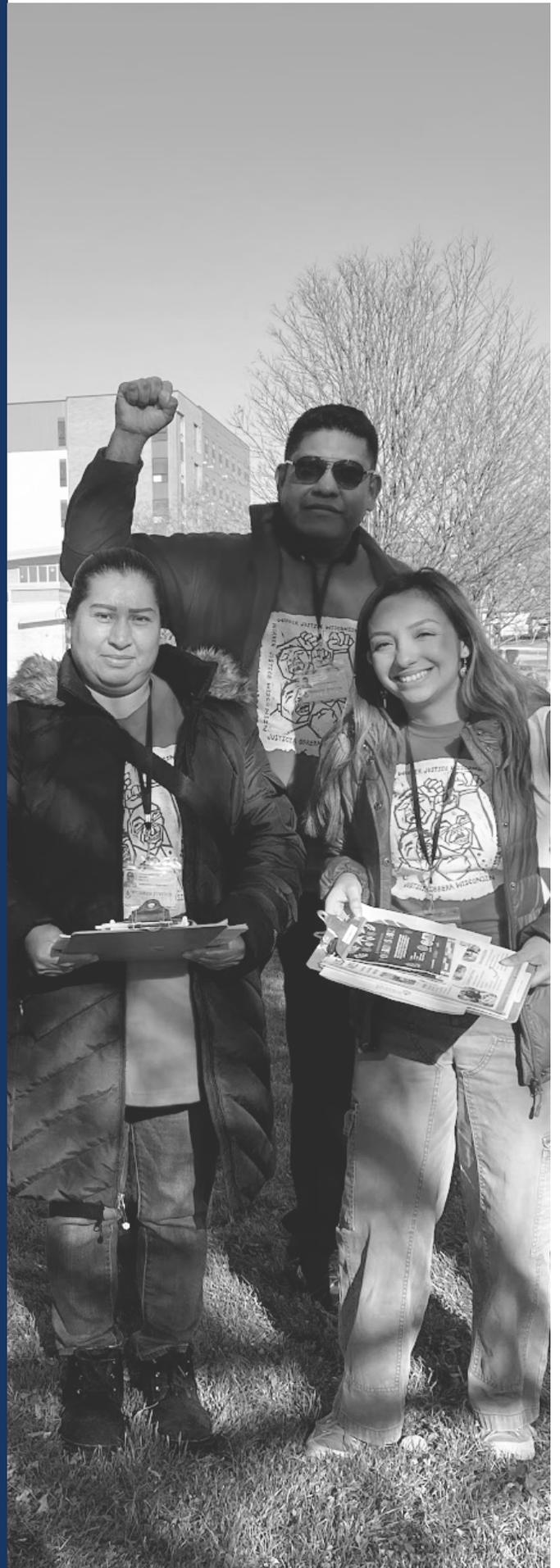




Annual Report 2023



Our Mission

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

2023 Priorities

- **EDUCATION:** Equip workers to understand and fight against workplace exploitation. Educate workers on what a co-op is, how to establish one, and their rights as workers and owners if they choose to become cooperativists.
- **ORGANIZING:** Build rank-and-file movements of workers to take collective, jobsite actions to improve working conditions, pressure employers to adopt industry-wide standards and/or recognize workers' unions.
- **LEADERSHIP:** Empower workers to assume greater responsibility within workplace campaigns and Worker Justice Wisconsin.
- **SOLIDARITY:** Build ally partnerships with community, faith and labor organizations.

OVERVIEW

2023 was all about honing our focus on collective worker empowerment, be it through workplace organizing or incubating cooperatives. We initiated several workplace campaigns, formed the Worker Executive Committee to lead our door knocking campaign centered on wage theft, hired our construction organizer, and made our cooperative organizer position full-time. We hired Garnet Monthie as our new Business Manager, and Katrina Woods became our Payroll Assistant. We published our worker justice study guide with the Wisconsin Council of Churches. Setting themselves as a model for what they preach, the staff of Worker Justice Wisconsin became unionized with OPEIU 39 after being voluntarily recognized by the Board of Directors on October 5.



WORKER CENTER

Our worker center continued to grow in 2023 to meet demands. We now have four talented full-time bilingual organizers. Robert Chrisl is the Program Director, and he oversees the daily operations of the center and heads the hospitality organizing program. Socorro Cortez is the Membership Organizer and also leads our community outreach efforts. Frida Ballard became full-time in August as the Worker Cooperative Organizer, marking the first time we have had a full-time person leading the cooperative incubation program. Daniela Jaime joined our team in April as the Construction Organizer, marking the first time we have had a position of this kind. All the organizers have been busy building collective worker power.



EDUCATION.

The first and most important step to building worker power is education, and as such, we trained far more people than ever before in 2023. In total, we provided the workers' rights training to 506 workers and community members and 111 service providers, and the worker cooperative training to 59 workers and 6 service providers. Trainings took place in our offices in the Madison Labor Temple, all over Dane County and elsewhere, including:

- Monona Grove Liberal Arts School
- St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church
- Boys & Girls Club of Dane County
- Catholic Multicultural Center
- The Latino Academy for Workforce Development
- St. Joseph's Catholic Church
- Just Bakery
- Urban League of Greater Madison
- La Sabrosa Radio (Formando Lazos Familiares)
- Bridge Lakepoint Waunona
- The ACE Institute conference in Puerto Rico
- The Poverty Matters Conference in LaCrosse, WI
- The Chicano/Latino Studies Lunch Hour at UW Madison
- The Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority Conference
- Vel Phillips Memorial High School
- Centro Hispano
- UW Madison Mecha

WORKPLACE ORGANIZING.

As stated in our priorities, our focus coming into 2023 was to strengthen our organizing and cooperative programs so that workers would be better equipped for collective action. To that end, we partnered with 23 worker leaders to initiate five workplace campaigns in hospitality and food production. All campaigns were forged in collaboration with the South Central Federation of Labor and/or a local union, and we expect for at least one of these workplaces to become unionized within the year. We have raised over \$20K in our Solidarity Fund should workers require it during a strike or if they are fired illegally for organizing their workplace.

The DALE program helped our organizing efforts in 2023. Workplace organizing drives are often difficult due to fear, and in the case of many of the workers with whom we partner, immigration related fear. It is this fear that prevents more workers from joining a workplace campaign, resulting in a premature conclusion that is common in the labor movement. Fortunately, in late 2022 the federal government initiated a program called DALE that allows immigrant workers who have experienced any form of immigration-related intimidation from their employer while organizing their workplace, filing a wage theft complaint or reporting an unsafe

working condition to receive protection. The protection includes: a two-year work permit, access to a driver's license, access to unemployment insurance, and more. The National Relations Board (NLRB), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development (DWD) all participate in this program. In 2023 we filed for DALE protections from the NLRB for workers in two of our target workplaces, and for two individual workers from the DWD. All cases were approved by the respective agency and moved forward to the next steps.

For as valuable as DALE has been to encourage workers to defend themselves and organize, many are still plagued by fear and financial constraints. As we continue to dive deeper into worker organizing, we are mindful that the process has many false starts and can take a long time. But we also know that if we are patient, persistent and strategic, these efforts will pay off with more unionized workplaces, higher industry standards, and better worker-centered laws.



WORKER MEMBERSHIP.

One important way to empower and encourage workers in the long organizing struggle is through our Membership Program. We held eight membership meetings during the year, attended by a range of 4-25 workers, during which we discussed topics from immigration law, workers compensation, to unionization. Presenters included representatives of the Catholic Multicultural Center, Hawks Quindel, S.C., SMART 565, LiUNA 464, Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers, and IBEW 159. Our Membership Program ended the year by hosting a Posadas Holiday event attended by over 180 people. It was a beautiful celebration of immigrant workers and their children.

As part of the membership program, our Membership Organizer initiated the [Executive Committee in June with the idea of building a rank-and-file movement to tackle general working-class issues regardless of industry or workplace.](#) It is composed of worker leaders and members of key organizational partners. After several months of analyzing the most persistent issues faced by workers, the Executive Committee decided to lead a Wage Theft Campaign. Originally envisioned as a policy initiative, it became apparent through experience, door knocking, and the course of many discussions that it would need to begin as an educational campaign to impart

workers with a clear understanding of why and how wage theft happens. Moving forward, the Executive Committee will focus on targeted door-knocking in affected neighborhoods and trainings in neighborhood community centers to create a community-wide understanding of the need to combat this problem. The campaign is expected to intensify in 2024.

CONSTRUCTION.

After years of helping construction workers file individual claims, and with the partnership of key trade unions, we were able to hire a full-time person to organize construction workers for grass-roots collective action to apply pressure for higher industry standards. Daniela Jaime, who came from journalism, filled the position in April. During 2023, she spoke with workers in 34 construction sites about what they are experiencing and educated them on their rights. She also partnered with a group of workers to recover \$22,000 in stolen wages by directly confronting the employer (learn more in the Highlights section), and led a [powerful session at the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Conference](#) in November. She will lead our first annual State of Construction community report and livestream event, including worker testimonies, on March 28, 2024.



COOPERATIVE INCUBATION.

In addition to offering the cooperatives training to 59 workers and 6 service providers, we spoke with more than 150 workers about cooperatives and the benefits of democratically owning a business. We also incubated two cooperatives: (1) El Chisme launched in October to a crowd of more than 100 people (read more in the Highlights section), and (2) [Shaky Hands textile cooperative](#), which is continuing the process of incubation into 2024. Very importantly, our Cooperative Organizer cultivated a strong support network of provider organizations to increase access for immigrant-led,

non-English speaking cooperatives. These organizations include but are not limited to: the Madison Public Library, the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC), Madison Worker Cooperative (MadWorC), Madison Cooperative Development Coalition (MCDC), Shared Capital Cooperative, and Small Axe Cooperative. In partnership with these organizations, we are increasing access to information, resources and capital so immigrant-led cooperatives can flourish in southern Wisconsin.

INDIVIDUAL CASEWORK.

In order to provide individual case management for workers as we gear our resources toward collective worker empowerment, we began holding bi-weekly Grievance Sessions on May 11. Held every other Thursday, they begin by providing a workers' rights information sheet, followed by each worker sharing their respective workplace problems, and then separating into different groups to file grievances with the appropriate government agency. While these cases are generally not conducive to collective action, the grievance sessions provide an avenue for collective sharing so workers know they're not alone, and prepare them for future work situations where they may have a greater ability to make collective change. In 2023, 64 workers participated in these sessions.

WORKER CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS RECOVER 22K IN UNPAID WAGES:

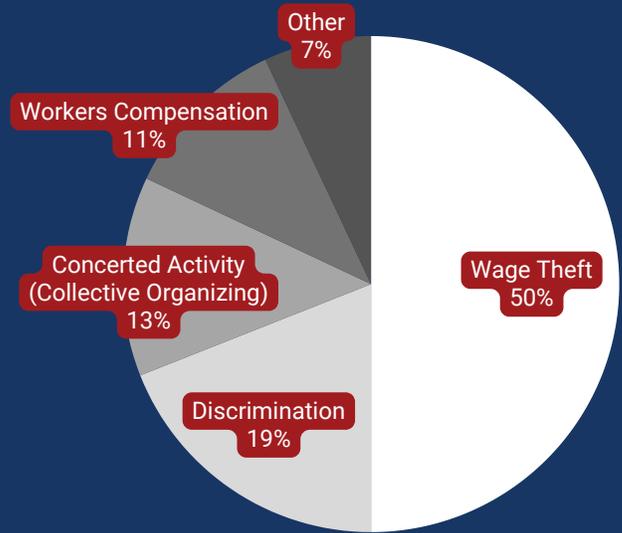
In the local construction industry, the lack of regulation in subcontracting is a big problem. Too often it results in misclassification and wage theft.

Yeison, Ivan, Juan Carlos and Marlon experienced the problem firsthand. [They were cheated out of their wages from November 2022-May 2023](#) by FDM Construction, a subcontractor hired by Stevens Construction. In total, they were owed \$22,000. Stevens was the developer at the top of the chain, and ultimately the one responsible since they were the company that contracted the fraudulent parties.

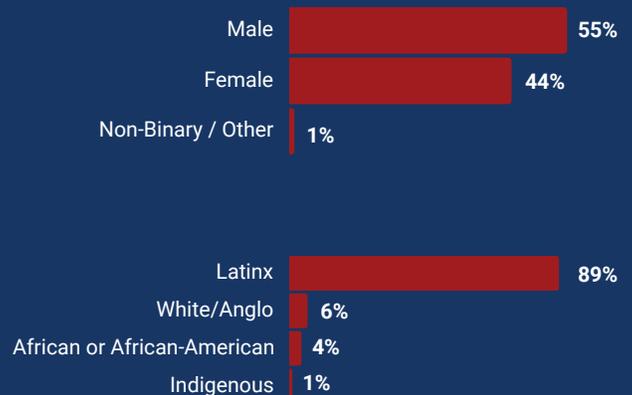
So Yeison, Ivan, Juan, Carlos and Marlon got together and pressured Stevens to pay their stolen wages. Within two weeks, Stevens paid them the full amount of \$22,000, but only because they came together to exert pressure.

It's only by speaking up and building collective worker power that workers can put an end to wage theft and other workplace problems!

In 2023 we opened 161 individual cases:



Demographics of the workers who opened cases:



According to our most recent information, we helped recover

\$79,941.63

in previously owed but unpaid wages in 2023.

CRUSHIN' IT APPAREL/THUNDER BAY WORKERS' PRESS CONFERENCE:

On September 12, the employees of Crushin's It Apparel, now Thunder Bay, held a press conference to pressure owner Jeremy Kruk to pay them their over \$8,000 in back wages and bargain with their union - IUPAT 7 - in good faith.

David, Doricela and Leonel, three of the employees that Kruk unlawfully fired due to their organizing efforts in August of 2022, were the primary speakers. The press conference was held in front of Thunday Bay, at 1831 County Road V, Columbus, WI. They spoke with authority and grace in the face of an employer who retaliated against them and who refused to bargain with their union or pay their back wages.

To date, Kruk has not bargained a contract with IUPAT 7, he has not paid his employees their back wages, and he has not paid workers' lost earnings after illegally firing them for organizing. In response, the National Labor Relations Board has passed his case to enforcement, and IUPAT 7's lawyers are pursuing double damages in court for the unpaid wages. The workers are standing firm as the fight continues.

EL CHISME:

Wisconsin's first food truck cooperative, El Chisme, Spanish for "The Gossip," launched in October 2023 at an event hosted by WJW outside the Madison Labor Temple. Through assistance from WJW as part of our worker cooperative incubation program, Guadalupe Gomez converted her 12 year old food truck business to a worker-owned cooperative. Gomez and her children serve up Mexican street food such as esquites, birria tacos, pambazos, ham sandwiches, and tacos ahogados. After years of helping their mom build up the business, the now worker owners are able to share in the profits. The family is currently saving money to finish refurbishing a food truck, which will let them extend their season. MCDC provided a \$10,000 grant for the co-op members to receive business development services.



FAITH ENGAGEMENT

After many hours of collaborative work with the Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC), our worker justice study-action guide became available on the WCC website in 2023. We are grateful to Community of Hope UCC and Glenwood Moravian Community Church for piloting the program before it was published, and for their valuable feedback.



ABOUT THE WORKER JUSTICE STUDY-ACTION GUIDE:

Work is where many of us spend most of our waking hours. Work can give us a sense of purpose, an opportunity to share our talents, and a way to provide for ourselves and our families. Work is also a place where some of the most egregious injustices occur: a denial of basic human dignity, a lack of safety, and wage theft. This study guide, created by Worker Justice Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Council of Churches, aims to help Christians understand the importance of worker justice.

The four session study-action guide will look at:

- Faith & Labor 101: What is “worker justice”? Why is it a crucial issue for people of faith?
- The Struggle for Workers’ Rights & the Crucial Role of Faith Allies
- The Power of a Coalition: Collective Worker Organizing & How Faith Allies Lend Strength & Witness
- How Worker Justice is Intersectional

The study-action guide is available free of cost at wicchurches.org/2023/08/worker-justice-study-action-guide.

The theme of our 2023 Labor in the Pulpit/On the Bimah/In the Minbar program was “Faith Partnership,” and we invited faith communities to reflect on the question “As people of faith, how do we partner with workers who are fighting for more just and humane working conditions?” We were delighted to have the following congregations participate: Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society, Wauwatosa Avenue United Methodist Church, First Baptist Church of Madison, Community of Hope UCC, Advent Lutheran, Algoma Lutheran, People’s United Methodist Church, James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Glenwood Moravian Community Church, Lake Edge UCC, Middleton Community UCC.

On separate occasions, we were invited to speak to congregation members at Orchard Ridge UCC, Madison Mennonite Church, and First United Methodist Church. We offered workers’ rights trainings at St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Joseph Catholic Parishes. We want to extend a big thank you to Christ Presbyterian Church for donating their beautiful fellowship hall for our 2023 Faith Labor Breakfast on May 4.

Though we were without a Faith Outreach Coordinator in 2023, we continued to make as many connections with faith communities as possible, with the hope of strengthening our faith relationships in 2024.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Our budget continued to grow in 2023 thanks to a number of grants and generous donations.

We were awarded the following grants: Equitable Recovery (Department of Administration), Dane County, MCDRC, the City of Madison, The Sinsinawa Ministry Grant, the Ally Grant (WEDC), Evjue Foundation, Partners in Equity (Dane County), Seeds of Hope and Southwest Association grants (United Church of Christ), City of Middleton, and Dane County Bar Association Pro Bono Grant. We had sub-grants from the following organizations: Kids Forward (WCPER), Latino Academy (EPA), JustDane, and Project Respect.

We received large organizational donations (\$500-50,000) from unions, faith congregations and other community organizations including: North Central States Council of Carpenters, Construction Business Group, IUPAT 7, Roofers Local 11, IBEW 159, SEIU Wisconsin, CMRJB Workers United, Carpenters Local 314, UFCW 1473, SMART 565, Madison Teachers Inc., Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers, Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, Orchard Ridge UCC, Madison Mennonite Church, Hawks

Quindel, S.C., Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, and Common Wealth Development. We also raised much needed funds through our events and fundraising campaigns, workplace giving, and membership dues.

In total, we raised \$479,428.84 in 2023. Our net assets at the end of 2023 were \$72,718.70. Of that amount, \$23,989 is in the Worker Solidarity Fund account. The remaining amount - \$48,729.70 - will be used for general operations in 2024.

We are immensely grateful to all our funders whose contributions make our work possible. As we expand to address the overwhelming demands of nonunionized, mostly immigrant workers, we are deeply thankful for your enduring partnership and support. As we enter 2024, our primary focus will be establishing a reserve fund to safeguard the long-term financial stability of WJW.

2023 Income

- Grants: \$284,389.00
- Large Organizational Donations: \$138,824.97
- Events and Fundraising: \$46,783.65
- Workplace Giving: \$7,629.16
- Membership Dues: \$1,802.06

Total Income: \$479,428.84

2023 Expenses

- Payroll Expenses \$338,341.81
- Contract Services \$29,584.17
- Rent and Operations \$90,814.97

Total Expenses: \$458,740.95

**Assets going into 2024:
\$72,718.70**



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Worker Justice Wisconsin is able to empower workers and challenge unjust working conditions in great part because of our extensive partnerships with unions, faith congregations, and community organizations, many which have already been discussed in this Annual Report. The organizations that attended our Faith Labor Breakfast event on May 4 and Posadas event on December 8 are among those we partnered with the most in 2023. They include:

- Beth Israel Center
- Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers District Council of Wisconsin
- Building Trades Council of South Central Wisconsin
- Carpenters Local 314
- Catholic Multicultural Center
- Common Wealth Development
- Community Immigration Law Center
- Community of Hope UCC
- Construction Business Group
- COWS (now the High Road Strategy Center)
- CWA Local 4630
- First Baptist Church of Madison
- Glenwood Moravian Church
- Havens Wright Center for Social Justice, UW Madison
- Hawks Quindel, S.C.

- IBEW 159
- IBEW 2304
- Interpreter's Cooperative of Madison
- JustDane
- La Sabrosa Broadcasting
- Labor Radio
- Lake Edge UCC
- Latino Academy for Workforce Development
- LiUNA 464
- Madison Cooperative Development Coalition
- Madison Mennonite Church
- Madison Teachers Inc. (MTI)
- North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters
- OPEIU Local 39
- Orchard Ridge UCC
- Painters District Council 7 (IUPAT 7)
- Roofers Local 11
- School for Workers, UW Madison
- SEIU Wisconsin
- SMART 565
- South Central Federation of Labor (SCFL)
- Voces de la Frontera
- Wisconsin Council of Churches
- Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
- Workers United CMRJB



Board of Directors

- Kurt Kobelt, President
- Charity Schmidt, Vice Preside
- Natalie Gerloff, Secretary
- Edna Baldwin
- Paulette Harder
- Julio Garcia
- Mary Kremer
- Jeff Mehrhoff, with Adam Gifford as alternate
- Alexia Kulwiec
- Steve McDonald

Staff

- Rebecca Meier-Rao, Executive Director
- Robert Christl, Program Director
- Socorro Cortez, Membership Organizer
- Frida Ballard, Worker Cooperative Organizer
- Daniela Jaime, Construction Organizer
- Garnet Monthie, Business Manager
- Katrina Woods, Payroll Assistant

As we stated during our Faith Labor Breakfast on May 4, "If we are to make a systemic impact in our community, we will have to do it together. So often employers and their allies pit workers against each other to make sure they don't exercise their collective voice. It will take our collective effort to fight against that divide and conquer strategy." We are grateful to have so many wonderful partners in the struggle for worker justice.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Community Report on State of Construction, March 28
- 2024 Faith Labor Breakfast, May 16





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workerjustice.org