

SEIZING THIS MOMENT FOR BAY AREA WORKERS

February 18, 2016 by tsff

What does a good job mean to you?

To Guadalupe, a 40 year-old mother that works at McDonald's, it means a safe environment and fair wages for her hard work. It means that with a 40-hour work week she can afford to bring her daughter back home to live with her.

For Gabriel, it is a schedule and a check that he can rely on, knowing what days he will work and what bills he will be able to pay with each check.

Guadalupe and Gabriel shared their stories with a room of funders along with [East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy](#)(EBASE), [Silicon Valley Rising](#), [Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment](#) (ACCE), and [UC Labor Center](#), who together are advocating for good jobs for workers in the Bay Area. Hosted by [The San Francisco Foundation](#), [The California Wellness Foundation](#) and EBASE, this group was brought together in recognition that supporting communities building power and voice is central to our progress as a region.

“We don’t take lightly our charge to connect philanthropy to community through briefings like this. That’s because philanthropy has an important role to play in both nurturing equity movements AND influencing progressive policy change.” – Judith Bell, Vice President of Programs at The San Francisco Foundation.

The stories we heard touch upon some of the most pressing issues we face as a region.

“We’re in an incredible moment where these things are really possible,” explained Kate O’Hara of EBASE.

In the Bay Area alone, ten cities have passed minimum wage increases, with another seven in the works. These region-wide wins have meant 880,000 workers got a raise, and \$450 million went into the local economy.

The question worker advocates are grappling with is: if we have to continue passing policy city-by-city will we be able to reach everyone? A statewide initiative would reach all Californians, and is a way that funders can jump in over the next few months to make a real impact. If the upcoming state minimum wage increase passes 180,000 workers in the Bay Area would receive a raise.

The raise makes a real tangible difference in the lives of workers. Guadalupe explained the impact raising the minimum wage made for her, “I can pay my rent in one check now, not two. I can go to the gas station and fill up my tank.”

Guadalupe could not afford to keep her daughter living with her; however, with an increased wage and a stable a 40-hour work week she could afford to bring her daughter home.

The national movement to improve low-wage work has gained incredible momentum over the past two years, and some of the most cutting edge work is happening right here in the Bay Area.

“We don’t have an infinite window of opportunity. This model needs to be cemented so there’s an understanding that cities can fight for equality: that they can, have the right to, and should be able to fight for these policies,” Annette Bernhardt, senior researcher with the [UC Labor Center](#) shared with the group.

Raising workers’ wages is one solution, but as we learn more about the type of unstable and chaotic living situations low-wage jobs create, we know that there is much work to do beyond wage. **Cal Wellness is one partner who is taking a new look at wage and employment as part of their strategy to improve the health of families.**

“The economy is creating jobs that are increasingly part time, temporary and often without adequate and stable hours,” explained Cal Wellness Program Director Padmini Parthasarathy. “Fair employment with good wages and benefits is a strong predictor of good health. This is why Cal Wellness takes a broad approach to improving health outcomes, including strengthening pathways to obtaining and retaining employment, building financial assets, and improving financial security.”

The philanthropic community has an important role to play in supporting these efforts. Funding solutions, advocating for change, and mobilizing our networks to get involved are all ways that individuals and institutions can join the movement to support low wage workers. We need to advance solutions that further raise expectations on low wage work so that individuals and families can stay in their homes and fully engage in our communities.

As we celebrate local victories, there remains much work to be done to ensure effective implementation and enforcement, and guarantee real change for tens of thousands of low-income workers.

There are many ways for you to get involved, whether you are with a funding institution, or are an individual looking for ways to learn more and show your support.

To learn more about how you can support minimum wage and the low-wage worker movement, reach out to [Femke Freiberg](#).

We look forward to supporting your interest and connecting with you!

Photos thanks to ACCE, Working Partnerships USA and EBASE!