

# Immigrant Workers Centre

## Annual General Report: 2012-2013



# Introduction:

This report will provide an overview of the Immigrant Workers Centre's (IWC) activities in 2012 and 2013 and will be presented at the 2013 Annual General Assembly. The report provides a list of our Board of Directors and staff; as well as a review of our: outreach projects, casework goals, educational initiatives, campaigns, events, and partnerships.

# People

## Board of Directors

Aadi Ndir

Giuliana Fumagalli

Malcom Guy

Alexandra Law

Jean Beaudelaire Nagmo

Manon Perron

Alison Gault

Jennifer Whiteside

Mark-David Mandel

Andrea Kneeland

Jill Hanley

Tess Tesalona

Aziz Choudry

John Edmon

Yumna Siddiqi

Eileen Young

Jorge Frozzini

Eric Shragge

Manon Camire

## Community Organisers

Aadi Ndir

Joey Calugay

Kader Belaouni

Mostafa Henaway

Noe Arteaga

## Stagiaires and Volunteers:

The IWC has hosted students from a variety of university programs in Montreal notably: stagiaires from Concordia, McGill, and Université de Montréal, as well as enjoying the support of many tireless and dedicated volunteers.

# Ongoing Programs :

The IWC has continued its commitment to extend support to greater numbers of migrant workers through outreach targeted at both communities in Montreal and the province of Quebec. In addition, we continue to provide individual support around labour issues, notably through legal and specialist clinics, organising educational and skill development meetings and workshops, translation services, and supporting/ accompanying workers in their attempts to contest labour issues or access benefits and services.

# Outreach

Weekly and bi-weekly outreach has included distributing flyers and information about the Centre and worker's rights; specifically targeting factory districts and migrant-populated areas, particularly Cote Des Neiges, Parc-Extension, Notre Dame de Grace, Cote-de Liesse and St-Michel. Outreach has also involved solidarity actions with striking workers, and has extended to providing support to temporary foreign workers living in communities outside of Montreal, including St. Adele, St. Anne De Bellevue and Chicoutimi.

# Individual Work

In 2012-2013, we followed approximately 180 individual cases in addition to phone consultations. On average the centre hosted 5-7 walk-in cases per week. 4-5 of these cases resulted in longer-term consultation and involvement with the Centre including assistance around issues of: housing, work-related complaints, CNT or CRT mediation, preparation for submitting grievances, CSST claims, refugee claims, navigation of institutional bureaucracies, access to health care and social services, access to legal aid, as well as providing translation and accompaniment services.

# Education

## Labour and Immigrant Rights Workshops

The IWC facilitates workshops with interested groups and community organizations to raise awareness around workplace rights and resources. In the past year the IWC held an average of two workshops per month, normally involving 5 to 20 people. Workshops were given on an informal basis and aim to be highly participatory. This allows for workshops to become an exchange of information and experiences, from both workers and facilitators. Workshops have tackled several themes this year such as: Basic Labour Standards, Health and Safety in the Workplace, Access to Social and Labour Rights for Migrants, and Women's Rights in the Workplace.

## Drop-In Legal Information Clinic

In addition, the IWC offers a Drop-In Legal Information Clinic every Thursday from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm (for call-ins or drop-ins) and provides assistance with legal questions or issues. These sessions also introduce workers to the Centre and provide an opportunity for solidarity building as workers can meet each other, share experiences and ask questions in a safe space.

# English and French Lessons for Migrant Workers

In collaboration with Frontier College, the IWC regularly provides free English and French classes to users of the Centre throughout the year. These classes serve to help migrant workers scope with communication challenges in their places of work and their environments.

In addition, the 2012-2013 year has seen the introduction of a program that will assist temporary foreign workers in Saint Adèle with the French test requirements for their permanent residency. Online and in-person classes will be provided and practice French tests will be used to help prepare these workers for their tests.

## Know Your Rights! Information Manual for Temporary Foreign Workers

This year, the IWC produced an information manual for Temporary Foreign Workers. The manual includes information on immigration policies, labour rights, social rights, and contains tips for survival, strategies for community organizing and how to be in solidarity with other workers. The manual will serve as a tool for outreach efforts, information sessions, and training workshops by workers for workers.

# Arts/ Media

## IWC Artist Bloc

With the support of their generous grant for the 2013-2014 year, the IWC, in partnership with Engrenage Noir/Rouage, has embarked on an exciting project in community activist art. The art was co-operatively created by workers and for workers to share stories of resistance and dignity in struggle. In the early part of 2013, the IWC Artist Bloc shared trainings in theatre, movement, writing, and visual arts, and were inspired by teachers and artists from around the world (Brazil, Mexico, Columbia, the Philippines, and California). The group also performed at the IWC's Mayworks! cultural festival celebrating workers' struggles. The festival presented art performances and installations as well as attending participatory actions such as the Status for All March in Côte des Neiges and downtown Montreal. The IWC Artist Bloc continues to meet regularly to collectively create public arts interventions and develop their own strategies in activism and in dialogue with our communities. In the coming months, the group plans to broaden its horizons and incorporate new media, music, storytelling, visual art and participatory theater approaches into its community arts activist work.

## Radio show “Las noches del trabajo”

Every Saturday at 9pm Radio Centre-Ville (102.3 FM) broadcasts a radio show in Spanish that discusses various topics related to the world of work and more specifically topics that affect the working conditions of the immigrant community in Montreal. Practical information such as labor standards and how to file a complaint with the CNT and broader information on social issues such as employment insurance reform, child labor, and the temporary foreign worker program are a few examples of the content of this radio show. Las noches del trabajo has been a useful platform to disseminate the work being done at the IWC and has most importantly brought voice to the injustices that foreign workers face in Canada.



# Events

## Mayworks!

Mayworks! 2013 was an event that drew in the participation of many immigrant workers and allies. It featured theatre pieces by the IWC Artist Bloc, exploring themes ranging from the experience of living without status, the process of migration, workplace injustices at the hands of agencies and employers alike, and the daily organizing of immigrants for status, equality and better work conditions. The evening also included performances from PINAY cultural group, Les Zimmi Grands choir, and the South Asian Women's Community Centre dance group.

## Screening: The End of Immigration

On June 28, 2013 the IWC held a special screening of the End of Immigration to celebrate the national debut of this documentary on Radio-Canada. Filmmakers Marie Boti and Malcolm Guy were at the screening and facilitated a question answer period at the documentary's end.

## STATUS FOR ALL

On May 18, 2013 the IWC marched in solidarity with hundreds of festive and determined demonstrators who converged downtown as part of the annual STATUS FOR ALL demonstration. The STATUS FOR ALL protest marched in support of the following demands: an end to deportations, detentions and double punishment; the implementation of a comprehensive and inclusive regularization program for anyone without status in Canada, meaning Status For All, and the building of a Solidarity City in Montreal.

# Campaigns:

The two priorities for the IWC are campaigns to make changes in the regulations governing temporary placement agencies and to improve the conditions of workers in the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. In both of these campaigns, the IWC supports workers' leadership and participation. Outreach activity has targeted workers in both of these groups. Trying to gain access to CSST for Domestic Workers remains an on-going campaign.

# CSST For Domestic Workers Campaign

The campaign to allow Domestic Workers access to CSST was intended to fight for domestic workers' right to be covered by workers' compensation regardless of status, and was officially launched on March 8th, 2006 (International Women's Day). The campaign committee, under the leadership of the IWC, PINAY, Association des Aide Familiales du Québec (AAFQ) and l'UTTAM, has mobilized the support of more than 120 unions and community groups to support the demands. Since the Charest government promised to amend the law in 2009, the IWC has continued to contact unions and community groups dealing with women, immigrants and work issues in Quebec, building an even broader consensus that the discrimination against domestic workers must end! During 2012-2013, the Campaign continued lobbying pressure and media intervention in order to demand a change to the law.

# Placement Agency Worker Campaign

Beginning in 2010, the IWC and Au Bas de l'Echelle built a partnership to make relationships with agency workers and prepare to lobby the government for better conditions. The demands include (but are not limited to) co-responsibility between employers and agencies, regularization of agencies, and specific demands such as the permanent hire of agency workers following three months of work.

The campaign has received the support of close to 200 unions and community organizations and is continuing to grow.

A membership campaign in 2012-2013 led to the creation of the Temporary Agency Workers Association (TAWA), a group for placement agency workers from a diversity of locations to come together for mutual education, support and action. TAWA holds regular meetings, information sessions, and events. The association's members have decided on major common themes, and have planned workshops to address these themes including: workers compensation, employment insurance, and housing. These meetings and workshops have built a sense of solidarity among agency workers as they have begun to recognize that a massive, varied, and growing number of workers face these same conditions, from Dollarama to nursing homes. Additionally, specific cases have been highlighted surrounding dangerous workplace conditions, unpaid overtime, unpaid holidays, and unjust dismissal. Policy demands aim to address the changing nature of the labour force, as agency labour continues to expand.

# Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Campaign

In the last decade, the number of temporary workers far exceeded that of permanent immigrants to Canada. In 2012, 35,600 workers came to Quebec to find work. However, these workers do not benefit from the same rights or working conditions as their landed-Canadian counterparts. This is particularly impacted due to: the complexities of navigating the applications and requirements associated with obtaining a work permits; a propensity to receive lower wages; difficulties in accessing or joining supportive unions; as well as not enjoying a long list of other benefits linked to job security.

In 2012-2013, the IWC met with workers with precarious status throughout Quebec, from Saguenay to the Laurentians and the Eastern Townships. Since the launch of the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Campaign, the IWC has built contacts among several groups of workers from Chicoutimi to Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. Efforts to date have included:

- \* Training workshops for specific groups of TFW workers (landscaping, video game developers, telecommunications, service industries, machinists, welders and tower riggers).
- \* Defending migrant workers' rights to EI benefits and the right to stay to look for other employment after unjust dismissals.
- \* Partnerships with labour rights organizations outside of Montreal (in particular, in the region of Saguenay – Lac St-Jean) to provide information about TFW rights.
- \* Developing workers' leadership in advocating for policy changes at the federal and provincial level.
- \* Participation in Quebec and federal coalitions working on TFW issues.
- \* Production of a human rights manual for TFWs.

# Coalitions and Partnerships:

The IWC works closely with a number of organizations including Au Bas de L'Echelle, PINAY-Filipino Women's Organization of Quebec, AGIR, UTTAM, and the Just Solutions Clinic of the Montreal City Mission. In addition, the Centre is a member of several coalition and working groups that share common interests.

# Coalition of Precarious Workers

This past April 5th, a diverse group of 60 immigrant workers representing a campaign coalition initiated by the IWC, which includes PINAY-Filipino Women's Organization of Quebec, the Association of Temporary Agency Workers, Dignidad Migrante, and Mexicans United for Regularization, came together in a Public Assembly to put forward a set of demands for a provincial law protecting precarious workers, as precarious work has become central to the functioning of neo-liberal economic policies in Quebec. Banding together under a common banner, domestic workers, migrant workers, undocumented workers and temporary agency workers presented their stories of unjust work conditions, and lack of access to the most fundamental workplace and immigration rights. Workers were pushing for a legislation that includes CSST coverage for Live-in domestic workers, accountability of temporary agencies and companies alike, and better protection for temporary foreign workers regardless of their status. The groups are also looking to raise the minimum wage to twelve dollars per hour for the province. Finally, we are also looking for access to Provincial services for undocumented workers to services provided by the Ministère De L'Emploi et de la Solidarité Sociale.

## Front de Défense des Non-Syndiqués

The FDNS is a coalition of union and community groups with the goal of improving Quebec's labour standards.

## Conseil communautaire de Cote-des-Neiges/ Snowdon

The IWC is a member of the CDN Community Council, attending meetings regularly in order to exchange information with local groups about activities and issues and to build relationships for collaboration.

# Solidarity Across Borders

Solidarity Across Borders is a Montreal-based coalition engaged in the struggle for justice and dignity of immigrants and refugees. The Immigrant Workers' Centre actively supports the "STATUS FOR ALL!" campaign.

## Canadian Labour Congress

This past May, the IWC was invited by the Canadian Labour Congress to attend their annual meeting. The Centre was given the opportunity to present to CLC members information about its work. The presentation was well received and added to the CLC's ongoing dialogue regarding labour standards and migrant workers in Canada.

## Canadian Council for Refugees (TFW Working Group)

In early 2011, the IWC was approached by the CCR to become a member of its TFW Working Group out of recognition of the IWC's leadership around this issue in Quebec. The Working Group brings together immigration advocates from across the country and develops education and advocacy materials to be used by member organizations.



# Sources of support:

- \* La Fondation BEATI (allowed us to conduct radio interviews with migrant workers, while also training these workers to conduct their own interviews with each other)
- \* Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (Service aux Collectivités with McGill University) (allowed us to foster important community group partnerships)
- \* Summer Student Grant (allowed us to hire several students over the summer months)
- \* Engrenage Noir/Rouage (provided a grant for community activist art)
- \* Citizenship and Immigration Canada.
- \* Public Service Alliance of Canada –Social Justice Fund
- \* Individual donors

More details are available in the Annual Financial Report.

# Thank You:

The IWC would like to offer a special thanks to all of its community partners, donors, and volunteers. This year we would like to take the opportunity to specifically thank: QPIRG McGill, CAW Québec, TUAC, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Engrenage Noir, Public Service Alliance of Canada, CSN, CSN Conseils Centrale, CUPE and AMUSE McGill

