# “We Are So Tired:” Young People’s Plans for a Better Future of Work

*The Workers Lab*
*September 2024*

## Introduction

At The Workers Lab, we seek to center workers who have been excluded–excluded by this country's labor laws, excluded by the narrow measures we use to gather data on work, excluded from opportunities to earn and to flourish. We believe that by centering these workers, building a system around their needs and their experiences, and lifting up their voices as leaders, we can create a truly inclusive economy.

Gig and nonstandard workers–those working outside full-time, direct-hire, long-term employment–are among the most excluded. They are disproportionately Black, Brown, queer, and disabled. They are ineligible for most of the benefits and protections afforded to traditional employees. They are also more likely to be young–to be early in their careers, facing challenges and making choices that will shape the rest of their lives.

This project focuses on young people, ages 16 to 24, who are disconnected from traditional employment arrangements–young gig workers. This population, though removed from spheres of influence and missing from most mainstream data on work–are exactly the people who have the greatest potential to imagine a better, more equitable future of work.

This report is part of The Workers Lab’s multi-year participatory research project, the Gig Worker Learning Project, which seeks to develop the first worker-centered, participatory data on the ways people work in today’s economy. This project began with conversations with frontline workers, grew into a participatory qualitative project engaging hundreds of workers across the country, and is being developed into a first-of-its-kind survey next year. In this report, we center young people’s experiences and shift power to them to shape understandings of and solutions to the biggest problems in our economy.

Young people are living the realities of today’s economy and are poised to be most impacted by decisions made today. Solutions for the future should be shaped by the leaders of the future, who are closest to the problems and have the most at stake. Rather than seeking to design and create opportunities *for* these people, leaders and decision-makers need to take a backseat, designing and creating opportunities *with* them, listening to their experiences, priorities, and ideas. This report represents a step in that direction, using a participatory approach to identify the workplace challenges faced by young people today and their vision for a better future of work. For The Workers Lab, this is not a one-time report, but an ongoing commitment to empower young people to be voices and agents of change.

In the following pages, this report outlines the participatory methods used to engage young people in this project and uncover the challenges they face. It then shares the common experiences of these participant-researchers, including the ways they work and the challenges they face. It then highlights their ideas for solutions, before sharing their reflections on what’s to come.

## Our Research Process

### *Participatory Research*

At the heart of this project is a participatory approach, which seeks to equip and empower people to be researchers of their own conditions and voices for change. It directly engages communities in the entire research process, recognizing people as experts in their own lives and breaking down the barriers between "researchers" and "subjects."

A participatory approach is particularly well-suited to both a project on "gig" and nonstandard work and a project on youth. Existing data on gig and nonstandard work has long been complex and often contradictory. Measurement relies on terms and categories designed long ago by professional researchers to describe a standard, full-time, single-employer model of employment, and the full range of ways people work today do not fit neatly into these categories. Rather than forcing these ill-equipped categories, a participatory approach allows participant-researchers to inform the development of terms, categories, and questions, making them much more likely to reflect real experiences. Similarly, giving young people the steering wheel for the research process is likely to lead to questions, categories, and observations that accurately reflect their experiences and the world they are navigating. There are no better equipped people to answer questions about the future of work than the generations who will shape it.

### *Identifying Participant-Researchers*

This project centers young workers, between the ages of 16 and 14, who work outside of traditional employment contexts. This includes app-based driving and delivery workers, informal workers, temp and seasonal workers, resellers, domestic workers, artists and creative workers, on-demand shift workers, short-term workers, and more.

We focused on Los Angeles and New Orleans–two metro areas that reflect both the rich diversity and the deep challenges found across the US. Participants from these cities were joined by people from across the country, leading to nuanced conversations that reflect both commonalities and regional priorities.

To identify and recruit participant-researchers, we reached out to a broad network of organizations who work with, organize, or aggregate people engaged in some form of "gig" or nonstandard work, or who work with opportunity youth in regions we focused on. We encouraged participants to refer peers who met eligibility criteria to the project. Our goal was not to be representative but to intentionally include groups of young workers who have been excluded from conventional research approaches. By designing research around these workers, we hope to work toward definitions, measures, and solutions that truly include all.

### *The Research Process*

We brought groups of young workers together virtually for open-ended focus groups, using a general framework of questions that asked what people do for work, the challenges they faced, and the solutions they envisioned. We were transparent about the research process and

invited questions, criticisms, and suggestions from participant-researchers. As a result, focus groups were not identical but reflected the ideas, experiences, and priorities of the participants. A total of 106 participant-researchers participated in 16 focus groups between February and May 2024. All are between 16 and 24 years old. Two thirds earn less than $25,000 annually, and ninety percent are people of color.

Following the focus groups, we reconvened participant-researchers to analyze the conversations and identify themes and findings. We compiled transcriptions from all focus groups, and then grouped quotes around general themes of what people do for work, challenges they face, what they appreciate, their ideas for solutions, and thoughts on the future of work. We held three virtual workshops, with participants from a variety of focus groups in each workshop. At the workshops, we walked through what analysis looked like and agreed on shared guidelines for process and mutual respect.

Next, in small groups, participant-researchers reviewed each group of quotes to identify themes. Each group allowed time to review and reflect individually, and to discuss areas of agreement and divergence together. Participant-researchers agreed on findings in their small groups before sharing them across the workshop. The research team then compiled the findings from the three focus groups, which are presented here. A draft of the report was shared with all participant-researchers for an opportunity to review and provide feedback, which was incorporated before publication. Participants were compensated for the time they spent in focus groups and workshops.

### *Notes on This Report*

Throughout this report, the plural first person “we” is used to reflect the shared perspectives of participant-researchers, who are the authors of this report. Though not every statement reflects the beliefs and experiences of every participant-researcher, the conclusions shared here reflect widespread agreement across all workshops. Differences of perspective among participants are noted throughout. Direct quotes from participant-researchers are shared in boxes throughout the report.

In this report, we share a broad overview of findings from this project. In coming months, we will release deeper dives into specific components introduced here, including work and family, artificial intelligence, career paths and training, racism and corporate DEI initiatives, and healthcare access.

## The Realities of Work

Almost all participant-researchers regularly work–a lot. Although full-time jobs are rare, the vast majority of us work two, three, or more jobs on a regular basis. For some, that means having one primary job, supplemented with odd jobs or app-based work as needed. For others, it means that we consistently rely on a range of jobs. We are piecing together work, taking jobs that we can when we can, to earn enough money to live on. We work across a wide range of

> *“In this economy, one main stream of income is not feasible, with the rent prices and phone bills and all the other activities… We have to work a lot of jobs to meet basic needs.”*

sectors and industries. Common jobs include childcare, driving and delivery work via apps, and part-time service, retail, and reception work. Other jobs include teaching, creative work, nonprofit and advocacy work, pet care, cleaning, home repair jobs, and care facility work. Much of this work is not captured in employment statistics, because we complete jobs intermittently, sporadically, and under the table. We are pushed to work these jobs because the cost of living is too high, wages are too low, and we have struggled to break into more stable employment–more on those challenges to come.

*"We don't have a full day to work every single day, because we're doing other things, like school or other responsibilities. So we'll just try to take a whole bunch of separate jobs that add up financially."*

In addition to work, most of us have other commitments and priorities that demand our time. Some have caretaking responsibilities, often for parents, children, or both. Some of us are seeking or are in college or training programs. Some have creative, athletic, cultural or other pursuits that are core to our identity and well-being. Often, these complex schedules prohibit us from holding single, higher-paying jobs, so our only option is to piece together multiple, lower-paying jobs. Because we might not be available every weekday for an entire shift, we are locked out of many jobs, and feel like we need to pick up what we can, when we can.

Piecing together work is not only about earning enough money to live. It's also about trying to plan for the future, and to find work that is fulfilling. Many of us work at least one job that we like, that we feel drawn to, or that relates to our goals and plans for the future, while also needing to work another one, two, or more jobs to meet our current basic needs. We can't choose only jobs that we like or that relate to our plans, so there is a degree of randomness–a combination of things we seek out and things that we take because the opportunity presents itself. We have jobs that are only for money and jobs that are for our passions.

*"It's normal to have a lot fo jobs at the same time, but those jobs don't actually align with each other, or with an actual career path."*

## What We Like

Despite the realities of working too many jobs for not enough pay, we appreciate aspects of our work. Above all, we appreciate the agency to structure our time and the social interaction we gain through work.

*"We're all saying the thing that matters most is that I can make my own hours and decide when I can work. But shouldn't everyone be able to do that?"*

### *Agency over Time*

We do not want, and in many cases cannot hold, schedules that are set by someone else and that require long, regular shifts. That type of rigid, dictated schedule is incompatible with the range of commitments and priorities we carry. We want and need agency in choosing when we work. We see an increasing demand among people to

exercise choice over when they work. We see this as a basic right, something that should be available for all jobs, and not something that requires people to give up decent pay, job security, or a career path to have. Work is one responsibility we have among others, and should not be the one thing that everything else needs to get scheduled around.

*"Flexibility can mean a lot of different things. But what matters most is a very basic ability to say no, to say no to a job that isn't good or doesn't pay well."*

Real choice over when we work also means that we should not have to work all the time. There is no choice or agency if we cannot say "no" to a job. When jobs are low paying, we get trapped in a cycle: we need to work outside of a traditional, full-time job so that we can choose our hours, but then we are paid so little that we have to work every possible hour that we can, which then leaves us with no choice over how we spend our time.

### *Social Connection*

In addition to control over our time, most of us appreciate and find joy in the social interactions we have through our work, even across the wide range of sectors and types of work we are engaged in. We connect with new and interesting people, whether coworkers or customers. We hear different perspectives, learn where different people are coming from, and encounter different experiences and backgrounds than our own. This enriches our lives, keeps things interesting even when tasks are boring, and allows us to experience human connection.

*"There are an overwhelming number of us saying our favorite thing is meeting new people and connecting with them. Put in context with the stereotype that younger people are anxious and antisocial and don't want to leave the house, we actually crave that connection."*

These interactions are especially appreciated when we feel accepted for who we are, whether by coworkers, supervisors, or customers. Positive interactions with some cannot undo or make up for bad treatment, discrimination, or toxic environments. But they can carry us forward and help us make it through those challenging situations.

## Facing Challenges

We face several challenges in our work. The most pressing are low pay, the difficulty of finding entry level positions, a lack of balance, and racism.

### *Low Pay and High Costs*

The issue of pay is challenging on multiple fronts: while low pay is definitely a problem, it is exacerbated by high cost of living, high work-related expenses, a lack of job security, and a lack of benefits, especially health insurance.

*""There are many jobs where you can work and work and work and not make anything."*

The core of the problem is that most of our jobs do not pay enough. Minimum wage is not realistically enough to live on anywhere, especially in states where it is under $10. With these jobs, we can work and work and work and still not be able to afford basic needs.

The impact of low wages really hits when considered alongside the cost of living. We need two or three or more jobs to afford an apartment. A typical situation is sharing a one-bedroom apartment with multiple people, not having a car, and struggling with groceries, while knowing that we have debt. Other things feel totally out of reach, like going on a vacation, or having a car, or even getting an oil change for a car. And when things like vacation, or dining out, or buying ourselves something occasionally are totally out of reach, it's detrimental to our well-being. We work so hard, so much of the time, for the absolute minimum. It can feel hopeless.

*"People suffer when it comes to just universal, basic needs like food, water, shelter. We have to work for those, but it's hard to find jobs, and then it's hard to maintain, even with the job. There's a problem here."*

In addition to the basic living expenses, like rent and food, many of us face additional expenses because of our jobs. For example, those of us working driving and delivery jobs need to pay for gas, tolls, and car maintenance. Others of us must commute, so we're taking hours and spending a lot on gas or transit fares just to get to and from work. Some of us have jobs with certain expectations of dress and appearance, which can be costly, especially if we haven't been in that type of job before or our bodies have recently changed.

The short-term financial challenges are exacerbated by a long-term sense of insecurity. Most of the jobs we hold do not come with stability. We know they could vanish any day. So even if we do make enough, there's a feeling that we always need to be working and making more, to cover us in case the job is no longer available. That sense of instability is draining–we often do not know if we will work that day when we wake up, and if we will be able to work enough to pay bills that month.

Low pay, high costs, and insecurity are made worse by a lack of benefits. Piecing together different jobs means few of us get benefits. Health insurance is incredibly expensive. Although some of us are able to be covered by parents' plans, those of us without that option are left with exorbitant costs or the risks of being uninsured.

*"It's like, really really really expensive to have health insurance."*

### *Paradox of Entry-Level Jobs*

We aspire to get beyond our current situation of piecing together countless low-paid jobs in order to meet basic needs. However, when we look to the future, for opportunities for more stable jobs with career paths, we meet another challenge: the seeming paradox of entry-level jobs requiring two to three or more years of relevant work experience. As we have described, we work a whole range of jobs, usually all at the same time, along with hobbies, interests, and

responsibilities, all of which prepare us for workplaces. However, these experiences are largely discounted or unacknowledged in hiring. We are blocked from opportunities because we have not yet been given an opportunity. These are comically unrealistic expectations, and it seems impossible to get a foot in the door. We see a growing trend, with some of us who have landed more stable jobs noticing that new hires are now required to start with more experience than we had. This challenge is felt most acutely by those of us without four-year college degrees, but the situation is universal across education levels and regions. Those of us who have gone through college feel like our degrees are worthless from the employers' perspective, after we've been turned away repeatedly for not having enough work experience.

These obstacles seem to be built on the assumption that no one should need to be trained for a job, which is not realistic. Whether or not someone starts a job with experience, they should have a training period specific to that job. By not providing training, employers are also holding people back from advancement. We hear bosses and supervisors talk about the importance of professional and career development, but do not provide concrete opportunities. The burden is on us, as young employees, to identify, find time for, and often pay for any training. Those of us who are gig or contract workers especially struggle to find training and development opportunities; we lack clear pathways at workplaces, and also need to learn all sorts of skills on our own, from taxes to insurance to scheduling to marketing.

*"Many of us are being shunted into food service, and other kinds of these grunt positions, because we just can't move into positions where they require you to already have more experience."*

When every entry-level job requires to have already held a similar job, the transition from low-paying, low-quality odd jobs to high-paying, career-path jobs seems impossible. Since the only way to have the experience these jobs ask for is often to hold unpaid or volunteer roles, many of us feel locked out of career paths, potentially for life.

### *Lack of Balance and Mental Health*

In addition to challenges of pay and career development, the demands of balancing so many jobs to meet basic needs leaves nothing left for self-care, passions, or personal growth. Our hopes and expectations are not unreasonable–we want time to exercise, to go for a walk, to eat a meal during a workday, or to drink water. But for many of us, these simple needs feel out of reach. The culture we find ourselves in at work celebrates productivity at the expense of all else. The expectation too often is to work like a machine, to never take a break, to never slow down. Everything is for profit maximization, and that is not how we are meant to live. Work should allow us to live the lives we want, rather than being the place we devote all our time and energy.

*"Yes, we have that main job. But that main job is not enough. So we are forced to get that second job. And then that turns into what being burnt out."*

Among our peers, balancing so many jobs for so little pay is the norm. Because of that, aligning schedules for social time is essentially impossible. Even if you find a few minutes for rest, it doesn't align with the few minutes your friends might have. We feel drained and cannot

recharge in the ways we need. Similarly, the windows of time we end up with are often at odd and unpredictable hours, so it's hard to fit in things that happen on a regular schedule, like meetings, church services, or appointments. Our jobs drain us, and prevent us from filling back up.

### *Racism*

*"Every single struggle can be compounded by having a marginalized identity."*

Our society, including its workplaces, have been shaped by inequalities, and especially by racism. The experiences of people with different backgrounds are not the same. Those of us who are Black, Latine, and Indigenous especially face additional challenges, and have the impacts of other challenges magnified by our identities. We have encountered coworkers and bosses being dismissive of our ideas, or not putting time or resources into them, and then pointing to the failure of those dismissed or under-resourced ideas as reason not to listen to us again. We have been looked over for mentorship or promotions, and seen older coworkers who share our identities face the same thing time and time again. We deal with a huge mental strain of racially charged situations, or being treated differently, with no time in our day left for coping and finding joy. Those of us in gig and contract jobs have the added challenge of lacking legal protections against discrimination, and of lacking an HR department or any pathway for filing a complaint. We often do not know what our rights or protections are and find it nearly impossible to find someone to talk to, including when working through an app.

*"In 2020, a lot of companies were coming out with these diversity, equity, and inclusion statements and creating positions within their company...Now, fast forward a few years and they're eliminating these divisions in these companies."*

We've also seen a rollback of companies' interest in and commitment to advancing diversity since 2020. We heard a lot of words then, about companies' goals and intentions, but we have not seen much action, and in some cases, companies are rolling back those goals or eliminating DEI positions they had created. It feels like backward movement.

## Finding Solutions

Looking toward solutions to the challenges we face, some are long-term, structural changes that require questioning and undoing deeply held beliefs and long-standing traditions. Others are really quite simple.

### *Pay and Benefits*

> *"If people are working 40-hour weeks, we should be able to afford groceries and a place to live."*

One of the simplest is to just pay us more. We envision a higher minimum wage, so that someone can live off their earnings from a single full-time job. That includes a standard base pay for rideshare and delivery drivers, so we can count on earning at least equivalent to a living wage. Another approach to consider is instituting a guaranteed income as a starting point for everyone, regardless of if or how they work.

Higher pay would allow us to work fewer hours, which means a better balance between work and everything else. We could take care of ourselves, so that we could bring better, rested selves to work. Beyond the clear benefit to our own wellness and our relationships, this would reduce burnout and turnover, benefiting our employers.

Along with raising our pay, a full set of solutions would address the cost of living, especially housing and medical care. Universal health care would drastically reduce the cost and stress associated with seeking care and would lead to more equitable health access across different ways of working.

### *Career Paths and Hiring*

While every single job should pay a decent wage, we also need training and clear, accessible career paths to land better jobs. We need widespread acceptance that training and learning happen on the job, and that people are not going to show up already knowing how to do a job. The burden of preparing needs to be on employers to provide training, not on employees to already know what to do. We need more truly entry-level jobs, along with paid internship and apprenticeships, that do not require years of related work experience, that set us on career paths. These positions should not go to those who already have the most experience, but should go to people trying to start out. When employers train us and invest in us being good employees, we feel a stronger connection to the job, and we are better at it.

> *"How can we expect people to do a good job when you never give them any type of training? How will they learn?"*

Before training can happen, we need to improve hiring practices. Across all types of jobs, we need simplified application processes that hold employers accountable. Currently, there is a huge administrative burden of applying for jobs, which rarely leads to hearing any sort of reply. We are more likely to receive marketing emails from prospective employers than notification if a position has been filled. Application processes often require technical or other skills that fall far outside of what would be required for the job itself. We want to hold employers accountable to pull down job postings once filled, to notify applicants if a position has been filled, especially if they have undergone one or more interviews, and to post pay as a part of job descriptions.

### *Policy and Structural Solutions*

> *"Companies don't have a heart, but they do have rules that they have to follow...There needs to be genuine, well thought-out policy that addresses real challenges and people's real lives."*

While we have identified several actions individual employers can take to improve work, we also acknowledge that many of the challenges we face are structural issues that require big picture, multi-sector solutions. Though individual employers can improve the lives of their workers, while likely boosting the retention and productivity of those workers, they cannot solve these problems for all or for good. For that, we need clear rules that all employers follow. We need a level playing field, where companies who act in the long-term interests of their workers are not at a short-term disadvantage. We need public policies that directly address the challenges we face, that are in touch with the realities of work today. Two clear areas that need substantial policy intervention are benefits and taxes.

Our current system of benefits, especially healthcare, is broken and backwards. Many people are left out entirely simply because they do not have the right kind of work. Most often, the people who lack benefits are the people working hardest, or juggling the most, piecing together different work to make ends meet, and facing the additional expense of paying for their own health insurance and funding their own time off. In addition, if public benefits are available, they are set up to exclude as many people as possible, with barriers and obstacles in place that are hardest to overcome when you need the benefits most. The things that equip people to be not only good workers but also good people in a society should be free–things like education and healthcare. We need these things in order to be our full selves and show up to our families, our communities, and our workplaces.

In addition, taxes placed on workers feel very high, with little input on how that money is used. We lack direct influence over policymakers, in the way that large companies do, because we are unable to make substantial donations, because we are not paid enough by those same companies that are channeling their money to political donations. We want transparency and influence into shaping how taxes are used and who benefits from credits and loopholes.

Although big picture, structural solutions are often dismissed as impossible or infeasible, they are actually in the best interests of the vast majority of people. We see all these solutions as moving us toward a world in which people are valued, invested in, and treated like humans, and where people can do what they want, what they are called to, and what they feel gifted in, without worrying about if and how much it will pay.

## Confronting and Reimagining the Future of Work

When we look toward the future, two trends dominate our vision: first, the place of artificial intelligence in shaping work and society, and second, the trend of rapidly deteriorating work conditions and our hope for a change of course.

*Uncertain Impacts of Artificial Intelligence*

We hear a lot about artificial intelligence, and many of us encounter it in our lives, whether at work, school, or from peers. Its impact on us and on society, though, is up in the air, depending on how it is managed and deployed, and who controls and influences those processes. We see both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, there is the potential to do less menial and grunt work, and more types of tasks can be automated. More automated tasks could give us more time and freedom–time we would love to reinvest in our families and communities to make a stronger society. On the other hand, there is the potential to eliminate jobs entirely, leaving us with even fewer options to eke out a living. We are especially concerned about AI being used to eliminate arts and creative jobs, and its potential to lower the economic (but not cultural or societal) value of human-produced art. We are also concerned that unregulated AI deployed by profit-maximizing employers could worsen the experience paradox, because AI can be used to do entry-level work that currently provides essential inroads to certain career paths. For example, when AI is used to do legal research that historically has been done by paralegals, the pipeline into law school and legal careers is further narrowed down.

*"One thing that I keep encountering is, I'll ask my boss a question about how he want something done. And he keeps saying, why don't you just try and have AI do it? Which is deeply frustrating because I'm here to learn."*

To maximize the positive potential and minimize risks, we see a need for guidance, monitoring and regulation shaping how AI is used. We also see a clear need for accessible training and transparency into AI systems, so that people understand what is happening, are positioned to fight decisions they disagree with, and are capable of getting emerging jobs working with these systems.

The future of AI is going to reflect the direction of the economy overall. If we continue to reward maximizing productivity and profit above all else, then AI will support that. If we continue to close doors to stable career paths, then AI will support that. But that is not a reflection of AI itself; it's a reflection of the society it is built into. When we hear people being afraid of AI taking something from them, like their jobs, they're actually afraid of people making the decision to take those jobs away. And focusing too much on AI can be a distraction from addressing the problems we currently face as a society. If we focus on those instead, then AI will be introduced into and reflect a better, fairer world.

*"AI can't even tell you how many n's are in the word mayonnaise correctly. I personally am not worried about that. I'd rather have paid vacation."*

*An Unsustainable Course*

As we see it, the issue we need to focus on to get to that better, fairer world is the steady deterioration of working conditions in the face of steadily rising expenses. Right now, we are on an unsustainable trajectory. Today's young people work longer, earn less, and pay more than previous generations. Last century, you could have one job and generally afford what you needed. That is not the case anymore. The cost of living keeps rising, especially for housing, education, and healthcare, but jobs are not paying more. Each year, it gets harder and harder to live, which is the opposite of what we want and expect as we age and grow in our careers. It is completely normalized among our generation to need two or three or more income streams. Companies are trying to pay as little as possible, instead of paying us enough to support a family or pay for us to go to school. They compete over who can pay the least rather than who can treat people best. They are skimping wages and holding society back instead of equipping us to grow and progress forward, as individuals and as a society. These conditions are exacerbated by job insecurity. In the face of disruption, whether an economic downturn, a pandemic, a climate emergency, or something else, companies are very quick to lay people off. We feel like we always need to know our next option, adding to the unsustainable feeling of today's labor market.

*"People are so exhausted, they're doing so many jobs. We are so tired. It's just so hard to keep up, and it makes me question if the way we're working now is sustainable. Will people burn out of the workforce? Will the workforce entirely change based on our upcoming generation?"*

The inadequacy and instability of work has led to a growing divide between the rich and everyone else. When the gap between the rich and everyone else is widening, it seems impossible to make that jump, to become better off. It gets clearer and clearer that we need big changes, and we need to make them as a society, not as individuals.

Despite these challenges, and in some ways because of them, we see a better future ahead. We want balance, mental health, and security. We want to flourish as humans and as communities. Our goals, and the solutions we talk about, are not meant only to solve economic problems or to merely have more money in our bank accounts. They are meant to allow us to live rich, fulfilling lives. Contrary to economic assumptions, our goals are generally not to maximize our income. They are to pursue our passions, to build families and communities we can take care of, and to find meaning. Jobs are a means to these ends.

*"Once we get into leadership positions, a lot will change, and it's going to get better. We will change the rules, change the regular hours. There will be positive change."*

With these priorities, we want to change course for ourselves, our peers, our communities, and the world. Right now, most of us are working several jobs to make ends meet. But we will be the leaders in the future, making decisions and able to change some of the policies, practices, and systems that we are dealing with today. We may not agree on all the specifics of how to solve these challenges–the balance of policy

solutions and market solutions, how much to increase wages, how to hold companies accountable. But we do agree on the key challenges we face, and we recognize that people need to come together to solve these, across differences of race, gender, region, and many other factors that are used to divide us.

Leaders today can listen, and involve us in their decisions, as we start to shift course. Or they can continue the trends we see today, making our future job even harder, but even more necessary. We have lived through how tiring and how unsustainable our current situation is. We face a lot of challenges today–so many challenges that things cannot stay this way. They need to change, and we will be the ones to change them.

## Partners and Acknowledgments

The following participant-researchers are co-authors of this report and have opted to be named here. This project is and will continue to be theirs, along with the many other participant-researchers who have chosen to remain anonymous. [List forthcoming]

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We partnered with many worker organizations to identify and recruit participant-researchers for this project. We are not naming these organizations here to protect the confidentiality of participant-researchers, but we encourage you to learn about the range of organizations The Workers Lab has supported and partnered with, who both demonstrate the power of worker-centered innovation and represent the types of groups who partnered with us on this research.