

COMMUNITY JUSTICE PROJECT

Focuses on Racial Justice, Poverty and Human Rights



Chuck Elsesser, pictured at right, (the author of this piece), long time Florida Housing Coalition Board member, together with colleagues, Alana Greer and Meena Jagannath, opened a new public interest law firm in July, the Community Justice Project Inc. (CJP) in Miami.

CJP is founded on the principle that positive social change—the creation of a more democratic, just and equal society—comes from movements organized and led by those most impacted by social injustice. We bring to bear legal tools that strategically complement organizing campaigns and have been engaged in campaigns ranging from slum housing and gentrification to low wage employment and police accountability - but always with a focus on building the power of community-led groups organizing for change.

We are also dedicated to a social entrepreneurship approach - employing nimble and innovative approaches in responding to our clients' request for support. For example, last year we developed a first-ever "JusticeHack" in Miami in which the problems faced by low income communities of color were "hacked" by a diverse group of participants including members of Miami's growing tech community. That initial event led to the formation of a number of new relationships, and several ideas generated by the "JusticeHack" - particularly those

relating to public housing - continue to percolate along with those new relationships.

We are also working with Legal Services of Greater Miami to defend a group of residents in a mobile home park threatened with closure. Our work also incorporates the use of international accountability mechanisms. Given the governmental inaction on the case of the fatal police Tasing of 18-year-old Miami artist and skateboarder Israel Hernandez in 2013, Meena Jagannath and Alana Greer worked with the family of Israel and the Dream Defenders to write a report to the U.N. Committee Against Torture. Meena traveled with a community delegation to Geneva to present the report and advocate for international attention to the case and the deeper issue of police impunity. As a result of that advocacy, the Committee specifically cited that case for follow up by the United States government and attention to the issue of police accountability.

These innovative approaches often conflict with the strictures and limitations of most legal services funding, which focuses significantly on traditional legal representation of individual clients. This conflict was a significant impetus to create an independent CJP.

If you are interested in learning more and/or supporting our efforts, visit communityjusticeproject.com/donate. **HNN**