



ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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LETTER FROM THE **CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS**

We have been campaigning for a permanent home for justice, compassion, and love for years, and in 2022 made our dream a reality. In October we moved into 300 Douglass, marking a new chapter in VOCAL-NY's history and a critical turning point in our ability to create safe, loving, and supportive spaces for low-income New Yorkers impacted by HIV/AIDS, the drug war, mass incarceration, and homelessness.

With our roots planted firmly in New York, we identified a new vision: national expansion. Through the creation of a new 501c3 organization, VOCAL-US, we launched the first state-based chapter of our national expansion, VOCAL-KY. In six months of operating, the team in Louisville engaged over 700 people through outreach and already has 200 regular members.

We entered the year riding the highs of 2021, our most successful New York State legislative session ever. We knew we had our work cut out for us. State and city budgets placed an emphasis on gutting essential services for low-income New Yorkers and prioritizing investments in criminalization, incarceration, and lining the pockets of the wealthiest.

While elected officials turned away from budgets and policies rooted in compassion, VOCAL-NY did what it does best: focused on building long-term political power among low-income people across New York State who are directly impacted by our issues. Rather than focus on one-off campaigns, or raising money for a single bill push, we are steadily building power and providing life-saving services. Our successes in 2021 did not come overnight, but rather from decades of community organizing and power building. As always, VOCAL-NY is focused on building a movement.

We are proud of how far we've come and excited for what's next. It would be impossible to be where we are now without your continued support, and we are excited to keep growing with you.

— Alyssa & Jeremy





2022

BY THE NUMBERS

ORGANIZING & CAMPAIGNS DATA

8,268 new contacts
5,272 people mobilized
663 new members
102 direct actions
28 member meetings

SERVICES DATA

414,117 **sterile syringes** distributed
3,613 **safer sex kits** to help prevent the spread of STIs
4,231 kits that included **personal protective equipment** and sanitizer
3,416 kits that included **sterile smoking supplies**
4,373 **fentanyl test** strips
743 **Narcan** kits
3,274 **fit packs**, containers that can safely store both new and used syringes
2,653 **hygiene kits** that include body wipes, soap, and shampoo
747 **referrals** for other services, often including escorts
171 **people tested** for hepatitis c, with 10% of people testing as detectable, moving 17 into care, curing 6+ individuals and currently treating 7 people
4890 total participant **encounters**
348 new syringe exchange **participants**
11,896 **PPE kits** distributed
363 street **sessions**

ACCOMPLISHMENTS & HIGHLIGHTS

Passed a statewide expansion of the [House Our Neighbors with Dignity Act](#) and won \$100 Million for it as well as regulatory relief in NYC to allow more buildings to be eligible for conversions.

Opened [VOCAL-NY's permanent home](#) at 300 Douglass in Brooklyn

Launched [VOCAL Kentucky](#) in Louisville

VOCAL-NY released polling conducted by Data for Progress demonstrating the majority (64%) of New Yorkers support expanding [Overdose Prevention Centers](#) and 70% support decriminalizing [low-level drug possession](#).

The Assembly Health Committee of the New York State Legislature moved the [Safer Consumption Services Act](#) through committee.

Organized [International Overdose Awareness Day](#) events in Albany, New York City, and Rochester, as well as in Louisville, Kentucky.

[VOCAL-NY's Civil Rights Union](#) held an 18-hour vigil at City Hall Park to honor the 18 lives stolen on Rikers Island in 2022.



STATE OF THE **ORGANIZATION**

VOCAL-NY continues to address the intersecting issues of **homelessness, mass incarceration, HIV/AIDS, and the drug war**. We do this by organizing and mobilizing directly-impacted and low-income New Yorkers in every corner of the state, across **four unions** and **six different chapters**.

In Brooklyn, we continue to run **harm reduction health services** for people who use drugs. We provide services from our home on **Douglass Street** as well as through peer and mobile exchange in neighborhoods across Brooklyn, including **Brownsville, Coney Island, East New York, Red Hook and Sunset Park**. Through an innovative partnership with **Mount Sinai**, we are one of the only syringe services programs in the country that provide **hepatitis C testing and treatment**.



CAPITAL REGION

Significant shifts unfolded in the Capital Region in 2022. Through several staff changes, organizers and leaders were challenged to pivot their approach. Rather than focus on broad base building, Albany organizer **Ash Radliff** emphasized education for members and leaders that honed their skills and leadership.

The Albany Chapter formed specific, recurring teach-ins organized and run by our members and leaders that gave ownership of their stories and empowered their experiences. The Albany CRU created a biweekly parole reentry class.

The Albany Users Union launched its **first harm reduction based training** at a recovery community center. Ash, alongside **Leader Madeline Hogan**, introduced Social Justice & Activism as a pathway to Recovery in NYS at a Recovering Conference. VOCAL-NY took to the streets for International Overdose Awareness Day, demanding the passage of the **Safer Consumption Services Act** and for **Overdose Prevention Centers** to be authorized statewide.



CIVIL RIGHTS UNION

The [Civil Rights Union](#) had a successful year focused on [base building](#), [leadership development](#), and moving forward a series of campaigns at the state level to challenge every aspect of the criminal punishment system, from [policing to parole reform](#).

The CRU was in rapid response mode from the start, with Mayor Adams intent on rolling back the many reforms we implemented over the past five years. Our NYS legislative platform prioritized [Ending Qualified Immunity](#), [Daniel's Law](#), [Challenging Wrongful Convictions](#), [Parole Reform](#), and [Restoring the Right to Vote for People in Prison](#). In NYC, we led a cross-union action in Harlem to [protest Mayor Adams' plan](#) to criminalize New Yorkers under the guise of reducing gun violence.

The CRU ramped up local prosecutor work by supporting campaigns like [Free Prakash](#), providing [Court Watch and accountability support](#) to CRU members with open cases, and leading a [public town hall](#) with Manhattan District Attorney, Alvin Bragg.

Throughout the legislative session, the CRU raised the profile of priority bills, including passing the [Challenging Wrongful Conviction Act](#) through the Assembly.

The CRU conducted regular [base-building](#) activities and tabled at events like Harlem Pride, bringing our work to a wider audience. We began an innovative [Defund the Police](#) tabling project through which we met [more than 300 people in council districts](#) throughout the city and educated them on the need to defund the police and invest in our communities.

The CRU held a statewide leadership retreat in Albany where [40 CRU Leaders met to determine 2023 legislative priorities](#). Leaders created a national storytelling project to shift the narrative around bail reform, which was a flashpoint in the 2022 elections.

The CRU had one of its most active years in VOCAL-NY history, with weekly direct actions or events. [Over 200 people directly impacted by mass incarceration and policing were moved to action through our work](#). The CRU held a leadership development training series, including media training for members and leaders. The CRU's success lies in the strength of its leaders, and never losing sight of leadership development and shifting the narrative.



HOMELESSNESS UNION

In the thick of Mayor Eric Adam’s first year in office, the Homelessness Union responded to a constant barrage of initiatives that continued and sustained a long history of criminalizing homelessness.

In April 2022, Homelessness Union Leaders unveiled a [Homelessness and Housing Roadmap](#) for Mayor Adams’s Housing Plan. It outlines a clear plan to rapidly rehouse New Yorkers living in the streets and shelters. The Mayor did not release his housing plan until June of 2022, after six months of pushing and enacting practices of criminalizing, institutionalizing, and pandering to real estate forces in New York City.

While fighting the Mayor’s agenda in NYC, our Homelessness Union leaders also fought for the [Housing Access Voucher Program \(HAVP\)](#) at the State level. If funded, HAVP would become a state-funded rental assistance program that will prioritize homeless individuals and households. Through our work with our coalition partners in the [Housing Justice for All Coalition](#), the State Senate and State Assembly adopted HAVP in their One-House Budgets. Unfortunately, Governor Kathy Hochul and their team did not include HAVP in the budget, not wanting to utilize state dollars to fund this program. In 2023 as the Governor claims that they will prioritize housing in the state budget, we will galvanize our allies in the legislature to include HAVP in any housing plan enacted by the state.

In the latter half of 2022, [Krystal Cerisier](#) joined our Homelessness Union as our [Homelessness Union Organizer](#). Their focus is on developing a base for our CityFHEPS Improvement and Expansion Campaign and building power with queer youth who are experiencing homelessness. In May 2022, [Adolfo Abreu](#) joined VOCAL-NY as the [Housing Campaigns Director](#), working with the staff and leaders from the Homelessness and Positive Leaders Union.

POSITIVE LEADERS UNION

In 2022, the Positive Leaders Union fought for the passage of [Rest of State Housing](#), alongside our partners in the [End the Epidemic](#) coalition, at the state level to replicate services and care provided to People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in New York City.

The HIV/AIDS Service Administration (HASA) in NYC offers intensive case management services that provide needed support and government benefit programs for individuals living with HIV/AIDS via a one-stop approach. In the past, VOCAL-NY fought and won a 30% rent cap for HASA recipients and we are committed to doing the same for PLWHA throughout the rest of the state.

Through our work with our coalition partners, [funding to replicate this HASA-like infrastructure](#) was placed in the Senate budget but not in the State Assembly budget. Towards the end of the state legislative session, we walked away with new legislation and bill sponsors in the State Assembly and will focus our efforts in 2023 on [educating the legislature on this program](#).

In October 2022, leadership from HASA attended our monthly town hall meeting in which they heard from HASA recipients on issues they're experiencing with case workers, access to services, and issues with securing housing placements. In 2023, our New York City PLU will [develop demands and a campaign to hold HASA accountable and improve the program](#) for recipients.



USERS UNION

Riding on the success of OnPoint launching the nation's first sanctioned Overdose Prevention Center in late 2021, VOCAL-NY's Users Union brought the fight to the Statehouse. Our Users Union leadership team was relentless in the fight for the [Safer Consumption Services Act \(SCSA\)](#) – our bill to authorize, expand, and fund Overdose Prevention Centers statewide. Every week during the session our leaders were educating lawmakers, moving community members to action, and ensuring this issue remained in the press.

Although the Safer Consumption Services Act did not pass either house in 2022, we have built a large momentum around support for [Overdose Prevention Centers \(OPCs\)](#). We gained nearly 40 cosponsors on the SCSA bill, passed the bill out of the Assembly Health Committee for the first time since it was introduced in 2017, and built deeper relationships with lawmakers. We strengthened the depth and power of our Users Union's statewide leadership and organized many tours to the OPCs. VOCAL-NY's User Union helped [change the narrative on OPCs with over 151 press hits](#) from January to June, from January to June, showing OPCs in a positive light by the press, by lawmakers in Albany, and in the streets.

After the legislative session, we pivoted to running a pressure campaign on Governor Hochul, urging her to authorize OPCs through executive action. We organized a [virtual town hall with 82 participants that educated the broader community on OPCs](#) and how to use our collective power through direct action to urge the Governor to take action. And, for [International Overdose Awareness Day](#), we organized actions in Albany, Rochester, and New York City – which resulted in 9 people being arrested, including Assemblymember Gallagher.

We will keep fighting until we bring the life-saving services of OPCs statewide!



GROW - GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING WINS

Last year was the first full year of the GROW Program. The GROW team serves as a wide-reaching outreach effort in areas frequented by VOCAL-NY's constituency. GROW builds our membership base and is a training ground for new organizers in our own style of outreach. [In 2022, GROW doubled the ratio of contacts to outreach activities, bringing 100 new members into organizing, and mobilizing members and leaders 532 times.](#)

GROW continues to show its effectiveness in developing new organizers with training, practice, and professional development. [Krys Cerisier](#) was promoted from the GROW team to a full-time community organizer with the Homelessness Union. [Leonel Lopez](#) was promoted from a part-time GROW organizer to full-time [GROW Field Captain](#) to help lead and manage the team.

LEADERSHIP

ACROSS UNIONS AND ACROSS THE STATE

ROCHESTER LEADERSHIP 2-DAY RETREAT

We held our first Western New York 2-day [Post New York State-Budget Leadership Assembly!](#) On April 13th-15th we brought together leaders from across the state for a gathering to assess the budget fight, reflect on where we have succeeded, and identify areas for growth.

POWER ACADEMY

POWER Academy is VOCAL-NY's leadership development training that enrolls leaders across all unions. POWER Academy participants take a deep dive into the [history of movement building and problematic systems that operate through power, privilege, and oppression](#). Through this lens, participants polish their understanding of organizing tactics, campaign strategies, and the political process.

ALBANY LEADERSHIP ASSEMBLY

VOCAL-NY traveled to Albany with leaders from each issue-based union. [Each region of our membership was represented from Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, Albany, Westchester, and New York City.](#)

The Statewide Leadership Assembly ensures that we hold space for leadership to deepen their relationships, provide political education and skills building, and prepare for statewide campaigning priorities to be shared and discussed.





DIRECT SERVICES


DROP-IN CENTER


In October of 2022, our home at [300 Douglass Street](#) officially opened!

We are proud to offer:

-  Harm reduction supplies through our syringe services program desk

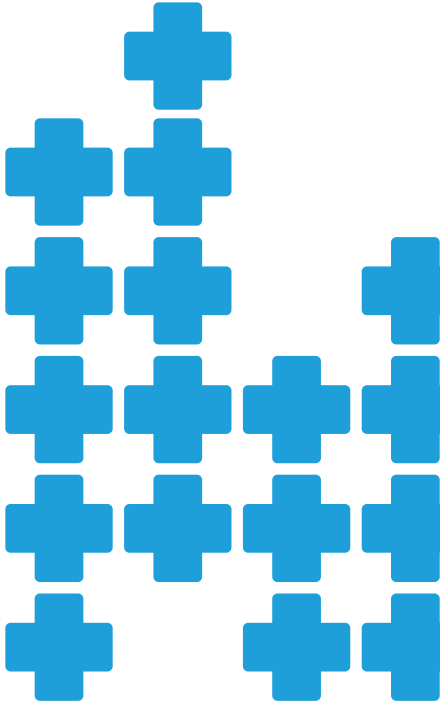
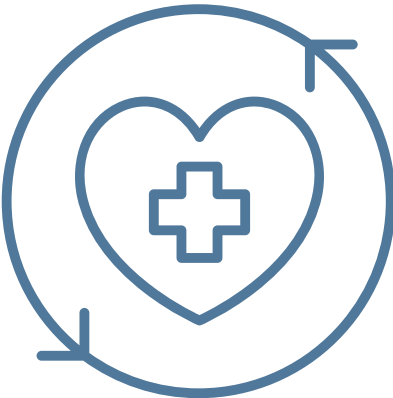
-  On-site hepatitis C testing & treatment

-  A drop-in center with laundry facilities, bathrooms, showers, library, computer bank, and food pantry

-  Drop-in center group programs including yoga, poetry workshops, film screenings, harm reduction education, support group, and more

We have partnered with our community for onsite services such as:

- SAFER NYU Law & Legal Action Center legal clinic
- Brooklyn Federal Credit Union financial literacy programming
 - *This means support for participants opening bank accounts, tax filing, credit score improvement with Cooperative*
- Public Health Solutions & MetroPlus insurance enrollment and navigation





HEALTH SERVICES

VOCAL-NY is proud to offer [hepatitis C screening](#) and treatment with care coordination throughout the greater Brooklyn community in the following neighborhoods: Bed Stuy, Brighton Beach, Clinton Hill, Coney Island, Crown Heights, Gowanus, and Red Hook.

We offer hepatitis C services through our continued partnership with [Mount Sinai Hospital](#) through the REACH program and Institute for Liver Medicine.

PEER DELIVERY SYRINGE EXCHANGE (PDSE)

VOCAL-NY's approach to harm reduction is Peer-informed and led by people with lived experiences.

We provide [harm reduction services](#) throughout the following neighborhoods in Brooklyn: Bedford Stuyvesant, Brighton Beach, Coney Island, Crown Heights, Red Hook, Downtown, Sunset Park, Brownsville, East New York and Williamsburg.

Since April, our [new PDSE office](#) is located at 44 4th Avenue in Brooklyn. The new office gives us the space to store supplies and for VOCAL-NY peers to have lockers, tables, supervision, strategic monthly meetings, and training.

Our PDSE team worked closely with our Health Services team and Hepatitis C Educators to provide [hepatitis C education and testing](#) at some of the locations we serve. We provided [COVID-19](#) education and personal protective equipment as well as continued to refer street participants to our Care Coordinator, Laura Levine, for vaccine appointments.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

KRYSTAL CERISIER,

HOMELESSNESS UNION COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

Krystal Cerisier is one of VOCAL-NY's Homelessness Union Community Organizers.

Born and raised in the Bronx, organizing is a part of Krystal's family tradition; identifying issues in the community and wanting to provide care comes naturally. After attending Global College, Krystal was searching for a way to connect the global struggles they witnessed abroad with the struggles they saw in their local community. This search led Krystal to VOCAL-NY's User Union. Krystal found power in the intersectionality of [VOCAL's union based issues](#) and the [harm reduction narrative](#) quintessential to VOCAL-NY's work. The Users Union provided a space where Kris could learn, grow, and teach love and compassion.

Krystal started at VOCAL-NY as a part of the GROW team in August 2021, eventually joining the Homelessness Union as a Community Organizer. Their focus is on developing a base for our [CityFHEPS Improvement and Expansion Campaign](#) and building power with queer youth who are experiencing homelessness.

Krystal's advice to people looking to join the fight is to join an organization, and spend time in the community with people with whom you can engage and learn. Find a place where you can have honest and transparent conversations about the issues. Krystal is looking forward to the work the Homeless Union will do in 2023 as they connect their [lived experience, values, and love of their community to create change](#).



BOARD SPOTLIGHT

MARILYN REYES

VOCAL-NY UNION LEADER AND BOARD MEMBER



Marilyn Reyes, born and raised in The Bronx, is a mother, grandmother, activist, public health worker, and more.

Fueled by her experiences and desire to improve job prospects for people coming home from incarceration, Marilyn joined VOCAL-NY and is a part of multiple unions, as well as a member of the board of directors. She served as a [Peer Educator with New York Harm Reduction Educators \(NYHRE\)](#), a non-profit organization devoted to promoting the health, safety, and well-being of marginalized, low-income persons who use drugs or engage in sex work, their loved ones, and their communities. Marilyn is also [Co-Director for the Peer Network of New York \(PNNY\)](#) and a member of the [National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls](#). Marilyn's work uplifts her own experiences, but also the experiences of so many women who have had their lives upended by the [failed war on drugs and mass incarceration](#).

Since 2018, Marilyn has also worked as a Wellness Advocate with the [Relay Initiative](#), providing peer support services in NYC Emergency Departments for participants after they experience a non-fatal overdose.

For Marilyn, the highlight of 2022 was celebrating [syringe decriminalization](#) and the opening of New York City's first Overdose Prevention Centers. However, she stresses the importance of staying in the fight for [Overdose Prevention Centers](#) to be authorized state-wide and the need for solidarity outside of New York City. This is why International Overdose Awareness Day is a highlight of her year; a day for direct actions statewide and a space to unite in love, loss, and compassion.

VOCAL UNITED

VOCAL-NY staff unionized in 2022! VOCAL-NY completely supports unionization; it is important to the protection of staff and creates a more equitable workplace. The Union was ratified in late 2022, and is now VOCAL United, a part of the Association of Legal Aid Attorney's UAW 2325. We support VOCAL-NY staff in this movement and recognize the necessity and power behind it.





VOCAL-KY

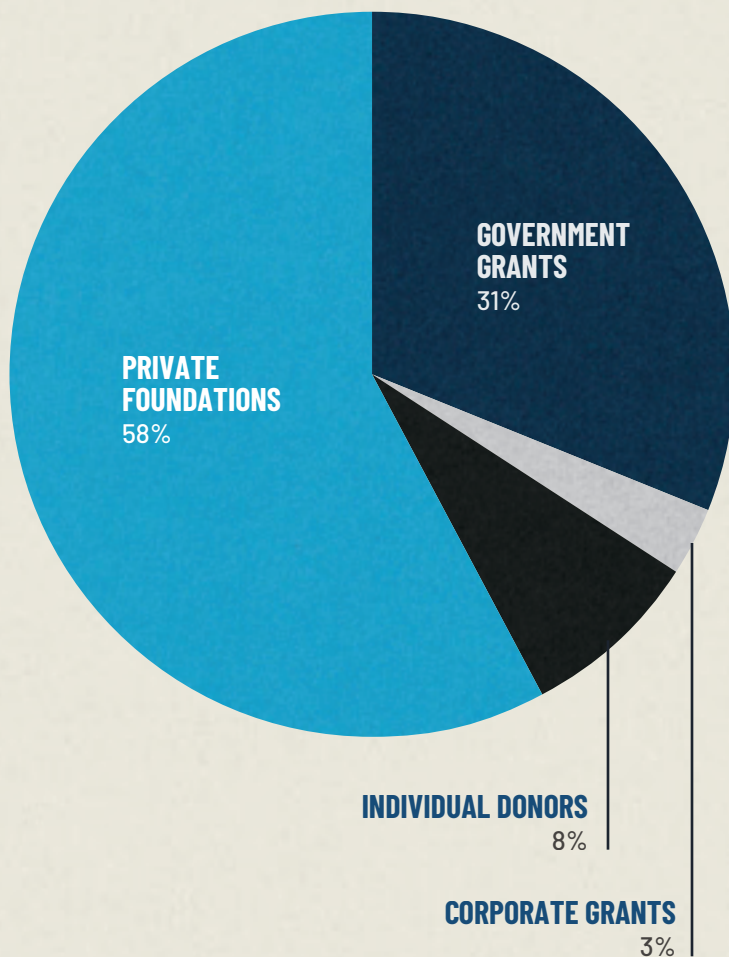
VOCAL-NY's primary issues plague low-income and communities of color in every corner of the country. Launching VOCAL-KY tackles those deep divisions across the United States - between rural and urban, communities of color and the white working class, coastal states and major parts of the South. Finding common ground across these divisions through deep relational organizing, shared analysis, and strategic campaigns, is exactly what VOCAL does best. Within New York, VOCAL has already demonstrated the ability to unify across progressive and much more conservative geographies. By staffing our work in new states with leadership steeped in the dynamics of those locations, and armed with the VOCAL model, we are prepared to help heal deeply problematic divisions in the country.

VOCAL-KY was launched in Kentucky in June 2022 and has had an incredible first 6 months. VOCAL-KY was launched with Shameka Parrish Wright as Director, Alfredo Carrasquillo as Canvass Manager, and Jennifer Twyman as Lead Organizer and Coalition Builder. Together they reached over 700 people through outreach and VOCAL-KY has around 200 members. They jumped into advocating for life-saving legislation and had over 40 media hits, including a feature in the Courier Journal, coverage of VOCAL-KY's Roadmap for Louisville Metro Government, and a Mayoral Forum for VOCAL-KY members and the community. The team expanded to include Jessica Lawrence and Ronnie Morris as members of the GROW team. VOCAL-KY shows the power of solidarity and the need for the movement nationwide.

FINANCIALS

With growing support from donors like you, VOCAL-NY is meeting the needs of low-income New Yorkers impacted by HIV/AIDS, the drug war, mass incarceration, and homelessness. Last year, through private foundation grants, corporate giving, government contracts, and individual donations, we had an operating budget of \$5.2 million. Every dollar we receive is well spent.

2022 REVENUE BREAKDOWN



WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES





SOLIDARITY DONORS



Benjamin Hughes
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Co-Executive Director

JEREMY SAUNDERS
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Infrastructure

ANGELA BOWE
People & Culture Manager

DIYAA CAPIL
Development Associate

KENDALL EPLEY
Operations & Data Manager, VOCAL-KY

ZACHARY FORD
Managing Director of Strategic Growth

JAMAL KHAN
Chief of Staff

MARIAH MCGOUGH
Communications Manager

KAREEM WATSON
Operations Manager

Organizing & Campaigns

ADOLFO ABREU
Director of Homelessness

IMANI ADDISON
Western-NY Community Organizer

BIZ BERTHY
Downstate Organizing Coordinator

LUIS BOLAÑOS ORDONEZ
Civil Rights Union Community Organizer

JASMINE BUDNELLA
Director of Drug Policy

ALFREDO CARRASQUILLO
GROW Manager, VOCAL-KY

KRYS CERISIER
Homelessness Union Community Organizer

NICK ENCALADA-MALINOWSKI
Civil Rights Union Campaigns Director



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STEVEN GRAY
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JONATHAN KELLY
GROW Organizer

JOHNEA LEE'A LAWRENCE HALL
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JOSEPH LOONAM
Homelessness Union Campaigns Coordinator

LEO LOPEZ
GROW Field Captain

KIPP LYLE
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STANLEY MARTIN
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RUWI SHAIKH

HIV/AIDS Campaigns Coordinator

KIMBERLY SMITH

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Homelessness Union Community Organizer

JENNIFER TWYMAN

Community Organizer, VOCAL-KY

JAWANZA WILLIAMS

Managing Director of Organizing

KELI YOUNG

Civil Rights Union Campaigns Coordinator

Services

HECTOR BARBOSA

PDSE Outreach Worker

CARO BOLAÑOS ORDONEZ

Healthcare Navigator

AMANDA CLAY

Healthcare Programs Associate

ARASH DIBA

Managing Director of Harm Reduction Services

KHALEED FAHIE

Syringe Exchange Peer Educator

TARA FEDELE

PDSE Outreach Worker

JEFFERY FOSTER

PDSE Outreach Worker

CHARLOTTE GRAHAM

Drop-in Center Associate

DAVID KALINOSKI

Healthcare Programs Manager

LAURA LEVINE

SEP Care Coordinator

SHANTAE OWENS

Syringe Exchange Peer Educator

ALFREDO PADILLA

Syringe Exchange Worker

GRACIELA RAZO

Drop-in Center Manager

PAULA SANTIAGO

PDSE Outreach & Peer Education Manager

CAREY SMITH

PEER Outreach Worker

NATE TAYLOR

PEER Outreach Worker

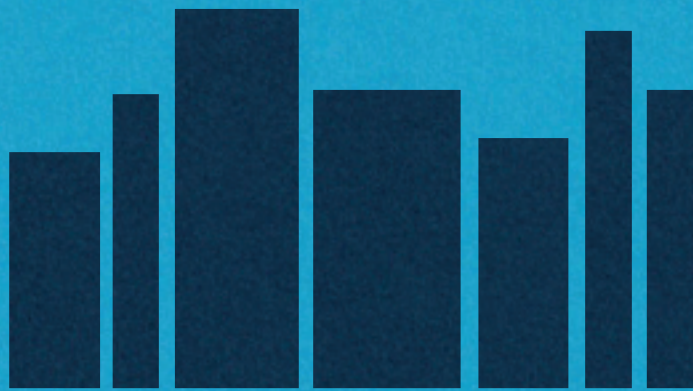
MELLANIE THOMAS

Data Associate

LOUIS WINSLOW

PEER Outreach Worker





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Board Member



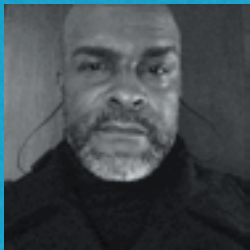
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WAYNE STARKS
Board Member



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VOCAL-NY IS A STATEWIDE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION THAT BUILDS POWER AMONG LOW-INCOME PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HIV/AIDS, THE DRUG WAR, MASS INCARCERATION, AND HOMELESSNESS IN ORDER TO CREATE HEALTHY AND JUST COMMUNITIES.



DONATE

To improve the lives of low-income New Yorkers impacted by HIV/AIDS, the drug war, mass incarceration, and homelessness – and create systemic change that impacts many more.

Give Only: vocal-ny.org/donate

Or by mail: 300 Douglass Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217

For more information: donations@vocal-ny.org

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