

2024

ANNUAL REPORT



Sprouting the Seeds of Solidarity



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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear WJW Community:

As we reflect on the past year, I am heartened by the collective strength of our community. Worker Justice Wisconsin (WJW) exists to build power with rank-and-file workers and allies to fight for dignity and justice in the workplace, and in 2024 we firmly lived up to this mission.

Our annual report highlights the work we accomplished together, from expanding education initiatives that reached nearly 800 workers and service providers, to publishing our fifth edition of the Workers' Rights Manual and partnering with workers to recover over \$126,000 in stolen wages, most of it through collective activity. Our organizing efforts led to, among other things, stronger workplace committees, a successful staff unionization effort, the launch of a worker cooperative, and the beginning of the Rapid Response Network, which mobilizes allies to stand in solidarity with workers fighting for their rights in the workplace. Read on to learn more, as we provide much more detail in the pages ahead.

None of what we have accomplished would be possible without the generosity and commitment of our partners, donors, and community supporters. Your contributions—whether financial or by showing up when workers need you—make a real difference. We extend our deepest gratitude to the organizations, unions, faith communities, and individuals who stand with us in this struggle. Together, we will build a Wisconsin where all workers are treated with dignity and respect.

In Solidarity,



Rebecca Meier-Rao
Executive Director



2024 HIGHLIGHTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Education

► **Workshops and Trainings:** Provided education in Spanish and English for 574 workers and 218 service providers, exposing nearly 800 people to the labor movement and increasing their knowledge of workers' rights and cooperatives. In addition to our own offices, we gave our workshops and presentations in the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, Catholic Multicultural Center, Chilton Public Library, Dane County Job Center, East High School, Good Shepherd Food Pantry, JustBakery, Latino Chamber of Commerce, Madison College, Madison Public Library - meadowridge, McKenzie Regional Workforce Center, Monona Grove High School, Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ, Our Lady of the Assumption, Sunshine Place, Unidos, Union South @ UW Madison, US Federation of Worker Cooperatives Conference, UW Center for Cooperatives, Vel Phillips Memorial High School, WayForward Resources, Wisconsin Building Trades Council Conference, and YWCA Racial Justice Summit.

► **New Workshops and Materials:** Developed a "How to Read Your Pay Stub" training to arm workers against wage theft, and with the South Central Federation of Labor, developed three immigration-related trainings and [flyers](#) to ensure immigrant workers and the labor community know their rights during anti-immigrant actions.

► **Surveyed Construction Workers:** As part of our Susan Harwood OSHA grant, new WJW Organizer [David Ortiz Whittingham](#) surveyed 55 Spanish-speaking workers and subcontractors about safety issues they have experienced at work. We will use the results to develop our OSHA training in 2025.



Strengthening Worker Power

► **Staff Unionization:** On Labor Day, our staff and Board celebrated the ratification of WJW staff's first contract with OPEIU Local 39. The decision to unionize, supported strongly by the Board, was driven by the need to protect workers in the face of anti-worker laws prevalent in the United States. It also reflects our belief that we must practice what we preach. Our organizers work to educate low-income and immigrant workers about the benefits of unionization, and it's important that they be able to point to their own participation in the union movement.

► **Organizing:** Led by WJW Organizer Robert Christl, began two workplace organizing drives with 12 worker leaders forming the workplace committees. Though workers are encountering more resistance and fear in the present environment, committee leaders remain strong and willing to engage in a long-term struggle.



► **Rapid Response Network:** Launched the Rapid Response Network, inviting community allies to participate directly in workers' struggles against unjust working conditions. This initiative mobilizes supporters swiftly to stand in solidarity during critical workplace actions. 124 community members signed up for rapid response in 2024.

Wage Theft Campaign

► **Wage Recovery:** Partnered with workers to recover \$126,290.78 in unpaid wages. An exciting development this year is that, of the amount that was recovered, \$80,039.28 was recovered by workers engaged in collective concerted activity.

► **Media Collaboration:** With WORT FM, began a series of interviews featuring workers who have fought to recover stolen wages. This collaboration aims to shed light on wage theft and generate public pressure to criminalize this exploitative practice. Listen to Luis Miguel and Vanessa, and Los Volcanes Cooperative members Juana and Francisco on the WORT FM website or our News & Events page.

► **Comité del Pueblo:** Formed the Comité del Pueblo with a dedicated group of five worker members and WJW Organizer Socorro Cortez. They participate in all decision making about the direction and strategies of the Wage Theft campaign, and lead campaign actions.

► **Door-Knocking:** In partnership with the Allied Drive Neighborhood Association, members of the Comité del Pueblo door knocked all over the Allied Drive neighborhood to educate residents about wage theft and their labor rights.

Cooperative Incubation

► **Los Volcanes Cooperative Launch:** On Oct 10, Los Volcanes Textile Collective held their open house marking their launch. The event was attended by over 70 people. Emerging from the closure of Crushin' It Apparel, the workers formed Los Volcanes, a cooperative focusing on screen printing, sewing, and embroidery. Supported by our cooperative incubation program, Los Volcanes exemplifies worker resilience and entrepreneurship.

► **Ecosystem Building:** In September, WJW Organizer Frida Ballard presented at the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives Conference alongside

Charity Schmidt (UW Center for Cooperatives) and Steve Herrick (Interpreters' Cooperative) about the bilingual support network for immigrant cooperatives that they have formed in Dane County. In addition, Frida spoke with six cooperative ecosystems across the country and identified key area business partners to identify best practices and strengthen the bilingual ecosystem in Dane County.

► **Recruitment:** Created materials and activities for cleaning cooperative focus groups, and began recruitment for the cleaning cooperative incubation program.

Community Engagement

► **Faith Outreach:** We welcomed Mary Munyutu as our part-time Faith Outreach Coordinator. Mary's efforts have deepened our engagement with diverse faith communities, fostering collaborative support for worker rights and advocacy.



► **Labor in the Pulpits/On the Bimah/In the Minbar:** During this year's program, we were honored to be invited to speak at James Reeb Unitarian Universalist, Orchard Ridge UCC and Common Grace. Also participating this year were Beth Hillel Temple, St Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Zwingli UCC, Lake Edge UCC, and the Southwest Wisconsin Association of United Church of Christ. You can locate our 2024 Resource Packet in the Labor in the Pulpits/On the Bimah/In the Minbar tab on our website.

► **Immigration and Labor Working Group:** With the South Central Federation of Labor, initiated the Immigration and Labor Working Group to ensure unions are prepared to confront the anti-immigration rhetoric and policies of the current administration.



Cases of Collective Power

Of the \$126,290.78 in stolen wages that WJW helped recover in 2024, a large part of that - \$80,039.28 - was recovered by workers joining forces to pressure their employer.

One of the most significant victories was of three construction workers who were owed almost \$36,000 by LNR Services, a landscaping company in Richland Center, WI. They went three months without receiving a single penny of the money owed to them for their work. In October, they came to Worker Justice Wisconsin to learn how to fight back and get what is legally theirs. Although the company tried to divide and conquer the workers, and cheat them out of their money, they remained united throughout the process and refused to settle for less. Within two months, their boss had no choice but to pay them their owed wages.

They have an important message for all workers: there is strength in unity! We have to learn our rights, organize, and push back against unscrupulous employers if we're going to put a stop to wage theft in Wisconsin once and for all!

Another important victory in 2024 was that the owner of Crushin' It Apparel was finally forced to pay his employees the wages he stole from them back in 2022. After filing their cases with the Department of Workforce Development,



mounting a picket, and holding a press conference to apply pressure on their former employer, the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) took on their case in April of 2024. Soon after, several Crushin' It Workers met with Attorney General Josh Kaul, who praised them for their strength and perseverance. The case was settled on December 10, and Kruk has since paid his employees. Though it took a long time, the Crushin' It workers remained unified and spoke publicly and courageously about their experiences, empowering other workers to do the same.

Finally, we want to highlight an event that celebrated the power of collective action. We held a State of Construction event on March 28th with a group of 34 workers, 11 partners, and 303 viewers across Facebook Live. We gathered for our State of Construction report and to hear Marlon's testimony, as he experienced wage theft and recovered the full \$22,000 he and his co-workers were owed through collective action.

BY THE NUMBERS



574

workers took
our trainings



136

worker cases
opened



21

Group
Grievance
sessions held



3

new worker-led
committees
formed



1

worker
cooperative
incubated

\$126,290.78

unpaid wages recovered

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

2023 Income	Grants	\$313,516.00
	Labor Donations	\$118,500.00
	Faith Donations	\$3,625.69
	Events and Fundraisers	\$18,027.66
	Individual Donations	\$21,607.13
	Membership Dues	\$735.00
	Other	\$39.03
	TOTAL	\$476,050.51
2023 Expenses	Payroll	\$364,668.87
	Contract Services	\$37,629.64
	Rent and Operations	\$57,798.09
	Payments to Solidarity Fund	\$3,391.22
	TOTAL	\$463,487.82
Assets going into 2024	\$63,993.66	

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all our 2024 grantors:

- City of Madison
- Dane County
- DOA Equitable Recovery
- Madison Cooperative Development Coalition
- Common Future Accelerator
- Sinsinawa Ministry Grant
- Evjue Foundation

We are also grateful for being sub-award recipients with:

- Project Respect
- JustDane
- Kids Forward
- UW Center for Cooperatives.

We deeply appreciate the generous support of our labor partners:

- Construction Business Group
- North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters
- Carpenters Local 314
- IUPAT 7
- Roofers Local 11
- Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers
- SMART 18
- SMART 565
- Workers United Chicago and Midwest
- SEIU Wisconsin
- UFCW 1473
- United Legal Workers Local 2320
- Madison Teachers Inc.

- Milwaukee Area Service and Hospitality Workers Organization
- CWA Local 4671

A profound thank you to area faith organizations for your generous support:

- First United Methodist Church
- First Unitarian Society
- James Reeb Unitarian
- Lake Edge UCC
- Our Lady of the Assumption
- Plymouth UCC
- Orchard Ridge UCC
- Community of Hope UCC
- Glenwood Moravian
- Lakeview Moravian
- Sinsinawa Dominicans

And very importantly, we could not do this work without the constant support of the many individuals who generously contributed to WJW. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Thank you also to all of you who attended our Faith Labor Breakfast in May. It was a wonderful event celebrating worker solidarity and power!



LOOKING AHEAD

2025 Goals

As we plan for the future, we are setting ambitious goals:

- **Expand Education through additional workshops, radio programing and community outreach**
- **Build worker power through regular membership assemblies, workplace organizing, escalating the wage theft campaign and incubating a cleaning worker cooperative.**
- **Increase leadership opportunities for workers through targeted workshops and involvement in committees and the board of directors**

Further integrate faith and labor allies into this movement, fostering a broader coalition for economic and social justice.



Our Team

Board of Directors:

- Kurt Kobelt, President
- Charity Schmidt, Vice President
- Natalie Gerloff, Secretary
- Jac Weitzel, Treasurer
- Paulette Harder
- Edna Baldwin
- Julio Garcia
- Lola Loustaunau
- Steve McDonald
- Mary Kremer
- Jeff Mehrhoff, with Adam Gifford as alternate

Staff:

- Rebecca Meier-Rao, Executive Director
- Robert Christl, Program Director
- Garnet Monthie, Business Manager
- Socorro Cortez, Membership Organizer
- Frida Ballard, Cooperatives Organizer
- David Ortiz Whittingham, Construction Organizer
- Mary Munyutu, Faith Outreach Coordinator



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