WORKERS’ DIGNITY

Jack Willey, Mario Mercado, Cristina Condori, and Patrick Cate

3013 B Nolensville Road
Nashville, TN 37211
WORKERS DIGNITY
Jack Willey
3013 Nolensville Road
Nashville, TN
Who We Are

• Workers’ Dignity is a worker led center organizing for economic justice and the dignity of all.
• Workers’ Dignity was founded in 2010 as a response to the widespread abuse workers were experiencing throughout Nashville, particularly wage theft amongst its immigrant peoples.
• Since then members have recovered over $209,000 from employers in wages and employee benefits, as well as improved worker conditions.
• Workers’ Dignity is a multi-racial organization dedicated to the principles of direction action, justice, and democracy.
Wage Theft

• Wage theft is a national problem characterized by systemic failure of employers to pay employees for work done.
• Wage theft can occur through refusal to pay for overtime hours worked, misclassification of employees as contract workers, and outright failure to pay earned wages (NELP, 2013)
• On average, victims are deprived of $2,634 over a year. (Economic Policy Institute, 2014)
• Recent research is also beginning to show not only the economic damage wage-theft leaves on communities, but also its impacts on public health. (Minkler et al., 2014)
Nashville

• Nashville is in a period of unprecedented urban growth.
• This growth is centered primarily around the development as a major tourist destination not only nationally, but increasingly internationally.
• The impact of this growth in tourism is to fuel development in the hospitality industry, real estate and therefore construction, as professionals seek to move here, and the entertainment industry.
• Not coincidentally this is where we see the highest prevalence of wage theft, as low-wage workers struggle to find available jobs, often immigrants, African Americans, and those unable to find secure housing.
• As Nashville continues to grow, we have reason to believe wage theft will only rise without intervention.
Our Work

• Workers’ Dignity believes that those most affected by wage theft are those most capable of truly ending it.
• Working with low-wage workers to build power and directly engage those who are responsible for wage theft, the systems wide effect of labor exploitation can most effectively be curtailed.
• After four years of success through the community, workers have won over $200,000 in stolen wages.
• Workers’ Dignity’s next step is the Just Hospitality campaign, a city wide effort centering on the hospitality industry specifically, the goal being to create a cleaning workers bill of rights, and a city agreement protecting workers.
• Community and health research will play a large role in supporting this campaign.
Just Hospitality

• As we continue with our Just Hospitality campaign, a deeper knowledge of the extent of wage theft and those it effects is needed.
• Although direct action and base organizing has been and will continue to be the main focus of Workers’ Dignity, this knowledge will support outreach efforts.
• In addition, this campaign will also rely on community efforts outside of just workers, and reliable health information will inform the public in order to galvanize support.
Research Questions

• Although Workers’ Dignity has extensive anecdotal information and personal testimonials on wage theft, this data have not been compiled and analyzed more thoroughly for public consumption Therefore, we are looking for a number of questions that might be answered:
  
• 1). What are the statistical incidences of wage theft, and how does it affect some populations disproportionately?
• 2.) What populations might it be affecting that we are not making contact with?
• 3.) To what extent is public health being affected in Nashville through safety risks and a lack of accessibility to health care and benefits.
Our Assets

• Workers’ Dignity has worked and fought for Workers’ right in Nashville for four years, and has gained the trust and accessibility of potential populations.

• Staff has already participated in a community based research project, with the training, organizational capacity, and competency for more research.

• Recent successes in the Just Hospitality Campaign have galvanized public and community support, placing the organization in an optimal position to produce the best possible data and research related to wage theft and public health.

• As an organization truly and democratically ran by those most affected by wage theft, working with Workers’ Dignity will offer researchers the opportunity to conduct true community based participatory research, generated by the community and for the community.