



# Annual Report, 2019

**Our Mission:** Worker justice is necessary for a just economy. Worker Justice Wisconsin builds collective worker power through training, labor rights education, collective action and community engagement with an emphasis on interfaith involvement.

## 2019 Priorities:

Wage Theft Mitigation

Workplace Discrimination

Support and Protect Low Wage Workers

Build Worker Leadership

Ensure a Sustainable Organization



This "Know Your Rights" training was done in partnership with the Rape Crisis Center and emphasized sexual harassment in the workplace.

### **Trainings and Community Awareness:**

We conduct weekly "Know Your Rights" trainings in our office, and offer trainings to service providers in our community to extend awareness of the needs of workers. We offered a volunteer training session at the Catholic Multicultural Center in April, broadening an understanding of worker issues and explaining what being a volunteer in our office means to you as an individual, and what it brings to workers and the broader fight for worker justice.

In 2019, workers who came to the center were experiencing these workplace issues:  
40% Discrimination (includes harassment)  
31% Wage Theft  
10% Workers Compensation Injury  
7% Safety & Health  
5% National Labor Relations Board related  
5% Social Security No Match / Immigration Issues  
2% Family Medical Leave Act violations

In 2019, workers at the center documented and claimed \$91,008 in stolen wages. We continue to get updates on recovery of these claims, sometimes over several years.

In 2019, 176 workers took our Know Your Rights training, and 109 went on to open a case with assistance from the Center. For the first time in our records, Discrimination was the leading violation among the workers we saw. This may reflect a larger intolerance we see in our communities, but still is deeply troubling.

We conduct service provider trainings in the community, and 57 people participated in those trainings this year.

We worked with Labor Radio producers to provide on-air information about wage theft and the work done by Worker Justice Wisconsin to recover stolen wages. In March and again in a November follow-up, Dave Zweifel (editor emeritus of the Capital Times) featured the issue of wage theft and our work in his column, which you can access at: [Ripping off the Workers Has Got to Stop](#) and [Worker Justice Wisconsin Fights for Labor Rights](#).

We staffed tables at Dia de Los Ninos at the Goodman Center and at the Annual Labor Fest with the South Central Federation of Labor. We participated in “Day Without Latinixs and Immigrants” general strike and mobilization at the Capitol, urging the legislature to restore drivers licenses and state ID cars for immigrant families and other low income people in Wisconsin. Being a visible part of the community is an aspect of our work we look forward to increasing.

In November we were prepared to rally at the home of a delinquent employer who was holding back over \$11,000 from five workers. The restaurant had closed, his partners left the state, but the debt to the workers remained, and he had moved to another business in Madison. After making an argument that the wages were not owed (a Department of Workforce Development report found that there was proof of nonpayment) the former employer agreed to a payment schedule to make these workers whole in a monthly payment over 5 months. The first payment is all that has been received to date, but a signed agreement makes the process for claiming non-payment a bit clearer, and we are assisting the workers in the next action. Direct action is important, but vigilance is also necessary. Stay Tuned.

### **Faith Community Partnerships:**

This year we were part of creating a Multi-Faith Religious Leaders Council, working with Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice. At the first meeting over 30 religious leaders attended, determining goals to increase the influence of social justice voices on issues of local and statewide concern, joining together for advocacy and action on issues facing our community, and rebuilding the network that was part of the Interfaith Coalition of South Central Wisconsin. Our members gave “Labor in the Pulpit” presentations to several congregations for Labor Day observances, and in a new outreach, we participated in a dinner conversation with one congregation, discussing both our work and the role of faith in current worker and labor issues.



### 2019 Faith-Labor Breakfast:

Hosted by Christ Presbyterian Church on April 27<sup>th</sup>, our Keynote was delivered by the new Lieutenant Governor, Mandela Barnes. Our theme, “Not Just Making History, but Making a Difference” was central to his presentation, calling us to do the hard work it takes to move honoring workers and justice in our world from nice words in a speech to real action. Peter Bakken, coordinator for Public Policy at the Wisconsin Council of Churches, spoke with those assembled about the connection that faith communities in particular have to worker justice, and the bridges we need to build to realize that vision.



We concluded in community with the South Central Federation of Labor’s Annual Workers’ Memorial Recognition, a tradition that serves as a reminder of workplace safety and the cost that results from improper training and information, inattention to safety standards, cost cutting that results in hazardous working conditions, and of the number of individuals in our state who die on the job each year. It never ceases to be emotional as the roll call of those who died in the past year is read, name by name.

### Community Partnerships:

In partnership with multiple organizations around the state and the community, we provide information and assistance to the workers who come to our center and can locate and provide the same to others who may not have found us except through referrals by informed partners. Joining Forces for

Families, Children's Wisconsin, Access Health, the Rape Crisis Center and Centro Hispano are great partners, sharing referrals and information. The ARC, The Road Home, the Catholic Multicultural Center and the Madison Equal Opportunity Division are partners in training and planning future training. We also continue to value our connection with the labor community, including our member unions and our affiliate status with the South Central Federation of Labor.

A grant from Worthy Causes provided the funding to revise and translate a brochure from the updated "Workers' Rights Handbook" in both English and Spanish (the revised handbook translation and printing was funded by a UCC Southwest Social Concerns grant and is currently in production, though the updating and translation are both complete.)

A grant from the Madison Cooperative Development Coalition provided us an avenue to expanding the options we bring to workers who take our Know Your Rights training. By banding together and becoming their own employer, they are empowered to create a workplace that treats workers fairly – but achieving that takes information as well as assistance.

In 2019 we had 33 workers who participated in "Worker Cooperatives 101" training in 4 separate presentations. As an example of the empowering results of this partnership, read the story of just one group of workers, the Iron Roots Restaurant Cooperative:

WJW serves many workers in the restaurant industry, a sector with rampant exploitation and wage theft. We began working with the Iron Roots group in February 2018 when they came to the center with a shared concern of unethical treatment of employees and feeling both underappreciated and underpaid at work. They were tired of company CEOs always excluding them from important decisions regarding their career and workload and they were seeking information about their rights and options - they were looking for help to find a solution. They were immediately drawn to the idea of forming a worker cooperative and were eager to learn more. WJW has provided these workers with a safe place to organize and plan. Our advocacy team has provided both individual and team training support about worker cooperatives.

After months of planning, WJW staff connected these workers to MCDC where they applied and were approved for a grant that will make the Iron Roots cooperative a reality. We are excited to continue to support Iron Roots as they create an exception to the restaurant rule- a workplace with fair wages, job security and dignity, where workers have a voice on the job. We will support them by channeling restaurant workers we help to the better jobs Iron Roots will offer, providing information and training on workers' rights and safety, and spreading the word about the work they are doing in order to drive people to patron the Co-op. We are grateful for the opportunity to support them in the development and sustainability of this much needed alternative.

In December, Worker Justice was represented as the UW Health Nurses presented their demand for voluntary recognition by the Board along with signed cards from nurses at UW Health locations around the state. Their call for a union voice in the workplace reflects the impacts they experience as drastic changes in staffing ratios reduce effective patient care and the positive, collaborative environment that made UW Health a remarkable system for both patients and staff.

Another new partnership in 2020 will be with Project Respect, working together on a 3-year effort to combat human trafficking. Our existing connection to vulnerable workers and experience with worker training and intake on other workplace issues will join with their expertise to identify and disrupt this abusive reality that too often operates in plain sight, right before our eyes.

## Financial Sustainability:

### 2019 INCOME:

Individual Contributions	\$ 8,784
City/County Grants	69,605
Congregations, Unions & Other	8,656
Events/Fundraisers	5,489
Grants*	<u>22,200</u>
Total	114,734

\*a significant portion of grant funds listed here are reserved for projects in process with costs to be incurred in 2020

### EXPENSES:

Program Salaries	\$57,197
Rent/Operations	9,036
Events	650
Debt Retirement	<u>7,035</u>
Total	73,918

We are thankful for your contributions.

Although our donations were roughly the same as the prior year, grant funding was bolstered by increased contributions from the City of Madison and Dane County. With assistance from two grants we were able to return our lead advocate and center manager hours we had to reduce in 2018, and employed a Program Manager to work on an outreach program that included training on worker cooperatives. (information earlier in the report.) Despite news that the increased grant from the City will not continue in 2020, new grant areas and our emergence from legacy debt offers new possibilities and the potential for greater financial stability as well as pursuing our mission in this community.

**Wage theft** is the failure to pay workers the full wages to which they are legally entitled.

**How is \$15 billion stolen from workers every year?**

**Pay Stub and Illegal Deductions**  
Taking illegal deductions from wages or not distributing pay stubs

**Overtime and Off-the-Clock Violations**  
Failing to pay time-and-a-half if working more than 40 hours per week or asking you to work off-the-clock before or after your shift

**Tipped Minimum Wage Violations**  
Confiscating tips or failing to pay the difference between your tips and the minimum wage

**Meal Break Violations**  
Denying you your legal meal breaks

**Misclassification Violations**  
Misclassifying workers as independent contractors to pay a wage lower than legal minimum

Interfaith Worker Justice  
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#WageTheftDOA #StopWageTheft

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Staff: Niko Magallon, Program Manager, Kristin Taylor, Worker Center Manager, Sarah Soliman, Office Manager, Joyce Ehlert, IT Intern.

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