



Sex  
Workers  
Project

Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center  
20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Statement  
December 6, 2021

It is with great pride and gratitude that we celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary here at the Sex Workers Project (SWP) of the Urban Justice Center (UJC). In December 2001, our founder Juhu Thukral, launched this innovative and critically needed organization with the support of Doug Lasdon, Executive Director of the Urban Justice Center. At that time SWP was the first organization to serve sex workers as well as survivors of human trafficking across the spectrum of choice, circumstance and coercion in the sex trades from a human rights, trauma-informed, harm reduction and anti-oppressive approach. Today, SWP is thriving as one of the largest sex worker rights organizations in the United States, providing free legal services to people in the sex trades, while simultaneously advocating for policy change at the local, state and federal levels; engaging in original research and international human rights mechanisms for domestic advocacy; and educating the public nationwide about the realities of the sex trades by speaking from our own lived experience as sex workers as well as advocates.

Among many other victories, SWP has:

- provided criminal, immigration and labor legal services to over 1,000 individuals in the sex trades
- become national experts on forms of relief for migrants in the sex trades including T-Visas and asylum claims, as well as how to successfully mitigate the collateral consequences of criminal convictions related to sex work, human trafficking or being profiled as sex workers
- published groundbreaking original research on the sex trades and the experiences of sex workers including: *The Road North*, *Revolving Doors*, *Un-meetable Promises*, and *Behind Closed Doors*
- grown from a local project to a national organization with staff in NYC, Washington, DC, California and New Orleans
- provided trauma-informed social services including counseling, therapy and case management to hundreds of sex workers and survivors of human trafficking
- conducted support groups and leadership empowerment groups for sex workers from a harm reduction, human rights and sexual liberation frame rather than a missionary savior frame like so many other organizations
- successfully sued strip clubs for wage theft
- introduced decriminalization legislation in Oregon and New York and supported decriminalization policy efforts in Louisiana, Colorado, California, Rhode Island and Washington, DC
- engaged in international human rights mechanisms including the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) of the United States and treaty reviews for the International Covenant on Civil and

Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)

- co-founded the DECRIM NY Coalition in 2018
- educated thousands of people about the lived realities of sex workers and the complexity of the sex trades including journalists, lawyers, doctors, students, community boards, independent police monitors, police departments, social workers, and community based organizations
- Centered current and former sex workers, trans, queer, non-binary and BIPOC individuals as staff

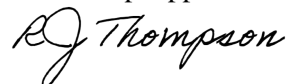
This 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year we launched our groundbreaking destigmatization documentary series that humanizes sex work and sex workers from multiple perspectives. The first installment in the series, *(Sex)ual Healing* debuted in New York City in September to outstanding reviews, followed by showings in Berlin, Germany. The second installment of our series is currently in pre-production and will focus on sex workers as parents, partners and family members as well as affirming families of origin and chosen families.

Our legal team continues to be the foremost experts in the country on the intersections of immigration and asylum law, migration, sex work and human trafficking, winning dozens of legal victories for migrants in the sex trades, while affirming and assisting clients holistically with needs including housing assistance, mental health referrals and vacatur of criminal convictions.

Our policy team introduced the first decriminalization bill ever in the state of Oregon this year, while being a core part of coalition efforts to repeal loitering for the purposes of prostitution from the New York Penal Law which had been used for years to profile transgender women of color. SWP also had a full circle victory with the passage of the START Act in New York which expands the possibility to vacate criminal convictions beyond only prostitution charges that were incurred by a human trafficking survivor because of force or coercion by a trafficker. SWP's founder Juhu Thukral was the person who first introduced the concept of this type of relief in SWP's early years, resulting in future SWP staff winning the first vacatur bill in NY in 2010 that paved the way for this expansion bill in 2021.

**This holiday season and into the new year, I hope you will support the work of SWP by donating whatever amount is meaningful for you at <https://swp.urbanjustice.org/donate-2/>. All of this work depends on individuals like you.** Very little institutional support exists to protect and promote the human rights of sex workers in the United States. Unlike other social justice movements, the sex worker rights movement is still deeply under resourced with very few organizations staffed and funded. Please help us sustain our current work and realize our vision of a sexually liberated world where all workers have the autonomy and power to fully enjoy their human rights.

With Deep Appreciation,



RJ Thompson, Esq.

Managing Director

Sex Workers Project

Urban Justice Center