



# WORKER JUSTICE WISCONSIN FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER

1602 S. Park St. #115, Madison WI, 53715 • (608) 255-0376  
info@workerjustice.org • [workerjustice.org](http://workerjustice.org)



This Holiday Season, join the movement by helping WJW hire another Worker Organizer. With our Worker Membership program in full-swing, more scheduled trainings, and our worker cooperative incubation program as strong as ever, we need to expand. But we cannot do it without you. Make your end-of-year contributions today to provide workers the tools they need to fight for their rights in the year ahead!

There has always been a strong connection between faith and labor, and that unity has never been more important or necessary to the health and wellbeing of our community.

Worker Justice Wisconsin is committed to being a unifying force that strengthens the bonds between faith

and labor organizations in our region, and helps to mobilize them towards worker justice organizing.

With the support of faith and labor leaders, we are able to be strong advocates for equal rights and fair wages for all workers. In 2023 we will continue to grow our worker empowerment program by cultivating worker leaders to lead WJW's vision for years to come.

Please join Worker Justice Wisconsin as we build worker power and support the rights of low-wage workers throughout our region.





# FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER

## WJW RECEIVES PARTNERS IN EQUITY GRANT

Six local agencies have been selected to receive the Tamara D. Grigsby Office of Equity and Inclusion’s 2022 Partners in Equity (PIE) Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Grants, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced. The grants are intended to address systemic racial inequities in one of the following areas as it relates to criminal justice: health (including pandemic health related responses), education, employment, and criminal justice.

“Through the PIE Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Grant Program, Dane County and partnering local organizations can help address racial inequities and work to ensure opportunity for all in our community,” said County Executive Joe Parisi. “Congratulations to this year’s recipients.”

“I appreciate the work of this committee that partners with organizations in Dane County to increase access and opportunities to help improve the lives of all Dane County residents. The PIE Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Grant Program is an intentional commitment that hopes to support the amazing work of many of our local organizations in their efforts to fight against the systemic racial disparities that are faced,” said Brenda González, Office of Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee member.

The 2022 PIE-RESJ Grant will be used for Worker Justice’s Construction Project (\$10,000). The project is in the grassroots organizing division of the Construction

### IN THIS NEWSLETTER...

- PARTNERS IN EQUITY GRANT.....2
- LAS POSADAS 2022.....3
- STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEW.....4
- WJW IN THE NEWS.....5
- BLOG HIGHLIGHT.....6
- HOLIDAY HOURS.....7
- STAFF AND BOARD.....9

Council on Racial and Economic Justice (CCOREJustice). The CCOREJustice was established in June 2022 with the Building Trades Council of South Central Wisconsin and several trade unions to eliminate the practice of misclassifying workers as independent contractors in Dane County. Large contractor companies misclassify construction employees to avoid paying payroll taxes, benefits, and workers’ compensation insurance, which may lead to unsafe working conditions and wage disparities. WJW and their partners work to assist individual workers harmed by misclassification. The project is geared to help workers who have suffered the consequences of misclassification and to prevent misclassification of workers.

#### Other recipients include:

- Centro Hispano
- Midwest Mujeres
- Simpson Street Free Press
- WRPT Big Step
- YWCA Madison

To learn more about the Office of Equity and Inclusion and its mission, please visit <https://equity.countyofdane.com/>



# FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER

## LAS POSADAS 2022

On Thursday, December 15, Worker Justice Wisconsin hosted a community celebration for Las Posadas! All community members were invited for a holiday celebration and worker meeting.

The Posadas were a huge success. Rank-and-file workers celebrated the season, debated, and democratically decided upon next year's big campaign to tackle wage theft as a movement. Workers have had enough and are getting organized!

Many thanks to our co-sponsors, IUPAT District Council #7, the South Central Federation of Labor, and the Regional Council of Carpenters/ Carpinteros Latinos Unidos, for supporting such a successful event, complete with food, beer, piñatas, dancing and fun! Thank you to our supporters and allies as well!





# FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER

## STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEW: REBECCA MEIER-RAO

Rebecca Meier-Rao came to the position of ED of WJW almost by happenstance. As a theology professor at Edgewood College, Rebecca figured she'd be educating for the rest of her life. However, thanks to the efforts of a devoted former board member and Edgewood faculty member, Sr. Maureen McDonnell, Rebecca was persuaded to join the mission.

**"IF EVERY PERSON HAS INHERENT DIGNITY AND WORTH, THAT MEANS EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO A GOOD AND THRIVING LIFE"**

Besides this, it was key that the designated leader of WJW had a passion for truth and justice. Lastly, the leader needed to have some connection with the faith community.

Rebecca, having been raised by a Lutheran pastor in Argentina, fit the intersection well. This upbringing provided a strong drive to fight for justice and equity. She recalls growing up literally in the church, describing the cross behind her home that was visible from the surrounding neighborhood streets.

Because of its iconographic visibility, people of the neighborhood would come to the church begging nearly every day. Sometimes, families would send children to supplicate, knowing that it was harder to deny them their requests. Though Rebecca's family would prepare extra food every day, the questions surrounding the "why" of inequality began to trouble Rebecca at a young age. "I was taught that we were

made in the image and likeness of god at a young age. God loves us all equally, right? Why am I getting fed while other children have to beg?"

Rebecca's passion is driven by a concept present in all of the Abrahamic religions: Imago Dei, or the idea that humans are made in the of God. Rebecca says "We have intrinsic dignity. It's not something that we earn, not something that is conferred upon us, and not something that can ever be withdrawn. We have it because we are. If people have intrinsic dignity and worth, people have the right to a tolerable life."

Rebecca says on the state of US inequality: "I knew that being poor in the United States was expensive. When you're poor, you're more vulnerable to paying parking tickets, overdraft fees, late fees, and more. I knew that people took advantage of poor people. But learning about wage theft was something else. Knowing that people who live paycheck to paycheck are having their wages stolen, that blew my mind."





# FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER

## WJW IN THE NEWS: TONE MADISON ([FULL ARTICLE HERE](#))

By a vote of six to zero, screen printing workers at Crushin' It Apparel on Voges Road in Madison chose last month to form a union. However, shortly after the employees initiated the unionization election, owner Jeremy Kruk began a series of layoffs that would eventually encompass all eight of his organizing screen printers and embroiderers. The business will remain open, but Kruk said he will now contract out much or all of his custom orders to other shops.

IUPAT will lead the negotiations for the workers as their new union representatives. IUPAT Business Representative Adam Gifford says that the layoffs did not change anything about the immediate future for the workers. Gifford did not engage in hypotheticals about what the union's next move might be if Kruk kept to his guns and followed through on selling the equipment. Instead he reiterates IUPAT's commitment to getting the Crushin' It employees back to work.

Kruk tells Tone Madison that the decision to lay off staff was unrelated to the union vote and instead based on his desire to sell the equipment they operated. While he acknowledges that he posted the machines for sale publicly after the workers began organizing in August, he says that he had attempted to privately find buyers as early as June. Kruk remains within his rights to sell the equipment, though the NLRB could rule that he improperly terminated their operators and demand he hire them back. "Due to the financial strains on the business, we've closed up those divisions

**"WORKERS HAVE BEEN MISTREATED AND THEY'RE SICK OF IT. AND THAT'S WHAT UNIONS ARE FOR."**

and will no longer produce them. We sold or are in process of selling all of the equipment," Kruk told the Capital Times in a November 1 story. "This door to my life is now closed."

Kruk says he felt worker organizers targeted employees he characterized as "easily swayed," calling it "a shame." "That is not accurate at all," says Gifford. "[Crushin' It Apparel staff] wanted a union." Gifford stresses that workers led all organizing efforts up through the election, and that Kruk had galvanized his own staff against him prior to and during the organizing. "They were not respected," Gifford says.

The successful unionization drive at Crushin' It is just the latest in a surge of union drives that have taken hold both in the Madison area and the nation.

Over the past year in the Madison area, baristas at Colectivo and the Capitol Square Starbucks and Raven Software quality assurance testers have successfully secured the right to collectively bargain with their employers.

Whether cases like Crushin' It represent a turning of the tides remains to be seen, but Gifford says it's time to defy trends in the labor market over the last several decades that have favored employers.

"Workers have been mistreated and workers are sick of it," Gifford says. "And that's what unions are for."



# FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER

## BLOG HIGHLIGHT: WORKER CENTERS: STRATEGIES AND FEATURES

*Based on the article "How Worker Centers Organize Low-Wage Workers: An Exploration of Targets and Strategies" by Jessica Garrick.*

The role of worker centers in our society is a relatively new element of recourse for workers within the broader labor movement. To learn more about the role of worker centers in the labor movement, the distinctions between worker centers and unions, and the diverse services and duties that worker centers have adopted, read on!

Perhaps to an indiscriminating viewer, worker centers and unions could look the same. From afar, worker centers and unions seem to serve the same broader goal: improving conditions for workers. But in reality, worker centers and unions work in complement, with worker centers involving unions in their proceedings to varying degrees (for example, some worker centers funneling organizing workers to existing locals). To make matters more complicated, worker centers are highly diverse, worker centers play a vital role in raising workplace standards independently of unions, but they do complement one another, which can be explained by the history of worker centers.

As unions lost power throughout the second half of the 20th century, worker

centers emerged and began adopting some of the duties that unions and organized labor maintained in decades before. However, worker centers do not exist as a monolith, nor do they exactly replace the services and benefits that unions provide(d) to their members. Many worker centers did not incorporate with the goal of absorbing the role of the union within the labor movement. Worker centers tend to be hybrid organizations, combining direct service provision and organizing support.

One of the primary distinguishing features between worker centers and unions is membership. Worker centers, generally speaking, do not require any sort of membership in order to access their services, nor are they funded by dues in any significant way. Of course, many worker centers do employ a membership system as an organizing strategy. Unlike unions, however, this membership tends to be on the basis of race, immigration status, and/or geographic area. Some worker centers do focus on industries, such as the National Domestic Workers Alliance, the National Day Labor Organizing Network, and the Restaurant Opportunity Center-

**SAVE THE DATE:  
FAITH LABOR BREAKFAST**

We will have our Faith Labor Breakfast on April 28, 8AM-10AM, followed by the SCFL Press Conference for Workers Memorial Day.



# FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER

## BLOG HIGHLIGHT

United. These worker centers tend to rely heavily upon bargaining; hoping to negotiate agreements with major employers. Frequently, they organize politically on the basis of raising standards across employer networks to address sector-wide issues.

**“A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS...”**

The role of the state in labor is no new debate. Some Progressive-era leaders were critical of the potential for policy and legislation to effect significant, perduring change. The services that some worker centers have adopted is representative of this debate, focusing less on changing policy and more on making measurable, concrete gains within their constituencies. Some of these strategies include targeting workplaces where workers will be likely to mobilize coworkers, providing education on workplace rights and protections, targeting publicity-conscious employers, and/or engaging with major employers to develop contracts, agreements, and standards that benefit workers across the industry or area.

Clearly, there is high diversity in the services offered and strategies employed by worker centers. Like mentioned, the hybrid model allows for balance between service, education, organizing support, policy advocacy, and more. This is important especially when one considers the political environment of the geographical location of the worker center; policymaking as a strategy may be

less effective in red states. Additionally, political wins are slow, bureaucratic, and rarely result in immediate, noticeable change in the day-to-day lives of workers. However, worker centers ultimately tend to converge on similar models and issues, particularly wage theft, improving industry standards, and building coalition-based power structures. Both policymaking and grassroots campaigns both have a functional role in the struggle to raise workplace standards, but without a doubt, worker centers will play an important role in this change for years to come.

**HOLIDAY HOURS**  
*December 22nd-January 3rd, we'll be open weekdays 9AM-3PM. The office will be closed December 30th and January 2nd. We'll restart our regular hours on January 5th.*

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Worker Justice WI



@workerjusticewi



@workerjusticewi



Worker Justice Wisconsin



# FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER



**Everyone has rights at work, regardless of immigration status. Come to the Catholic Multicultural Center to participate in a training on your rights in the workplace.**

***KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!***

## **Presenter**

**Dr. Robert Christl • (608) 866 0651**

***Program Director***

***2nd Tuesday  
of the month  
at 5:00pm***



***1862 Beld St,  
Room 6,  
Madison, WI***



# FOURTH QUARTER NEWSLETTER



# WORKER JUSTICE WISCONSIN

## STAFF AND BOARD

### STAFF

Rebecca Meier-Rao — Executive  
Director

Robert Christl — Program Director

Katrina Woods — Business Manager

Frida Ballard — Worker Organizer

Socorro Cortez — Worker Organizer

Gretchen Baumgardt — Faith Outreach  
Coordinator

Caleigh Judd — Communications and  
Development

### BOARD

Kurt Kobelt — President

Charity Schmidt — Vice President

Natalie Gerloff — Secretary

Sarah Soliman — Treasurer

Apolonio "Polo" Duran

Edna Baldwin

Paulette Harder

Sister Mary Kremer, O.P.

Jeff Mehrhoff

Julio Garcia

Alexia Kulwicz