

# Urban Justice Center

## Sex Workers' rights and Human Trafficking

<https://swp.urbanjustice.org/sexual-liberation-giving-circle/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

INVEST IN A  
SEXUALLY LIBERATED WORLD.

*Join the Sexual Liberation Giving Circle*

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**\$200,000**

in unrestricted funding by

**DECEMBER 2021**

to celebrate 20 years of  
defending sex workers rights

Building a compassionate and generous donor-base is integral to the success of the sex workers rights movement. Here are a few of the traits we look for in supporters.

You're committed to doing the right thing regardless of stigma. You know that when you support sex workers rights, you're chipping away at harmful stereotypes and setting an example for others to do the same.

You know that unique challenges must be met with innovation and risk-taking. You see that this movement is just getting started and are willing to help us push through political and societal set-backs. You believe in the importance of community-led efforts.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to advance the sex workers rights movement in the United States if we can secure the right resources. The landscape is tricky. There are challenges that haven't been faced by any other movement, but there are also unique opportunities to fundamentally change how we understand sex, labor, consent, criminality, and social justice. If we were able to secure supporters like you who are willing to publicly join us and hold stake in our success, we'll be able to ensure these opportunities aren't squandered.

The Sex Workers Project is raising \$200,000 in unrestricted gifts by December 2021 to commemorate each of the twenty years we've spent defending the rights of sex workers and help us build a sustainable foundation for the next two decades. With a gift ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000, you can show your commitment to creating a sexually liberated world where all workers have the autonomy and power to fully enjoy their human rights.

SWP is gearing up for the long-haul.

We need allies like you to join us.

*Join the Sexual Liberation Giving Circle Today*

Joining the Sexual Liberation Giving Circle is an investment in more than just the Sex Workers Project, it's an investment in the entire sex workers rights movement.

Sex work is an issue that is rapidly entering mainstream conversations. We're working to make sure these conversations are informed by actual sex workers who are treated as experts on these issues.

By working with us, you are helping shape this conversation.

Despite being deeply intertwined with issues like labor rights, racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive justice, sex work receives a small fraction of funding.

By joining the Sexual Liberation Giving Circle, you'll push the boundaries of philanthropy and show funders that sex workers rights must be included in their social justice priorities.

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Its time to put your money where your mouth is and invest in sexual liberation.

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Free limited edition merch

Shout outs on social media, thank you posts, acknowledgment on website

Early viewing of docuseries episodes

VIP tickets to all events virtual and in person, special thank you at events

Bi-monthly briefings on SWPs progress

Ambassador

\$10,000

Partner

**\$5,000**

Ally

**\$2,500**

Supporter

**\$1,000**

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If we want our movement to be strong and worker led, we need to make sure our community has access to culturally competent legal representation that can reduce harm and empower workers to participate in structural transformation. Our attorneys set the industry standard for legal care. We provide compassionate representation, create jurisprudence, win cases and broaden the spectrum of choice for our clients.

The sex workers rights movement currently lacks the legal backbone it needs to be successful.

The LGBTQ+ movement has Lambda Legal. The racial justice movement has the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. The reproductive justice movement has the Center for Reproductive Rights. As we aggressively pursue changes to laws that harm sex workers across the country, we find ourselves asking: What would the landscape look like for sex workers if our movement had a similar legal hub?

Building on its boundary-pushing and precedent-setting successes in the arenas of impact litigation and immigration law, the Sex Workers Project will undertake the first phase of our legal expansion from 2021 to 2023. We will hire a Director of Legal Services to oversee our legal strategy as well as a legal research fellow to identify areas of law to focus future impact litigation efforts on.

*When SWP helped me gain my status as an asylee, my life changed. I no longer fear that I am at risk to be detained by the police or immigration because I am a transwoman or because of the way I've earned a living in the past.*

*Juliana, 2021*

Our attorneys are the leading national experts in their fields. Their work sets precedents and establishes jurisprudence, changing the reality of the legal landscape for sex workers and trafficking survivors. In our extensive twenty year history as the only major legal resource in the country dedicated to sex workers, have successfully engaged in a variety of practice areas including immigration law, criminal defense, impact litigation, and labor law.

88% of our cases have successful outcomes. This means clients are protected from deportation, secure asylum status, naturalize as citizens, achieve legal employment status and more. Currently, our clients represent a wide range of nationalities including Barbados, Chile, China, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, Senegal, South Korea, Ukraine, the United States, and Venezuela. The majority of our clients are between the ages of 25 and 54. 18% have children and their average annual income is \$11,400.

## **Direct Legal Services**

### **Impact Litigation**

#### **PHASE I**

#### **2021-2023**

Better meet the diverse and complex legal needs of the sex work community in New York.

Strategize for further expansion.

Partner with external law firms to conduct impact litigation cases.

Hire legal research fellow(s) to analyze legal landscape and identify priority areas for impact litigation efforts.

#### **PHASE II**

#### **2023-2025**

Expand legal staff further.

Build the foundation for a strong national network of attorneys dedicated to protecting the rights of sex workers.

Hire an attorney experienced in impact litigation to pursue priority areas and continue partnering with law firms.

Create strategic plan for moving forward with impact litigation.

#### **PHASE III**

#### **2025-TBD**

Become the legal backbone of the sex workers rights movement nationally.

Begin establishing SWP regional hubs across the country.

Follow through on impact litigation strategic plan.

## **PHASE 1 STRATEGY**

### **1. Expand Direct Legal Services**

Hire three new attorneys in priority practice areas who will provide:

- (1) Full legal representation including hearings and other litigation,
- (2) Policy advocacy with city agencies, and
- (3) Outreach to impacted workers.

Priority practice areas include:

(1) Criminal Defense

In the last four years, NYPD has charged over 1,800 people with prostitution, 89% of whom were people of color. It is essential that sex workers in New York have access to defense attorneys who respect their work and have the expertise to represent them in court.

(2) Workers Rights Law

There are rampant worker rights abuses in the legalized sectors of the sex work industry, including wage theft, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, stalking. Sex workers deserve to feel safe at work and receive a livable wage.

(3) Privacy & Tort Law

Sex workers are constantly the target of harassment, stalking, slander, libel, and defamation. Sex workers deserve access to attorneys who can navigate the complexities criminalized workers face when their privacy is violated.

**2. Build Capacity In the Legal Field**

(1) Provide competency training for attorneys dont currently have the expertise to work with sex workers and

(2) Increase the number of attorneys who are knowledgeable about the legal needs of different kinds of sex workers.

**3. Build Referral Services**

Hire a knowledgeable attorney part-time to:

(1) Field our help line calls,

(2) Make referrals to sex worker-friendly attorneys, and

(3) Build a network of attorneys who are able to accept pro-bono cases for sex workers.

**PHASE 2 STRATEGY**

**1. Hire staff attorneys who specialize in family law and impact litigation.**

**2. Use data from help desk to determine which existing practice areas need additional staffing & fundraise to hire accordingly.**

**3. Recruit legal fellows to handle additional cases in the areas of criminal defense, labor law, and privacy law.**

**4. Publish a report that contains:**

(1) A needs assessment covering the state of legal services for sex workers including analysis of available resources in each state, accessibility of resources, and severity of laws,

(2) A priority list for expansion of resources and staff based on the needs assessment

(3) An official strategy for

(a) developing a national network of attorneys dedicated to assisting sex workers,

(b) educating attorneys about the specific legal needs of sex workers in order to develop cultural competency, and

(c) engaging in community outreach to connect sex workers to attorneys in their state who have the expertise to assist them.

**Expense**

**Cost**

*Personnel*

Full Time Staff

\$387,100

+ Legal Director

+ 2 Staff Attorneys

*Client Programming & Services*

Empowerment Groups

\$90,000

+ 3 Sessions

Legal Fees

\$30,000  
+ 10k/Attorney

*Capacity Building*

Attorney Trainings

\$3,000  
+ 2 Events

**1 Year Total**

**\$510,100**

**2 Year Total**

**\$1,020,200**



The Sex Workers Project wants to make sure that conversations are informed by the lived experiences of sex workers. We will build on our work by releasing the pilot of our ground-breaking new docuseries, *Sex(ual) Healing*, which positions sex workers as educators and experts, highlights the experiences of people in the sex trades, and aspires to shift the way we see sex and sexuality in our society.

Someone you love has done sex work but might not be comfortable enough to be out about it. SWP has successfully worked to humanize and destigmatize sex work among the general public through trainings and workshops with doctors, lawyers, and community boards as well as through media interviews with outlets such as *The Nation*, *CNN*, *MTV News*, and *Vice*.

As sex work becomes an increasingly common topic of conversation among the general public, the Sex Workers Project wants to make sure that the discussion is informed by the lived experiences of sex workers..In September of 2021, we will build on our work by releasing the pilot of our ground-breaking new docuseries, *Sex(ual) Healing*, which positions sex workers as educators and experts, highlights the experiences of people in the sex trades, and aspires to shift the way we see sex and sexuality in our society.

Through this reality-focused and nuanced docuseries, we will help millions of individuals better understand the complexity and diversity of sex work, recognize the harmful impacts of existing laws, and shift the way we talk about criminality, sex, and consent.

The Sex Workers Project is successfully re-centering the conversation to focus on the needs and experiences of sex workers. Our educational work takes on a variety of forms, including mainstream media outlets, podcasts, videos, and more. We also speak at conferences, events, and educational institutions to explain the importance of destigmatizing sex work and humanizing sex workers.

As we approach the Sex Workers Projects 20th anniversary, we are excited to launch a groundbreaking new docuseries, *Sex(ual) Healing*(September 2021), which aspires to shift the way we see sex and sexuality in our society by positioning sex workers as educators and experts and highlighting the range of experiences of people in the sex trades.

Through this reality-focused and nuanced docuseries, we will help millions of individuals better understand the complexity and diversity of sex work, recognize the harmful impacts of existing laws, and shift the way we talk about criminality, sex, and consent.

We plan on building *Sex(ual) Healing* into a full fledged documentary series. It will officially debut in September this year with a trailer release in August. Weve submitted the pilot episode to film festivals across the world to showcase our work.

Were seeking restricted funding to produce a more extensive version of the film that focuses on topics like sex work and family, the experiences of clients, exploring the different types of sex work, the impacts of criminalization on sex workers, and many others.

We will be applying to funding from a number of organizations and pitching the series to a variety of streaming services and networks in order to get it picked up.

Our goal is to use the series to educate, raise awareness, and build an audience we can mobilize to defend the rights of sex workers across the country.



As a movement, we often lack the information we need to demonstrate the implications of policies, assess the scope of impact of criminalization on sex workers, or determine need for legal resources. The Sex Workers Projects research offers a fact-based way to discuss the needs of sex workers in concrete terms to the public and legislators, determine which laws and policies are most harmful, and counter stereotypes about sex workers.

Limited funding spurred by stigma related to sex work creates a dearth in research on the lived realities of people involved in the sex trades. This means we as a movement don't have the information necessary to demonstrate the implications of policies, assess the impact of criminalization on sex workers, or determine need for legal resources. Our research offers a fact-based way to discuss the needs of sex workers in concrete terms to the public and legislators, determine which laws and policies are most harmful, and counter stereotypes about sex workers.

Currently, the Sex Workers Project primarily conducts qualitative and quantitative research, frequently in collaboration with academic institutions. We believe research must be conducted either by the sex worker community or in a way that ethically engages with the community. At times, academic research is conducted in an exploitative manner without the best interests of the subjects in mind. The Sex Workers Project is committed to working only with research partners who center the expertise and knowledge of sex workers and ideally come from the community. To date, most of our research has been focused on New York City. Moving forward, we'll be expanding the geographic range of our research.

Our long-term goal is to conduct representative participatory action research (PAR). This research approach involves researchers and participants working together to understand a problematic situation and change it for the better. . . PAR focuses on social change that promotes democracy and challenges inequality; is context-specific, often targeted on the needs of a particular group. . . and often seeks to liberate participants to have a greater awareness of their situation in order to take action (Participatory Methods).

As a first step in reaching our research goals, we will develop a guide on best practices for conducting research on subjects impacting sex workers, people profiled as sex workers, and others involved in the sex trades. This guide will not only dictate the research methods of the Sex Workers Project but be a resource for other stakeholders, including members of the academic community. It will be informed by the leadership of sex workers who have come before and presently work in the research and academic fields. These are the experts who have shaped the methods for ethical research on sex work and the lives of people involved in the sex trades.

Our groundbreaking research sets the standard for studies conducted about sex work.

**2018**

Un-Meetable Promises: Rhetoric and Reality in New York City's Human Trafficking Intervention Courts

**2012**

Public Health: The Impact of Using Condoms as Evidence of Prostitution in New York City

**2012**

The Road North: The role of gender, poverty and violence in trafficking from Mexico to the US

**2009**

The Use of Raids to Fight Trafficking in Persons

**2005**

Behind Closed Doors: An Analysis of Indoor Sex Work in New York City

**2003**

Revolving Door: An Analysis of Street Based Prostitution in New York City

We are currently conducting a scoping of potential groundbreaking research projects. One possible project includes a collaboration with Columbia University to evaluate the effects of a digital peer-support tool on HIV prevention, management, and outcomes among a large sample of full-service sex workers. This research would include an analysis on the barriers as well as opportunities presented by utilizing new forms of technology to address a critical health risk for sex workers.

Another research project would seek to document the lessons learned from the myriad campaigns to repeal laws criminalizing sex work making sex work more dangerous. In recent years there have been increasing successes to get state-level legislation introduced to decriminalize sex work. As the movement sees shifting perspectives on sex work and a budding political awakening to the urgent need for decriminalization, it is crucial that we document the experiences from both grassroots and grassroots efforts to revolutionize the way laws impact sex work.



At the Sex Workers Project, we believe in the full decriminalization of sex work because we believe all workers should be able to access their rights. When sex work is criminalized, workers are barred from accessing their rights under the law. No policies should be created without the vast array of input from people of different identities and different sectors of the sex trades, from street-based workers to strippers to people in the porn industry to massage providers.

At the Sex Workers Project, we believe in the full decriminalization of sex work because we support workers' rights. When sex work is criminalized, workers are barred from accessing their rights under the law.

We define criminalization expansively: criminalization of sex work is not limited to laws explicitly prohibiting prostitution. It includes:

We will not support policies such as the Nordic Model or the Equality Model. The Sex Workers Project founder Juhu Thukral aptly termed this approach the arrest first model, as it maintains a heavy law enforcement presence interfering with the industry and incorrectly defines all clients as exploiters and sex workers as victims.

As current SWP Managing Director RJ Thompson explains, Nordic model policies directly harm workers by targeting our clients and customers, taking away our livelihood. The assumption that everyone in the sex trades can, wants to, or needs to exit the sex trades is a paternalistic assumption that is simply untrue and that invisibilizes hundreds of thousands of adults who work in the sex trades by choice and circumstance.

#### *New Legislation*

#### *Relationship Building*

#### *Existing Legislation & Policy*

#### *Resource Development*

#### *Freedom of Expression Online*

Laws that regulate and limit freedom of expression on the internet stand to harm sex workers. This includes laws like SESTA/FOSTA as well as proposed legislation seeking to erode the protections enshrined in Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. We are part of a multi-stakeholder dialogue regarding online adult content distribution which will take place in the fall and we have applied to participate in the UN Internet Governance Forum in the winter. In addition, we track efforts to repeal SESTA/FOSTA and support partner organizations, like Woodhull Freedom Foundation as they pursue an historic lawsuit challenging the laws constitutionality.

#### *Financial Institution Policies*

Financial Institution Policies that allow financial institutions to discriminate against sex workers by barring them from accessing their bank accounts or other forms of online payment systems. When financial institutions that hold an oligopoly like MasterCard and Visa refuse to process payments from certain platforms based on suspicion of nonconsensual activity, platforms censor all activity that could possibly be perceived as such because they don't have the capacity to screen all content uploaded to their site. This makes it harder for sex workers to receive payment for their services. Furthermore, companies like PayPal not only shut down workers' accounts, but they also seize funds from workers. We're working with partner organizations to campaign against these policies that prevent sex workers from functioning on online platforms or accessing their money.

#### *DA Non-Arrest Toolkit*

Across the country, multiple District Attorneys have announced a non-prosecution policy for charges related to sex work. This means it is their policy to not prosecute sex workers for charges incurred while working. These policies reduce the harm of criminalization by making it easier for sex workers to earn a living and shielding them from some state violence. The Sex Workers Project will be creating a toolkit for District Attorneys across the country to explain the benefits of non-prosecution policies and how to go about implementing them. We look to Baltimore City State Attorney Marilyn Mosby and Washtenaw County District Attorney Eli Savitas as leaders in this effort as they have comprehensive policies that include non-prosecution for both sex workers and their clients.

#### *Relationship Building with Key Stakeholders in the Federal Government*

Educating policy makers is a crucial part of our work to end the stigma and shame that permeates policy making related to sex work. As such, we commit significant time to building relations with congressional offices as well as staff within federal agencies. These efforts have a two-fold benefit by both influencing proposed legislation as well as how laws are implemented to ensure they do not harm sex workers.

#### *SAFE SEX Workers Study Act*

The SAFE SEX Workers Study Act would allocate federal resources towards studying the impacts of FOSTA-SESTA on sex workers, possibly creating a pathway for the reform or repeal of the law. SWP is advocating for the reintroduction of the act so that we can formalize our understanding of how laws that curb freedom of expression online harm sex workers and in the hopes that the findings prevent the passage of similarly harmful legislation in the future.

#### *Dismantle NYPD Vice*

In coordination with community partners and local policy makers, we are working tirelessly to realize the dismantling of the deeply racist and ineffectual NYPD Vice Unit. At present, we are asking the New York City Council committees on Oversight/Women & Gender/Public Safety to hold a joint hearing to investigate Vice's abuses. The goal is to put the millions of dollars mishandled by the Vice unit towards ensuring community members, including sex workers and their clients, have the power to fully enjoy their human rights. We urge that Vice funding be reallocated to fund human services that can actually support and improve the lives of sex workers and low-income communities.

We welcome your questions and comments

Telephone: 646-602-5617

Email: [swp@urbanjustice.org](mailto:swp@urbanjustice.org)

SWP does not receive walk-in clients or inquiries. Please call our helpline at 646-602-5617

[Message](#)

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Accessibility Tools