

Urban Justice Center (UJC)

Contact Information

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Description of Organization

For 26 years, the Urban Justice Center has served New York City's most vulnerable residents through a combination of direct legal service, systemic advocacy, community education and political organizing.

Volunteer Opportunities

Community Development Project (CDP): The Community Development Project (CDP) works with dozens of community-based organizations throughout New York City that are engaged in organizing and advocacy work on behalf of low-income communities, particularly communities of color. Its work includes transactional legal services to grassroots non-profit organizations, litigation, research and policy, and technical assistance to non-profit organizations. While it partners with groups working on a wide range of issues, most of its work falls into one of these general categories:

- * Affordable Housing and Tenant Organizing to enforce the housing code
- * Employment and Labor Law Litigation on behalf of low-wage immigrant workers

*Transactional Legal Services and counsel to non-profit organization

*Consumer Rights

*Foreclosure Prevention Advice and Representation.

Safety Net Project (SNP) : The Safety Net Project advocates for economic justice for low and no income New Yorkers by ensuring access to public assistance/ food stamps as well as legal representation for NYHCA residents. We represent over 2,000 New Yorkers meeting them in their neighborhoods at community based organizations, district offices, and soup kitchens. At the heart of our work is protecting the due process rights and using a multi pronged approach of direct service, affirmative litigation and policy work.

Sex Workers Project (SWP): The SWP focuses on the provision of legal services, legal training, documentation, and policy advocacy for sex workers. Using a harm reduction and human rights model, the SWP protects the rights and safety of sex workers who by choice, circumstance, or coercion remain in the industry. SWP provides critical information to policymakers, activists, and the media on the human rights abuses faced by sex workers and those who are at risk for engaging in sex work. We use documentation-based advocacy, policy analysis, training and education, and collaboration with community-based service providers to advance practical, long-term solutions to the problems faced by this vulnerable and marginalized population. The SWP works in the following areas: criminal justice reform; trafficking in persons; and human rights documentation. SWP engages in policy advocacy at the local, state, federal and international level. In addition to direct service, SWP draws on the results of three comprehensive human rights documentation projects conducted by SWP in conjunction with respected scholars in the field to provide decision-makers with unique and critical information and practical recommendations for addressing issues relating to trafficking and sex work.

Street Vendor Project (SVP): In recent years, vendors have been victims of New York's aggressive "quality of life" crackdown. They have been denied access to vending licenses. They have been swept from the streets by powerful business groups. They have been unjustly harassed, and their property has been illegally seized. The Street Vendor Project works to correct the social and economic injustice faced by these hardworking entrepreneurs. SVP holds clinics to educate vendors about their legal rights, organizes vendors to participate in the political process that determines their fate, and engages in systemic advocacy to help policy makers and the public understand the important role street vendors play in the life of New York City.

Domestic Violence Project (DVP): The Domestic Violence Project is dedicated to providing survivors of domestic violence and their children with the support and advocacy necessary to achieve freedom from the abuse and violence in their lives. DVP's services include a combination of litigation, advocacy, and clinical services. DVP provides free direct legal representation in Brooklyn Family Court in family offense, custody and visitation, and child support matters. Additionally, DVP provides legal advocacy in Brooklyn, Bronx, and Queens. DVP works with concerted efforts on all fronts: governmental, law enforcement and at the grass-roots level involving smaller community based organizations. DVP works cooperatively with many agencies and task force groups on the local, city and state level to achieve the best protection with equal access to services under the law. For the clinical area, the initial inquiry may consist of a request for general information or may translate into a referral; however, the majority of inquiries result in crisis counseling and participation in support groups focused on empowerment and stress reduction. Where appropriate, UJC collaborates with mental health service providers. In addition, DVP takes an active role in domestic violence education by offering education to service providers and the community at large. DVP offers forums and legal clinics on-site at hospitals, other agencies, local libraries, and schools. In addition, DVP provides legal education through technical assistance in group and individual environments. Our quarterly newsletter serves to keep people informed of community resources, current issues and the specifics of our work. In a typical month, our staff hosts 10 education and outreach events to varying size groups.

Homelessness Outreach and Prevention Project (HOPP): HOPP advocates for economic justice for low- and no-income New Yorkers by ensuring access to public benefits and government accountability for these programs using a multi-pronged approach of direct legal services, litigation, research and policy advocacy. At the heart of HOPP's work is protecting the due process right of New Yorkers to a hearing before the termination of public assistance. HOPP's representation of individuals focuses on the enforcement of due process rights in the Cash Assistance, Food Stamp, and Medicaid programs. HOPP operates seven free and easily accessible walk-in legal clinics in food pantries and soup kitchens throughout New York City. HOPP also helps public assistance recipients seeking access to education programs through our legal clinic at Hostos Community College. HOPP's legal advocacy includes educating clients about their rights in the public benefits system and giving them the tools to advocate for themselves, advocating for them with the Human Resources Administration, representing clients at Fair Hearings, and filing Article 78 cases in New York State Supreme Court, when necessary. In addition, HOPP has represented thousands of New Yorkers in class action litigation, bringing lasting and systemic change. Recently, UJC has used litigation to ensure that low-income New Yorkers have due process in public benefits programs, and access to food stamps, post-secondary educational opportunities and affordable housing options. Finally, HOPP conducts research that examines current public benefits programs and promotes policy recommendations aimed at improving the delivery of public benefits and services to low-income families. HOPP also provides technical assistance on research initiatives conducted by other community groups.

The Human Rights Project (HRP): HRP attempts to situate domestic poverty and discrimination issues within a human rights framework. HRP uses this framework to promote a higher standard of government

accountability in regards to economic, social and cultural rights. HRP spearheads efforts to document, monitor, and report on economic human rights violations in the United States, and then publicize its findings through publications, community education, and direct action. HRP provides training to other groups seeking to use human rights standards in their work. HRP focuses on economic, social and cultural rights with a particular emphasis on discrimination. HRP actively seeks volunteers and collaborators for all of its projects, which include The New York City Human Rights Initiative. In addition, HRP joins the Independent Commission on Public Education (ICOPE) on the steps of City Hall to demand that Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein apply human rights standards to the policies and practices of the NYC school system.

Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP): IRAP is a network of chapters at nine law schools (eight in the U.S. and one at the University of Jordan in Amman), with more than 270 participating law students and supervising attorneys. We have provided over \$2.4 million in pro bono legal services and resettled more than 450 people who have been displaced by the war and have become refugees. IRAP is committed to representing the needs of this vulnerable population – saving the lives of Iraqis threatened by the withdrawal of US forces, guiding our persecuted allies to safe passage in the West, and creating a durable human rights infrastructure in the process that can be applied to future refugee crises. IRAP is asking the US government to help refugees by reforming the Special Immigrant Visa Process, allowing refugees to elect to be represented by legal counsel, and creating priority processing categories for vulnerable groups. Law students work in pairs, under the supervision of pro bono attorneys from private firms. They prepare visa applications, submit appeals, and advocate and empower our clients to successfully negotiate the resettlement process.

Mental Health Project (MHP): The Mental Health Project is a team of attorneys, social workers and advocates dedicated to enforcing the rights of low-income New Yorkers with mental illness. UJC represents individual clients, brings class action lawsuits and engages in community education with the belief that low-income people with mental illness are entitled to live stable and full lives, free from discrimination. The Mental Health Project lobbies the city and state governments for critical services and equal treatment for people with psychiatric disabilities in New York. In addition, UJC testifies at hearings, runs town hall meetings for government and agency officials to talk to mental health consumers, and publishes reports on substantive legislative issues. Services consist of Homelessness Prevention/Income Maintenance (representing clients in housing matters and advocating for social policies that combat homelessness; and ensuring that clients have access to benefits, including food stamps, Social Security and public assistance), Discharge Planning (enforcing state and federal laws requiring hospitals, jails and prisons to provide people with mental illness with crucial social services prior to discharge), Criminal Justice (fighting against the criminalization of mental illness and for the humane treatment of people in prison with mental illness), Disability Rights (advocating for the rights of people with mental illness to live in the least restrictive setting appropriate, and to be active participants in decisions regarding their lives), and Advocacy for Veterans (assisting veterans with PTSD and other mental health problems by providing legal services to access housing, health care and income).

Peter Cicchino Youth Project: Of the estimated 20,000 teenagers living on the streets of New York City, almost half self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). These teens have been thrown out of their homes or have run away from foster care because of homophobia, harassment, and physical abuse. Once on the streets, the majority of them turn to prostitution and drug use. UJC created the Peter Cicchino Youth Project to reach out to these young people and help them stabilize their lives. Through this project, UJC has assisted thousands of teens to navigate the complicated channels of government benefits, access permanent housing, and continue their education. Every week, UJC conducts legal clinics at drop-in centers

for runaways and LGBT youth, where we counsel clients one-on-one. UJC also engages in systemic advocacy and impact litigation around issues such as the mistreatment of LGBT youth in New York City's foster care and juvenile detention systems. Finally, UJC works with LGBT young adults who are "aging" out of foster care, to ensure that they receive legally required discharge planning and to give them the skills they need to successfully transition into independent, adult lives. UJC's litigation and advocacy efforts have led to many positive reforms, including the establishment of foster care housing specifically for LGBT foster youth and increased training on LGBT issues for foster care workers.

Areas of Substantive Law

Consumer Law
Disability Benefits
Domestic Violence
Employment Law
Foreclosure Law
Health Care

Housing Law
Human Rights
Immigration Law
Non-Profit Law
Public Benefits
Veterans Affairs

General Notes

Capacity: UJC has the capacity to supervise and manage 5 volunteers during the school year. During the summer, UJC has interns, thus, there is less room for volunteers.

Experience: Previous experience in substantive law is required.

Supervision: Other attorneys will be on-site and available to the Attorney Emeriti as needed. However the ideal candidate will have significant experience with the specific area and will not require significant supervision. If the volunteer works offsite, supervision can be available by telephone as needed.

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