours of assistance through interns, volunteers and pro bono.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<td>35 Attorneys volunteered</td>
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<td>25 Law Students volunteered</td>
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<td>11 Other Volunteers volunteered</td>
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Impact Cases

In the last year, the Coalition continued to open direct lines of communication between the State Office of Mental Health (OMH) and directly impacted community members. We helped plan three OMH Town Halls so community members could 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.
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. SVP collaborated with a coalition of immigrants rights organizations and small business groups including United For Small Business NYC, Jews For Racial and Economic Justice, Desis Rise Up and Moving, among others, to pass Intro 1116 in the New York City Council. This legislation will gradually increase the number of mobile food vending permits and provide other vending reforms.

DVP has forged strong relationships with agencies that focus on serving specific populations and sub-populations with critical expertise beyond DVP’s scope. For example, DVP has formed a strong partnership with La Colmena, where we lead monthly legal clinics for undocumented immigrants seeking consultation with an immigration attorney, who meets with them one-on-one to discuss their safety, potential relief, and legal expectations. DVP utilizes this shared service model with a range of other local agencies including Help Roads, Make the Road, Seaman’s Society, Bronx Pride, Right Rides, El Centro, Riverfund, Grace Institute, NYC Anti-Violence Project, Safe Horizon, Sanctuary for Families, and Barrier Free Living, in addition to all of the on-site providers at each Family Justice Center location.

SWP receives referrals from Congregation Beit Simchat Torah for Jamaican transgender sex workers in deportation proceedings. SWP also works with and receives referrals from the Trans Latinx Network, New York City Anti-Violence Project, Make the Road New York, Womankind, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, Brooklyn Defender Services, and Legal Aid Society.

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, Flattbush Tenants Coalition, Housing Court Answers, JustFix 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 Stephen Levin, Office of Assembly Member Chantal Jackson, 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.

MHP expanded and led the Access to Recovery (A2R) Coalition, a group of organizations and individuals who advocate for increased access to mental health recovery services through Medicaid.
Significant Collaborations

The coalition meetings are attended by a diverse group of organizations, including government agencies, service providers, and other advocacy groups.

MHP is part of the Treatment Not Jail Campaign coordinated by the New York County Defender Services. We also collaborated with the Jails Action Coalition and the HALT campaign to end solitary confinement in New York City jails, and we are part of the Fair Chance for Housing Campaign. MHP started the Disability Advocacy: Reentry (DAR) Initiative. This initiative seeks to break down the stigmatization and marginalization of formerly incarcerated individuals with mental health needs by increasing their access to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. We have partnered with the Social Security Administration and other service providers to connect individuals recently released who need help to restore Social Security benefits, specifically benefits interrupted by incarceration.

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. MHP obtained pro bono assistance from attorneys at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP to file an Article 78 proceeding against the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs challenging redactions to documents produced in response to a Freedom of Information Law request. This agency is responsible for oversight of prison mental health treatment and implementation of the SHU Exclusion Law and HALT Solitary Confinement Act. The extensive redactions made to the requested documents prevented the public from understanding the quality of mental health care provided to people who died in DOCCS custody as well as the Justice Center’s oversight.

Sources of Funding

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