



CITY OF TACOMA

University of Washington

Department of Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences

ENVH 600: Understanding the Needs of Precarious Workers in Tacoma

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UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF PRECARIOUS WORKERS IN TACOMA



Introduction

In partnership with the City of Tacoma's Employment Standards office (ES), this Livable City Year project seeks to address the needs of precarious workers in Tacoma. In our project, we define precarity as "the state of having insecure employment or income," which makes workers more vulnerable.

The City is particularly interested in learning how precarious workers engage with two newly adopted city ordinances: 1) paid family leave (PFL) and 2) minimum wage law.

These ordinances, enacted on January 1, 2018, require that employers provide a minimum wage of \$12 per hour and a

minimum of one hour of paid sick leave for every 40 hours worked. Both ordinances apply to all employees who work in Tacoma. These rights apply to all employees in Tacoma regardless of where the employer's headquarters are located. Additional ordinance information may be found on the City's website.

Although the Employment Standards Office has conducted outreach on these ordinances, they receive few requests for assistance from precarious workers. They believe this silence is due to systemic factors, rather than an absence of need for help.

Methods

To collect qualitative data, the City connected the student researchers to community organizations that could speak to the barriers precarious workers experience.

The City identified approximately 10 organizations and the student researchers pursued interviews with their key staff. These interviews include five questions about the most pressing issues facing precarious workers, barriers to reporting rights violations, recommendations for improving outreach, and opportunities for collaboration between community organizations and the City.



Employment Standards and Tax & License team doing outreach at T-Town 2018.

Photo Credit: Sergio Flores

Centro Latino's clients struggle to report employment rights violations. "Having the information is one thing and having the confidence that there won't be retaliation against them for saying it's their right, are two different things."

— Centro Latino

Initial Findings and Recommendations

Interviews are still being conducted, but the following table summarizes the key messages provided by interviewees.

Name of Organization	Name of Organization	Issues addressed
Rainbow Center	LGBTQ Communities	Social services and resources for discrimination and harassment experiences
Sound Outreach: Hilltop Center for Strong Families	Unemployed and/or Underemployed	Employment skills coaching; interview skills; financial management; tax prep and Medicare support.
Tacoma Community House	Refugees and Immigrants	Education, immigration, housing and employment resources. Also, Domestic violence and sexual assault prevention.
Centro Latino	Latino and Indigenous communities	Family support, rape sexual assault prevention, wellness for men of color and LGBTQ communities, work support, ESL classes, translation services, technology education. Also employment support.

Organizations planned to interview in final report:

Korean Women's Association, Tacoma Urban League, Career Path Services, WorkSource, Puyallup Tribe, United Way of Pierce County, and YWCA of Pierce County.

These organizations report that their constituents experience: wage theft, withheld paid sick leave, physical abuse, and discrimination. It seems likely that significant numbers of rights violations occur in the

construction and service industries. Workers fail to report violations for a variety of reasons, including: fear of retaliation, ignorance of their rights, and lack of trust in the government. Community organizations also seem to be ignorant of the existence of the ES and confused about violations enforcement processes.

To reduce rights violation reporting barriers and build trust, based on our interviews and research thus far, we recommend the City: Release targeted marketing campaigns with enforcement data Co-lead multilingual workers' rights trainings with trusted community organizations, being mindful of the historical, political, and institutional factors in government distrust when developing trainings

Regularly attend community organization meetings to build trust Consider resourcing community organization partners to bolster their work in the community.