

Young Workers United

**Five Year Report
2002-2007**

Young Workers United is a multi-racial, membership organization dedicated to improving the quality of jobs for young and immigrant workers and raising standards in the low-wage service sector in San Francisco. Our strategy uses organizing, grass-roots policy advocacy, leadership development and public education. We organize our constituency through daily worksite and campus outreach as well as at churches and other organizations.



Contact us:

415-621-4155
workingyouth@hotmail.com
P.O. Box 420963
San Francisco, CA 94142

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A Peruvian immigrant restaurant worker with two daughters and 15 years in San Francisco. A 24 year old queer Mexicana immigrant who loves Madonna. A young African American man, raised in San Francisco with the Giants tattoos to prove it. A working class woman from St. Louis who earned her design degree working in restaurants. A San Francisco State student and restaurant worker who spends his non-working time coaching Little League. The founder of Young Workers United, a young organizer who saw the problems, had a vision and jumped in. Finally, a lifelong activist with a doctorate in Economics now researching African Americans and the labor movement.

No, this is not some new reality show. This is the Board of Young Workers United. We welcome you to explore the work that we have done across race, gender, language, immigration status and age. As wildly different as each of us is, we have come together to fight for justice in the restaurant industry, on campus and at City Hall. There is no other place that we have found where we can truly build solidarity and win victories.

Our lives have been changed and immeasurably enriched because we are members of YWU. YWU's spirit of democracy and member leadership has taught us how to hold a press conference, run an action, plan a campaign and pass legislation. Gaining those skills has been profound. But even more so, YWU has given us hope. In each of our backgrounds, our highly corporate world has presented many blocks to our full participation in the economy and society. YWU has armed us with the knowledge and community to take back our right to participate and to believe in our ability to change the world.

And change the world we have! In six short years, together we have passed the first paid sick days law in the country, passed the highest minimum wage in the country, over \$500,000 in back pay for workers and won a \$4.5 million lawsuit against the Cheesecake Factory. We have won municipal IDs for all San Francisco residents, universal health care for all workers in the City, and educated thousands of young and immigrant workers and students about their rights and how to organize. We have distributed thousands of voter guides and know your rights guides. We have changed the debate in the media and had our members on the front pages and TV screens of major news outlets. We have been to the US Social Forum and spoken all over the country about our work.

We have been breathing life back into our democracy through building community, improving conditions and learning how to respect each other and work together. We are excited to continue this critical work, the very work of rebuilding a livable society. We have valuable insight to offer to the many others who are committed to a new world. In the spirit of solidarity, we offer you this report on our work and our energy to continue it!

In community,

The YWU Board



From left to right: Huber Herrera, Micah Allen, Lily Castillo, Pete Sherman, Beth Byrne. Not pictured: Sara Flocks and Steve Pitts

The cozy warmth of a café, the familiarity of our favorite restaurant, the thrill of watching movies on the big screen, it's clear how vital the service economy is to our daily lives. What's not so obvious is the war being fought behind the counter and the kitchen door.

Everyday, managers threaten immigrant workers with deportation if they complain about working conditions. Female servers endure sexual harassment from customers and managers who consider it just part of the job. Corporate policy allows managers to fire workers who stay home when they or their children are sick. Working students drop out of school or fail classes because their wages are too low, they can't find a job or they have to pay out-of-pocket for medical care.

The National Restaurant Association has hundreds of lobbyists working to keep the minimum wage low and unlivable. Union busting is a billion dollar industry. Insurance and pharmaceutical companies keep their profits astronomically high by fighting any move towards universal healthcare. The tightly conglomerated media outlets drum a steady cultural beat of apathy, consumerism and worker and immigrant bashing. Our government has made education our absolutely last priority.

These forces have dramatically restructured our economy over the past twenty years and created massive inequality. Young and immigrant workers bear the brunt of these changes as they struggle to get ahead amidst skyrocketing college tuition costs, falling wages and benefits, and the disappearance of full-time, living wage jobs. While the changes in the economy have been well documented, very few unions, advocacy groups or researchers pay attention to young and immigrant workers who struggle to balance low-wage jobs in retail and restaurants with attending community college, GED or English as a Second Language classes.

“From the price of a college education to the new cutthroat realities of the economy, young adults are trying to establish themselves in a society that has grown widely unequal and less responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens. This generation has less economic mobility and security than other generations.”

-Tamara Draut, author of “Strapped: Why America’s 20- and 30-Somethings Can’t Get Ahead,”

However, corporations depend on the labor of these workers to fuel stupendous growth and profits in the retail, restaurant and entertainment sectors. Low-wages, no benefits, little regulation and lax attention to labor laws all increase profits while trapping young people in a cycle of lousy jobs and little money or time for education.

At the same time that young workers struggle in the new economy, images of attractive and rich young people saturate our society in advertising and pop culture. Credit card companies prey on young people with aggressive marketing on campuses with the message that they too can be consumers even with poverty wages. The bleak economic outlook and sparkling consumer possibilities fuel the cycling between school and work. It's not a surprise that young people have become increasingly disengaged in politics, voting or civic organizations.



At Young Workers United, we see youth and immigrants as more than students, workers and consumers. We see them as critical to slowing the growth of inequality, building a healthy economy and breathing life back into democracy in this country. Young workers and immigrants are among the first to feel the burden of government cuts, corporate policies and economic shifts. The new generation, also known as the millennials, will be the ones to inherit a planet wounded by war and greed.

We organize young and immigrant workers for two main reasons. First, we believe that profound social change will only come when those people who are most affected by social problems lead the movement for change. In the low wage service industry, the great majority of those affected are young workers and immigrants. The best way to engage people in politics is to get them involved in the issues that directly impact their lives.

Second, we believe it is crucial to build solidarity among those struggling in the industry. We organize young and immigrant workers to improve standards where they work and to fight for immigrant rights, win laws that raise the minimum wage, paid sick days, breaks and health care. We organize young and immigrant workers to fight together for legislation such as the Municipal I.D.s for immigrants and to march side by side in May 1st Immigrant Rights demonstrations.

First and foremost, we organize young and immigrant workers to be the leaders, organizers and voters who will rebuild our democracy city by city, person by person, and make this a better world for everyone.



Alicia Hershey

Alicia Hershey is a 25-year-old Korean American graduate of San Francisco State University's Creative Writing Program. She's published some of her poems and is looking forward to continuing to write. When she was a child, however, she wanted to be a waitress. Alicia has worked server jobs for years to pay rent and tuition and support herself. Before YWU, she wasn't politically involved at all. YWU met Alicia through worker outreach at the State Labor Commissioner.

"I worked at the San Francisco Brewing Company as a server. The owner there, Allan Paul, grabbed me by the arm, yelled at me and never paid us overtime or even allowed us bathroom breaks." With YWU's help, Alicia took action at the workplace. She organized with her coworkers to regularly flyer the restaurant, do delegations to the owner and even lead direct negotiations with Mr. Paul. After winning a several thousand-dollar settlement, Alicia's resolve to be part of the movement has only grown. Through YWU, she's been in a PBS documentary on work hours, featured as a speaker at a Progressive Campus conference in DC and extensively interviewed in a cover story by the San Francisco Chronicle magazine.

"Before, I felt powerless at work and the world at large. Now, I know how powerful I can be with an organized group. I can see myself continuing to work for justice as an organizer. I see myself now as a leader for what's right!"



Saybah Russ

Saybah Russ is graduating in biology from San Francisco State University and also a trusted, thoughtful member of YWU. Her nickname is “Too Legit” because Saybah demands all the information before making a decision, a strategy that has produced many sound policy committee endorsements. Saybah comes from a family of civil rights activists and continues this work with us. She has spoken before hundreds on behalf of rent control, workers rights, and young people’s advancement. She was our delegate to the Washtenaw County Workers Center where she spoke with and picketed with many Michigan immigrant workers. Partly because of YWU, Saybah spent the summer of 2008 in South Africa to learn more about the struggle. Saybah tells us, “Sometimes I find myself so focused on my science studies. YWU gives me the chance to get involved and learn and that participation is so fulfilling.”

Huber Herrera

My name is Huber Herrera and I live in San Francisco with my two daughters age 17 and 11. I am originally from Lima, Peru where I was a police officer for 11 years. I came to the U.S. in 1993 after my wife moved here with our daughter. I never planned to stay longer than a year, but I've been here for 13 years now.



I got my first job here as a baker at Noah's Bagels, steaming the frozen bagels. After a couple years my eyes started bothering me. The doctor told me that the steam

was causing damage to my eyes and that I had to stop work. I had to pay \$250 to get glasses, but the manager wouldn't let me change jobs. Eventually I got a job as a prep cook at the Cheesecake Factory Restaurant in San Francisco. We weren't allowed to take breaks even though it was a very busy restaurant and we worked long shifts.

I met organizers from Young Workers United because they stood outside of the Cheesecake Factory everyday. They called attention to injustices at work and gave us information in

Spanish about our rights. They called us and asked us to come to meetings to fight for justice at the Cheesecake Factory. In the end we won a settlement from restaurant. I got a check in the mail for the breaks I never got.

I continued to go to meetings at YWU. At the meetings we talk about our rights at work and as immigrants. We also help workers who have problems at their jobs. When we hold actions at a workplace, we plan weeks in advance. Every member of the committee has a task to do. For example, at the next action, I'm going to film it. Other members are in charge of making noise or bringing signs.

The goal of the actions is to let the boss know that the workers are not alone. The bosses think that workers are like animals. They think that we can't read or write. These actions show them that we are not stupid like they think. We are not alone and we know our rights. Our job is to help win justice for the workers and let them know that everyone has rights.

My hope is that Young Workers United will keep growing and never disappear. If a restaurant closes, then we can always get another job. But if YWU disappears, it will affect all of us. This is the only place where people like me—immigrant workers—can go for help. YWU is important for all of us.

Maria Medina

Maria is a Mexican immigrant from the city of Guanajuato. Married at an early age, by the time Maria was in her early 30s



she found herself, a mother of 7 children, widowed and in desperate need of money. Some days she would come home after a long day of work and find her children hungry and crying. Tired of her desperate situation, Maria made the heartbreaking decision to immigrate to the U.S. for work, leaving her children to leave her children, the youngest still just a toddler, and vowed not to return until

she had enough money to buy them all that they needed. When she first arrived to San Francisco over 14 years ago, Maria was homeless, broke, and alone and couldn't speak a word of English.

Her first job was working as a nanny for \$300 a month, working 6 days a week, cleaning, cooking, in addition to taking care of two children. Eventually, Maria found a new job working 12 hour days for Azteca Taqueria. At Azteca Taqueria, she endured consistent verbal and emotional abuse with no overtime pay, no lunch breaks, or sick time, going

as far as forcing her to come in and cover shifts while she was undergoing chemotherapy. Maria worked hard every day, battling cancer, homesickness and the need to be close to her children. After almost 10 years with the company, Victor Juarez, her employer, fired her for speaking up against management stealing workers tips. That's when she decided enough was enough and began fighting back.

With YWU's help, Maria and her coworkers recovered tens of thousands of dollars in backwages, and improved the working conditions for current workers of Azteca Taqueria and the other 5 restaurants owned by the Juarez. Despite having no previous activism experience, Maria has developed into one of YWU's most dedicated and powerful leaders in the movement for worker justice in San Francisco.

She considers this work important and wants to continue to fight so that other immigrant and young workers are not taken advantage of by greedy and abusive employers. "I stay in the organization so that I can help others defend their rights on the job the way that I have. I also stay because this organization helps people not only with problems on the job but also emotionally. It gives us a place to belong to and has become like an extended family".

“Warmest congratulations on the passage of Proposition F [Paid Sick Days]. This victory is a welcome precedent for what I hope will be a new time of progress for working families. I look forward to very much to working with you ...to win paid sick days for workers across America.”

- Senator Edward M. Kennedy in a letter to Young Workers United

On November 7th, 2006, San Francisco became the first place in the nation to overwhelmingly approve legislation giving all workers the right to paid sick days. That night, a boisterous group of YWU members gathered at an election night party to watch the returns. Dressed in YWU t-shirts and jeans, the group of young students and restaurant workers stood out among the politicians and political insiders. But more than anyone, YWU members had good reason to celebrate. After over a year and a half of hard work, Young Workers United had successfully written and passed paid sick days legislation and sparked a national movement for paid sick days.

Young Workers United first came across the need for paid sick days while surveying restaurant workers. Workers told stories of managers threatening to fire them if they called in sick and of working with pinkeye, laryngitis, flu, colds and injuries. Working parents described how hard it was for them to leave their sick children at home alone because they couldn't afford to lose a day's wages. Other workers talked about corporate policy that

required managers to discipline workers for calling in sick. Workers brought up the issue so frequently that YWU began to look into model paid sick days policies around the country. To our surprise, we discovered that NO law existed in the entire country requiring that workers receive any amount of paid sick days. Workers just did not have the right to take a day off when they got sick.

Young Workers United made a decision that we had to fight for the basic right to paid sick days. All of the rights we enjoy today—from minimum wage to overtime—we have because people fought for them. Now we had the obligation to fight for paid sick days.

The Legislation

Since no model legislation existed on paid sick days, YWU members wrote the law themselves, based on their first-hand experience of working low-wage jobs with no paid sick days.

With butcher paper posted all over the office walls and armed with a box of makers, YWU members set out to write the first ever paid sick days legislation in the country, with the following features:

- Every worker, including part-time, in San Francisco will earn one hour of paid sick leave for every thirty (30) hours worked.
- Workers may use their paid sick leave to care for themselves, their families and their domestic partners.
- Big businesses (over 10 employees) will provide up to 9 days or 72 hours while small business will provide up to 5 days or 40 hours.
- Employers may only require a doctor's note after three consecutive days of absence.

alone because they couldn't afford to take a day off. Servers told stories about having to work with the flu, colds and injuries. Our main talking points also described Paid Sick Days as:

- FAIR: We work hard. We need time to heal.
- HEALTHY: Paid sick days reduce the spread of contagious illnesses at work.
- COMPASSIONATE: Workers need paid time to care for kids, elders and family.

We aggressively targeted the ethnic and campus media for coverage of the campaign, featuring spokespeople who spoke Chinese, Spanish and who were students. As a result the campaign got almost daily coverage from outlets that directly reached the communities most affected by the lack of paid sick days.

Spreading Like Wildfire: Building a National Movement

In the years since the passage of paid sick days in San Francisco, YWU has worked tirelessly to both successfully implement the law and help other efforts around the country. We've received coverage everywhere from the Nation to the New York Times to Parade Magazine. Members have spoken at dozens of conferences and workshops across the country on the campaign and offered technical assistance to interested groups. We serve as advisors to the California Coalition for Paid Sick Days, and the Milwaukee campaign has adopted our messaging and media strategy. As of this writing, Washington, DC successfully passed sick days legislation, and seven other states, including New York, Ohio and California have introduced bills.

We are proud to have started a national movement and look forward to many more victories!

“It [paid sick days] has a wildfire of support across the country.”

- Senator Ted Kennedy, NY Times article, Dec. 5th, 2006.



Leonardo Prado is a YWU member, restaurant worker and single father. Before paid sick days legislation he couldn't afford to stay home to take care of his four-year old son Antonio when he was sick. “It really hurts in the wallet.” Leonardo said, “You don't have the option to say I can't work today, my son is sick.” Today, Leonardo can take a day off to care for Antonio, thanks to paid sick days.



Dressed in a green felt costume with big google eyes, Matt “The Germ” Garron ran into the cafeteria at City College San Francisco yelling at the top of his lungs: “I hate healthy people!” He ran up to groups of startled students and shouted “Now you’re sick and you’re not getting paid!” Matt grabbed the attention of crowds of students who looked up from their lunches to watch the roving street theater with rapt attention.

After Matt grabbed the attention of the audience in his green germ costume, YWU members came to the rescue dressed in white doctors coats with their magic Paid Sick Days spray bottles. They sprayed away the germ and passed out information to the audience about the paid sick days legislation, urging them to vote for it in November.

Matt Garron, a Young Workers United member, City College student and bartender, played the Germ at multiple YWU actions for paid sick days. From the steps of City Hall to City College, Matt played the Germ that attacked hapless students and workers. “My goal is to be a public health hazard,” he said.

A long-time member of the YWU Policy Committee, Matt helped write the paid sick days legislation. His green germ became a popular character in the campaign and was featured in articles and posters. After the Paid Sick Days victory, Matt helps other groups with the legislation and campaign by representing YWU at conferences and in the media.



Affectionately known as “the Mr. Burns”, YWU distributes thousands of these pocket know your rights guides in both spanish and English.

ORGANIZING, ADVOCACY & EDUCATION

Young Workers United is a multi-racial membership organization dedicated to improving the quality of jobs for young and immigrant workers and raising standards in the low-wage service sector in San Francisco. We do this through:

Worker Organizing

We’ve targeted the restaurant industry for reform because it is the biggest employer of young workers and flagrantly disregards the most basic labor laws. We have built two committees that work in tandem to bridge the onerous racial divide of the restaurant industry to unite native born workers with immigrant workers. These committees are the Worker Justice Committee, made up of young workers, and the Comité de Justicia para los Trabajadores, made up of immigrant workers.

Workers take collective action to directly confront their managers with the support of YWU members. Collective action is a critical first step to building the confidence of workers as active participants in shaping the world around them as well as winning improvements. Through public pressure and legal action, YWU wins back wages and sends a very public message to the restaurant and retail industry that they can no longer disregard labor law and abuse workers. The committees work together to enforce the laws that we pass through our policy work.

Immigrant Worker Justice

Immigration policy in this country is one of the most important policies shaping the low-wage service sector. Immigration policy criminalizing immigrants has institutionalized exploitation and inequality in low-wage sectors dependent on their labor. Immigrant workers suffer the worst violations of labor law, make the lowest wages and work the dirtiest, most dangerous jobs for the lowest wages. Employers use the threat of deportation and ICE raids to fight complaints or organizing drives.

Young Workers United organizes immigrant workers to fight for policies that improve their lives and to directly confront employers who use immigration status to intimidate and exploit workers. Our organizing lays the foundation for a larger movement for immigration reform by building solidarity between U.S.-born and documented low-wage workers and immigrant workers—two groups that have historically been played against each other to prevent movement-building.

Grass Roots Policy

We strategically use campaigns for public policy to raise standards for all workers in San Francisco's low-wage service sector. Our impressive policy victories, such as raising the minimum wage and winning paid sick days, create a de facto contract for workers outside of traditional collective bargaining laws.

Many of our members have never voted, let alone lobbied supervisors at City Hall. We build the political power and leadership of young workers by directly involving them in lobbying, electoral campaigns and mobilizing them around key issues. Our persistent and strategic involvement in local policy issues has built YWU into an important and respected voice for young working people in San Francisco.

Community College Organizing

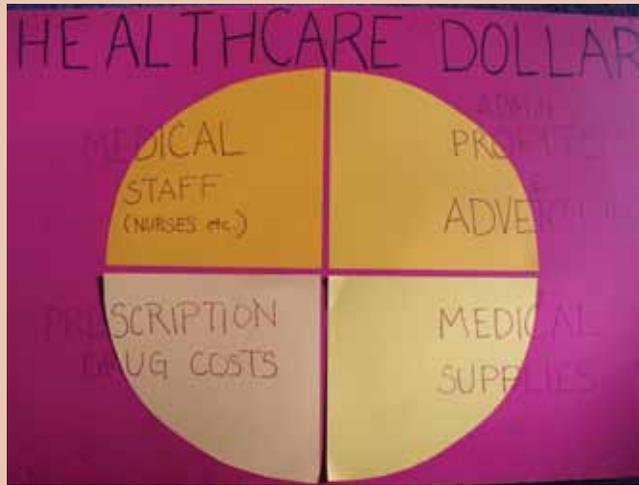
City College San Francisco (CCSF) is the largest working-class institution in the City, with over 100,000 students enrolled in everything from Hospitality and Culinary to English as a Second Language classes. Our strategy focuses on creating an institutional presence at CCSF through teaching classes to about their rights and benefits at work through the city-wide contract we've established with our policy victories.

Students in community colleges bear the brunt of tuition hikes and the faltering economy. Our outreach on campus around work, policy and electoral issues gives working students a way to understand and influence the political process that normally excludes them. Unlike traditional precinct operations, our electoral work focuses on the eleven satellite campuses of City College in San Francisco, mobilizing working students to affect policy and the politicians who enact them.

Leadership Development

Through all our work, we are building a new generation of leaders who directly experience, participate and lead a democratic organization. Our structure is formed to give working people control over their lives. Our committees engage in participatory education, campaign planning and decision making. Our Board is an elected worker-student Board.





STRUCTURE & DECISION MAKING

At Young Workers United, we believe strongly that those most impacted by economic and social inequality must lead the fight to breathe life back into our democracy and bring justice into our communities. Not only are working people, students, women, people of color and others who suffer the brunt most familiar with daily injustices, they are the ones most equipped and motivated to change the situation.

At the same time, we understand that all of us need to be taught how to live and work democratically. These skills have been removed and repressed from our society. For this reason, YWU's structure reflects our commitment to building leadership and engaging young people at every step of the way. This philosophy is called "prefigurative organizing", or the idea that the way we work now must reflect how we imagine a just society.

YWU is formed of several committees that flexibly respond to the needs of the community as well as carry out our mission. The committees serve to organize workers and improve working conditions, advocate for sound and relevant policy, educate ourselves and our peers and finally to carry out hiring, budgeting and travel opportunities. Committees make their decisions through consensus. We have a detailed process guide for when we cannot easily reach consensus.

Chart Of Structure

General Membership: These are all the members who are involved in YWU through coming to meetings, actions, trainings and other activities. Together, this group makes decisions such as our annual budget and long term planning.

Committees: Members work in committees to address needs and carry out campaigns. Our Worker Justice Committee and Comite de Justicia para los Trabajadores take on worker cases and campaigns, plan actions, produce a bilingual newsletter, outreach to workers and do education such as negotiation trainings and workers rights.

Policy Committee and El Comite de Desarrollo Politico take on grassroots policy, political education, immigration work, campus outreach, endorsements and other electoral work.

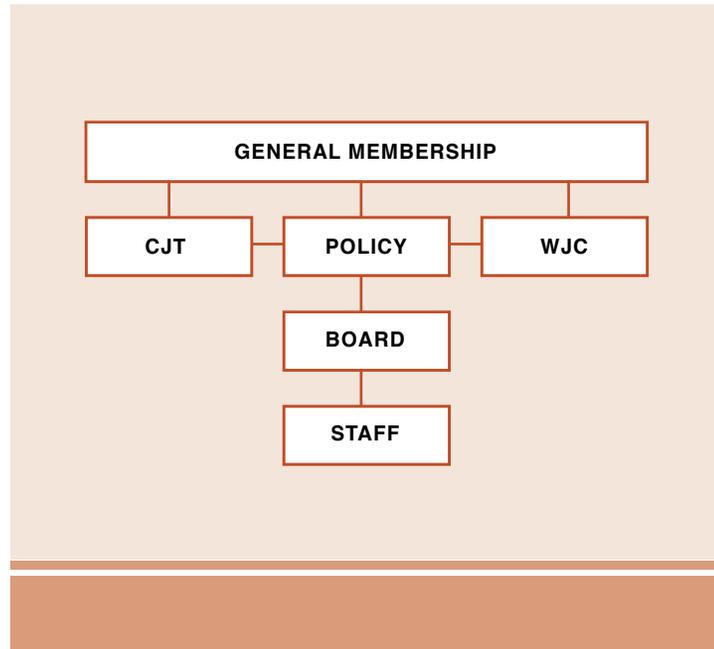
Travel and Opportunities Fund reviews travel, conference and speaking opportunities and gets our members out and about.

Board: The WJC, CJT and Policy Committees each elect a member from their committee to serve on the Board. The Board is convened to review and approve work plans, handle grievances and represent the organization. They are the body of final authority. In addition to five worker-members of the Board, we also have two community members (Sara Flocks, YWU founder and Dr. Steven Pitts, UC Berkeley researcher) to help guide our work and provide support.

Staff: The staff are the paid, fulltime organizers at YWU. They do daily outreach, carry out member plans and keep members informed. They report to the committees.

Moving Members Forward

As members develop skills and want to move into fulltime social justice work, YWU staff and alumni make sure to support them. YWU “graduates” can be found working for the Democratic Party, SEIU 1021, UNITE HERE Local 2, the SF Labor Council, CFA, graduate programs and community organizations. One of our members was elected to the City College Board of Trustees and another to student body president.



“YWU [is] ‘one of the most innovative, multiracial, multilingual organizations in San Francisco,’ according to Tim Paulson, executive director of the San Francisco Labor Council, an umbrella organization representing 150 unions and 100,000 members.”

“The Labor Council has worked with YWU on a number of campaigns, and though the YWU is not a member of the council, ‘they might as well be,’ according to Paulson. In the summer of 2007 the council presented YWU with a Labor-Community Action Award for work on the Paid Sick Leave Ordinance. And Paulson says that YWU’s organizers are ‘good examples of emerging leaders in the San Francisco labor movement.’”

Quote from “Victories in the New Labor Movement” by Colin Asher, San Francisco Chronicle, October 21, 2007

WORKER ORGANIZING

Young Workers United uses collective and legal action to confront the worst violators of labor law in the restaurant industry. After establishing a de facto city-wide contract establishing high standards for workers in San Francisco, our main work is enforcing that contract and educating workers about their rights.

A critical part of our worker organizing is building active solidarity between U.S.-born and documented workers and their immigrant, undocumented co-workers. Collective action and campaigns help break down the segregation, racism and xenophobia that the restaurant industry is built upon.

Our accomplishments over the last five years include:

- Winning \$500,422 in back pay for 138 individual workers for denied breaks, unpaid overtime, unpaid wages, late checks and minimum wage violations.
- Holding over 60 delegations, actions and rallies at workplaces in violation of the law.
- Handed out 10,000 number of Know Your Rights pamphlets to workers at their workplaces.
- Confronted 63 employers for violating city, state or federal labor laws.
- Helped win a \$4.5 million settlement in back-pay for workers and changed state-wide policy on breaks at the Cheesecake Factory Restaurant in California.

“My first waitressing job, I would work double shifts on the weekends, from 10 o’clock in the morning to sometimes 9 or 10 at night....I remember coming home and feeling like I couldn’t walk for days...I worked at the Cheesecake Factory for two years and they never gave us breaks.”

Patty Senecal, former Cheesecake Factory server

Cheesecake Factory is one of the most profitable restaurant chains in the US and the San Francisco location, atop Macy’s Union Square, has almost three hundred workers and reportedly brings in \$18 million in sales yearly.

Cheesecake Factory managers tried to squeeze even more profit out of the restaurant by denying workers meal and rest breaks during their 8-10 hour shifts. Exhausted and angry, servers decided to fight for their right to take a break. Marilyn Smith, a server, took the lead in organizing her co-workers to take action to win their back wages and improvements in their workplace, despite harassment, intimidation and threats from management. She said: “I have to watch my back now. But this just makes me stronger.”

YWU trained the workers on campaign strategy, escalation of tactics, media messaging, and labor law. Out of this process the workers decided to launch a campaign to use public pressure and direct action to force the company to settle the claims quickly rather than continuing to stall.

The newly-formed Cheesecake Factory organizing committee became public in June following a meeting of thirty workers with three demands: swift payment in full, no retaliation or appeals, and reform the breaker system by paying the relief waiter a higher hourly wage without tips. Within two weeks, a dozen Cheesecake Factory workers marched into the restaurant with a letter signed by sixty workers in support of these demands to deliver it to General Manager Jeff Resnick. As workers read the letter out loud to the lobby of the restaurant, Mr. Resnick frantically called the police.

The campaign heated up over the summer. By organizing around the claims, we increased the pool of claimants to almost two hundred, and began uniting the mostly white and young servers in the front of the house with the mostly latino immigrant kitchen workers.

With more direct action came victories. Cheesecake Factory workers began regular leafleting of customers about all these issues. In early August, a mass call-in to corporate headquarters got the company to announce two days later that they would implement statewide our demand for a higher wage for relief servers.

On Labor Day, about thirty Cheesecake Factory workers and other YWU members rallied in front of the restaurant. Management was so afraid we planned to enter the restaurant that they flew managers in from corporate headquarters, they stationed a manager to guard the entrance to the kitchen with a frying pan, and posted San Francisco police at every entrance to the building. Later in September YWU members leafleted the customers at the grand opening of the Corte Madera store.

On September 29, Board of Supervisors President Matt Gonzalez joined seventy YWU members to protest the Cheesecake Factory and demand they adopt a Code of Conduct signed by ninety CCF workers to improve workplace practices. With chaos in the street and in the lobby, Supervisor Gonzalez was followed by a KQED camera crew into the restaurant, where Manager Resnick and Area Manager George Gundry refused even to discuss workers' concerns. Rather than talk to their own employees about ways to improve working conditions and settle all the claims, Cheesecake Factory corporate decided they'd had enough and entered mediation with a class action lawyer in Southern California over all the San Francisco claims as well as some other parallel but unrelated lawsuits.

While YWU members chose to support the lawsuit settlement, we all recognized that it wouldn't improve all the other problems at work besides breaks. So we got five members of the Board of Supervisors and community leaders to sign an Appeal for Justice to the company asking for not only a settlement but that Cheesecake Factory be a model of good working conditions across the board. In November, YWU delivered the Appeal for Justice with Supervisor Chris Daly, and held a boisterous protest in front of the building.

Workers declared victory in 2006 when the Cheesecake Factory eliminated the hated breaker system and implemented a \$5 raise for servers. At the same time, pressure on company forced them to agree to pay workers state-wide a total of \$4.5 million for missed breaks. YWU presented workers with a giant check from the Bank of Just Desserts and celebrated a ground-breaking victory for workers.



“Worker wins her rights but someone told feds she’s here illegally”



Sonia Cano first started working with Young Workers United in June 2004 after she filed a claim against her employer, Si Señor Taqueria. Right before Sonia filed her claim, she told her employer she was three months pregnant. Two days later she was unexpectedly fired, even though she was one of their most experienced workers.

In the following months, YWU, Sonia and her partner Carlos worked to bring together other Si Señor workers to file minimum wage claims and demand respect from the owners. YWU leafleted workers and held meetings to help workers calculate and file claims and confront the owner who used racial insults. Workers stood up to this owner, demanding a stop to the racial harassment. Seeing the presence of workers organized with YWU, the racial harassment stopped and workers filed minimum wage claims.

In direct retaliation for fighting for her rights and organizing her co-workers, Si Señor owners sent an anonymous letter making false and defamatory accusations against the family to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE acted

immediately without any investigation into the tip. On December 16th at 7am ICE agents raided Sonia and Carlos’ home and took Carlos into custody. The next day he was bussed to a detention center in Eloy, Arizona where he was held for five weeks.

Only hours after the raid, YWU members sprang into action—raising money, collecting food and baby clothes and organizing a schedule to keep Sonia company and take her to doctors appointments. YWU also organized legal support for Sonia and Carlos to fight the deportation. As Sonia said: “Being nine months pregnant and alone, I counted on my friends, Young Workers United and my legal team for support and to survive.”

On January 15th, at St. Luke’s hospital, YWU members supported Sonia through her labor pains and finally the birth of a healthy baby boy, Miguel Angel Cano-Barrancos. One YWUer videotaped the birth to show Carlos upon his release. YWU continued actions and a media campaign against Si Señor Taqueria to send a strong message to all employers that discrimination, exploitation and intimidation of immigrant workers will not be tolerated in San Francisco.

As of May 2006, Sonia has settled her legal claims for workplace retaliation, discrimination and defamation with Si Señor. Sonia told the press, “Even if you are undocumented, stand up for your rights and ask for help from the community. You deserve your rights at work.”

Sonia’s story reframes the debate about immigration in this country. Major employers like Wal-Mart, Cheesecake Factory and others flagrantly violate worker protection laws every day yet immigrant workers are the ones targeted as criminals. As YWU member Mehera Reiter said at a press conference announcing Sonia’s case: “We need real immigration reform to protect the rights of workers and punish employers who break the law.”

The modern service industry functions because of immigrant labor. It is immigrants who are washing dishes, cooking meals, cleaning and stocking. YWU sees a clear connection between immigration policy and labor policy. Using the threat of deportation against organizing campaigns, destroying foreign economies and violently regulating the borders make for an employers' market in the US economy. YWU's *Comite de Justicia para los Trabajadores (CJT)*, our Spanish speaking workers' committee, has taken on just immigration policy as a key component of a strategy to improve working conditions for immigrants.

The education committee of the CJT, *El Comite de Desarrollo Politico*, has completed an in depth analysis and written a training for others to critically understand the economics and root causes of immigration policy as well as the possibilities for action and change. Out of this educational work, YWU engages immigrant workers to actively fight through just immigration campaigns, organizing immigrant workers for better work conditions, outreach to peers and building solidarity across working communities.

Municipal ID campaign

In 2007, San Francisco became the second city in the nation to pass legislation that will issue identification cards to any person residing in SF, regardless of immigration status. These cards will be used to report crimes, open bank accounts and a number of other functions. YWU played a leading role in this campaign and many of our members were featured in the English, Spanish and Chinese press.

YWU outreached to Lili Castillo at Papa Potrero's Pizza where she was denied minimum wage for years. Together with YWU and her co-workers, Lili was able to recoup thousands in back wages and

also confront her abusive manager. Lili was involved with the IDs work from the beginning through the CDP and CJT. She became the "face" for the press and was featured in many stories. "I believe in our power together. We have done great things for the City and I'm proud to be part of this work."





Building an Immigrants Rights Movement

YWU works with labor unions and community organizations through the Worker Immigrant Rights Coalition. YWU did support, outreach and media work during the recent (May 2008) raids on dozens of restaurant workers. Overnight, we turned out over 20 members to protest the ICE center where workers were being detained. We outreached to the media and had our members speak at the rally.

Worker Solidarity & May 1st

For three years now, YWU has been organizing immigrants and U.S.-born young working people to march in the May 1st immigrant/workers rights events. In 2008, more than 60 youth and immigrants chanted bilingually and walked together under the YWU banner. Before the marches, YWU outreached to over 1,000 people about the event and current immigration policy. We got hundreds of postcards of support signed and phonebanked to hundreds to get them out on the streets. YWU conducted popular education sessions to educate members about the historical significance of May 1st. This work has created a strong mutual understanding and trust between the Latino immigrant members and the young members that is one of the foundations for a revitalized labor movement.

YWU strategically uses grassroots policy to complement our organizing at individual workplaces. We build the political power of young and immigrant workers in order to win public policy that raises standards in the entire low-wage service sector. Our numerous policy victories together form a de facto “contract” that sets high standards for working conditions in San Francisco. Our members present the issues that are relevant to them and together we work to understand the issues, find solutions and engage more people. As we put a human face to daunting issues, we remind policy makers that governance is about real people and real problems.

Policy Victories

YWU won the first ever paid sick days law in the country. Many other localities and federal advocates are now following our lead. We have also won the highest minimum wage in the country, a universal health care system for all SF workers, and protected breaks from the Governor’s chopping block. We helped to win identification cards for all residents of San Francisco. We have done critical education and skills workshops on political power, media and other relevant topics.

Building Political Power through New Voter Engagement

Through our member run committee, the policy committee, every election we do education, research and endorsements of local and statewide initiatives. Then we come up with an outreach plan to register and educate students. We distribute our voter guides but also hold one on one conversations with students about elections, register them to vote and get contact information to increase their involvement. We have a vibrant, multiracial policy core of 20 young people.



Chris Jackson graduated from San Francisco State University where he joined Young Workers United as part of our policy committee. He met YWU through a film screening of “Eyes on the Fries” at City Hall. Over 70 people attended and YWU followed up with all of them. Chris was particularly interested in our work. “The only reason I was able to go to school was because my mom had a union job. YWU is doing that same work of ensuring opportunity for working people.” Chris worked with YWU to pass paid sick days and to bring awareness of the issue to SFSU, where he was student body president. Chris was elected to the YWU Board and served for a year. After he graduated, he enjoyed the support of YWU and the connections YWU had made to become a policy analyst for the San Francisco Labor Council. Now, he has been elected to the City College Board of Trustees. “YWU helped me to build the footing I needed to run for office, find work in the labor movement and continue to fight for the opportunities for young people. Thank you YWU!”

Engaging new participants in policy work

After we have recruited students into our policy committee (or other committees), we engage them in policy campaigns that often come from them, are highly relevant to the young and working community, and that offer opportunities to build skills and power amongst them.

One example is our work to win universal health care for all workers in San Francisco. YWU was one of two groups representing uninsured workers during this year's battle for universal health care in San Francisco. The Mayor and the coalition of organizations fighting for health care awarded YWU for our formidable work in the passage of the Health Access Plan. We recruited, trained and organized 75 workers to testify at 17 official hearings. YWU members were featured in the press to tell their stories about the lack of health care. We collected over 300 postcards from young workers in support of health care and informed hundreds of workers about the legislation through our newsletter and daily outreach.



Naomi Nakamura was a Labor and Community Studies student at City College of San Francisco when YWU came into her classroom to do a presentation. "The workshop was so fun and high energy. I knew then that I wanted to be a part of this!" Naomi joined the YWU policy committee and immediately went to work on the paid sick days campaign. She wrote eloquent letters to the editor, lent invaluable insight to writing the legislation and pounded the pavement to get the law passed. She was featured in a New York Times article about the law. Naomi continues to participate in the policy committee. "I had been looking for a place where I could do community organizing and get involved in politics. YWU is my political home, where I can come to express myself, really be listened to and watch my input and skills flower into victories like paid sick days."



Gregorio Diaz joined YWU through a classroom presentation in his City College ESL class. “I was inspired by the message of the workshop: that we have to get together to be effective.” Since then, Gregorio has been an incredibly active and productive member. He has been YWU’s member delegate to immigration coalitions, helped write YWU’s immigration rights workshop and worked on many cases and actions. Through YWU’s help on a case at the sushi restaurant where Gregorio worked, Gregorio was able to win nearly \$30,000 in back pay owed for overtime and breaks. The victory is bittersweet. Gregorio was able to go home to Jalisco, Mexico for the first time in many years but we at YWU bid a sad adieu to this great companero.

Organizing at Community College

In a time when young people are exhorted to “get an education”, and education is seen as the golden key to a comfortable life, young people more than ever are seeking out higher education. While many, including the students, view community college as temporary or “commuter schools”, the reality is that students can spend years earning credits as the state slashes opportunities and raises tuition.

Community colleges are the largest institution for working class youth and youth of color. In addition, ESL and GED classes attract immigrant workers. YWU sees community colleges as a ripe base for organizing. Our approach is to educate and engage young people around work, immigration and policy issues where they are: school. Just as community organizations target neighborhoods and electoral programs target precincts, YWU sees community colleges as our home.

For over 6 years now, we have developed programs with the students and faculty at City College of San Francisco.

Classroom Education and Outreach

YWU organizes teachers in relevant departments to host popular education workshops facilitated by YWU staff and members. We have been able to secure week long workshop sessions with the Labor and Community Studies Department at City College, reaching hundreds of young and immigrant workers. We teach labor rights through the City College’s hospitality department. We have developed ongoing class time with dozens of teachers and do at least 50 workshops a semester at San Francisco State University and other schools.

Curriculum Development

We have written 15 original workshops ranging from Economics 101 to the only popular education workshop on Profits in the Healthcare Industry. We have printed and distributed this curriculum as a vibrant, popular education resource for labor activists and teachers.

Building Political Power

YWU has outreached to thousands of students in our short history. We talk to them on campus about work issues. We've been able to collect thousands of postcards and involve students in the fight for minimum wage, universal healthcare, immigrant rights and paid sick days. We hold rallies and do guerrilla theater on the campuses not only about labor struggles elsewhere, but the students' own rights.

Through building this action oriented, mass outreach strategy, we've been able to:

- Elect a Young Worker to President of City College
- Elect a Young Worker to the Board of Trustees of the City College
- Have a former staff member hired into the Labor and Community Studies Program
- Be a strong ally to the Teachers' Union
- Hold a Campus Candidate Forum with all the Board of Trustee candidates

“Young Workers United speaks regularly in our Labor and Community Studies classes. They are dynamic and interesting presenters who touch on recent legislative and political developments that are of great interest to students at the college. These include the community-led campaign to raise the San Francisco minimum wage and the current political debate around employer provided health care. Whether you are teaching about government, the economy, business or ethics, no one brings a grassroots perspective to the discussion more effectively than Young Workers. I recommend them as guest speakers”

- Bill Shields

Through our innovative and inclusive work, we are building a movement of young and immigrant workers that has proven to be a strong and victorious force. Together, and in coalition with other organizations, we are building ties and strengthening the labor movement in San Francisco and are spearheading a national movement with our example. With our ground-breaking policy victories, we have organized a de facto union contract in the city of San Francisco that includes annual raises, health care and paid sick leave. Our first 6 years have proven to us and the nation that our method of democratic, collective and member driven action and empowerment is indeed successful and will help pave the way for even greater success in the years to come! Thank you for sharing in the joys of our past and join us as we embark on our future work and victories to raise service industry standards and make working safe and productive for all workers!



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