



NEWSLETTER OF THE MILWAUKEE AREA LABOR COUNCIL



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"The union taught me how to fight for what I needed and what I had, and if it was something I wanted, how to go after it."

-Hattie Canty, the first Black woman elected President of the Culinary Worker Union



We've heard the motto time and time again, "a woman's place is in her union," and we know it couldn't be more true. A union contract is **the best** way to close gender and racial wage gaps and ensure safe and equitable workplaces. Being a woman in the workplace

comes with its challenges, varying across workplaces and industries, but being a woman in a union can offer solutions to combat some of those challenges.

Working women **make up 47% of the workforce**, but are paid less and lack access to **child care** and **paid leave**, even though women carry the majority of caregiving responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic further exasperated those disparities, forcing many women to leave the workforce all together. These women continue to stand strong and continue to redefine their workplaces.



Stacey Tyler (AFSCME Local 47) has been a public employee and union member in the public sector for 23 years. As a female building inspector, she had to work harder to gain the trust of landlords and prove her worth compared to her male counterparts. Being a black woman added another layer of discrimination.

Being a union member gave Stacey the opportunity to attend trainings and conferences, and take classes she could apply to her every day job. In her personal life, being a union member has allowed her to continue her education and earn college credit, repair her credit, and has provided

discounts on products and services.

"The union has taught me the true meaning of being a part of something larger. The union has been my voice in the past and now I'm learning to be a voice for others," Stacey said about her time as an AFSCME member.

Currently women comprise just 3% of registered apprenticeships in Wisconsin. Programs like the Mentoring Project and Childcare Pilot of EmpowHER, and the welcoming attitudes of local unions will help bring needed changes. Actively welcoming people who have not traditionally been represented in the building trades will grow the workforce and allow us to meet the upcoming staffing need generated by the bipartisan infrastructure bill and other federal funding.

Michele Williams (IBEW 494), a Journeyman Wireman, has seen her experience as a woman in the building trades change throughout the years. In her first year, it meant needing to be louder and physically stronger... to realizing that although you can gain strength and stamina through the repetition of tasks, not everything requires brute force. Michele quickly learned to adapt with techniques to accomplish the same tasks that someone else can carry out with sheer body strength.



Michelle Williams

Currently, being a woman in the trades means reaching out and greeting all the "Onlys." Building that community is critical to keeping skilled and talented women long term. Michele and other women in construction have done just that through the creation of empowHER. EmpowHER was founded to encourage and promote a path to leadership for women in the building and construction trades, to support and retain those that are already here, and to reach out and grow membership.

Michele's local union, IBEW Local 494 has given her opportunities from meeting other women in the field, to presenting at their Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (JATC), and recently presenting to Vice President Kamala Harris. Being a woman in the building trades is constantly evolving for the better.

Even in career fields where women comprise the majority of employees, they are still at risk of workplace harassment and danger. Healthcare and social service workers experience the highest rate of serious injury due to workplace violence. Statistics have recorded 15 per 10,000 workers compared with 4 per 10,000 workers for all workers. Dating back to 2010, the workplace violence injury rate in private hospitals and home health services nearly doubled- making our presence in these environments vital.



Piper Hogan speaking at a rally

Piper Hogan (WFNHP 5000) has been a union member for 6 years since she became a medical laboratory scientist running tests on everything from blood to spinal fluid and assisting in bone marrow collection. Being a union member has given Piper some peace of mind that she doesn't have to worry about being paid less than her counterparts or wrongfully terminated.

Being a union member has created a better sense of community in the lab, making it easier to stand strong together to voice grievances and fight for the things that many would take for granted.

Outside of the workplace, the union has offered Piper a variety of ways to get involved. Whether that be within the local, at the Young Workers Committee, or being an emcee for different events and coalitions, Piper has surrounded herself with a network of likeminded people fighting for justice at the workplace and in the community. Importantly, organized labor stands in solidarity with union members in their daily lives. Being in a union has been a great tool to fight back attacks on transgender people on all levels- a union contract can protect gender identity rights and used to grieve offenses.

Our sister Paula Uhing (USW 2-369) also encourages her female coworkers to join the union and get involved in union Committees. The union is as strong as its members and the provides a platform for their voices to be heard. June of 2023 will mark 34 years that Paula has been a Steelworker at her plant where she is currently an "Assembler A," allowing her the ability to move to any line at the plant.



Paula Uhing (far left), Linda Anderson, and Cindy Odden with Women of Steel 2023 Diaper Drive donations.

During that time there have been many unpleasant circumstances she has dealt with herself as a woman, has witnessed, or has been informed of coworkers' situations. Although the plant culture is slowly changing as younger people and more women are hired on the floor and in the office, there are still derogatory comments or viewpoints held towards women. They don't sit back and take it though, being a union member helped Paula in many of those situations and she always put her contract to good use.

Paula puts union committees and opportunities to good use as well. One of those committees is the Women of Steel which spans Steelworker women across the southern part of Wisconsin. During their quarterly meetings, Women of Steel dig into labor and union history, get involved in election work, and volunteer in the community. Being involved with WOS has helped build good union/company relations.

Overall, to make what a man makes in a year, it takes a white woman till March 14th of the following year. If you're a woman of color, it takes even longer than that. Union representation has shrunk the wage gap by nearly 43%- and union women make 22% more on average than women who aren't in unions. The benefits of a union membership are abundantly clear.



Liz Shuler, President of the AFL-CIO

Liz Shuler (IBEW), first female President of the AFL-CIO, summed it up perfectly when she noted "when we empower more women to form and join unions, we advance pay equity, salary transparency, benefits such as paid leave, leadership growth and so much more, in the workplace and beyond."