

2023 Year in Review



Sixth Street Community Center Team and Teens enrolled in our Teen Climate Justice Program after an art build at SSCC in preparation for NYC's Mass March to End Fossil Fuels (September 2023).

Summary

2023 was an incredible year of growth for Sixth Street Community Center (SSCC). After 45 years of service, we continued to provide robust support for families facing climate vulnerability and food insecurity through our organizing, advocacy and community-based programs. We embarked on new adventures, bringing a group of NYC Teens to the wilderness of the Pinelands National Reserve for a multi-day experience of hiking, canoeing, camping and connecting with our natural world. And our Youth Program kids produced, wrote and starred in their very own holiday play at the center. During a year where the City of New York has left our most vulnerable without adequate support, we supported thousands of newly arrived families seeking asylum with access to freshly cooked, hot meals, warm clothing, jackets and basic supplies.

Sixth Street Community Center | Annual Highlights

Teen Climate Justice Program

This year, our Teen Climate Justice Program has grown our engagement to reach 91 unique teens over the two semesters and summer program! We have a strong core group of 10 students coming consistently after school each workshop.

We started off 2023 holding workshops in collaboration with the Youth Program, exploring items in the winter CSA and stocking three local community fridges. The teens delved deeper into mutual aid with a guest from the People's Bodega. Some teens took a trip to MoMA PS1 to explore an exhibit on the development of NYC greenspaces which featured historical photographs of Sixth Street! As the Spring went on, teens embarked on an exciting partnership with local theater space the Wild Project, where they learned about the building's sustainable architecture, revitalized their green roof, and experimented with seed germination.



SSCC Teens from one of our Summer sessions in front of the center.

In March, teens traveled up to Albany two times in support of the Climate, Jobs, and Justice Package with NY Renewals coalition. During Youth Lobby Day, teens spoke directly with legislative offices of three state Assemblymembers and a state Senator about why climate justice is important to them. During the Mass Mobilization, teens performed a spoken word poem next to Governor Hochul's office, sharing our personal impacts from climate change in front of a crowd of two hundred.

In April, teens spearheaded a project to create a rooftop garden out of recycled milk crates to support the beehives at Sixth Street. Thanks to a generous donation from Green Guerillas, we were able to plant \$500 worth of native pollinator plant species in our new rooftop garden and our plot in neighboring 6BC garden! As we wrapped up the semester, teens focused in on preparing testimony called "My Climate Story" to prepare for a visit from Assemblymember Harvey Epstein and practice weaving personal narrative with climate testimony.

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SSCC Teens Lobby Visit to Albany. Meeting with Assembly Member Alex Bore's Legislative Director.

Teens took a weekend trip into Newtown Creek, where Brooklyn Community Boathouse volunteers showed teens how to canoe, and discussed the local ecosystems while touring the neighborhood's legacy of extractive industry from the boat.

Our summer program started off with a robust 13 teens in July, and a more intimate cohort of 7 in August. Both cohorts conducted food rescues from local grocery stores and stocked community fridges, ran Sixth Street's food distribution as the main volunteer force, and assisted with food distributions run by community partners.

July brought about an exciting partnership with the LES Ecology Center, who shared workshops on composting, and led stewardship activities of Tompkins Square Park. July ended with a climate and food justice expo hosted in Henry Street Garden, where teens taught the public what they had learned.

In August, teens engaged in cooking workshops utilizing our CSA ingredients, hosted State Assemblymember Harvey Epstein for a talk on his legislative priorities, toured the science labs and IlluminationSpace at the CUNY Advanced Science Research Center, and visited the Billion Oyster Project on Governor's Island to learn about ecology and biodiversity in the New York Harbor.



Teen Climate Justice Program visiting the Billion Dollar Oyster Project in the New York Harbor.

Sixth Street Community Center | Annual Highlights

Teen Climate Justice Program



SSCC Teens dropping off meals and produce at one of our local fridges on First Avenue.

Summer 2023 brought a brand new part of the TCJP - the Wilderness Access Trip! In partnership with YMCA of the Pines, 7 teens and the Program Director embarked on 4-day overnight backpacking trip in the Pine Barrens forest of NJ, at no cost to the teen's families. Teens learned about the local ecology, camping and survival skills, and formed a tight-knit chosen family over the course of the trip. For many teens, it was their first experience backpacking, camping, or swimming in a natural body of water. We look forward to offering a new cohort a trip with YMCA of the Pines in summer 2024.

The TCJP started off the fall semester by preparing for and attending the March to End Fossil Fuels, on September 17. Teens helped prepare with the march's art team by painting twenty-two banners for the youth to carry during the event! In those workshops, our attendance reached an all-time high of 35 attendees at one time.

During Climate Week, teens attended an event hosted by Sixth Street with Indigenous climate activists, including Helena & Nina Gualinga of Jovenes Amazonicos, about their protection of Yasuní national forest in Ecuador.



Defending Yasuni: SSCC Hosted an event during NYC's climate week, inviting Indigenous Youth Activists who were active in Ecuador's successful campaign to stop fossil fuel extraction and oil drilling in the Amazon.

Teens testified at multiple public hearings, including in favor of enforcing Local Law 97 to the Department of Buildings, and against a rate increase by National Grid alongside activists from No North Brooklyn Pipeline Alliance.

In an exciting lobbying meeting to advocate for the Climate, Jobs, and Justice Package, teens and staff from Sixth Street met with Senator Brian Kavanaugh about the Just Energy Transition Act. After hearing testimony from our teens, Senator Kavanaugh committed right then to be a co-sponsor for the bill - a huge win for the whole state!

November culminated in a trip to Albany to advocate for the NY HEAT Act with the Renewable Heat Now Coalition, where two students spoke at a press conference in the capitol building.

Teens are wrapping up the year with a workshop series from FloodNet, a community partner who installs flood sensors in NYC and collected data from the major citywide flood event on September 29th, by discussing how we can use technology and interpret data to support our climate justice advocacy and build resilient communities.



SSCC Teens Rallying for the Climate, Jobs and Justice Package up in Albany with coalition partners NY Renewables and TreeAge.

Next year, teens will begin an exciting 2023 by collaborating with TREEage to support the Green Healthy Schools campaign, and taking active bystander workshops led by youth from the Center for Anti-Violence Education.

The Teen Climate Justice Program was led by our Teen Program Director Anna Tsomo and was supported by our Climate Justice Organizer Hennessy Garcia.



Sixth Street Community Center | Annual Highlights

Sixth Street Youth Program

The Sixth Street Youth Program (SSYP) operated year round during 2023 for after school and summer, supporting a total of 95 kids. Throughout the 2023 season, we have continued to deeply root our work in exploration of the value of community and of collective care. Through storytelling and play, and fully embracing our kids' openness, imaginations, and creativity, we confront the injustices of today by envisioning worlds beyond the current one we live in. We offer a unique curriculum that weaves our pillars; arts, urban sustainability, urban farming and climate justice throughout our program. When introducing a workshop or new concept, we always give the youth the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, questions, and we honor and respect their contributions.



After School Program

The Sixth Street Youth Program (SSYP) After School served a total of 85 families during the Spring and Fall seasons. This fall semester we supported 45 students from four local public elementary schools representing a diverse cross-section of the Lower East Side community. We provide daily pick-up service from the four public schools, community building playtime, homework support, and a daily enrichment workshop. 86% of our enrolled families benefit from our reduced sliding-scale program fees, with 22% of students attending the program free of cost thanks to support from Assembly Member Harvey Epstein. We take pride in our daily enrichment workshops which focus on climate justice, social justice, upcycling and regeneration, food sovereignty, visual arts, and other creative offerings through our local neighborhood partnerships.



SSYP Fall Season Highlights

Our Sixth Street Youth Program and Teen Climate Justice Program collaborated on several occasions. During a special youth/teen collaboration at the beginning of the year, Sixth Street hosted Indigenous climate activists Nina Gualinga, Helena Gualinga, and Alexis Grefa and kids got to learn about their fight to stop oil drilling in Yasuní National Park in Ecuador. Our specialized workshops this fall included lots of cooking, baking, herbalism, land based learning in our community gardens, mutual aid, textile workshops, painting, drawing and sculpture. A few of our favorites this year were Land Art at Green Oasis Garden, paper bag self portraits, and writing birthday cards to LGBTQ+ Incarcerated People with our partner organization Black and Pink, and cooking squash and pumpkin from Sixth Street's CSA. Our kids this year are excellent performers and we have also been doing lots of performing and songwriting, and just ended the year with a project we are very proud of, a play our youth directed and produced about addressing food insecurity during the holiday season called "NYC Kids Slay Winter."



We continued our longstanding partnership with Wide Rainbow, another local non-profit organization that connects contemporary artists with the community. Through this collaboration, students were exposed to contemporary artists (NYC based and international) and art exhibits at Manhattan-based galleries like Hauser Wirth, Pace and David Zwirner. We also have continued our partnership with mutual aid organization EV Loves NYC to distribute meals to our neighborhood community fridges, and Two Boots Pizza, who donate pizzas monthly to celebrate our kids' birthdays.

Sixth Street Community Center | Annual Highlights

Summer at Sixth Street (SASS)

Summer at Sixth Street, our summer program for youth ages 5-13 supported over 47 families for 6 full weeks in July and August with an average daily enrollment of 20 kids per day. We explored 3 of our local community gardens, El Jardin de Paraíso, Green Oasis Garden and 6BC Botanical Garden all throughout the summer. Much of our gardening and land based workshops were guided by one of our Youth Program Coordinators, Ivy Denham-Conroy. Together we learned about soil ecology, healing herbs, invasive species, and the importance of neighborhood greenspaces for all creatures, human and non-human alike.



We took many fun field trips throughout the summer, from learning about the history of Loïsaida at the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Spaces in our own neighborhood, to trips to Battery Park Urban Farm and Governors Island! And as always, we celebrated the end of summer with our annual trip to Central Park where we took canoes around Central Park Lake. SASS was led by our youth program Coordinators Sam Fabian, Maddy Giles and Ivy Denham-Conroy, as well as Youth Educator Ebony Cawthorne. We also were lucky enough to have support from two interns, Mambwe and Thea. Mambwe is an SSYP Alumni who has returned to work with us summer after summer. We are so grateful!



Filling up the Loïsaida Community Fridge with fresh meals from our Mutual Aid Kitchen Project.



Typical of the Summer at Sixth Street spirit, the kids explored the wonders of our Loïsaida community and New York City, from trips to Battery Urban Farm and The Brooklyn Botanical Garden. We ended the summer with our annual trip to Central Park, where we spent an afternoon picnicking and canoeing in Central Park Lake.

SSYP was led by our Youth Program Directors, Krystal Bydonne (SASS 2022 & SSYP Fall 2022) & Shania Santana (Spring 2022), with critical support from Youth Educators Alex Lopez Guevara, Onyx Clarke, Sara Morales, Ryan Moore, Samantha Fabian, Ivy Denham-Conroy, Maddy Giles, Sarai Garcia and Ebony Cawthorne. Every summer including SASS 2022, we were supported by SSYP alumni Maddie (now a Junior in HS) and Mambwe who headed off to the University of New Mexico at the end of the summer!



Playful moments in the garden with our parachute!

Sixth Street Community Center | Annual Highlights

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program

SSCC has been committed to expanding food access and food justice for Loisaída residents for over 27 years. Bringing fresh, organic produce directly from a local farmer in the Hudson Valley to what has long been considered a food desert, SSCC offers their CSA to Lower East Side community members via a sliding scale membership that is based on household income. In this model, low-income households have their membership fees subsidized by higher-income households. Families can also use SNAP (food stamps) or EBT to pay for their CSA share.



Sixth Street's CSA Program supported a total of 75 family and household memberships in 2023. As one of the first CSA programs established in New York City, we've maintained our 22+ years of partnership with Hepworth Farms for our Summer/Fall 23' season and our longstanding partnership with Norwich Meadows Farm for the Winter/Spring 23' season.

We offer access to farm-fresh, organic produce on a sliding-scale membership based on household income, and we accept EBT/Food Stamps from low-income households. 75% of our households received shares at a reduced sliding scale rate and 10 additional shares were provided at no charge to low-income families.

SSCC's 2023 CSA Programs were coordinated by Ivy Denham-Conroy.



Emergency Food Distribution Program

Dating back to the homesteading movement in the late 70's and early 80's, Sixth Street Community Center has historically had free food lines wrapping around the block and extending down Avenue C. In 2020, when the COVID19 pandemic hit, we did what we know how to do best and responded to the drastic spike of food insecurity that was experienced by our community members. 2020 and 2021 was a year of learning how to run the program on scarce resources and funding.



Through 2023, we continued our Emergency Food Distribution Program year round. SSCC has continued to buy fresh produce at a discount for each distribution from Tay Shing, a wholesale distributor based in Queens, NY. Tay Shing has also donated over 75 cases of produce in addition to providing discounts on produce for the Program. We were supported by NYC Service Civic Impact Fund, Rainbow Sandals Foundation and Dot Connector. Operationally, we relied on recurring support from The People's Bodega, our mutual aid partner, who provided critical transportation/delivery of the produce from Queens, NY to our Center. Special thanks to Benham Jones for their time and energy.



Pictured L to R: SSCC Staff tabling for our CSA, a sample CSA share, community volunteers for our Food Distribution Program.

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Emergency Food Distribution Program (cont.)



SSCC Staff & Volunteers after a successful distribution this summer.

Since starting the program, SSCC has distributed a total of over 375,000 lbs of fresh produce and food via our Emergency Food Program. The Program currently supports an average of 125-150 families per distribution with 100% of the participants low-income and BIPOC. An estimated 95% of our Emergency Food Distribution participants are immigrants, elders, and seniors who reside in public and supportive housing just a few blocks from SSCC.



Davina Resto, SSCC's Food Justice Coordinator.

To learn more about SSCC's Emergency Food Distribution, watch, "On the Line," a short 10-min documentary about the program. The film was directed and Produced in 2021 by Naomi Schiller and Dan Fethke with support from the CUNY Graduate Center, The Center for Humanities Andrew W. Mellon Seminar on Public Engagement and Collaborative Research.

SSCC's Deputy Director, Jen Chanttanapichate, created a zine to accompany the film and unpack the issues surrounding food access, food justice, and heightened food insecurity due to the onset of the COVID19 pandemic. To watch the film and view the zine, visit: www.sixthstreetcenter.org/on-the-line.



SSCC Volunteer Bo Bao has been supporting our distribution since we started it in 2020.

In November & December of 2023, SSCC was generously granted \$5,000 from the Rainbow Sandals foundation and \$5,000 from the Stupore Family, which will allow us to sustain our Emergency Food Distribution through the first half of 2024.

SSCC's Emergency Food Distribution Program was organized and led by SSCC's Deputy Director, Jen Chanttanapichate, TCJP Director Anna Tsomo and SSCC's recently joined Food Justice Coordinator, Davina Resto. The Program is made possible thanks to the love, labor and financial support of our incredible community members and volunteers.



Warm, cold, rain or shine, there is always a line.

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Mutual Aid Kitchen Project

Sixth Street's Mutual Aid Kitchen Project provides space for Mutual Aid groups to cook and provide free meals for food insecure New Yorkers.



Volunteers with EV Loves NYC in our Mutual Aid Kitchen & Cafe serving newly arrived asylum seekers.

We began the start of 2023 welcoming over 550 newly arriving migrants through our doors. Organized by our mutual aid partner EV Loves in collaboration with local group Artists Athletes and Activists— We provided friendly access to free food, warm winter clothes, toys and supplies. We served people of all ages from infants to elders most of them traveling from all over the world and risking their lives seeking peace, opportunity and a fresh start.



One of many welcome stations at Sixth Street for our newest neighbors.

Our Mutual Aid Kitchen Project operates weekly and prepares around 2,000 meals per week. Meals are packaged and distributed to other community based organizations and local community fridges across the city particularly in neighborhoods that have been hit hardest by the pandemic. This past year, thousands of meals have been distributed to asylum seekers that were bussed up from states like Texas and Florida.



Families seeking asylum lining up outside SSSC for food and clothes.

This year, the operations of EV Loves NYC, mostly pivoted to support the thousands of families seeking asylum who were week after week showing up at our center's doors for food, supplies and clothing. This winter, as the cold weather crept in, many were arriving with the little clothes they had on their back and flip flops. The operation of providing meals, expanded to supporting our new neighbors with socks, shoes, warmer clothes and jackets. We hosted sock drives, clothing drives and jacket drives, where New Yorkers from all 5 boroughs came to Sixth Street to drop off needed articles.

Within the past month, over 3,500 asylum seeking families with children were given notices to vacate the city run shelters where they had been staying. Many families ended up at an intake center just a few blocks from SSSC, where they needed to re-apply for shelter. EV Loves and our neighbors began distributing meals directly at the intake center, providing folks with their first hot meal in days and in some instances, the only meals they would have that day.

To date, EV Loves NYC has made and distributed a total of 450,130 meals through our Mutual Aid Kitchen Project.



Children seeking asylum with their families play with a volunteer at SSSC while their parents gather food and supplies.

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Community Organizing & Advocacy

In 2023, we continued to deepen our work for Climate Justice through organizing for Public Power and the Climate Jobs and Justice Package with our coalition partners at New York Renews

Climate Jobs and Justice with NY Renews

SSCC is a proud member of NY Renews alongside 300+ statewide community-based climate organizations. We participated in weekly planning calls for the Climate, Jobs and Justice Campaign launch and routinely involved the Teens in our Teen Climate Justice Program.

As part of our work with NY Renews, we continued to organize and advocate for the passing of the Climate, Jobs and Justice Package (CJJP) which we helped launch and introduce last November in 2022. This year, we revamped the legislative package to include fewer bills. The Build Public Renewables Act which was included in the last package passed!

Building Public Renewables with Public Power

Hennessy Garcia, our Climate Justice Organizer, represents SSCC as a co-chair/steering committee member of the Public Power NY Coalition — where we are actively working on implementation of the Build Public Renewables Act which finally passed earlier this year thanks to nearly 4 years of grassroots organizing across NY State.

New York Heat Act with Renewable Heat Now

This Fall— We joined the Renewable Heat Now Coalition to fight for the passage of NY HEAT Act. During the last legislative session, we were really close to passing it. For the upcoming legislative session, we are confident we are going to pass it!



SSCC joined NY Renews Coalition partners up in Albany to rally for Climate, Jobs and Justice.

For NYC Climate Week—

We hosted Indigenous Youth Activists Nina Gualinga, Helena Gualinga and Alexis Grefa from Ecuador who have been active in defending Yasuní from oil drilling. In collaboration with our friends from Mullu TV, we invited NYC based climate justice organizers and movement builders to connect with our Indigenous friends to bridge solidarity and learn from shared struggles. Mullu TV provided interpretation for the event and all the youth are part of [Jovenes Amazonicos Collective](#). Yasuní, located in Ecuador's Amazon Rainforest region, is one of the most bio-diverse places in the world. It is home to Indigenous tribes and has been under threat from big oil for decades. This year, Ecuador voted to ban oil drilling in Yasuní and became the first country to stop fossil fuel extraction and protect Indigenous rights!

Mass March to End Fossil Fuels

We were one of 500 co-sponsors of the Mass March to End Fossil Fuels on September 17th. Hosting a major art build at the center, our Teen Climate Justice Program took the lead with painting 22 banners for the march. Our Teens were proud to have been able to contribute to the action in such a major way and even helped lead the March to End Fossil Fuels alongside Indigenous leaders, activists and other NYC Youth (Fridays for Future, Treeage to shout out a few). Over 70,000 folx were reported to have marched that day alongside us in the demand to end fossil fuels.

Other climate justice work highlights

include trips to Albany rallying to stop the Iroquois Pipeline Expansion, continuing our involvement in the No North Brooklyn Pipeline Alliance and building new relationships with indigenous led and grassroots organizations across the country that we connected with at Patagonia's Tools for Grassroots Activists Conference in South Lake Tahoe, California.

SSCC's Environmental Justice Plans for 2024

We're thrilled to announce that Sixth Street Community Center was granted \$150,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)! As one of 98 organizations selected across the nation for the EPA's Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem Solving Program, SSCC will use the award to engage our local community members around air quality and flooding issues. We're excited to potentially build on the work we've started with some of our community partners like LES Breathe, El Jardin Paraiso, CUNY's ASRC Community Sensor Lab and Floodnet. [Read the EPA's announcement here.](#)

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Community Land Trust (CLT) Campaign

This Land is Ours CLT

In recent years community land trusts have gained in popularity in New York City and around the country as housing has become increasingly unaffordable for the majority of households.

In 2023 Executive Director Howard Brandstein spearheaded Sixth Street's continued efforts to develop a community land trust on the underutilized New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) parking lot adjacent to the Center.



Rendering of the proposed low-income housing adjacent to Sixth Street Community Center.

Support from NYCHA Tenants

Our proposal for the site's development was formally endorsed in 2023 by the NYCHA LES 2 and NYCHA LES 5 Tenant Associations who represent residents living in the East 5th - East 7th Street area. With their participation along with the broader community and support of our elected officials, the CLT will address crucial issues around food accessibility, labor and tenant rights and renewable energy together with the construction of 55 units of permanently affordable housing for low-income and working class people. The residence itself will be structured as a Mutual Housing Association giving overcrowded NYCHA tenants and homeless families priority for apartments. In the 4,500 sq. ft. ground floor of the new building, we will develop a Community Supported Agriculture/Food Coop, Solar Energy Coop and Community Organizing Center providing critical space for NYCHA Tenant Associations organizing against privatization of public housing.



SSCC has historically been part of the CLT movement dating back to the 1980s. Our Executive Director, Howard Brandstein is pictured above and below organizing for CLTs. Photo above by Brian Patrick O'Donoghue and photos below by Marlis Momber 1986.



Sixth Street is partnering with This Land Is Ours Community Land Trust and Cooper Square Committee in this effort.

Here's our vision statement and more information.



Recent local community meeting we hosted with current LES residents at La Plaza Cultural Community Garden. CLT Activist, Tito Delgado, addresses the crowd.

Sixth Street Community Center

Expresses deep gratitude to all of our 2023 Funders and Supporters

THANK YOU!

- **Environmental Protection Agency.** Climate Justice & Community Engagement
- **New York Community Trust.** Teen Climate Justice Program
- **Pinkerton Foundation.** Teen Climate Justice Program
- **Assembly Member Harvey Epstein.** Sixth Street Youth Program
- **NY Renews/ Tides Foundation Regrant.** Climate Justice Organizing & Teen Program
- **Mount Sinai.** Youth Program & Emergency Food Distribution
- **NYC Service Civic Impact Fund.** Emergency Food Volunteer Engagement
- **Cottonwood Foundation.** Youth and Teen Climate Justice Programs.
- **Rainbow Sandals Foundation.** Emergency Food Distribution
- **Carol Stupore and Family.** In Memory of Tony Stupore. Emergency Food Program

Special thanks to: Danny Bowien, Mark Levy, Alicia House, Alice Choi and Tay Shing/Purvey'd, The People's Bodega, Benham Jones, EV Loves NYC, Mammad Mahmoodi & Sasha Allenby, Wide Rainbow, Trader Joes and Two Boots Pizza

THANK YOU to all who supported us through individual contributions!



From Top Left Clockwise: SSSC's Holiday Fundraiser Dinner by Danny Bowien, SSSC Teens up in Albany mobilizing for Climate, Jobs and Justice, SSSC wilderness access trip to the Pine Barrens, SSSC co-sponsored NYC's Blasian March for Climate Justice.