a fresh start

THE OHIO JUSTICE & POLICY CENTER’S 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

OJPC
OUR MISSION

OJPC’s mission is to create fair, intelligent, redemptive criminal-justice systems through zealous client-centered advocacy, innovative policy reform, and cross-sector community education.

WHAT WE DO

OJPC is a nonprofit, public-interest law firm in Cincinnati, Ohio, focused on issues of safety and justice. We work to substantially reduce the size and racial disparity of the Ohio’s prison population, as well as to protect the rights and dignity of incarcerated people. We serve people in the community by removing criminal-records-based barriers to employment, housing, education, and full community integration. In addition to offering direct, pro-bono legal services for impacted individuals, we advocate for public policy that creates safe and just communities at the state and local level. We provide education about criminal-justice issues through statewide presentations, a clinical legal program for law students, an annual internship program, community resource materials, and written legal and policy guides.
A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Often, I use my annual report letter to look back at the previous year’s most significant accomplishments. But sometimes it’s worth looking ahead to what we want to achieve in the current year and beyond. I’ll do that now.

Recently, OJPC launched a new project called Beyond Guilt. The project seeks to free people who admit guilt, are serving long sentences, have rehabilitated themselves and are ready to rejoin society. After winning our clients’ freedom, Beyond Guilt will connect them to mentors and services that will facilitate smooth, safe, productive community integration.

Though freeing individuals is important, Beyond Guilt is about much more. At a deeper level, we aim to transform the way society thinks about sentencing people who commit serious crimes. Elected officials on both sides of the political aisle talk about the importance of reducing mass incarceration. However, their policy prescriptions for getting us there—reducing sentences for people convicted of non-violent offenses—will not significantly reduce the prison population. As a recent Bureau of Justice Statistics report indicated, 55 percent of state prisoners nationally are serving time for a violent offense; only 15 percent of people serving time in state prisons are there for drug offenses. Thus, if we are really committed to ending mass incarceration, then we must reform sentences for people convicted of serious crimes. But are we naïve to believe we can move lawmakers to shorten sentences for people who have committed violent crimes? I don’t think so.

Storytelling is the key to any successful reform movement, and Beyond Guilt will tell lots of stories of over-punishment and redemption. In taking on the difficult task of reforming sentencing laws for people convicted of violent offenses, we will lift up the narratives of our clients, who made mistakes, learned from them, and can now safely be released.

I hope you will consider joining us in this fight, and thank you for your continued support of all of OJPC’s flagship projects, such as Second Chance, Human Rights in Prison and the Women’s Project.

Our sincere thanks,
A LETTER FROM THE BOARD

Dear Friends,

We are once again pleased to release the Ohio Justice and Policy Center’s annual report for 2018. As most of you know, in addition to our foundational programs, we fought very hard alongside a statewide coalition on Issue 1. Though the issue did not pass, the work we did certainly is the underpinning for our work moving forward.

So, we are redoubling our efforts to serve Ohio citizens by strengthening our current program excellence and expanding in ways that are innovative. As we focus our efforts, we do so in new ways that rely on the skillful and passionate commitment of the OJPC staff and board. This year’s theme, then, is “A Fresh Start”.

This year’s report relies on the tried-and-true method of telling the stories of those we serve. We highlight – Angela – a Second Chance client who had her record sealed and is now enrolled in a medical billing program at Great Oaks. We’ll also be introduced to Mia Hunter, hear about her upcoming release from prison and see what the future may hold for her. You’ll also hear from Elizabeth Hopkins, a strong ally of OJPC and a leader in Issue 1 organizing. She’ll share her perspective on the future of criminal justice advocacy.

Finally, David will introduce the Beyond Guilt project, which aims to promote equity and fairness. As always, OJPC is proud that it doesn’t write people off. And we invite you to support OJPC’s important work through the giving of your time, talent and treasure.

Thank you,

Eileen Cooper Reed
Chair
OJPC’S YEAR IN NUMBERS

14 Staff; including six attorneys.

57 “Justice Champions” trained through our Constitutional Litigation Clinic, summer internships, and other volunteer projects.

629 People provided with detailed advice and information at our Second Chance Community Legal Clinics and Classes.

$14,757 In court costs and fees remitted through OJPC’s zealous advocacy.

1,106 Barriers in Ohio law, restricting employment and community integration for people with criminal records, catalogued in our database, civicohio.org.

1,500+ People – including lawyers, judges, clients, other helping professionals, and the general public – who have attended presentations to learn more about our CIVICC database, human trafficking, criminal justice reform, and criminal records-based barriers to employment.

OJPC’s “Wasted Assets” report, published jointly with Policy Matters Ohio, finds:

994,000 Ohioans have felony records.

3.4 BILLION Wage dollars were lost in 2017 alone by Ohioans unemployed due to criminal records.

1.3 MILLION Ohio jobs are barred or restricted by Ohio law for people with criminal records — that’s 1 in 4 jobs.

See the full report at http://bit.ly/wastedassets
Mia was assaulted in her own home. If she had not known the assailant, it would have been a clear case of self-defense. However, the fact that he was her ex-boyfriend resulted in a jury convicting her for murder. Mia was sentenced to life in prison and would only be eligible for parole after 15 years.

Mia was a certified peace officer and a single mother of a teenager when she was sent to prison. She had never been in trouble with the law. While incarcerated, Mia obtained her GED, became an optician apprentice, and completed several OSHA certifications. She
has been trained as a tutor, a sign language trainer, and a mentor for other prisoners. She is also enrolled in college and has maintained a 4.0 GPA.

OJPC attorney Tiffanny Smith met Mia in early 2017 while developing OJPC’s Women’s Project for Incarcerated Survivors of Domestic Violence. Tiffanny filed a clemency application and advocated for Mia at her Parole Board hearing. The Board unanimously recommended that Mia be immediately released on parole. On January 7, 2019, Governor Kasich granted release to Mia after she completes 6 months of the prison’s reintegration program. In his 8 years as Governor, Kasich has not granted any other commutation to a prisoner for time served and release from prison.

Mia says, “I am humbled and over-appreciative for all that Governor Kasich has done for me! I am truly grateful for a second chance.”

Mia is one of many women incarcerated in Ohio for the death of her abuser.

The Vera Institute estimates that over 85% of women incarcerated suffered previous abuse. These women are re-victimized by the criminal legal system, and repeatedly traumatized within the prison and parole systems. Most of these women have no prior criminal history, have outstanding institutional records, and are not a threat to society. Yet, they remain in prison.

When she returns home, Mia said she plans to spend time with her daughter, meet new family members who were born while she was incarcerated, continue her college career at Ashland University, volunteer to help other survivors of domestic violence, and “take a long bubble bath.”
ANGELA: READY FOR A FRESH START

Twenty years ago, Angela* acquired several misdemeanor records related to past tumultuous relationships. “I learned that not all friends and family are good for you,” Angela reflects. Angela chose to find people who would have a positive influence on her life, instead of those who got her into trouble.

With help and inspiration from mentors, Angela turned her life around. She was determined to maintain gainful employment, despite the barriers created by her criminal record. Angela started and ran her own cleaning business from 2003 to 2006. When business slowed down, she found warehouse jobs that accepted applicants with criminal records. She often worked 10-12 hours per day, up to 7 days per week. Even if the jobs were seasonal, she took the opportunities she could get, and kept applying for better options.

Although Angela had stayed completely out of trouble since her misdemeanors in the late 90s, her criminal record held her back from having a meaningful, stable career that would truly be enough to support her family.

In 2008, Angela hoped to seal her criminal record, but unfortunately, she was ineligible under the law at that time. So, she continued going from job to job.

Years later, after suffering an injury at her warehouse job, Angela realized that she needed to find a different path. She enrolled in Cincinnati Works, where staff told Angela that OJPC might be able to help. Angela was directed to OJPC’s Second Chance Legal Clinic at the Freestore Foodbank.

“I was elated when this happened!” Angela reflects. “In the past, if I was laid off or a seasonal term ended, I’d find another job. But when I got hurt, I had time to think about the types of work I actually wanted to do,” Angela says. “I’ve wanted to do medical billing and coding ever since I went to my friend’s graduation [from that program] in 2006. The schools require you to have a clean background check, so I was excited to learn about [services provided by] OJPC.”

Although Angela had been ineligible for record sealing in
the past, OJPC paralegal Sheila Donaldson Johnson conducted a new, deeper dive into the case. With the supervision of an attorney, Sheila also analyzed the case in terms of Ohio new record sealing law – a law which had improved after OJPC’s legislative advocacy.

Sheila discovered that under the new law, Angela was eligible for a full record sealing! She was able to have all her misdemeanor convictions and charges sealed, which significantly expanded opportunities for her. After 20 years, Angela had finally removed the stigma of her past.

Angela enrolled in Great Oaks in the fall of 2018 to train as a medical office specialist in billing and coding. The school ran two different background checks, and both came up totally clean. And, just as Angela started school, her oldest son began his freshman year of college, on a full scholarship.

Angela is excited to begin her career. She feels encouraged that companies partnering with Great Oaks are waiting for graduates like her – who have received high-quality training and are ready to work.

Angela is so grateful that OJPC helped her to finally seal her criminal records. In the future, she plans to move to Florida, where there are many medical facilities.

*This client’s name was changed for the purposes of this story to ensure privacy.
"The fight is alive and well"
THE LASTING IMPACT OF THE ISSUE 1 CAMPAIGN

Elizabeth Hopkins brought her whole self to the Issue 1 campaign. And even though it didn't pass last November, it brought lasting light and learning to her and to the marginalized people she seeks to lift up every day.

OJPC was one of the leading organizations behind Issue 1, the 2018 ballot initiative to increase drug-treatment and crime-survivor resources by reducing the prison population. Starting even before 2018, OJPC poured countless hours into the research, drafting, planning, and advocacy of this bold attempt to shift our criminal justice system from punishment to healing. But far more important than our hard work were the numerous people it touched in numerous, sometimes unexpected ways. People like Elizabeth Hopkins.

Elizabeth was then a long-time community organizer with the Cincinnati-based AMOS Project (which is part of our strong ally, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative). As an organizer who logged thousands of hours in greater Cincinnati communities, she saw the Issue 1 campaign as by far the clearest policy she has ever had to offer the people she organized. “I looked people in the eye every day — people of color bearing the brunt of systemic racism; people struggling to makes ends meet; people with a family member in jail; people like me who had to bury friends that died from overdoses — and knew I was offering them something that would have a huge and concrete impact on their lives. Issue 1 was tangible to people. They felt it.”

The ballot initiative forced a reckoning with mass incarceration: if locking people up for drug addiction has not worked for the last 40 years, why do we still do it? Why not boldly step away from the laws that land people in prison? Why not invest in drug treatment and crime-survivors’ healing instead? “Even though we didn’t win in November, those questions are still there. They’re there bigger than they’ve ever been. What we won in November was a major narrative change.”

Politicians are taking notice. Since Election Day, the legislature has taken up Senate Bill 3 to accomplish some of the policy goals of Issue 1, including reclassifying some drug-possession felonies to misdemeanors.

This highly political endeavor impacted Elizabeth in a very personal way, as a mother of two.
young children. “My kids are what gave me the deepest energy to push for Issue 1. I knew if, God forbid, my kids ever got tangled with drugs or the criminal justice system, I wouldn’t want them just punished for punishment’s sake. And I knew that how people racially defined my kids would make it worse for them. That’s how the system is now: so focused on just caging people, with so much racial bias. And what good has that done us? All of us would want healing responses for our kids. That’s what Issue 1 was about for me: not so much fighting against broken systems we don’t want; instead, fighting for the world we do want — for ourselves and our children. Even after Issue 1, because of Issue 1, that fight is alive and well.”
Every passing week since I completed my summer internship at OJPC, I have waited for word on one of my clients, “John Doe.” More than anything, I hope to one day receive a photo of him hugging his son.

“John” is the father of a young teenager, but the overbroad rules of “post-release control” prevent John from freely seeing, talking, or even writing to his son, much less giving the boy a hug. Because John was convicted of a sex offense, Ohio bars him from contact with any minor, including his own child, for five years—even though the crime did not involve a minor or family member.

When David Singleton asked me to help him take on the case, I was shocked at the long list of restrictions on people convicted of sex offenses, regardless of the circumstances or facts of the crime. I quickly realized that these are people who are seen as irredeemable by the state, and they are in fact one of the most marginalized groups in the country. But OJPC does not write people off, and we did not write
We filed suit in federal court—my first ever court appearance—to fight for John’s constitutional right to be with his family. I was drawn to OJPC precisely because of this work: fighting for the rights and humanity of all people, including those that no one else is willing to fight for. It is a privilege and a responsibility to be able to tell another’s story, and all the more so when it is a story that is not often told.

Fortunately, at OJPC, I was able to learn from the best. For instance, when I told David that I was nervous about a criminal defense clinic I would start in the fall, he volunteered to stay late at the office to guide any interested interns in a trial skills “bootcamp,” with a focus on developing narratives. That, after all, is what strong advocacy is about: expressing the humanity of those you represent. David’s guidance proved crucial for me, from telling the federal judge why John deserves relief to representing indigent criminal defendants in Boston trial courts this fall.

The level of dedication revealed by David’s response is another reason why I came to OJPC: a reputation for stellar mentorship. Whether in one-on-one chats over career decisions or a full office discussion about racial justice, I learned as much from speaking with the inspiring humans I worked with as I did from the varied litigation work I completed. Their commitment to clients, resilience in the face of injustice, and willingness to guide a young lawyer are truly amazing. I know that wherever I go in my career, I will continue to be thankful for the lessons I learned and the people I met through my summer at OJPC.

As I continue to wait on the decision in John’s case, hoping for that photo with his son, I am excited to begin my own career of fighting for individual and systemic justice, one case at a time.
On April 30th, OJPC launched a new project: Beyond Guilt. Beyond Guilt aims to do for over-punished prisoners who admit guilt what innocence projects have for wrongfully convicted persons who claim actual innocence. (This project will contrast the Innocence Project, as a “Guilty Project” of sorts.)

While Beyond Guilt’s clientele will be less politically palatable than the defense of innocent prisoners, OJPC has always believed that all people deserve legal representation and fair treatment, regardless of guilt or innocence. Beyond Guilt seeks to represent individuals convicted of more serious offenses, including violent crimes, who have admitted guilt, have been properly rehabilitated, and are ready to rejoin society.

With the help of prosecutors and crime survivors, we aim to free people who are guilty of their crimes of conviction, have served a significant sentence, and who can demonstrate rehabilitation. In addition to focusing on freeing individual prisoners, we will empower them to become advocates for sentencing reform, not just for people who commit low level non-violent drug offenses, but also for individuals who commit more serious crimes.

“If we are really committed to reducing mass incarceration, we must expand our understanding of which prisoners deserve to live among us again,” said David Singleton, who will lead the new project.

Beyond Guilt will operate out of the OJPC office in Cincinnati, although we’ll work to build a network of similar projects throughout the country.

To learn more, visit BeyondGuilt.org.
In the summer of 2007, Andrew Butler was enrolled at the University of Toledo studying drama. His prospects for success seemed bright. But Andrew and his friend, Christopher Avery, made a fateful decision that altered the course of their lives. Short on tuition money, they decided to rob two banks at gunpoint to pay for college. No one was physically injured during the robbery, but both men accepted responsibility for their actions and pled guilty. Despite having no prior criminal history, Andrew and Christopher received twenty-year sentences for their crimes.

After arriving in prison, Andrew and Christopher set about improving themselves. Each completed numerous rehabilitative programs and proved themselves to be model prisoners.

In January 2019, OJPC filed a judicial release motion on behalf of Andrew; Christopher was represented by a private attorney. OJPC argued that Andrew had served a significant sentence — more than eleven years — and had rehabilitated himself. Hamilton County Prosecuting Attorney Joseph Deters agreed and asked the court to release Andrew and Christopher.

On March 1, 2019, the court decided to release Andrew and Christopher and placed them on five years of probation, ordering that each complete their college education. The judge also ordered Andrew and Christopher to participate in a mentoring program OJPC is developing.

Andrew and Christopher are doing well. Both are working, volunteering and speaking to young people about the importance of thinking through the consequences of actions. Andrew and Christopher have paid their debt to society and will continue to make a meaningful difference in the community.
David Singleton  
*Executive Director*

Verjine Adanalian  
Attorney  
*Equal Justice Works  
Crime Victims Justice Corps Fellow*

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Paralegal

Laura Beverly  
Operations Manager

Jorge Dalence Gastelu  
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Tyra Patterson  
Community Outreach Strategies Specialist

Tiffany Smith  
Attorney  
*Incarcerated Survivors of Domestic Violence*

Pam Thurston  
Attorney  
*CIVICC*

Kevin Werner  
Policy Director
CONGRATULATIONS, SHEILA

If you’ve ever called OJPC on the phone or been to a free legal clinic, there’s a good chance you met or spoke to Sheila Donaldson Johnson.

In 2018, Sheila celebrated her 16th work anniversary with OJPC.

In 2018, Sheila also celebrated 25 years of sobriety. Sheila is one of two members of OJPC’s staff to have been incarcerated. That life is far in Sheila’s rear-view mirror, but those experiences allow Sheila to connect to clients and meet their needs in a way other staff members cannot.

OJPC is proud and very fortunate to have Sheila on staff!

THANK YOU, STEPHEN

Stephen JohnsonGrove has been the face of OJPC’s advocacy efforts for 15 years. Most recently, you likely saw him on the front lines during the 2018 election advocating for smart policy reform via Issue 1. Stephen also fought for the expansion of record sealing and expungement, for fair hiring and “ban the box” laws, and for the rights of people with sex offenses. At the beginning of Stephen’s career, though, he helped launch the Second Chance Project and the CIVICC Database, two cornerstones of OJPC’s work today.

Stephen will leave OJPC in 2019 to start a new job with the Ohio Transformation Fund. He’ll continue to work for smart criminal justice reform for the Buckeye State, and he’ll still work closely with OJPC and its allies.
FRESH FACES AT OJPC

Many of OJPC’s supporters were introduced to Tyra Patterson as an OJPC client around 2016. Since the start of 2018, however, Tyra has been a staff member at OJPC, using her knowledge and personal experience to help clients and advocate for reform. Today, Tyra serves as OJPC’s Community Outreach Strategies Specialist. She plans events, organizes fundraisers and represents OJPC at local, state and national events.

Marais Jacon-Duffy joined OJPC a few weeks after Tyra, in early Feb. 2018. She has a background working in news, most recently at WCPO Channel 9 in Cincinnati. She said she wanted to work for OJPC so that she wouldn’t “be a bystander” to the injustices in our criminal legal system. Since joining OJPC, Marais has redesigned OJPC’s website, updated logos, and boosted social media presence significantly. (Marais also designed this report!)

Alyssa Beck joined OJPC in the spring of 2018 as a paralegal working on OJPC’s Second Chance Project. Alyssa has worked at law firms in the past, but her passion for law was sparked by her family’s own experiences with the criminal legal and prison systems. If you attend an OJPC legal clinic, you will likely see Alyssa there. She also helps clients at Cincinnati Works every week.

Verjine Adanalian joined OJPC in June 2018. She was hired by OJPC through a 2-year fellowship with Equal Justice Works. Verjine is an attorney specializing in assisting OJPC’s Safe Harbor clients (those who have survived human trafficking and need help expunging or sealing criminal records). Verjine graduated from the University of Cincinnati College of Law in 2018 and served as managing editor of Human Rights Quarterly.

Laura Beverly joined OJPC as Operations Manager after Devorah Waesch announced her retirement at the end of 2018. Laura most recently worked in retail, but has a wealth of experience working with nonprofits. Although she hasn’t been on staff for long, Laura has helped the staff adjust to a newly-renovated office, and she’s currently overseeing the recruitment and onboarding of new hires.

Kevin joined OJPC in May 2019 and is the primary staff member responsible for policy advocacy and lobbying initiatives. He brings years of experience in community and grassroots organizing in major cities across the country. Immediately before joining OJPC, Kevin led Ohioans to Stop Executions.
REVENUE

Board Contributions: $16,610
Community Shares Contributions: $5,742
Individual Donations: $104,555
Major Gifts: $68,000
In-Kind Professional Services: $85,000
Foundation Grants: $570,509
Governmental Grants/Contracts: $90,980
Other Income: $34,876

Total Revenue: $976,273

EXPENSES

Administrative & General: $29,300
Employee & Payroll Expenses: $744,702
Facility Expenses: $84,619
Insurance: $5,258
Litigation Expenses: $12,155
Professional Services: $162,824
Technology: $7,979
Travel: $15,793

Total Expenses: $1,062,632
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Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction
Ohio Transformation Fund
Open Society Foundations
SC Ministry Foundation
United Way of Greater Cincinnati

The City of Cincinnati
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