



# Onward Upstream

**Navigating Community-Wide**

**Problem-Solving**

# Contents

Letter From the Executive Director and Associate Director	1
Upstream Education & Programs	2
Spotlight: Why I Volunteer	3
Academic Partnerships	4
Board of Directors, Staff, Fellows and Interns	5
By The Numbers	6
Volunteer Attorneys	8
Donors	8

# Year in Review

In 2022, Step Up to Justice (“SU2J”) elected new leadership and welcomed Lisa Lovallo as our Board President. Lisa, Vice President & Market Leader for Cox Communications Southwest Region, brings a wealth of experience and a passion for improving access to justice in her new role. Lisa’s election marked an exciting juncture in our organization’s history. With her guidance, we engaged increasingly diverse partners from business, civic philanthropy, and industries outside of the legal community. In partnership with SU2J’s founding board, our new leadership positioned SU2J to preserve our mission while expanding our capacity to address the ever-growing need for civil legal services to assist low-income individuals and families in Pima County.

SU2J also paused to celebrate the organization’s sixth year of operation. This celebration also included an internal challenge to continue to innovate. We asked: “How can Step Up to Justice advance civil justice for low-income families in Pima County?” Although SU2J’s work will always include free civil legal assistance delivered by volunteer attorneys, SU2J recognized that emergency legal services alone will never fully close the justice gap. Instead, and in addition, our community needs reliable and trustworthy upstream outreach and education to help prospective clients avoid future legal disputes and to reduce the number civil legal emergencies in our community.

SU2J recognized that, alone, emergency legal services will never fully close the justice gap. Closing this gap also requires reliable and trustworthy upstream outreach and education before a prospective client has a civil legal emergency.

To meet this objective, SU2J expanded three of our legal education projects: eviction prevention, mobile-home ownership, and consumer issues. Each resource was designed to target the common pitfalls that threaten low-income households, with the ultimate goal of preventing legal emergencies and the emotional trauma and economic hardship that so often accompany them.

SU2J is a small organization, but we accomplished important work in 2022. Together with our community partners, volunteers, and donors, SU2J continued to grow the breadth and depth of our work. Thank you for your ongoing support of SU2J’s mission. With your help we have increased access to civil legal justice in our community. We move forward with a renewed passion for justice and a commitment to lifting our neighbors out of poverty.

In Service,



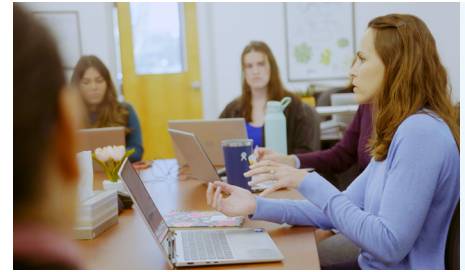
**Michele Mirto**  
Executive Director/Attorney at Law



**Melissa Spiller-Shiner**  
Associate Director/Attorney at Law

# Upstream Education

In an effort to inform, intervene and prevent future legal disputes, Step Up to Justice is investing significant resources in the development of upstream community education projects. The curriculum is available both online and in live workshop settings, in English and Spanish. The online materials were established for ease of access and convenience. The live workshops take place in conjunction with many of Step Up to Justice's 26 community partners and allow volunteer attorneys to go into the community and meet clients where they live and work.



## Programs

### MAPP

Step Up to Justice's **Mobile Home Owner Asset and Property Protection (MAPP)** Project, was initially funded with the support of the American Bar Endowment. The presentation explains mobile home owners' legal rights and responsibilities when they own their mobile home, but rent the land beneath the home. The intent of the project is to help mobile home owners avoid disputes with their landlords and preserve their primary asset.



### BEACON

Step Up to Justice's **Bankruptcy Education and Consumer Outreach Network (BEACON)** Project launched with support from the American College of Bankruptcy Foundation. The goal of the project is to reach low-income residents before they have a legal emergency and provide them with information about their rights and responsibilities as consumers/debtors. Armed with this preventative education, consumers will be able to make informed decisions and avoid legal disputes.



### RENT

At inception, Step Up to Justice's **Renter Education For Neighborhoods & Tenants (RENT)** Project, was funded with support from the Agnese Nelms Haury Foundation. The project and curriculum were originally created in partnership with the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law and its Innovation 4 Justice Project. The presentation and materials explain tenants' legal rights and responsibilities under the Arizona Residential Landlord & Tenant Act. The intent of the project is to help tenants avoid disputes with their landlords, prevent eviction, and preserve housing stability. *Additional support for RENT comes from Chicanos Por La Causa and the H.S. Lopez Family Foundation.*





# Spotlight—Why I Volunteer

**Meghan McNamara Miller, Tretschok, McNamara, Miller & Feldman, P.C.**

Meghan McNamara Miller has been a volunteer lawyer with SU2J since we opened our doors in 2017. Meghan assists SU2J with our Federal Court Clinic where she helps clients with Social Security Disability matters. She also accepts cases for direct representation.

In 2022, Meghan met a client at the clinic and agreed to represent him. For two years, the Social Security Administration had alleged that the client received an overpayment from the government of more than \$32,000. In addition to demanding repayment, the Social Security Administration sought to terminate the client's future benefits. Meghan appealed the case and received a fully favorable decision from the Administrative Law Judge, who found that the client did not have to repay the \$32,000 and is still eligible for Social Security Benefits.

Meghan shared the following:

*"I entered the legal profession to be able to help people. I went to law school because I was able to see that my father, who is a lawyer, was able to give a voice to people who otherwise wouldn't have one. And that's what motivates me in my practice. Giving back is so important to me. It feeds my soul. And it is intensely rewarding to be able to help people who have no means to hire an attorney and who are facing really challenging, really stressful issues in their lives."*



Meghan McNamara Miller, SU2J Volunteer, and Shawn, former SU2J client.

# Academic Partnerships



Above L to R: Students Sierra Rhodes, Lucy Siczka, Ashley Bremner

Right: Professor Sylvia Lett, Associate Clinical Professor of Law, University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law

Professor Lett says, "Volunteering enables people to re-engage in the Tucson community and see their work have a positive impact." She shared that she also sees the difference in her students "who can put their classroom skills to use and learn how to love the law."

In 2022, Step Up to Justice grew our partnership with the University of Arizona, engaging student interns and volunteers from the School of Government and Public Policy, the Legal Paraprofessional Program and law students from the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law. Through their work with Step Up to Justice, students developed client interview skills and helped grow the organization's capacity.



## Staff, Fellows and Interns

**Kayla Armantrout**  
*Family Law Fellow*

**Ashley Bremner**  
*Administrative Assistant /  
Intake Specialist*

**Guadalupe Durazo**  
*Administrative Assistant*

**Grace Harrington**  
*Intern*

**Briana Hoyos**  
*Program Coordinator*

**Michele Mirto**  
*Executive Director  
Attorney at Law*

**Meena Ravishankar**  
*Intern*

**Amanda Rutherford**  
*Director of Outreach  
Attorney at Law*

**Myrna Seiter**  
*HOME Fellow*

**Melissa Spiller-Shiner**  
*Associate Director  
Attorney at Law*

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*Raytheon Technologies*

**Denice R. Shepherd, Board Treasurer**

*Law Office of Denice R. Shepherd, P.C.*



## SU2J STAFF

L-R (back row) Grace Harrington, Briana Hoyos, Meena Ravishankar, Michele Mirto

L-R (front row) Ashely Bremner, Melissa Spiller-Shiner, Guadalupe Durazo, Amanda Rutherford, Myrna Seiter

Not pictured - Kayla Armantrout

# 2022 By the Numbers

**\$1,500,000** in Free Civil Legal Services  
Provided to the Community

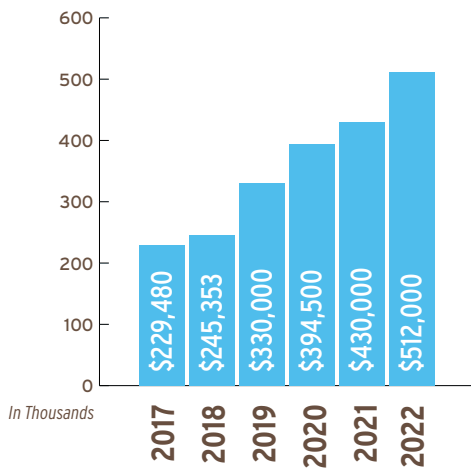
**244**

Volunteer Attorneys

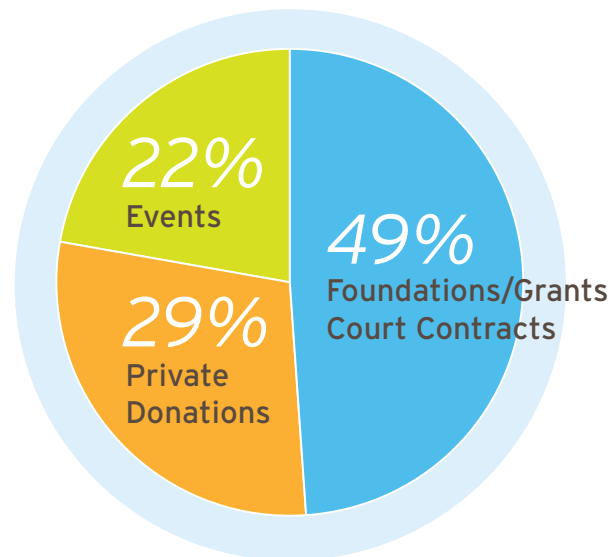
Our cost per case is **72% less** than the  
average cost per case for traditional legal aid

Increased clients' collective assets by **\$2,324,738**, increased their collective incomes  
by **\$372,636** per year, and decreased their debt by **\$864,064**

## Annual Budget



## Funding Sources





# 645

Volunteer attorney-led legal clinics

Volunteered **4,506 hours**  
to assist our low-income neighbors

SUZJ impacted the lives of  
more than **1,000** children

Expanded the reach of **3** Upstream  
Community Education Projects

Volunteer attorneys helped **1,502**  
low-income clients with their civil legal needs

**7** Full Time Staff +  
**2** Part Time Employees

## Our Clients

**14%** Over 65

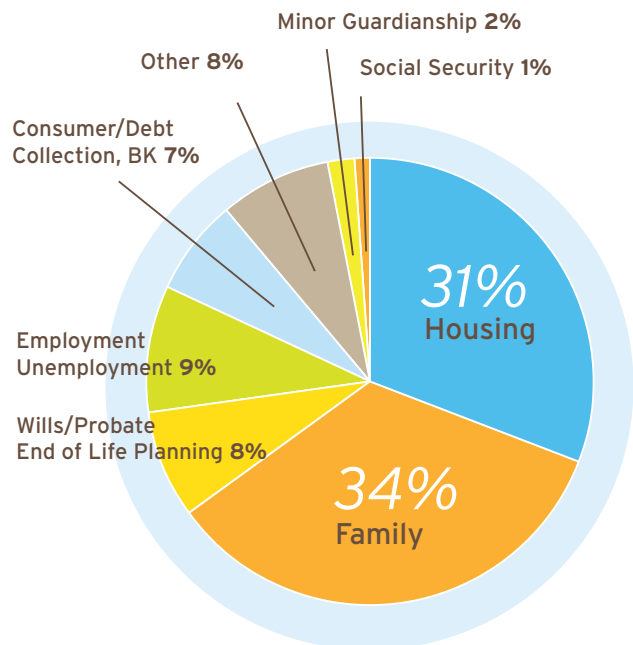
**27%**

Victims of Domestic Violence

**64%**

Women

## Our Services



## Special thanks to all who make Step Up to Justice Possible

### Volunteer Attorneys

Peter Akmajian  
Ronald Allen  
Monali Amin  
Lauren Audette  
Don Awerkamp  
Peter Axelrod  
William Bacon  
Robert Barrasso  
Thomas Bayham  
Brooke Bedrick  
Laura Belleau  
Elisabeth Benavidez  
Jodi Bernstein  
Christie Blair  
Ivelisse Bonilla  
Paul Bowron  
Patrick Broom  
Caleb Brown  
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Randi Burnett  
Brendan Burns  
J. Patrick Butler  
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David Curl  
Frederic Dardis  
Joubert Davenport  
Lynne Davies  
David Diamond  
Suzanne Diaz  
Peter Economidis  
Robert Erbe  
Blair Feldman  
Robert Fleming  
Erin Fox  
Roger Frazier  
James Frisch

Shannon Giles  
Leonie Gray  
Kristin Green  
Nathan Hannah  
Andrew Heideman  
Joy Herr-Cardillo  
Megan Hill  
Nicci Hinderaker  
Barney Holtzman  
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Jane Jacobs  
Robert Johnstone  
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Michael Kelly  
Arienne Kerr  
Colleen Kinerk  
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**“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.”**

**— Desmond Tutu**



Step Up to Justice  
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Tucson, AZ 85745  
520-276-3815  
[www.StepUptoJustice.org](http://www.StepUptoJustice.org)