



# Annual Report 2022

# Our Mission

Worker Justice Wisconsin advances justice in our community by building collective worker power together with Faith and Labor allies.

## 2022 Priorities

- Worker Training and Organizing
- Cooperative Incubation program
- Worker Membership program
- Faith Outreach and Education
- CCOREJustice

## OVERVIEW

2022 was a year of growth and exciting changes at Worker Justice Wisconsin. We hired three new staff members: Katrina Woods, Business Manager; Robert Christl, Program Director; and Frida Ballard, Organizer. Rebecca and Socorro went from part-time to full-time, and Robert was hired full-time. We moved our offices from room 116 to the larger room 115 in the Labor Temple, and now utilize 116 as a classroom and worker organizing space (thanks to Sarah Soliman for arranging the move so well). Since our new offices became available in February, we have been working primarily in-person. We keep regular office hours Monday-Saturday.



# WORKER CENTER

With the addition of Robert and Frida, Socorro working full-time, and two dedicated volunteers - Bowen Cao and Iva Petrova - the worker center team accomplished a great deal to empower workers for collective action and democratically-led workplaces. We revamped the worker's rights training into a three-part comprehensive format on how to organize one's workplace, created a flyer that lists workers' basic rights with the relevant agencies to file complaints, and did significant outreach to offer trainings throughout the community. We revamped the worker cooperative training into a three-part comprehensive introduction on why and how to form a cooperative, and launched the cooperative incubation program in collaboration with the Madison Cooperative Development Coalition (MCDC). We also updated the Workers' Rights Manual, which we expect to print in 2023. Most of our trainings and resources are available in English, Spanish and Mandarin. We gave trainings in the Catholic Multicultural Center, the Latino Academy and JustDane, and lined up trainings in area churches and other community spaces for 2023.



Our worker membership program grew in 2022 from 1 to 45 members. We held regular monthly membership meetings where all were welcome to join the movement. One highlight was our July 13 meeting, when our participants got to speak with one of the workers organizing at Milagros Factory with Arise Chicago. Our membership program culminated in the Posadas Holiday Party on December 15, an event that was attended by over 100 people. Rank-and-file workers celebrated the season, debated, and voted in favor of the next year's campaign to tackle wage theft as a movement.

2022 also saw the formation of the Worker Solidarity Fund, which provides a basic financial safety net for workers when they are retaliated against or fired for engaging in legally protected organizing activity, or if the workforce decides to go on strike. The fund is governed by worker members and a representative from the staff and board.





It played an instrumental role in supporting organizing screen printers during their worksite campaign at Crushin' It Apparel last summer, a campaign that was widely covered in the [local news](#).

As per our commitment to collective worker power, workplace organizing and incubating cooperatives took center stage in 2022. We helped organize two workplaces: Clarion Hotel and Crushin' It Apparel. As a result of their campaign, Clarion employees secured a \$2/hour across-the-board pay raise, three additional

floating holidays, and a 12-room cap on the number of rooms housekeeping has to clean per shift. The Crushin' It Apparel campaign has been more difficult because the owner has been uncooperative and retaliatory every step of the way. But the good news is that in November, Crushin' It employees won their union election with IUPAT 7. Three of them are also working with the Flora Cooperative in Milwaukee (also part of IUPAT 7) to expand their Shaky Hands screen printing shop to Madison, and they have already received the MCDC \$10,000 grant to aid in the process. All of the Crushin' It employees are currently awaiting decisions by the Department of Workforce Development and the National Labor Relations Board regarding back wages and over twenty unfair labor practice complaints. They have already received a statement of interest from NLRB General Counsel Abruzzo to the DHS, requesting that USCIS grant deferred action and an employment authorization document to eligible employees of Crushin' It. The fight will be long, but all the right steps are being taken to win the battle.

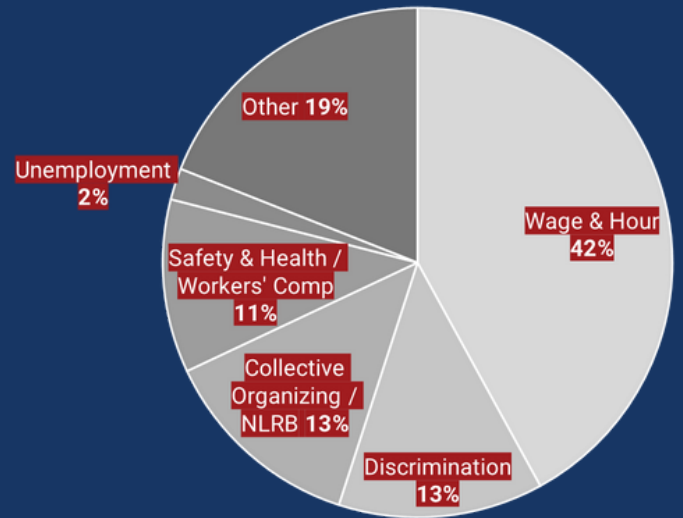
In addition to the Flora screen printing cooperative, we started the process of incubating two other cooperatives: El Chisme food cart and Los Hornitos bakery. All of them are Latinx immigrant-led. In 2022 we made the commitment to incubate

cooperatives rather than just educate workers on the process. Forming a cooperative is difficult enough, but for the population we partner with it is even more challenging. Most speak little to no English, often have only basic reading and writing skills, and are unfamiliar with the legal requirements to start a business in Wisconsin. We train them, interpret and translate whenever needed, and help write ByLaws, apply for grants, develop networks and apply for LLC's, all the while preparing the cooperative owners to take greater leadership of their business until they are self-sufficient. As challenging as it is, we are committed to doing this work because it strengthens working-class businesses, and it is good for the economic development and social empowerment of a population that is especially susceptible to experiencing [wage theft and other workplace abuses](#).

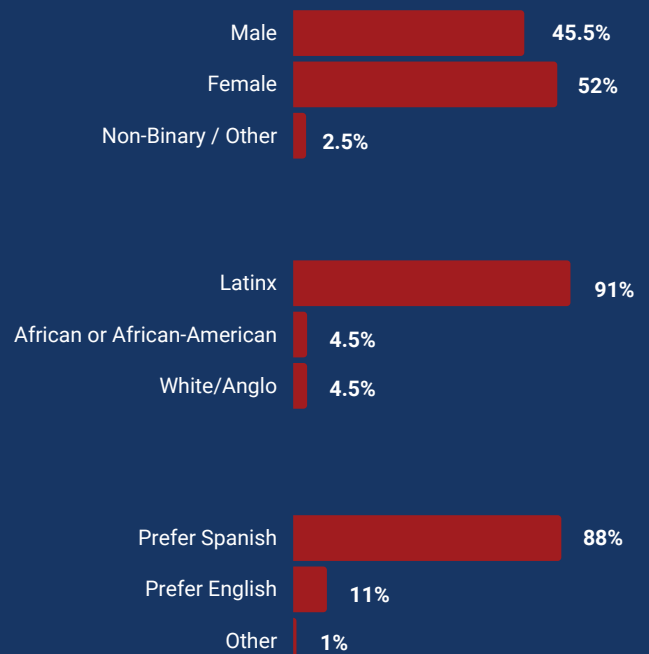
In total, the worker center provided the worker organizing training to 107 workers and 28 service providers, opened a total of 216 new cases, and organized two workplaces. We provided the cooperative training to 33 workers, and started the incubation process with three cooperatives.

**We helped recover \$121,560.11 in previously owed but unpaid wages.**

## Worker Center cases:



## Demographics of the workers who opened cases:



# FAITH ENGAGEMENT

We were fortunate to contract Gretchen Baumgardt of Be Blessed Wellness to help us with our Faith Outreach program. She prepared a user-friendly [toolkit](#) for our Labor in the Pulpits/On the Bimah/In the Minbar program that takes place every September, and dispersed it widely among interested congregational participants. The toolkit was published on our website and that of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, along with the [video](#) we created for the 2022 program. In all, 21 faith communities participated in last year's Labor in the Pulpits, and they donated over \$2,000 to go toward the Worker Solidarity Fund. Participating congregations included: Brown Deer UMC (Milwaukee), People's UMC (Oregon), Lake County UU (Hartland), Middleton UCC, Madison Mennonite Church, Advent Lutheran Church (ELCA), and the Islamic Center of Madison.

Another big project that Gretchen helped develop was the 4-part worker justice study guide that we will be publishing in collaboration with the Wisconsin Council of Churches in 2023. The guide includes reading materials, videos, handouts and activities, along with a PowerPoint

The study guide encompasses the following topics:

- **Session 1:** What is worker justice and why is it a crucial issue for people of faith?
- **Session 2:** The struggle for workers' rights and the role of faith communities in the U.S. labor movement
- **Session 3:** The power of a coalition: collective worker organizing and how faith allies lend strength and witness
- **Session 4:** How worker justice is an intersectional issue and review

Two Madison-area congregations will pilot the study guide during the season of Lent in 2023, after which we will complete revisions and publish it in the late spring or early summer.

We continue to meet with faith leaders and invite them to participate in our worker membership meetings and organizing campaigns. It made a big impact on Crushin' It workers when Rev. Kelly Asprooth-Jackson of First Unitarian Society and Rev. Jeff Vanden Heuvel of Messiah Lutheran prayed with them at their picket. We are grateful to these and all congregations who stood in solidarity with workers during hard-fought campaigns in 2022.

# FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Our budget continued to grow in 2022 thanks to a number of grants and donations. The largest funds came from the Equitable Recovery grant, which was issued by the Wisconsin Department of Administration. We were awarded a total of \$275,856 for 2022-24, and received our first disbursement at the end of 2022. We were also awarded grants from Dane County, the city of Madison, Project Respect (for human trafficking screening), the Sinsinawa Dominicans, the Evjue Foundation, and Fueling Philanthropy (from a course at UW Madison). We were awarded a \$35,000 MCDC grant in 2022, though the funds arrived in the early part of 2023.

We were grateful to once again receive \$25,000 from the Construction Business Group (CBG), along with the continuous support of their staff with our construction worker cases. We are also grateful to Carpenters Local 314, Painters District Council 7, MTI, and CWA Local 4630 for their financial support in 2022, and to the many generous donors who helped us raise over \$40K to sustain our organization. We ended the year with over \$40K in our accounts.

**Assets going into 2022:**  
**\$67,758.92**

## Income

- Equitable Recovery (DOA): \$99,592.00
- Dane County Grant: \$40,979.00
- City of Madison Grant: \$10,738.00
- Project Respect: \$20,000.00
- Fueling Philanthropy: \$5,000.00
- Evjue Foundation: \$10,000.00
- Sinsinawa Grant: \$17,500.00
- Fundraising Campaigns and Donations: \$43,502.51
- Organizational Donations: \$29,546.00
- Donations to the Worker Solidarity Fund: \$15,370.53

Total Assets and Income: \$359,986.96

## Expenses

- Payroll Expenses: \$230,458.88
- Contract Services: \$19,231.41
- Rent and Operational Expenses: \$60,838.77
- Payments from the Worker Solidarity Fund: \$7,473.53

Total Expenses: \$318,002.59

**Assets going into 2023:**  
**\$41,984.37**



We will focus on building up our reserves in the next two years to provide greater job security for those working at WJW.

We received \$15,370.53 in donations for the Worker Solidarity Fund in 2022, and disbursed \$7,473.53 during the height of the Crushin' It campaign. We are extremely grateful for the participation of the community in building this fund. The day the Crushin' It employees were illegally fired and mounted the picket last August, we had just over \$300 in the account. In the course of one week we received over \$7,000 to sustain the brave actions of these workers, most of whom were already owed back-wages when they were fired. Your contributions to the Solidarity Fund meant that workers could pay their rent and buy food for their families as they stood up for their rights to a fair wage and safe working conditions.



## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

As we refined our worker education, organizing and cooperative programs in 2022, our staff received trainings or had conversations with a large number of governmental and community organizations, including, but not limited to: the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, the Wage and Hour Division, the National Labor Relations Board regional office, the Great Lakes ADA Center, the City of Madison Department of Civil Rights, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), WWBIC, and the UW Madison School for Workers.

As always, community partnerships played an important role in 2022. We continued to co-lead the Dignity at Work Coalition with Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice. We forged partnerships with the Catholic Multicultural Center and the Latino Academy to offer monthly worker trainings for their clients and students. We signed an MOU with JustDane to train their JustBakery cohorts on their workplace rights, and arranged a joint partnership with Sustain Dane and the Latino Academy to teach self-advocacy as part of an EPA grant.



During the second half of 2022 we did extensive outreach to faith and other community organizations to offer our trainings in their spaces, and as a result we have already trained more than 100 people on their workers' rights and how to collectively organize in 2023. We spoke at La Sabrosa radio station on a regular basis.

As in previous years, we appreciated the collaboration and support of the South Central Federation of Labor. President Kevin Gundlach was particularly helpful during theCrushin' It picket in August, connecting us with area press and rallying union members to join the picket. The Construction Business Group (CBG) and MCDC have been very important partners, meeting with our staff on a regular basis and providing invaluable guidance in their respective areas of construction and cooperatives. MadWorc has also participated in our regular meetings with MCDC, and we envision partnering more closely with them in our cooperative incubation program moving forward.

A very exciting development in 2022 was the formation of the Construction Council on Racial and Economic Justice (CCOREJustice). The idea for the council arose after many conversations with various trade unions, as well as CBG and the Building Trades Council of South Central Wisconsin, about the

pervasive problem of misclassification in the construction industry. We formed CCOREJustice with the purpose of providing a common space to address the problem collectively. As the arm of the council, we proposed a new position at WJW that would be dedicated exclusively to organizing construction workers, and thanks to the financial support of the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, Painters District Council 7, Roofers Local 11, and the Partners in Equity Grant of Dane County, we have the funds necessary to hire a full-time Construction Worker Organizer in 2023. The new Construction Organizer will work closely with CCOREJustice to eliminate the practice of misclassification.

In addition to the trade unions listed above, SMART Local 565 has decided to sponsor WJW in 2023. We will also be partnering more closely with Workers United on a joint project this coming year. We are grateful to all our community, union and faith partners for their steadfast support and partnership.



# Board of Directors

- Kurt Kobelt, President
- Charity Schmidt, Vice President
- Natalie Gerloff, Secretary
- Sarah Soliman, Treasurer
- Edna Baldwin
- Paulette Harder
- Apolonio Duran
- Julio Garcia
- Mary Kremer
- Jeff Merhoof
- Alexia Kulwicz

# Staff

- Rebecca Meier-Rao, Executive Director
- Robert Christl, Program Director
- Katrina Woods, Business Manager
- Socorro Cortez, Organizer
- Frida Ballard, Organizer
- Gretchen Baumgardt, Faith Outreach (Contracted)

# Volunteers

- Bowen Cao
- Iva Petrova

## ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

As is evident by this report, our organization is growing to fight for justice at work. We have grown because of your support. But the more we grow, the more we become aware of how much is needed to challenge exploitative business practices and create a truly empowered workforce. Your continued and increasing support will make our necessary growth a reality. You can support us in many ways:

- **Become a sponsor of WJW by donating \$500 or more**
- **Become a recurring donor - sustaining donations make for a sustainable organization!**
- **Ask your workplace to participate in a workplace giving program with WJW**
- **Attend our Faith Labor Breakfast this spring and see how else you can get involved!**



**WORKER  
JUSTICE**  
WISCONSIN

[workerjustice.org](http://workerjustice.org)