

WORKERS' ACTION CENTRE

JUSTICE FOR WORKERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Annual Report 2020



Fighting for Paid Sick Days!

August 29, 2020: #SafeSeptember action for paid sick days with the Decent Work and Health Network

WAC members have made our voices heard loud and clear this year—paid sick days save lives! We've been fighting for paid sick days for years, but when the pandemic hit this became even more urgent. Too many of us are being forced to choose between following public health advice to stay home when sick or our financial security—how can we stay home if it means we can't pay next month's rent or put food on the table? It has been incredible to see so many WAC members posterizing neighbourhoods, calling MPPs, hosting phone zaps, and organizing for paid sick days.

Remember in 2018, when the Ford government rolled back the 2 paid sick days we had won? Well, now over half of workers across the country have no paid sick days and for low-income workers this number jumps to over 70%! Black, Indigenous, and workers of colour who are over-represented in low-wage, frontline work are most at risk of becoming infected and least likely to have paid sick days. Paid sick days are a racial justice issue!

In the midst of a global pandemic, the provincial government is still denying workers this basic right. After enormous pressure, the federal government stepped in to provide the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) in September 2020. But the CRSB is not paid sick days.

CRSB pays less than minimum wage and is only available for workers who lose more than 50% of their weekly income. It does not cover workers who have not earned enough in the previous year and people without Social Insurance Numbers. This is why we have been speaking out about the urgent need for provincially legislated paid sick days in the ***Employment Standards Act*** now!

We have been in the newspapers, on the radio and on TV in English, Tamil, Punjabi, Chinese and Spanish calling for paid sick days. Support has grown to include not only workers & health providers, but Medical Officers of Health and mayors across the province. Polls also show that over 80% of people in the province support paid sick days. We are not alone in our fight.

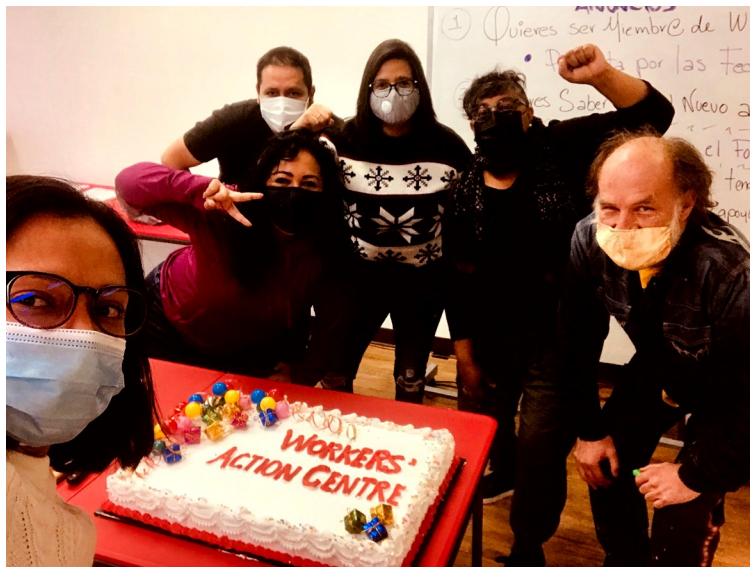
People are seeing how the lack of workplace protections is driving the spread of COVID-19 with outbreaks in long-term care homes, warehouses like Amazon, food processing plants like Cargill and countless other workplaces. By refusing to legislate paid sick days, the government is playing politics with peoples' lives. It has to end. That is why we are continuing to call for at least 10 paid permanent paid sick days and an additional 14 days in public health emergencies. We can't wait any longer!

Our WAC Family Comes Together for Support

WAC members had a tough year in 2020. Job loss, health risks, racism, fear of getting sick and dealing with employer abuse increased. Our phone lines were jammed with workers needing help. As soon as COVID-19 hit, we pushed the federal government to make sure emergency benefits were available to all workers.

WAC staff and members sprang into action as our members began losing their jobs and everyone became worried about paying the bills and staying safe. In April, we began a program distributing fresh vegetables and fruit food boxes with FoodShare every Saturday and were able to continue this until the end of December.

Saturdays were a buzz of activity as we distributed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and frozen dinners, provided information on income supports, checked in with members and met new workers having a hard time. We raised money for workers that did not qualify for benefits to help them pay rent and bills.



October 3, 2020: Celebrating the Workers' Action Centre's 15th anniversary while distributing food boxes and PPE to workers.

We met so many new workers who have now become part of our WAC family and have joined the fight for decent work and status for all!

The Fight for Emergency Income Benefits for ALL Workers



August 7, 2020: Scarborough members visit MP Shaun Chen and MP John McKay to demand improvements to EI, a \$15 federal minimum wage, and status for all.

A huge piece of work during 2020 was to make sure COVID-19 emergency benefits were adequate and available to all workers. We all know that there have been many problems with Employment Insurance (EI). Many of us don't qualify as we don't have enough hours of work and, when we do get access, the amount of benefits is not enough to live on. We worked with our allies and were successful in getting the floor of \$500 per week for everyone—even workers who were independent contractors, self-employed or who worked for cash. One of the biggest problems in accessing benefits was needing a valid Social Insurance Number. This was a significant barrier for our members who have precarious immigration status. This important struggle for access continues.

The Workers' Action Centre (WAC) is a worker-based organization committed to improving the lives and working conditions of people in low wage and precarious work – through education, support, research, policy analysis, advocacy, leadership development, and community action. Our work is guided by these principles: maximum involvement of the people affected, developing leadership among workers, shared learning and action for change.

Full and Permanent Immigration Status for All!

A critical campaign launched in 2020 was Status for All. WAC is a member of the Migrant Rights Network, which is a national coalition of migrant worker groups who have come together to challenge Canada's unfair immigration laws. Energetic and creative actions took place all across the country. WAC members worked together with our migrant group allies to send strong messages to the Federal Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino, participated in a car caravan to support farmworkers in Niagara, and joined powerful actions in downtown Toronto. Our organization has an important role to play in supporting workers in Ontario whose immigration status is being used by employers to take advantage of them on the job. We will not stand for this injustice!



September 20, 2020: Green Light - Status for All action at Yonge & Dundas in Toronto



November 1, 2020: Day of the Dead Celebration for Status for All, honouring the migrant farmworkers who died of COVID-19. Thank you to the staff and allies who contributed their photos.

IN SOLIDARITY

Thank you to our union allies for their generous financial support of the Fight for \$15 & Fairness. We look forward to organizing with you as the Justice for Workers campaign.

FIGHT FOR
\$15 & FAIRNESS

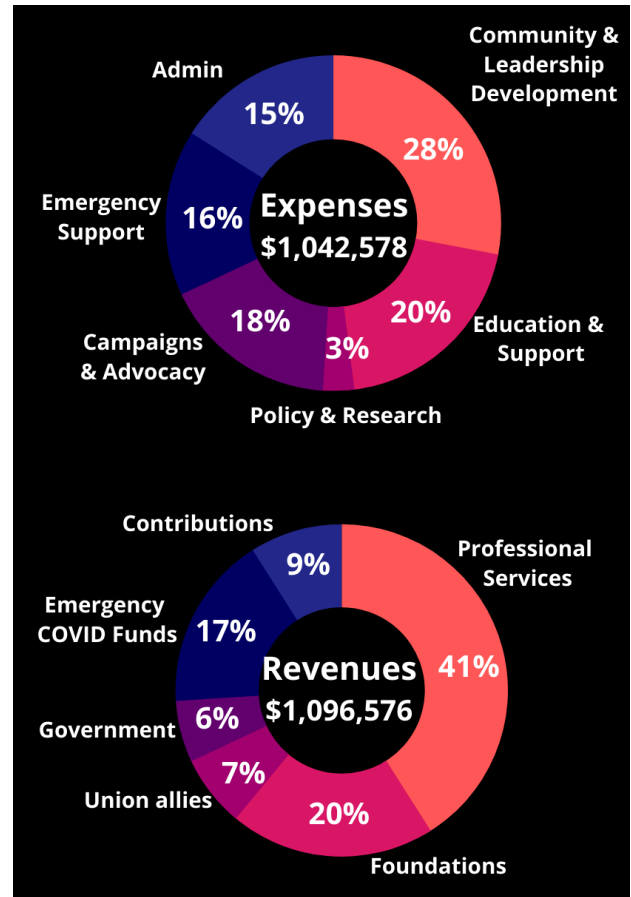
SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- Society of United Professionals
- Hamilton-Wentworth Elementary Teachers' Local
- PSAC Social Justice Fund

Building the Workers' Movement

10+ Meetings with MPPs or government representatives	10 Provincial organizing meetings hosted online with 1,400+ participants
13 Organizations and coalitions as networking partners	45 Virtual Know Your Rights workshops hosted with 7,200+ participants
100+ Workshops on employment rights	200+ Attendees at our in-person Provincial Strategy Meeting
200+ Workers participated in the Community Outreach project	200+ Media hits: 30 in Mandarin, 60 in Punjabi, 50 in Somali, 20 in Tamil
260+ Households received food boxes	230+ Workers received direct income support
Twitter followers increased by 500+	Facebook followers increased by 800+
1,200+ Workers supported through the helpline	12,200+ Workers attended our workshops

Financial Summary



A Big Thank You to our 2020 Project Funders

Canadian Community Fund - Unifor
City of Toronto
The Law Foundation of Ontario
United Way Greater Toronto

AND to the following organizations for their special EMERGENCY PANDEMIC SUPPORT for vulnerable workers:

Canadian Red Cross
Community Food Centres Canada
FoodShare
OCASI
Toronto Foundation

Special Thanks to:

Our Members, who make all our work possible

Our allies – union members, social justice and student activists, faith leaders, healthcare providers, and community partners - for your commitment and spirit

to improving the lives of all workers

Our legal volunteers who give their time, energy and support

Our Monthly Solidarity Program Financial Supporters (you know who you are!)

We would like to especially acknowledge the following for their support, guidance and commitment to social justice:

- The Atkinson Charitable Foundation
- The George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation
- The Maytree Foundation
- Ontario Employment Education and Research Centre
- Parkdale Community Legal Services

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