

Worker Solidarity Network Annual Report 2023

WSN23

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Worker Solidarity Network operates on the unsundered territories of the Coast Salish peoples, specifically the Lək wəŋən (Songhees), Xwsepsum (Esquimalt), xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh). WSN is committed to acting in support of Indigenous sovereignty and resistance.

Board

President	Spencer Lachmanec
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Communications	Jiyeon Ha
Fundraising	Michael Fraser
Community Engagement	Ismail Askin
Climate and Labour	Jen Kostuchuk
Administration	Jade Kulhawy-Bartlett

Eight years ago, a small group of workers in so-called Victoria joined together to discuss their common experiences and struggles in the non-unionized retail, restaurant, and hospitality sectors: unfair scheduling, workplace discrimination and harassment, and bosses stealing already low wages. Recognizing that these problems all stem from an overall lack of worker power and knowing the historical effectiveness of labour organizing, they began helping each other through mutual aid, acts of solidarity, and direct action.

Today, WSN boasts over 300 grassroots members throughout the province and seven dedicated staff members in Victoria and the Lower Mainland. Our members and staff work to improve working people's everyday lives and to build collective worker power for long-term systemic change. WSN distributes accessible workers rights education, supports and empowers individuals facing workplace injustices, and advocates for stronger and better-enforced worker protections.

Together we can redistribute power and mobilize across sectors and across the province, putting solidarity in action by demanding a safe and equitable future for all. When we fight, we do win!



Jan

Justice Delayed is Justice Denied rally in Vancouver.
First Worker Wednesday of 2023.

'Mental Health at Work' video series launched.

Feb

Valentines Day 'Candygrams' outreach.

BC government announces Employment Standards
Branch budget increase.

March

Know your Rights workshop with WorkBC Centre.
International Working Women's Day fundraising
panel.

Workshop series with Pro Bono Students Canada
UVic Law students.

WSN presents to University of Victoria students.

April

WSN and Poverty Reduction Coalition coauthor an
op-ed on the just transition.

Earth Day rally with Socialist Alternative Youth in
Vancouver.

May

International Workers Day event with local labour
organizations and grassroots collectives.

The Climate and Labour Project releases 'Can't
Stand the Heat: Get out of the Kitchen' report.

WSN presents at New Westminster's Secondary
School Climate Conference.

June

WSN begins 'Organizing 101 Workshop' series with
Liuna 1611.

WSN launches Climate and Labour Justice
campaign.

WSN members meet with MLAs Rob Flemming and
Grace Lore about better protections for gig
economy workers.

July

'Know your Rights' workshop with Victoria
Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society.

Aug

Justice Delayed is Justice Denied campaign launches new demands in response to the announced Employment Standards Branch budget increase.

WSN partners with CityHive's Youth Climate Innovation Lab on 'Surviving the Elements' project.

Sept

WSN reaches 315 members.

WSN united with migrant-led organizations calling for Status for All.

Oct

WSN begins 'Turning up the Heat: Climate Conversation with Workers' series.

Climate Workers Webinar with the Council of Canadians and Wilderness Committee.

Halloween 'Candygrams' Outreach.

Nov

The Solidarity Steward Program commence a strategy session to review our legal advocacy approach.

'Know your Rights' workshop with University of Victoria CanAssist.

Dec

Annual General Meeting.

Social media

Social media followers and yearly increase
(as of October 19, 2023)

1,677 Instagram followers - up by 482 (+40.33%).

744 Twitter followers - up by 82 (+12.4%).

1,418 Facebook followers - up by 58 (+4.3%).

Media coverage

August 28, The Tyee: Too Hot to Handle: Heat Poses Rising Risk to BC Workers

June 17, Chek News: Six foot thermometer placed outside B.C. Legislature in rally for worker protections

June 17, Victoria News: PHOTOS: Worker Solidarity Network calls on government to protect workers in extreme heat

June 6, Vancouver Sun: 'Exhausting': What it's like to live on minimum wage in Vancouver

June 4, The Georgia Straight: Can't stand the heat: Kitchen workers suffer when temperatures soar

April 28, Spring Magazine (Op-Ed): From IWD to May Day: Connecting working women's struggles

April 13, The Tyee (Op-Ed): Why We Need Social Justice in the Just Transition

April 5, Chek News (Video): B.C. to increase minimum wage to \$16.75 starting June 1

Feb 24, The Tyee: BC Pledges a Big Budget Boost to Protect Workers' Rights

Press releases

Extreme weather events expose lack of enforced employment protections in B.C., report finds - May 9, 2023 (For Climate Report release)

International Working Women's Day Rally - March 11, 2023 (IWWD)

Workers rally at Portal Park to challenge the notorious underfunding of Employment Standards Branch - January 18, 2023 (Justice Denied)



Photo by Harland Bird

The Climate and Labour Project has completed its first community-engaged research, focusing on the experiences of 31 food service workers during extreme heat, droughts, and floods. Collaboratively with workers from the project, we developed a list of nine policy demands to better protect all workers.

The research forms the basis of WSN's first report, *Can't Stand the Heat? Get Out of the Kitchen*. We launched the report in May at a virtual event with many in attendance, including workers, board members, community organizers, academics, and health professionals.

The report highlights how extreme weather makes food service labour more precarious. It also shows how the workers we collaborated with reacted to extreme working conditions—through acts of solidarity.

The project is now in the knowledge mobilization phase. We are prioritizing distributing accessible information about worker rights during extreme weather by promoting our digital toolkit and facilitating workshops for low-wage workers and members.

Can't Stand the Heat? Get Out of the Kitchen!

The impact of extreme weather events on food service workers in British Columbia



SPRING 2023

Worker
Solidarity
Network

Can't Stand the Heat? Get Out of the Kitchen revealed:

87% of workers are not or do not know if they are unionized

77% of workers reported that their workplace does not have adequate protective measures implemented when it comes to environmental disasters

77% of workers experience amplified physical health concerns at work during extreme weather events

84% of workers experience compromised mental well-being during extreme weather events

97% of workers identified what concerns them the most about climate change's impact on food service workers (e.g., no compensation for unsafe work, transportation problems, unreliable hours, business closures, etc.)

“We were just trying to stay safe. So we put wet rags into the freezer and then put them on our heads. We didn't care what we looked like serving customers... we're all in it together.”

- Server interviewed for research project

The Solidarity Steward Program provides frontline support for non-unionized workers across BC. Workers without unions are taking on bad bosses and fighting back against wage theft, discrimination, retaliation, and health and safety concerns. Their courageous efforts show that when we fight together, we win!

Stewards support workers with pathways to justice such as offering support or representation with Employment Standards complaints, facilitating community letters demanding compensation for stolen wages, and supporting worker-led workplace campaigns.

In 2023, at least **65 workers** requested support through our online support form, referrals, social media and 'Solidarity Hotline.' The program connects workers to employment rights education and is the gateway to WSN legal advocacy campaigns.

The Solidarity Fund supports workers who lose their jobs for speaking truth to power. The fund offers redress to workers who need financial support when fighting for stolen wages, standing up for their rights, and responding to racism and discrimination.

In 2023, WSN members and community allies raised **\$3100** for the Solidarity Fund.

Join us in delivering both justice and direct financial support to workers. Pitch-in to the Solidarity Fund today! Visit workersolidarity.ca/fund/



Labour rights violations like wage theft, discrimination, and unfair working standards are widespread. However, workers have long-faced barriers when seeking justice through the official channels at the Employment Standards Branch (ESB).

The problems at the ESB have included understaffing, suppression of complaints, employer bias in practice and procedures, procedural unfairness in complaint investigation and adjudication. The ESB's failures have immense ramifications on workers' lives. Meanwhile, bad bosses continue to break the law with few consequences.

Recognizing the shortcomings of the ESB, WSN launched the Justice Delayed is Justice Denied campaign to win the ESB funding necessary to adequately serve workers' needs. In February 2023, due to workers tirelessly organizing under the Justice Delayed is Justice Denied banner, the provincial government pledged \$12 million for the ESB.

In response, the Justice Delayed is Justice Denied Campaign has launched a letter campaign asking the Minister of Labour to ensure that any changes to the ESB are made in consultation with workers and are aimed at a process that is Accessible, Correct, Fair, Accommodating, and Effective.

Demands:

Open Work Permits for All Workers Immediately.
Climate Paid Leave.
Free and Reliable Public Transportation.
Maximum Temperature Policy.
Minimum Wage Increase.
15 Paid Sick Days.
Additional Access to Breaks.
Enforced Health and Safety Regulations.
Increased Access to Unionization for Precarious Workers.

Employment law was not written to anticipate a rise in extreme environmental disasters. There are no laws in place to protect workers who do not report to work during an extreme weather event. Moreover, health and safety measures in the workplace are dated, rarely enforced, and ineffective.

Workers need updated, improved, and better-enforced legal protection. Workers are demanding immediate policy changes to mitigate the increased dangers they face due to climate change.

WSN launched a letter-writing campaign directed at WorkSafe and the Minister of Labour demanding a 'Maximum Temperature Policy' and enforced health and safety regulations. This letter begins the discussion with decision-makers while identifying possible supporters and activists who want to join the campaign!

As temperatures rise, workers do too!





In December 2021, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued a mandate letter to Immigration Minister Sean Fraser, calling on him to implement a regularization program that would ensure permanent resident status for undocumented people living and working in Canada and increased access to permanent resident status for migrant workers and students. This mandate is a direct result of decades of migrant organizing, which continued even in the face of COVID-19.

Migrant justice organizers continue to pressure federal politicians to actually enact a regularization program that would provide status – without exception – for people currently living in the country undocumented, who may number as many as half a million.



Over the past year, the Migrant Rights Network, a network of organizations including the WSN, has held rallies across the country calling for #StatusforAll. In October, the network held actions at the offices of 32 cabinet ministers in multiple provinces. WSN stands in solidarity with migrant leaders calling on the government and all political parties to implement a regularization program that will ensure permanent status for all undocumented people in Canada.



8

Worker Wednesday organizing meetings.

17

outreach days.

17

new member orientation phone calls.

20

rallies and actions for campaigns including phone zaps.

21

workshops hosted.

112

members have joined WSN in 2023, bringing WSN's mighty membership to 363.

136

Worker Wednesday participants

500+

workshop attendees

2500+

educational materials distributed.

Worker Wednesday

Every last Wednesday of the month, workers and community allies gather virtually to mobilize and organize for worker justice in BC. Worker Wednesdays offers a space to find pathways to obtain worker-led demands and to take action for legislative change to ensure workers are protected.

WSN-Pro Bono Students Canada Know Your Rights Series

In spring 2023, Pro Bono Students Canada joined WSN for a two-part workshop series to provide workers with the opportunity to learn about their rights during an Employment Standards Branch complaint process, how to address termination and retaliation, employer health and safety obligations during extreme weather events, and more.

WSN-LiUNA Organizing 101 Series

Starting in June 2023, WSN and the Labourers' International Union of North America local 1611 teamed up to offer a comprehensive, free online workshop series covering the basics of standing up for your rights, organizing your coworkers, fighting back against employer abuse, and forming a union.

The workshops included understanding the Employment Standards Act, worker rights during an Employment Standards Branch complaint process, Labour Code 101, talking to your coworkers and more. Over six workshops, WSN and LiUNA connected with 54 different workers over 5 months. The workshop series will resume in 2024.

Turning up the Heat: Conversations with Workers Series

WSN's most recent workshop series, "Turning Up the Heat", launched in September 2023, where we shared information on the intersections between climate and labour, the barriers to refusing unsafe work, navigating mental health during extreme weather, and organizing to build worker power in the face of climate crises. The four-part series was facilitated in collaboration with mental health experts, community organizers, public health experts, and radical worker organizers.

Wage Theft Clinic

WSN's Wage Theft Clinic is a staple in our programming and is provided upon request to workers and community organizations. Workers learn the essential information needed to advocate for themselves and their coworkers, including the top forms of wage theft, the different avenues to justice, and how to calculate overtime, statutory holiday pay, and vacation pay.

Financial statement for the year ending December 31, 2022.

Statement of operations

Income

Donations	532,547
Grants	7,579
Interest	-
	540,127

Expenses

Salary/Wages	310,562
Employee benefits	19,132
Contract labour	3,480
EI/CPP	23,242
Payroll/HR	13,835
WCB	535
	370,785

Accounting services	1,654
Administration fees	8,360
Bank fees	266
Fundraising	34,070
Honouraria	1,475
Insurance/other fees	1,193
Misc.	685
Office equipment/supplies	10,268
Refreshments	2,722
Rent	35,399
Training/development	1,296
Travel	9,561
Website/digital campaigns	23,139
	500,874

Surplus/(deficiency)	39,253
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96.9%

3.1%

86.4%

5.1%

0.9%

6.2%

3.7%



WSN's membership is essential to the organization. Members show up in solidarity with workers by handing-out know your rights materials during outreach and amplifying workers' voices at community events. They are right beside WSN and our allies during marches and rallies, fighting with us for worker justice and a better future for all.

Thank you for your solidarity, inspiration, and commitment. We are forever grateful!





Big shoutout to all the workers who are fighting for justice every single day!

Thank you to all who spoke at Worker Wednesdays.

Thank you to allies and collaborators who provided support, guidance, expertise and partnership in the work that we do.

Thank you to WSN member Thomas Reimer for fundraising \$2000 towards the Solidarity Fund.

Thank our funders for their generous support. We couldn't do this work without them:

UFCW 1518

Vancity

Columbia Institute

Victoria Foundation

BCGEU

United Way

Law Foundation

Cupe local 50

Unifor 333

Canadian Women's Foundation

Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions

