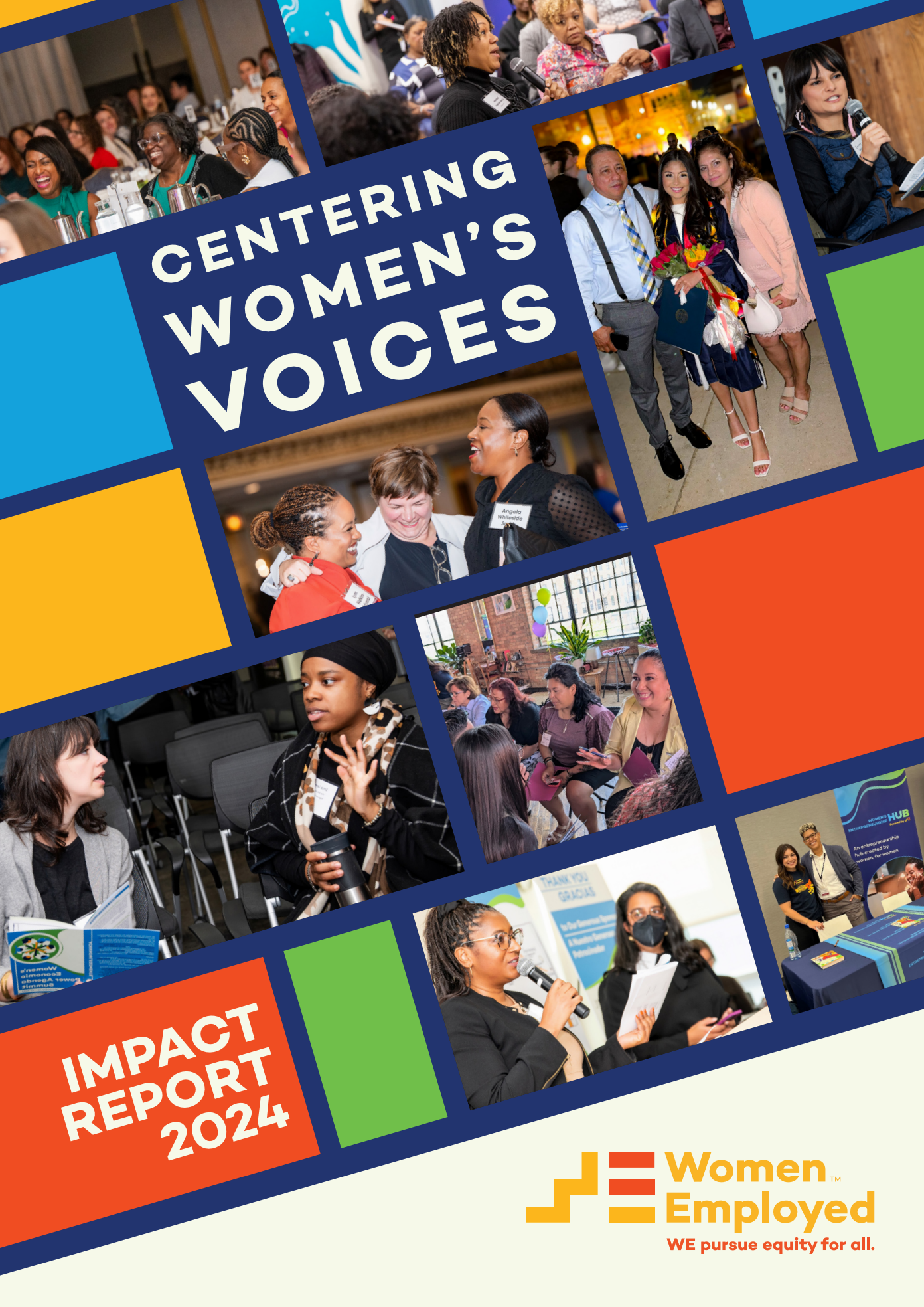


CENTERING WOMEN'S VOICES



IMPACT
REPORT
2024

 **Women[™]
Employed**

WE pursue equity for all.

DEAR FRIENDS,

There is no question that our mission continues to be as relevant as it was in 1973. Women Employed (WE) has responded strategically to the demands of the moment with unwavering commitment to the long-term vision: building women’s economic power. Women still face significant barriers to economic equity—and they are even greater for Black, Latina/x, and low-paid women. And we are proud of the incredible strides we’ve made to help them improve their economic status.

In just the past year, we secured expanded paid leave in the City of Chicago, winning the most forward-thinking law in the country. We expanded our ASPIRE Project, helping more Illinois students succeed in higher education. We hosted the Women’s Economic Power Agenda (WEPA) Summit, bringing advocates, experts, and working women together to discuss what women truly need. You’ll read more about these and other victories in this report.

The secret to our success, the reason WE has been able to identify the best strategies to alleviate women’s economic burdens, is that we listen, and we unapologetically center the needs of working women.

Centering Women’s Voices means giving them the space to share their own stories. We are pulling the chairs out at our tables and inviting women to take a seat. We are bringing their voices and experiences to advocates, funders, policymakers, and legislators who have the power to drive solutions. We are reaffirming that their needs are both valid and valued. And we are working hard to remove the barriers that stand between them and the opportunities they seek.

In this report, we are proud to feature women, in their own words, who have benefitted from our work. We are thankful for the partners who help us remove barriers and create pathways to new realities. This work is bigger than us. And we cannot be successful without seeking out and listening to the women who will be impacted by it most.



Lynn Watkins-Asiyanbi
LYNN WATKINS-ASIYANBI,
Board Chair



Cherita Ellens
CHERITA ELLENS,
President and CEO

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Women Employed’s work is driven by our mission to improve the economic status of women and remove barriers to economic equity. We are guided by our current strategic plan, which focuses on growing the economic power of women in Illinois, concentrating on those who have the greatest needs—women in low or unpaid work, and who are Black and/or Latina/x. Our plan includes four key pillars:

ENSURE the appropriate recognition and compensation of the essential work done by women.

Radically **SHIFT** the distribution of resources.

FORGE pathways to economic security, leadership, and wealth.

DRIVE organizational sustainability, capacity, and excellence.

We know we won’t achieve this plan without **Centering Women’s Voices** in the solutions. It is only by listening, by bringing the women we work on behalf of to the table, that we can understand their needs and surface the most impactful strategies for change. We strive to do that every day.

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IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Centering Women's Voices means actively listening to them, understanding their experiences, then bringing their voices to the tables where change happens, and advocating for strategic solutions that do not lose sight of their best interests and needs. Here are a few of the things we've been able to do this year, thanks to your support.

SECURING AN ILLINOIS CHILD TAX CREDIT

We helped win a first-ever state Child Tax Credit to help reduce childhood poverty. The final budget passed by the Illinois General Assembly included \$150 million over two years, with \$100 million annually thereafter. That means **qualifying families can now receive up to \$300 per child under 12 to cover basic expenses.**



PROVIDING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND SHAPING CONVERSATIONS

In the past year, WE brought our expertise to councils, commissions, and coalitions—including the City of Chicago's Mayor's Advisory Council on Women, the Illinois Labor Advisory Board, IBHE's Commission on Equitable Public University Funding, the Coalition on Transforming Higher Education Funding, the Raising Illinois Coalition, the Data-To-Action Board of Advisors, the Illinois Domestic Workers Coalition, and many more—**bringing the needs and voices of working women to the tables where decisions are made.**



Additionally, **WE kept our issues in the public eye, educating and building collective will to drive change.** Our experts were interviewed for more than 60 stories in outlets like Crain's Chicago Business, Chicago Sun-Times, WGN, ABC, NBC, WBEZ, Yahoo, and the Chicago Tribune. We spoke on topics ranging from pay transparency, to caregiving, sexual harassment, subminimum wage, paid leave, and more!

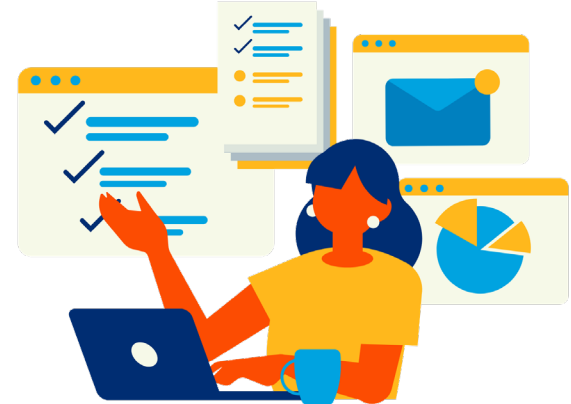
SHARING KNOWLEDGE ON WORKER RIGHTS CAMPAIGNS



Your rights are only good if you know you have them. Over the years, WE has developed expertise in running public education campaigns. This year, we released a report to help other organizations learn from our experiences. **Building a Know Your Rights Campaign shares lessons we learned from our campaign to inform Illinois women of their equal pay rights.** Our 18-month campaign, which we developed in partnership with the Illinois Department of Labor, funded by a FARE Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau, reached millions! We want to ensure other organizations can do the same.

RESEARCHING HEALTHCARE CAREER PATHWAYS

WE began an original research study, supported by JPMorganChase, **investigating career pathways for entry-level healthcare workers, who are disproportionately Women of Color.** We're looking at healthcare training programs in Chicago, healthcare workers' needs, and their perceptions of career advancement. We hope to learn what barriers keep these women from advancing and to lift up proven best practices and innovations that will enable more women to access higher-level careers with family-sustaining wages.



PRIORITIZING EQUITY AND INCLUSION, INSIDE AND OUT



You can't drive systemic change externally without prioritizing an internal culture of equity and inclusion. Women Employed is doing the work to center the needs and voices of our own people. This year, WE were recognized for that work, **coming in at number 22 out of 100 employers on Crain's Chicago Business 2023 Best Places to Work in Chicago.** We were ranked in the top 25 percent for our deep commitment to systemic change at all levels.

AND THAT'S NOT ALL!

Keep reading to see more ways we're **Centering Women's Voices** and driving change, and to hear directly from the women who are impacted by our work!

IN HER WORDS

MELANNIE AGATON

When it came to college, the question was never if I was going to go, that was always the plan. But my biggest barrier was how I was going to pay for it. Because my parents are Latino immigrants, their job prospects were very limited, so finances were always unsteady.

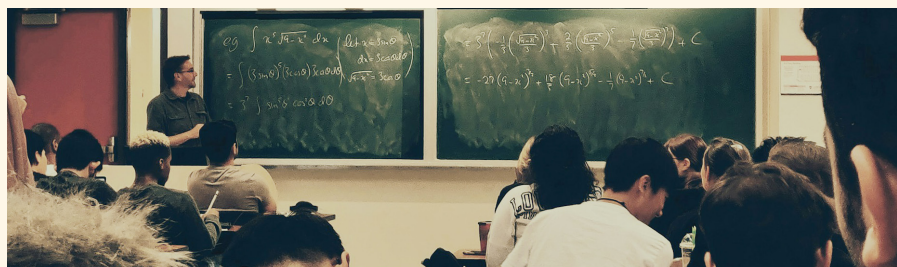
I was ineligible for need-based financial aid due to my parents' retirement funds being counted as income, so paying out of pocket was my only option, which I knew would be difficult. In high school, I excelled in my classes and extracurriculars to receive scholarship offers, but it still wasn't enough. But my parents, having attended college in their home country, valued higher education and wanted the same for me. So, they made the difficult decision to drain their entire retirement funds that they saved for over 30 years to pay for my education. They chose my future over theirs.

Because there's a wide range of circumstances within marginalized communities and especially communities of color, equitable funding is important. It ensures that students receive equal access

to the same opportunities, irrespective of what they can afford. It also ensures that regardless of what school someone is going to in the state, they can access programs that they may otherwise not be able to.

I hope future students have an easier path to paying for their education. Everybody deserves the opportunity to obtain a college degree. Especially those whose backgrounds are like mine. And Women Employed (WE) is helping to make that possible.

The people who are the most impacted often don't have a voice in the room, but WE is bringing awareness to these issues and centering their voices where they would otherwise not be represented. They're advocating for various bills and ensuring that we have policies that address community needs. And that's important. Knowing there's someone in the room, who's fighting for you and who understands you, makes all the difference in the world.



MAKING EDUCATION MORE ACCESSIBLE

PRIORITIZING EQUITY IN EDUCATION

For more than two years, we've been working with lawmakers, universities, and policy experts to **prioritize adequate and equitable funding for Illinois public universities, so every university has the resources they need to serve their unique student populations.** This year, we helped shape recommendations released by the Commission on Equitable Public University Funding. In addition, WE helped draft legislation to enact an equitable funding formula for Illinois public universities.



We also advocated for and **won \$10 million in additional need-based financial aid** for Illinois students through the MAP grant. These advances will ensure all Illinois students can get a college education, and are crucial to closing access and achievement gaps faced by students from low-income households and Students of Color.

EXPANDING THE ASPIRE PROJECT

We expanded our Accelerating Student Progress and Increasing Racial Equity (ASPIRE) Project. ASPIRE, established in 2021, works directly with Illinois community colleges to reshape developmental education as part of WE's long-standing effort to improve outcomes for adult students and Students of Color. **In addition to working with 10 colleges to put into effect placement, course, curriculum, and program changes, as well as systems to track student progress, we developed an Equity-Minded Leadership Academy in partnership with the University of Southern California (USC),** where instructors and administrators are working to foster a sense of belonging and equity for students in the classroom. These measures



will ensure more colleges can better support students on their path to college completion.

BUILDING CAREER PATHWAYS

For some women, the traditional college system may not be the best route to improve their job prospects. Career pathways programs help adult students build their academic skills, explore career options, and get credentials and certifications they need to succeed. After the pandemic forced some of our partners to leave the program, **this year we rebuilt our Career Foundations Consortium—a group of community-based organizations delivering our Career Foundations course—back to nine organizations, including two members who serve domestic violence survivors as part of our pilot program focused on building survivors' economic power.** Our Career Foundations Consortium was recognized at the 2024 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Summit with the Collaboration Award!



IN HER WORDS

ROSALIA SALGADO



As a mom of two, not having access to paid time off was very difficult. Trying to manage my kids while working two jobs, I missed a lot. It was even hard for me to run errands, take a vacation, and take time off work if I was sick, unless absolutely necessary. I needed my hours. I needed my check. Living paycheck to paycheck, I couldn't afford to miss that day of work. I couldn't even afford to miss an hour.

Since things have opened back up post-COVID, schools have been doing more and having more activities. And I love that. So, I try to schedule everything around my daughters and their extracurriculars, but there have been moments where I couldn't do things like attend parent-teacher conferences, school plays and meetings, or after-school activities. And a lot of those meetings weren't recorded. I often wondered if the school staff or the principal felt like parents didn't care. And it's not that we didn't, we just needed to go to work.

But since the passage of the paid leave ordinance in Chicago, I've been able to do things like take a mental health day. Or if I'm feeling sick, I can take a couple of days to get better so I can be my best self at work. It's been a huge relief knowing that I have time that is accumulating where I can focus on myself and my kids. I know that if I take a day or two off, money will still be there for me to pay my rent and other expenses without things falling apart or behind.

I have been speaking with other parents about this ordinance, and we're all excited about it and even what's to come. It's hard being a mom and trying to survive without having paid time off. So, it's important that people not only know about it, but tell others and take advantage of this benefit. It makes us feel appreciated for all our hard work.



IMPROVING WORKPLACES

WINNING PAID TIME OFF IN CHICAGO



On the heels of passing the Paid Leave for All Workers Act in Illinois last year, we advocated for an expanded paid time off ordinance in Chicago this year. And thanks

to you, WE WON! **The ordinance, which went into effect on July 1, 2024, builds on the five paid sick days that working people in Chicago were already entitled to earn, adding up to five days of flexible paid time off that can be used for any reason.** It's the most forward-thinking law in the nation, and especially impacts part-time and low-paid workers in jobs that don't typically provide benefits, who are disproportionately women and People of Color. Between the two laws, roughly 2.5 million more Illinoisans can now care for themselves and their families without risking their paychecks.



Winning laws isn't enough. **We must make sure people know their rights. So, we launched a public education campaign,** creating websites and fact sheets, running digital ads, sending emails, and sharing social media toolkits. This year alone, our campaign reached 2.2 million people across the state!

SECURING A FULL AND FAIR WAGE FOR TIPPED WORKERS



After years of advocacy, **Chicago's City Council passed an ordinance to end the subminimum wage for tipped workers in Chicago.** The ordinance phases out the subminimum wage over five years, ensuring tipped workers rightly earn Chicago's full minimum wage with tips on top. This makes Chicago the largest U.S. city to independently pass a full and fair wage, and is a step toward economic security for the Black and Latina/x women most likely to hold those jobs.

EQUAL PAY CHICAGO COALITION



Working with our partners on the Equal Pay Chicago Coalition (EPCC), we laid the groundwork for Chicago to remain a leader on pay equity. As EPCC's backbone organization, we led a strategic planning process, solidified EPCC's mission, rebranded, launched a new website, and held the first webinar in the Equal Pay Chicago Pay Equity Series: *Making Salary Transparency Work*. We are elated to continue the work of this coalition by advocating for equal and equitable pay for all, with the ultimate goal of eradicating the persistent pay gap and ensuring a more just and inclusive future.

IN HER WORDS

SADE DIXON



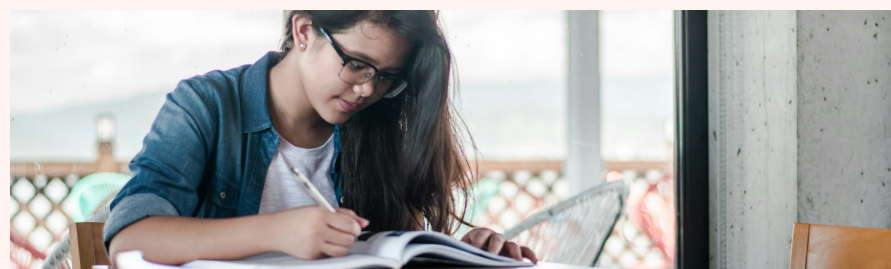
Cleaning was a part of my Saturday morning chores growing up. And as I was cleaning to cope with my mother's passing in 2020, I realized how beneficial those skills were to others and decided to invest in myself. I was no longer working at the time and decided to start a cleaning business, Satin Sheen Cleaning Services, in 2021. I made my own flyers, managed my social media pages, and put the word out to everyone I knew.

When I started, I charged \$25 a room and worked for hours. But I didn't know how to keep my overhead down, or how much product to buy, or understand taxes. That all changed when I was introduced to the Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE Hub). I was pitching my business at an event, and Women Employed was there. A member of the WE team pulled me aside after. She'd really listened to me, and she showed me how WE Hub could help me.

WE Hub has given me structure and helped with understanding the importance

of branding, taxes, and how to create a sustainable business with hopes of growing it into a franchise one day. I have also been able to employ other moms and give them an opportunity to make additional money. One of the things I love the most about WE Hub is learning about grants, especially as a Black woman entrepreneur. In addition to exposure. I have been put into places where people can learn more about me and my business.

Before learning about WE Hub, I would spend hours surfing the internet for information. But now, everything I need is housed in one place. I tell women that the Women's Entrepreneurship Hub helps to give you a framework of what you want to do and a checklist on how to get everything done. WE Hub is your resourceful best friend. It's the friend that you can call and pick their brain, and they will give you the answers you're looking for.



LISTENING AND LEARNING

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC POWER AGENDA (WEPA) SUMMIT

WE convened 11 planning partners from across Illinois to plan and host a 2-day Women's Economic Power Agenda (WEPA) Summit. The summit brought together 49 organizations and over 100 participants, and centered the voices of workers not often included at policy and advocacy tables, bringing them together with advocates, policy organizations, worker centers, labor groups, small business owners, and more. WEPA focused on addressing the barriers to economic equity working women in Illinois continue to encounter, including a persistent wage gap and compounding effects of racism and sexism.



We then compiled our learnings into a report, Women's Economic Power Agenda for Illinois.

The report provides recommendations in the areas of caregiving, workers' rights and protections, language access, wages and public benefits, women's entrepreneurship, consumer protection and financial education, as well as public and private funding. Learn more at womenemployed.org/wepa



CENTERING THE NEEDS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Since launching the Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE Hub) in 2022, we have been connecting with women who have started, or who are seeking to start, their own businesses. In May, we launched a report, *Listening and Learning from Women Entrepreneurs*. The report shares what we have learned from women business owners across the state, and

provides recommendations for ways that business service organizations, government agencies, investors, and nonprofits can better meet the needs of low-income, Black, and Latina/x women entrepreneurs. Based on what we've heard, we've already enhanced the WE Hub, and developed a Money Finder tool aimed at helping more women access business grants and loans. Read the report at womenemployed.org/wehub



WE CHAT WITH LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR JULIANA STRATTON

In April, we collaborated with Illinois Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton to host a We Chat on the South Side of Chicago. As a part of We Thrive, the Lieutenant Governor's initiative focused on financial well-being for Illinois' women and girls, **this stop brought together women workers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders for an audience-focused conversation, where guests shared their needs and experiences, and what they feel would build their economic power.** What we heard from guests was personal, and moving, and serves as another example of how we intentionally create and participate in spaces to hear from community to help inform our strategies and shape our work.



Thank You

We are grateful for all our corporate partners, foundations, funders, and individual donors who made a gift between July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024. Due to space constraints, we are not able to list all of our generous supporters. Heartfelt thanks to all of you for fueling our work to build the economic power of women.

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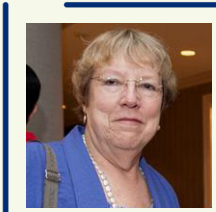
In Memory of My Aunt, "DKD"
Lydia Bueschel

In Memory of Andi Linderman
Eryn Weber-Shifrin *

In Memory of Rupal Patel
Ami Desai and family

In Memory of Marlene Pochis
Stacy Berk

In Memory of Michael Ward
Adam Hirsch



JOAN PERKINS' LEGACY OF IMPACT

Over the years, few have been more committed to Women Employed and our mission than Joan Perkins. When Joan attended her first WE meeting in the 1980s, she knew she had found a place to, in her words, "work on issues that were bigger than myself." That led to a lifelong commitment to WE. Joan's connection led her to join the Board of Directors, serving for more than 15 years, including as Board Chair. After retiring from the Board, she remained a steadfast friend, donor, advocate, and friendly face at our events. She also made the commitment to leave a legacy of advocacy by designating WE as a beneficiary in her will, joining our *Generations Circle*.

We were deeply saddened when Joan passed away in April. And we are proud to say that her legacy lives on. Thanks to Joan's foresight, Women Employed received a generous gift from her estate that will allow us to continue our work into the future. She also inspired others to give in her honor, ensuring her passion for the organization will live on. **Thank you, Joan. You will be missed!**

Thanks to those who have donated in Joan's memory:

Anonymous (2)	Vicki Curtis	Janet Schumacher
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Jill Crandall	Nancy Kreiter	

What will your legacy be?

Follow in Joan's footsteps, and ensure a future of economic equity and expanded opportunities with a legacy gift to Women Employed. You can join our *Generations Circle* by making a planned gift through a will or living trust, retirement account, or life insurance policy. For more information, contact Michelle Schwartz at mschwartz@womenemployed.org.

THANKS TO ALL OUR GENEROUS GENERATIONS CIRCLE MEMBERS

Kathleen Almaney
 Nancy D. Anderson+
 Shauna Babcock
 Gabrielle Cummings
 Vicki Curtis
 Tina M. Erickson and
 Michael A. Kruttsch
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 Karen Fishman ◊
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 Priscilla Perry+
 Janet and Philip Rotner
 Janet Schumacher
 Eric Stock
 Debbie Thorne and
 Jerry Esrig
 Lisa Turley
 Lynn Watkins-Asiyanbi

THE WORKING LUNCH

We are grateful to everyone who supported and celebrated with us at *The Working Lunch* on May 23rd. This year, we went ALL IN, hosting a thought-provoking conversation on the interconnection between the issues facing working women, and the collaboration needed to drive change. Our panel featured Rev. C.J. Hawking of Arise Chicago, Dr. Cristina Pacione-Zayas from the City of Chicago, and Audra Wilson of the Shriver Center on Poverty Law. We also honored people and organizations who are ALL IN on driving systemic change, including Arise Chicago, BMO, and Amber N. Anderson, Executive Director and Founder of the Black is Gold Organization.

Champion Sponsor:



Trailblazer Sponsors:



INVESTORS FOR CHANGE

With the generosity of our *Investors for Change*, who make unrestricted gifts of \$1,000 or more annually, Women Employed is able to pursue the best opportunities to improve workplace conditions and build pathways to higher education so more women can succeed economically.

ANNE LADKY LEADERSHIP FUND ◊

Thank you to these donors who founded the fund in Anne Ladky's honor and to those who have designated the total or a portion of their gift to the fund. All donations support initiatives aimed at increasing WE's impact on the conditions facing women in low-paid occupations and building our movement by engaging next-generation leaders as activists for women's economic justice.

NANCY B. KREITER ADVOCACY FUND*

Special thanks to the donors of this fund that support Women Employed's work to strengthen federal equal opportunity policies.

GENERATIONS CIRCLE

Thanks to our supporters who have included Women Employed in their estate plans, future generations of women will have meaningful opportunities to achieve their aspirations for themselves and their families.

ELEVATE, MONTHLY GIVING ☆

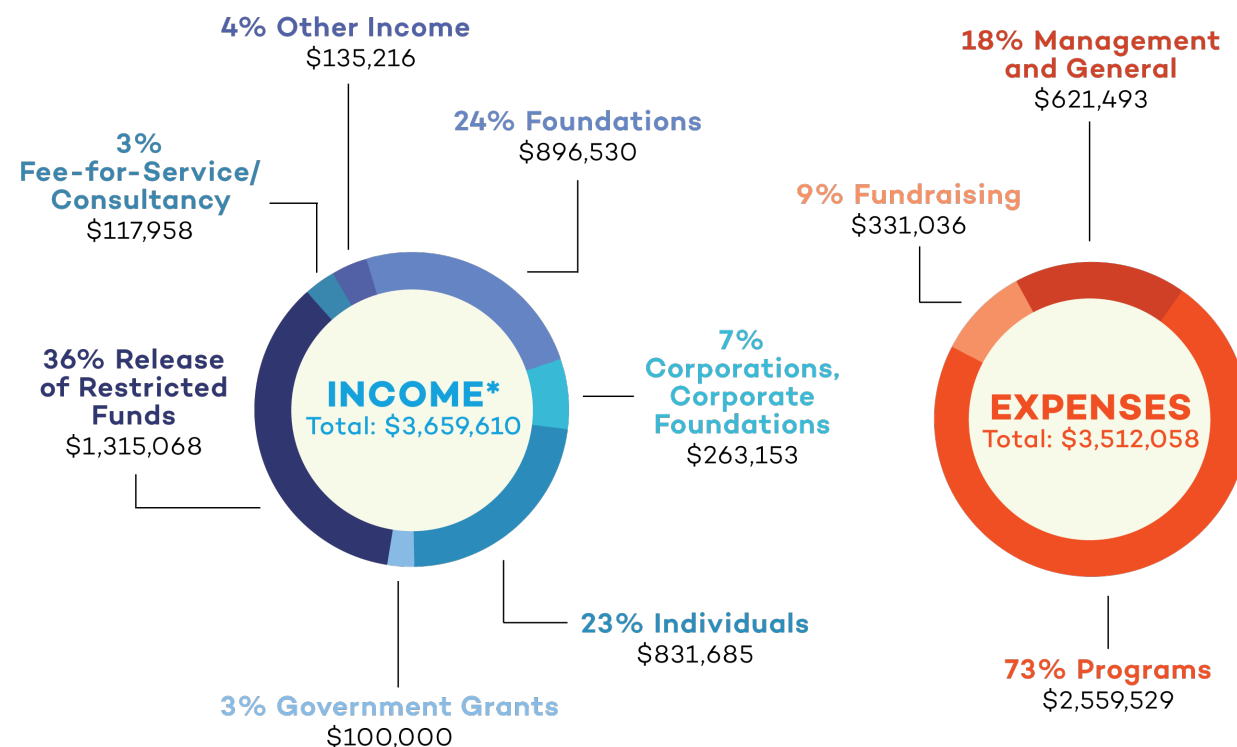
Elevate, our monthly giving community, is a passionate and determined group of monthly supporters on a mission to improve the economic status of women and remove barriers to equity. Make a monthly gift and join people just like you, giving anything they can to prove how unstoppable we are when we work together!

DEDICATIONS

Honor a loved one with a gift in their name to Women Employed for a birthday, anniversary, or other special occasion. Donations in memory of a special person honor their life and continue their legacy. The tribute gifts noted are donations of \$150 and above.

For more information on these special giving opportunities, call Michelle Schwartz at (312) 481-6770 or visit womenemployed.org.

FINANCIALS



*Unrestricted Dollars



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