

Problems on the Job?

A Worker Center Can Help

Gizele Bombardier, Lorryne Reiter Alves, and André Simões

Problems on the Job

Maria took care of two older people. She worked over 60 hours per week. She did not get paid overtime.

Lupe worked in a grocery store. Her manager treated the workers badly. He yelled at them in public. He cut their hours. He pushed them to quit their job.

We work at the Brazilian Worker Center (BWC). We met Maria and Lupe when they came to us for help. We helped them learn their rights. We helped them fight back. Now Maria and Lupe help other workers.



The law requires employers to pay overtime. If they do not, that is wage theft. Wage theft is against the law. Image: www.workingnowandthen.com

We Help Workers Find their Power

The Brazilian Worker Center is a safe space for all workers. We help them use their power. We make sure they know their rights. We support them to be safe on the job.

Workers often tell us that their employer breaks the law. For example, they don't pay overtime, like in Maria's case. Or they harass workers, like in Lupe's case. We help the workers solve the problem. Sometimes, we bring their



Employers are not allowed to harass workers. Harassment is against the law. Image: creazilla.com

This article is available at two levels: high beginner (pp. 10-12) and high intermediate (pp. 12-13).

case to the Attorney General’s office. (See box on p. 13.)

Employers sometimes try to scare workers who are undocumented. They say, “If you complain, I will call immigration.” This is retaliation, which is a crime.

Workers Fight for Themselves

Workers who do not have “papers” have rights at work. We teach them about their rights. Then they can fight for themselves.

We help workers meet each other. They learn they are not alone. They feel stronger. They are able to fight back. That is how a Worker Center can help.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the authors, what does BWC do?
2. Have you ever had an employer who broke labor laws? What happened?
3. What questions do you have about worker centers? Find one in your community, and invite them to speak at your program.
4. Try reading a higher level version of this essay on pp. 12-13.



Gizele Bombardier, Lorryne Reiter, and André Simões are staff members of the Brazilian Worker Center in Boston, MA, and they are enrolled in an English for Organizers class at their workplace. They are Brazilian immigrants. They come from different backgrounds but they share the same commitment to support the rights and dignity of all people.



Members of the Brazilian Worker Center rally for worker rights. Image: Lenita Reason’s Twitter feed.

Resources to Find Out More

Workers’ Rights

“Advocating for Yourself” – an ESOL lesson plan about workers’ rights published by the City of Philadelphia. Get the PDF [here](#).

“Workplace Health and Safety ESOL Curriculum” – published by the MA Worker Education Roundtable. Get the PDF [here](#).

Worker Centers

Cornell University Library has an archive of worker centers in the U.S. Click [here](#) and search for your state or city to find a worker center near you.

Unions: Another Resource for Workers

Read “Organizing for Our Fair Share” – an article about unions on pp. 48-51 of [Issue 36](#) of *The Change Agent*.