



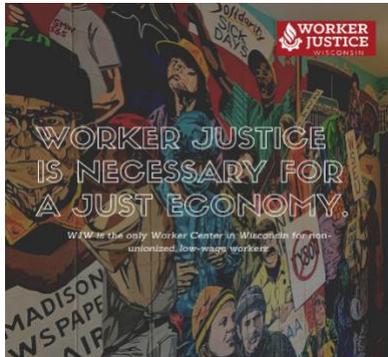
## Annual Report, 2020

### 2020 Priorities:

COVID-19 Response  
Wage Theft Mitigation  
Worker Cooperatives  
Strategic Planning  
Faith Community Outreach  
Sustainable Fundraising

**Our Mission:** *Worker Justice Wisconsin advances justice in our community by building collective worker power together with Faith and Labor.*

### Worker Center, Advocacy and Communications



For as difficult as the year was for many of us, it was also a time of tremendous growth for Worker Justice Wisconsin. The year began with the hiring of Socorro Cortez as Worker Center Advocate in January, and Rebecca Meier-Rao as Executive Director in February. By March all staff were working remotely and the worker center caseload had nearly tripled compared to that same time the year before.

Until March we had weekly “Know Your Rights” trainings in our office for workers and service providers. Due to COVID-19 we had to temporarily close our office, at which time all staff started working remotely. This entailed issuing laptop computers (which were provided by the North Central Regional Council of Carpenters), personal printers, and in some cases, staff cell phones. We also had to shift all our files to the cloud and transition to a new cloud-based database system, learn to communicate via Zoom, and much more. Staff and regular volunteers adapted very quickly, and in the summer we began offering the “Know Your Rights” training via



***In 2020, workers who opened cases as the center were experiencing these workplace issues:***

- 44% Wage Theft
- 19% COVID-19
- 18% Discrimination
- 9% Safety & Health
- 8% Workers Compensation Injury
- 1% Immigration
- 1% Other
- 

**Total wage theft wages recovered in 2020:  
\$141,040**

Zoom. Because of many workers' initial discomfort with the technology, and due to the urgent nature of many of their cases, we stopped requiring them to take the training prior to meeting with a Worker Center Advocate. Despite these considerable obstacles, we provided the training for 160 workers and 43 service providers in 2020.

As we all know, COVID-19 wreaked havoc across the workforce in 2020, and the impact was especially devastating to low-wage and immigrant workers. As a result, the worker center experienced a significant increase in worker cases right when we started operating remotely in the spring. The number of new cases remained high through the summer, and in the fall they slowly came down to a number closer to what it had been the previous year. In all, workers opened 210 new cases with WJW in 2020 (nearly double the year before). The number of workers who contacted us and who we assisted in small matters, like helping fill out a financial assistance form or referring for immediate services, was substantially higher than that – at least in the 300's range. In the spring and summer, the demand was constant and overwhelming; thankfully, our worker center staff, Kristen Taylor and Socorro Cortez, were able to increase their hours to meet the demand. During this time, Project Respect started providing gifts cards for food, toiletries and transportation for WJW staff to distribute to workers in particularly vulnerable situations. This was a huge help to many. Of those who opened cases with WJW in 2020, 88% were Latinx, and most were primarily Spanish-speaking.

In September we renewed our partnership with the Madison Cooperative Development Coalition (MCDC) to initiate new worker-led cooperatives. We gathered and trained workers interested in forming a cleaning cooperative three times, until, by the end of the year, there was a large enough group to take the next steps of applying for a MCDC mini grant and incorporating as a worker cooperative. We expect they will be incorporated by May 2021. We have groups of workers interested in a construction cooperative and a mechanics cooperative ready to begin the training process soon.

Many more significant things happened in 2020. Our Worker Center Manager, Kristen, provided a four-part Worker Advocate Training for 8 WJW staff and volunteer participants in the summer. In the fall she also arranged a Certified Community Partner Training with the Madison Civil Rights Department for WJW personnel and case managers from Children's Wisconsin Community Services. Among the participants in these two trainings were UW Law School interns Anna Rossi and Elizabeth Euler. Both have been extraordinary additions to the WJW worker center, as they help investigate case information and assist workers to write letters of concern to their employers. Long-time volunteers Sean Anderson and Stefania Sani were also invaluable members of the

WJW team, taking on additional worker cases during the spring-summer COVID-19 spike, and devoting considerable time to ease the difficult transition to our new database system.

Moreover, WJW staff spoke in various programs on Labor Radio and La Movida, and Rebecca wrote an article for Union Labor News. We partnered with many organizations through the Dignity at Work Coalition to form a COVID-19 task force focused on low-wage and immigrant workers. In the fall we initiated a quarterly WJW newsletter, edited by our Office Manager Sarah Soliman. In 2020, WJW had two successful online fundraising campaigns, and we grew our Labor in the Pulpits/on the Bimah/in the Minbar program. We capped the year with a very productive strategic planning process.

Our office has been open on a limited capacity basis since August. We are abiding by Forward Dane and CDC guidelines. Worker trainings and individual meetings are being conducted both remotely and in the office, according to workers' abilities and needs.



**WORKER JUSTICE WISCONSIN**

**Workers' Resource Center**

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*I am grateful to Worker Justice Wisconsin because they helped me recover my unpaid wages, and I want to invite everyone having wage problems- you can ask for help. Yes, you can get your unpaid wages back! So I invite you to come to Worker Justice Wisconsin and don't be afraid. Today, thanks to them, I have recovered 3 months of wages that I thought I'd never see, and I'm very happy and grateful for their support. They are ready to help you with your workplace problems and to demand our rights!*

**Testimonial from: José Manuel Perez**

## **Faith Engagement**

In September 2020 we continued our tradition of Labor in the Pulpits/on the Bimah/in the Minbar, with a special focus on workers most impacted by the COVID-19. We created a video for congregations to use if they wished: Rebecca spoke about the increase of cases at the worker center, and Sr. Maureen McDonnell (Sinsinawa Dominican) and Pastor Jacobo Castillo (Iglesia Fuente de Vida) reflected on worker justice/empowerment from the perspective of their faith traditions. About 15 congregations participated, which was a marked increase from the year before.

In the latter part of the year, we welcomed Grace Shockman as our new faith outreach coordinator, and since coming on board she has connected with around 25 congregations of various faith traditions. Some of the communities include: religious leaders and congregation representatives from Glenwood Moravian and Lakeview Moravian Churches, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Parish, Lighthouse Church, Beth Israel Center, Messiah Lutheran, and Lake Edge UCC.



Outreach to faith communities has been very rewarding, as opportunities for authentic and long-term relationships are being laid down. This process has opened our eyes to the importance of understanding the mission, priorities, and work of faith communities and has also allowed us to ask how we too can be a resource. We continue to consider creative ways for engaging our collective audiences around the intersections of labor issues, knowing that racial justice, housing and food insecurity, immigration, human trafficking, and the effects of COVID-19 are all related to the work we do at Worker Justice Wisconsin. It is just the beginning of many exciting partnerships with faith communities!

## **Strategic Plan**

During the latter part of 2020, Worker Justice Wisconsin underwent a strategic planning process where the Board of Directors, staff and volunteers together determined it would be more proactive for workers to shift to a model focused on collective worker organizing. We believe this is the best way to stop workplace injustices before they start!

Central to building collective worker power is a strong membership program that fosters community bonds. To that end, WJW will initiate its worker membership program in the spring of 2021, raising consciousness about class exploitation and oppression, demonstrating why building worker power in collective actions is necessary for systemic change, and training workers to be organizing leaders.

Our vital community partners in this program are religious congregations, labor unions and other individual and community members committed to economic and social justice in the workplace. Therefore, we made a commitment to meet with faith and labor

leaders to increase awareness about the problems that non-unionized and immigrant workers face (problems exacerbated during the pandemic) and to strengthen our connections to a community of support for WJW worker-led actions and campaigns.

As part of strategic planning we also updated our WJW ByLaws, refined our fiscal policies, and laid out clear expectations and an onboarding process for new board members.

Given the wonderful consensus that the WJW board, staff and volunteers came to during strategic planning, this is where we are headed in 2021:

- ✓ A worker membership and organizing program that includes regular trainings, strategy sessions and celebrations.
- ✓ Faith community, union, and individual supporter membership program to build the power of the coalition for economic, racial and immigrant justice in the workplace.
- ✓ Education and engagement with faith communities and labor unions
- ✓ Movement toward collective worker power and worker-led actions/campaigns.

### **Community Partnerships**

During 2020 Worker Justice Wisconsin engaged in numerous partnerships. Particularly during the pandemic it was very important to collaborate with area organizations to make sure vulnerable workers were not only empowered but also taken care of, especially if they didn't qualify for unemployment or other government assistance due to their immigration status. To that end, we regularly referred people to each other or were in communication with the following organizations: Centro Hispano, Latino Academy, Catholic Multicultural Center, Public Health Madison & Dane County, Construction Business Group, UNIDOS, Project Respect, the Tenant Resource Center, South Central Federation of Labor (SCFL), and Voces de la Frontera. For training purposes, we also collaborated with the City of Madison Civil Rights Division and Children's Wisconsin Community Services.

Our ongoing partnership with Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice (WFVJ) again proved very important in 2020. In May, our two organizations collaborated to bring together advocates and direct service providers from around the state to talk about what low-wage and undocumented workers were experiencing during the pandemic. From that initial conversation, a committee was formed to address the issues that were identified. The Dignity at Work Coalition, which our two organizations founded in 2015, agreed to incorporate that committee into the work of the Coalition. The committee includes representatives from WJW and WFVJ, the Dane County NAACP Labor and Industry Committee, Voces de la Frontera, Kids Forward, Freedom Inc., SCFL, and the Teaching Assistants Association and University Labor Council of UW-Madison. During the course of 2020, the committee worked with the Madison & Dane County Public Health Department to strengthen their public health orders and to create a poster in English, Spanish and Mandarin to educate workers about their rights, their employers' responsibilities, and how to file complaints safely. We reached out to the Latino Chamber of Commerce, Destination Madison, and Downtown Madison, Inc. to help disseminate the poster so it would be displayed in every workplace (as the Department

of Public Health requires). We also created two videos, each in English and Spanish, to ensure the safety of all workers: one aimed at workers in Dane County, the other for workers throughout the state of Wisconsin. In both videos Dr. Patricia Tellez-Girón, Associate Professor Dept. of Family Medicine, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, explains the importance of correctly wearing a mask. You can locate the videos here:

- Dane County Public Health (English): <https://youtu.be/COsCcAdgdXs>
- Dane County Public Health (Spanish): <https://youtu.be/NaMNqmWssOQ>
- State of Wisconsin (English): <https://youtu.be/SiGqBQrFnI8>
- State of Wisconsin (Spanish): <https://youtu.be/XFB5ZQv4QIY>

## **Financial Sustainability**

<b><u>2020 INCOME:</u></b>	
Individual Contributions and Fundraising Campaigns	\$ 36,589
Congregations, Unions and Other Donations	\$ 40,360
City and County Grants	\$ 45,656
Other Grants	\$ 75,708
Fundraising Events	<u>\$ 12,450</u>
<i>Total</i>	\$210,763
<b><u>2020 EXPENSES:</u></b>	
Program Salaries	\$117,802
Rent and Operational	\$ 40,112
Events	\$ 333
Debt Retirement (we are currently debt-free)	\$ 2,134
Contract Services	<u>\$ 23,950</u>
<i>Total</i>	\$184,331

In 2020, Worker Justice Wisconsin was very grateful to have grants from the Sinsinawa Dominicans, who funded our efforts in faith community outreach; Project Respect, with whom we partnered to combat human trafficking and who generously provided gift cards and emergency cell phones for our most vulnerable workers during the pandemic; the Madison Cooperative Development Coalition, for building new worker cooperatives; and the Dane County Bar Association Pro Bono Trust Fund, Dane County, and the City of Madison, who together funded the ongoing services we provide at the worker center. In addition to these grants, we are grateful for the sizeable contributions and sponsorships from these local organizations: Construction Business Group, CUNA Mutual Group, North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, Hawkes Quindel, Painters District Council No. 7, SMART Local 565, Law Offices of Kurt Kobelt, Edgewood College, the Sinsinawa Dominicans, Carpenters Union Local 314, and MTI. We are also heartened by the incredible support we received from individual donors during 2020. After having to postpone the Faith Labor Breakfast due to COVID-19, WJW did its first online Peer to Peer campaign April-May, raising \$23,561, most from small donations, and many of these from first-time donors. In December we had a Holiday online fundraiser that raised \$6,906. A special thank you to consultant Mike Spear, who helped with both campaigns and trained WJW personnel on effective online fundraising and communications. Finally, we are grateful for the workplace giving program through CSW, and for the increased number of recurring donors in 2020. In

turbulent times, our community – individuals, unions, community organizations and congregations, banded together and contributed over \$80,000 to Worker Justice Wisconsin. This generosity enabled us to fight for a more just and equitable treatment of all workers during a time when it was badly needed.

While we were saddened to have to first postpone and then cancel our 2020 Faith Labor Breakfast, and knowing that we will again not be able to host it in 2021 due to the continuing pandemic, we are nonetheless optimistic that we will be able to have a celebration event in a park this summer. We want to have this event to thank everyone for their amazing support in 2020, and to provide the opportunity for the whole WJW community of workers, religious and labor leaders, and community partners to come together in celebration of the fact that we have together risen to uphold worker justice in our community. More information about this event will be coming soon!



**2020 Board of Directors**

Kurt Kobelt- President  
Jim Cavanaugh – Vice President  
Mary Bell – Treasurer  
Saul M. Castillo – Secretary  
Paulette Harder  
Daniela Juarez  
Victoria Gutierrez  
Jeff Mehrhoff  
Matt Robles  
Charity Schmidt  
Scott Watson  
Ekpevi Ayite di Costa  
Pastor Jacobo Castillo  
Sister M. McDonnell

**Worker Justice Wisconsin - Staff**

Rebecca Meier-Rao – Executive Director  
Kristen Taylor – Worker Center Manager  
Sarah R. Soliman – Office Manager  
Socorro Cortez- Worker Center Advocate  
Grace Shockman – Faith Outreach Coordinator

And a special thanks to our great volunteers and interns...  
Stefania Sani, Anna Rossi and Elizabeth Euller