

2022-2024 Social Justice Accelerator Midpoint Assessment

I. Introduction

The Urban Justice Center's Social Justice Accelerator (SJA) is an incubator for early-stage nonprofits that are creating critical interventions on emerging issues, or developing new solutions to intractable problems. Now in its second class, the SJA provides support, guidance, community, and resources to help these organizations leap over the red-tape and other hurdles associated with launching an organization, allowing them to go directly to working on their issues as they see best.

After a rigorous application process, the following projects were chosen for support in March, 2022:

- [South Asian SOAR](#) – A national collective of survivors, organizations, and allies building a movement for joy, healing, and justice among survivors of intimate partner violence in the South Asian diaspora.
- [Peer Defense Project](#) – An intergenerational legal project that designs tools to respond to the legalized crises of segregation, resource inequity, and the criminalization of young people in New York City. PDP builds legal tools with and for youth leaders for dignity and justice in schools and communities.
- [Family Justice Law Center](#) – A legal project using affirmative litigation to seek justice for families mistreated by the child welfare system. FJLC challenges systemic abuses of government power that lead to the illegal separation of children from their families.
- [The Remedy Project](#) – A collective training students to serve as advocates for people incarcerated in the United States, by training them to utilize the power of the administrative remedy process from the outside to defend people on the inside.
- [Family Policy Project](#) – Organizers uniting researchers, parents/youth with lived expertise and advocates/allies working on the ground in impacted communities to develop research-driven transformative policy solutions for NYC families. FPP works to ensure they have free, competent legal help.

These five new projects join the powerful network of the Urban Justice Center, which is currently comprised of nine long-standing Anchor Projects housed permanently in our offices; the five Projects that graduated from the first cohort of the SJA (all of which are now freestanding, fully functioning nonprofits serving marginalized communities around the globe); and the over one dozen other organizations that have gotten their start at UJC, including the International Refugee Assistance Project, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and Take Root Justice.

“SJA’s resources and programming -- including fiscal sponsorship, back-office support, and coaching and training in organizational development -- have propelled the Family Justice Law Center’s growth and enabled me to focus on the problems we’re trying to solve.”

*-David Shalleck-Klein,
Founder, Family Justice Law Center*

II. Program Overview

Generous support from our partners allows us to offer our SJA leaders a full suite of services, trainings, and infrastructure. The first year of the program has focused on building secure foundations that allow them to thrive and bring critical advocacy to marginalized communities in the future; developing the network of supporters and peers that are crucial to doing their work; and laying the groundwork for major interventions in their field.

Each participating leader in the SJA receives the following:

Organizational audit & individualized growth plan

- Each organizational leader will receive a comprehensive assessment in five core areas of organizational health. This includes both an online questionnaire, a 1:1 intake conversation with Brooke, and 1:1 conversations with key members of the UJC team in the areas of media, fundraising, and financial health.
- Based on the results of the assessment, each has been given a growth report that identifies specific problem areas, and recommends a course of action for their time in the Accelerator.

In-house “Lunch & Learns” with Community of Mentors

- These informal lunches with UJS Project Directors and leaders are organized around key themes in organizational development, including, *e.g.*, media relations, fundraising, board development, and thought leadership.
- We coordinate with UJC leadership and Project Directors to lightly curate each group in accordance with the particular theme.

Live capacity-building workshops and panels with sector leaders [~ Bi-monthly]

- These workshops and panel discussions provide an opportunity for participants to learn from, and talk with, sector leaders about fundraising, staff & board development, and strategy & goal setting.

Organized Demo Breakfasts

- Organized breakfast convenings where potential funders, donors, and media contacts provide feedback to participants about their messaging and materials.

Brain Trust for Each Leader

- A brain trust is a facilitated gathering of experts and advisors that are brought together to provide strategic guidance and advice in response to a specific organizational challenge or question.

Participation in annual Action Tanks

- This longer convening (~3-4 hours) is organized around a single organizational question that is common across the entire cohort (e.g., evaluation, corporate fundraising, etc.). It includes a combination of training and a facilitated working session during which the participants are able to apply what they learned to their work in real time.

Daily access to informal network of organizational support

- Each organization has regular, daily access - both informal and formal - to the SJA cohort members, UJC's ED and General Counsel, the Director of the SJA Initiative, and the network of UJC's colleagues and mentors throughout the UJC office.

Access to NP Launch Lab Incubator program

- This includes access to a comprehensive online training curriculum, bi-weekly group coaching sessions, and a full library of templates and models (budgets, employee handbook, etc.)

III. Highlights & Accomplishments

In just one year, our SJA leaders are already seeing the transformative effects that being part of the Urban Justice Center brings to a young nonprofit. As an incubator of the future of social justice, we measure our success in two ways:

1. In concrete measures taken by the SJA cohort to ensure their organization's continued viability and efficacy moving forward; and
2. In advocacy, services, impact litigation, and research done to assist their clients and/or move the needle on their causes.

All five SJA leaders meet regularly with Brooke Richie-Babbage (the Director of the SJA), Kristin Jamberdino (UJC's General Counsel and Chief Operating Officer), and Doug Lasdon (UJC's Executive Director) to discuss organizational development, work strategy, and the day-to-day practicalities of running a social justice focused nonprofit. These meetings are tailored to the needs of each member of the SJA cohort, and have tackled important, concrete work strategies, including:

- How best to structure large grant application where one lead contractor oversees smaller grants to numerous subcontractors;
- How to develop and market Continuing Legal Education classes to other attorneys on your issues;
- How to structure and provide employee salaries, benefits, and HR concerns;

- How to find and work with pro bono counsel from major corporate law firms;
- How and why to apply for various kinds of insurance; and
- Sundry legal, technical, and technological advice as applicable.

To ensure viability and efficacy moving forward, all five Projects in our current SJA class have, with our assistance, met the following critical milestones:

- **Have raised between \$100,000 - \$650,000** to fund their operations moving forward. Developing their fiscal health and a strong budgeting/fundraising apparatus was the number one priority of our SJA leaders coming into the program, and this firm footing allows them to make strategic plans for the coming years, hire crucial staff, and serve their communities.
- **Have received their 501(c)3 status** or official fiscal sponsorship from another organization.
- **Have hired (or are in the process of hiring) their first paid staff** other than their founders.
- **Have developed strategic plans for their future growth**, working governing/advisory Boards to guide their future, and secure funding bases that mix institutional and individual support.
- **Have created websites, mission statements, and other necessary public-facing documents.**

With these accomplishments, we are secure in the knowledge that each of our SJA leaders has a viable future for their organization, and will move into their second year in the program ready and able to do critical work for their communities. Each member of the cohort develops their own services and strategic plan of work. Below is a snapshot of highlights from each Project.

[South Asian SOAR](#)

South Asian SOAR has used their first year in the SJA to radically transform the landscape for South Asian survivors of domestic- and gender-based violence living in the United States. Their collective network now includes 32 organizations spread across the country. With and through these partners, last year SOAR launched a “Survivor Storytelling Program,” which equips survivors with the tools to be their own advocates and trains them to tell their own stories. Along with the Survivor program, they launched “Their Light Remains,” a national remembrance series to mourn and valorize the 10 lives in their community that were tragically lost to gender-based violence in 2022.

Using their national reach, SOAR produced “Together We Rise: Voices from the Frontlines of South Asian Gender-Based Violence Work,” the first ever report to document the needs of South Asian survivors and communities. Finally, late last year, in response to the overturning of Roe v. Wade, they launched a digital organizing hub for South Asian communities: [South Asians for Abortion](#).

[Peer Defense Project](#)

The Peer Defense Project spent 2022 working directly with youth (and their advocates) to develop a framework for youth-centered justice. PDP's founder, Sarah Medina Camiscoli, published a bold declaration of this framework in the Fordham Law Review last year, entitled "[Subversive Legal Education: Reformist Steps Towards Abolitionist Visions.](#)" This paper, in turn, was developed in and through extensive organizing with youth leaders from around country. In 2022, PDP organized their first "Youth Defense Night," which brought together youth leaders, attorneys, and youth-serving organizations for training, strategic planning, and visioning a world of youth justice. In recognition of this work, Camiscoli was awarded a prestigious Echoing Green Fellowship for 2023.

[Family Justice Law Center](#)

The Family Justice Law Center has seen tremendous success in their first year in the SJA. In 2023, they are launching five major lawsuits against family policing agencies for unjustly punishing families, including violating their Fourth Amendment rights, non-consensual hospital testing, and cruel and unusual delays in removal hearings for families that have been torn apart by government agencies. They have secured pro-bono assistance for all suits, and are actively hiring their first Director of Litigation to oversee this work.

In recognition for all that they have already accomplished and the urgency of their work, the FJLC founder, David Shalleck-Klein, was awarded the 2023 David Prize, which annually goes to five visionary New Yorkers changing the city for the better.

[The Remedy Project](#)

Thanks to critical institutional support from the UJC's Social Justice Accelerator, The Remedy Project was able to hit the ground running in 2022. Already in just one year, they have trained over thirty student advocates to use the administrative remedy process to assist incarcerated people in filing grievances and seeking justice for their treatment. Those thirty advocates, in turn, have completed and filed more than 125 administrative remedy petitions. Additionally, the team is now creating a digital hub for future operations, to speed up trainings, collaborate on administrative remedy applications, and recruit more students from around the country.

[Family Policy Project](#)

The focus of the Family Policy Project this year has been educating the public on family legal issues while simultaneously developing the infrastructure to make critical policy change in the future. To that end, Nora McCarthy, co-founder of FPP, was invited to write "Upstream City," a monthly column for The Imprint that educates readers on family and child policy in New York City. Simultaneously, FPP put pressure on Child Welfare Services to release previously private neighborhood level data on their investigations and removals of children from their families, without which community organizers are unable to effectively work on these issues. CWS released the information to FPP, and they are publishing it to the wider community this year.

Finally, working in collaboration with the supporters developed through the work above, FPP has brought together a coalition of advocates to develop a bill to create a \$12 million dollar fund to support small, local, grassroots efforts to support families outside of the child welfare system. In 2023, they plan to bring the bill to a vote.