



The Latino Workers Project

from 2000 to 2015, an Update and Evaluation

What is the Latino Workers Project?

Fifteen years ago, the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (ICWJ) initiated the Latino Workers Project (LWP) to study the rapidly growing Latino population in Dane County and to address challenges faced by low-income Latino immigrants. The LWP interviewed workers, conducted door-to-door surveys, held community forums and reviewed available data. A fact-finding delegation comprised of leaders from different faiths, unions, and the Latino community reviewed and analyzed the findings. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected to bring to light the problems that this often marginalized population was facing in the workforce. The LWP released a report, *Can't Afford to Lose a Bad Job*, which documented the socio-economic and labor conditions of the Latino community and provided recommendations to address the most pressing issues. You can view the report at <http://wrcmadison.org/WP/wp-content/uploads/FinalPDFReport-English1.pdf>. Latino immigrants faced unique challenges because of issues of immigration status, discrimination and racism, lack of knowledge/comfort navigating public agencies and limited English proficiency. A number of recommendations that came out of that effort, including the formation of the Workers' Rights Center (WRC), were implemented.

Why Update the Latino Workers Project Report?

While much has changed in the past fifteen years, many of the original issues either remain or have worsened. The Latino population in Dane county has grown more than 75% since 2000. The Latino poverty rate in Wisconsin has increased significantly (28%). With the Latino population growing, job opportunities shrinking, and hard data lacking, the need for a re-evaluation is greater than ever. The project will give voice to thousands of immigrants who are struggling in low-wage and unstable employment and will serve as a platform for further action going forward. The WRC will work in partnership with our many community allies: the ICWJ, religious congregations, labor unions, City, County and State agencies, community organizations and educational institutions.

Since the first report was issued, many of the barriers and roadblocks identified remain. A clear eyed analysis of the challenges that remain and the steps necessary to address them will be essential for Dane County to fully benefit from this growing community's promise. The issue of immigration reform is very timely and Dane County has an opportunity to play a leadership role in this debate. Information gathered will assist community organizations and government in allocating scarce resources to the most pressing problems faced by Latino immigrants. By engaging with the broad and varied constituencies involved with the Latino community and mobilizing a coordinated and thoughtful response, we put ourselves in a position to help our community reach its full potential.

What are the Goals of the Latino Workers Project Report Update?

We will produce a report updating the socio-economic and labor conditions of the Latino immigrants in Dane County. We will be interviewing workers, and conducting door-to-door surveys in order to have a better understanding of the challenges faced by Latino workers. The LWP will organize a fact-finding delegation comprised of leaders from different faiths, union leaders, and leaders from the Latino community. This group will share their knowledge of the community and organize public hearings during the spring and summer, where they will hear testimony from immigrant workers and representatives of organizations that work closely with immigrant Latinos. The conclusions of the research, the findings of the delegation, and the recommendations will be published in a final report to be made public in the fall. We will then work to implement those recommendations.

How to Get Involved

We need help with outreach and surveying. We will particularly need help from people who are bilingual Spanish speakers. If you are interested in volunteering to help out with the LWP or want to learn more, contact the WRC at 608-255-0376.