

# Understanding Worker Centers in Chicago: A Qualitative Analysis

# Research Team

- Leslie Nickels
- Nadine Remington
- Joe Zanoni
- Julia Lippert
- Susan Buchanan
- Ari Glazer
- Jessica Aranda
- Jose Oliva
- Tim Bell



New York Times Photo



Source: [www.tanquesinoxidables.com.mx](http://www.tanquesinoxidables.com.mx)




Worker Center 4 Photo

# What worker center staff believe is needed (meeting 12/04)

- Who is accountable for worker safety?
- How do you get people to make decisions that protect their health and safety?
- How can agencies or employers be held accountable but maintain jobs?
- What resources are available for workers?
  - Clinic
  - PPE
  - OSHA
  - Peers
  - Other?
- How do we get “code of conduct” signed by temp agencies?
- What are the alternatives to temp or agency hiring of employees?
- How do we get current laws better enforced? But still maintain jobs?

# Background

- **Latino immigrants have the highest and most accelerating rate of workplace fatalities compared to other ethnicities.**
  - Culture
  - Language barriers
  - Fear
  - Economic necessity
  - Lack of training
  - Inadequate safety equipment



**Day laborers** = workers in the practice of looking for nonstandard employment in open-air, informal markets, such as street corners or temporary agencies.

# Background

Janice Fine describes **the role that organizations**, as opposed to individuals, **play an important part in improving living and working conditions of immigrant workers** Worker Centers: Organizing New Communities at the Edge of the Dream.

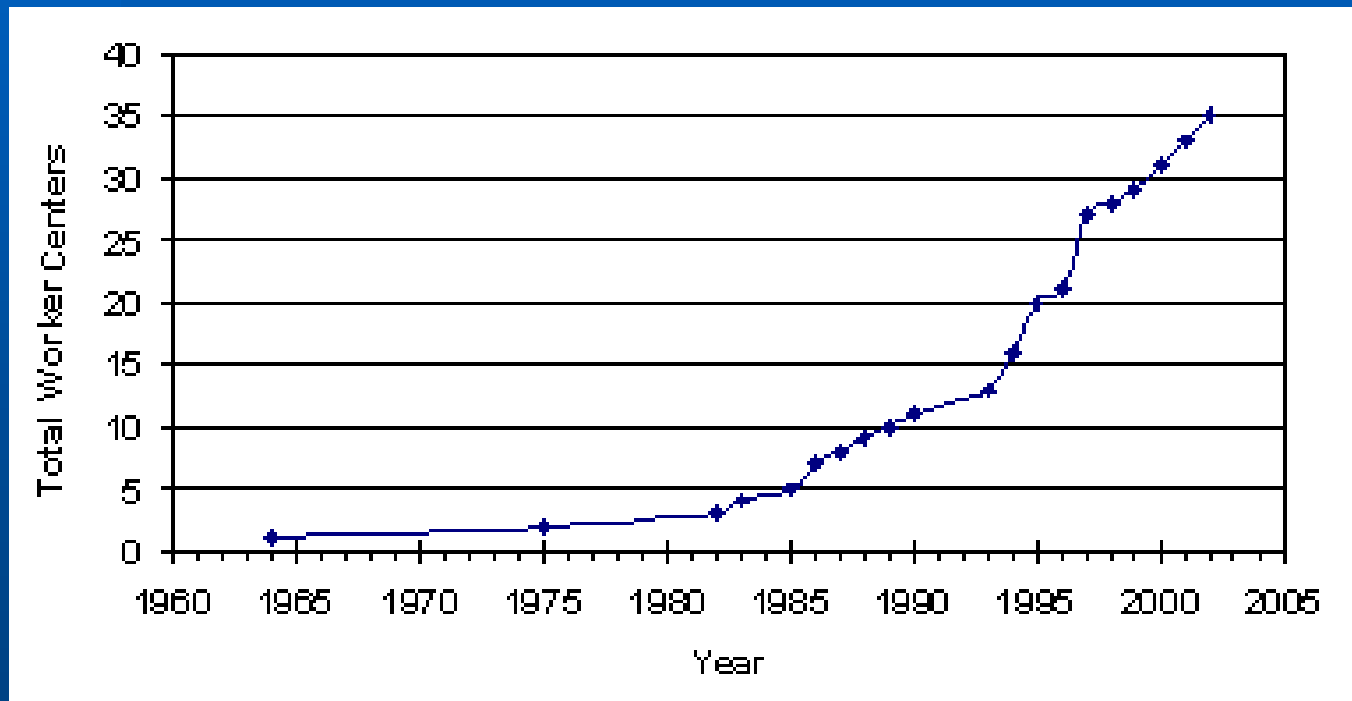
# Background

**Worker Centers** = organizations with missions to improve working conditions of immigrant workers and low-wage workers



# Background

## When did worker centers arise?



*J. Fine. Figure 1.2. When did worker centers arise? Page 10*

Understanding Worker Centers

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# Background

## Worker Centers: Organizing New Communities at the Edge of the Dream

- identified 135 (in 2003) worker centers in over 80 US cities, towns, and rural areas.
- up to 155 in 2006
- identified 8 workers centers in Illinois; 7 of them are in the Chicago area.

# Background

**Major services provided by the worker centers were legal, ESL classes, facilitating employment, citizenship, medical insurance and cooperative lending/financial assistance. (Fine)**

**Issues of basic occupational health services were not addressed in Fine's study**

# Purpose of this Pilot Research Project

**To understand the role of worker centers for improving work environments**

- case study of 4 worker centers in Chicago**
- Intervention research strategies to increase the capacity to provide health and safety services at the worker center level (hypothesis-generating research)**

# Partnerships

- **Criteria to be a partner worker center**
  - Be identified as a worker center by Fine's study
  - Be located within the city of Chicago
  - Support urban day laborers
- **Fine identified 7 worker centers in the greater Chicagoland area.**
  - One no longer existed
  - One was located outside the city of Chicago
  - One supported migrant and seasonal farm workers

# Community Groups

- CICWI-77
- Latino Union-14
- San Lucas Workers' Center-23
- Chicago Worker Collaborative- 50



# Development of Research Plan

**The decision to use a qualitative research design was driven by our interest in examining how specific worker centers operate in order to provide possible appropriate and customized intervention research strategies.**

# Development of Research Plan

- **Participatory action research**
  - systematic and collaborative process with the goal of bringing about social change (involves people in a process of change)
  - methodical inquiry with the intent of improving practices and solving significant problems
  - action *as* research



# Development of Research Plan

- Initial meeting
- Focus groups
- Observations
- Validation meeting
  - March 30, 2006
  - Met with the director of each worker center
  - Reviewed our preliminary findings

# Focus Groups

- 1 researcher facilitated
- the remaining researchers took notes
- tape-recorded and transcribed
- transcripts were translated into English

# Focus Groups

- The focus group questions were designed to be open-ended to initiate discussion.
- Staff, volunteers, and worker leaders
- 5 main questions with subparts

# Focus Groups

Center	Date	Facilitator	UIC attendees	Center attendees	Language	Interpreter
WC 1	10/4/2005	Nadine Remington	Julia Lippert,	2 staff & 2 volunteers	English	n/a
			Leslie Nickels,			
			Nadine Remington,			
			Joe Zandoni			
WC 2	2/3/2006	Julia Lippert	Julia Lippert,	3 staff & 6 worker leaders & 1 child (of a worker leader)	Spanish	n/a
			Nadine Remington,			
			Joe Zandoni			
WC 3	9/27/2005	Joe Zandoni	Julia Lippert,	2 staff members	English	n/a
			Leslie Nickels,			
			Nadine Remington,			
			Joe Zandoni			
WC 4	9/29/2005	Joe Zandoni	Julia Lippert,	1 staff and 4 worker leaders	Spanish and English	1 staff and Julia Lippert
			Leslie Nickels,			
			Nadine Remington,			
			Joe Zandoni			

# Focus Groups Questions

## 1. Describe your worker center.

A. What is your mission?

B. What role does your center serve in meeting needs for workers?

C. Does the worker center provide the following worker needs ?

- employment
- “social club”
- training
- advocacy
- worker rights
- housing
- healthcare

# Focus Groups Questions

**2. Describe the community you serve.**

**3. How do you reach workers?**

# Focus Groups Questions

## 4. Describe your relationship with employers.

A. Are the employers located in your community?

B. How do you get the workers employed?

# Focus Groups Questions

**5. What information or resources do you currently offer workers about workplace health and safety?**

**A. How important is workplace health and safety to workers?**

**B. What kind of information or resources would you like to offer workers?**



# Observations

<b>Center</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>WC 1</b>	10/30/2005	Center
	11/10/2005	Center
<b>WC 2</b>	1/17/2006	apartment building in Hoffman Estates
	3/7/2006	Center
<b>WC 3</b>	11/3/2005	Center
	11/10/2005	Center
	1/22/2006	Center and Lincoln Park streets (flyer distribution)
	1/25/2006	Cicero Street Corner
<b>WC 4</b>	8/31/2005	Protest: center, bus, manufacturing company, 2 stores, street in front of store
	11/22/2005	Church basement
	11/28/2005	Center and Temporary Agency

# Analysis

	Focus Group	
CENTER	Question #	
Worker Center 1	Themes	Supporting Quotes
Worker Center 2	Themes	Supporting Quotes
Worker Center 3	Themes	Supporting Quotes
Worker Center 4	Themes	Supporting Quotes
	Common Themes	

# Analysis

	<b>Observation</b>	
<b>CENTER</b>	<b>Question #</b>	
<b>Worker Center 1</b>	Themes	Supporting Observation
<b>Worker Center 2</b>	Themes	Supporting Observation
<b>Worker Center 3</b>	Themes	Supporting Observation
<b>Worker Center 4</b>	Themes	Supporting Observation
	Common Themes	

# Results

## COMMON THEMES: MISSION

CENTER	Focus Group	Observation
Worker Center 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ safe space</li> <li>▪ learn rights</li> <li>▪ organize strategize</li> <li>▪ improve conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ provide legal support</li> <li>▪ provide workers rights training</li> </ul>
Worker Center 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ make/change law</li> <li>▪ legal help</li> <li>▪ organize/strategize</li> <li>▪ learn rights</li> <li>▪ teach those with power</li> <li>▪ teach the workers</li> <li>▪ improve conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ organize</li> <li>▪ provide legal advice</li> <li>▪ help workers understand workers' rights laws</li> <li>▪ assist when workers are hurt</li> <li>▪ help people to keep employment</li> </ul>
Worker Center 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ provide tools</li> <li>▪ improve conditions</li> <li>▪ develop skills</li> <li>▪ safe space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ provide a safe space to find employment</li> <li>▪ provide legal support for wage issues, which are common</li> <li>▪ set wages for certain jobs</li> <li>▪ follow the rules decided by the workers</li> </ul>
Worker Center 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ change law</li> <li>▪ improve workplaces</li> <li>▪ direct action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ stop abuses of day laborers' at temporary agencies</li> <li>▪ direct action</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>2/4 safe space</b></li> <li>▪ <b>2/4 change law</b></li> <li>▪ <b>4/4 improve workplace conditions</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>4/4 safe space</b></li> <li>▪ <b>3/4 provide legal support</b></li> </ul>

# Results

## COMMON THEMES: EMPLOYMENT

CENTER	Focus Group	Observation
Worker Center 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>center not used to find jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>did not observe employment support</li> </ul>
Worker Center 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>center not used to find jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>did not observe employment support</li> </ul>
Worker Center 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>workers come to center to look for work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>employment is central to the center</li> </ul>
Worker Center 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>center not used to find jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>did not observe employment support</li> </ul>
	<b>3/4 center not used to find jobs</b>	<b>3/4 center is not a place to find employment</b>

# Results

## COMMON THEMES: HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO WORKERS

CENTER	Focus Group	Observation
<b>Worker Center 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workshops</li> <li>▪ Advocating</li>   <li>▪ workers' rights book</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Many posters on walls: a few OSHA-related (English)</li> <li>▪ Handouts, placards</li>   <li>▪ Workers Rights Manual developed by center in Spanish, English and Polish</li>   <li>▪ No resources seen used</li> </ul>
<b>Worker Center 2</b>	unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the worker leaders, staff and volunteers are the resources for post injury or post illness information</li> <li>▪ no preventative resources observed</li> </ul>
<b>Worker Center 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UIC partnership to educate the workers</li> <li>▪ legal support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Posters: 1 OSHA-related (English)</li> <li>▪ health and safety related videos</li> <li>▪ injuries on-the-job pamphlets</li>   <li>▪ No resources seen used</li> </ul>
<b>Worker Center 4</b>	UIC partnership to educate the workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No health and safety related resources observed</li> </ul>
	<b>2/3 UIC partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>2/4 health and safety resources available, but not observed as being used</b></li> <li>▪ <b>2/4 no preventative health and safety resources observed</b></li> </ul>

# Results

## COMMON THEMES: HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPORTANCE

CENTER	Focus Group	Observation
Worker Center 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff has to be careful in asking the H&amp;S questions and be patient in extracting that information, which takes time because               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Worker may be used to more hazardous working conditions in country of origin and not think that current working conditions are that bad</li> <li>▪ Workers may be fearful to discuss all conditions at the worker center</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ discussed often usually with personal stories</li> <li>▪ workers state the prevention and OSHA utilization are solutions to injured son the job</li> <li>▪ no faith in OSHA</li> </ul>
Worker Center 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Very important:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ workers have been fired for trying to improve safety conditions</li> <li>▪ workers have seen deaths and cancer in coworkers, family and friends</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ no faith in OSHA</li> <li>▪ fight for safer conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Did not observe workers discussing health and safety issues</li> </ul>
Worker Center 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Important enough to walk away from an unsafe job</li> <li>▪ no faith in OSHA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ health issues are brought up when researchers are introduced</li> <li>▪ wage issues are discussed more than health and safety</li> </ul>
Worker Center 4	<p>Important enough to keep standing up to employers (&amp; keep losing jobs)</p>	<p>wage issues are discussed more than health and safety</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>2/4 important enough to fight/leave job</b></li> <li>▪ <b>3/4 no faith in OSHA</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>2/4 wage issues are discussed more than health and safety</b></p>

# Jobs and Hazards

- ***Jobs***
  - Construction
  - Demolition
  - Landscaping
  - Moving
  - Light manufacturing
- ***Population***
  - Day laborers
  - Temp agencies
- ***Hazards***
  - Falls
  - Amputations
  - Chemicals
- ***Work Environment***
  - Employers
  - Finding work
  - Community and home
  - Undocumented
  - Exploitation



# Common Characteristics

- **The center itself is a safe and stable places for workers to meet and problem solve.**
- **The centers provide help in obtaining legal and health services.**
- **The staff and leaders are committed to fostering leadership skills.**

# Common Characteristics

- **The centers use a variety of training approaches that incorporate popular education methods.**
- **The centers have similar challenges in addressing health and safety issues.**

# Limitations

- Participatory action research
- Four different researchers
  - 3 different facilitators
  - 3 spoke Spanish
- Spanish Focus Groups

# Recommendations

## 1. Increasing access to health clinics and/or health services

- answer questions
- disseminate health information
- provide vaccinations
- schedule appointments at the clinic

# Recommendations

- 2. Increase health and safety awareness in everyday activities**
  - “charlas”

# Recommendations

## **3. Conduct train-the-trainer programs for specific health and safety issues**

# Recommendations

- 4. Identify and create center specific materials to educate workers on the important of health and safety issues in the languages spoken at the centers (Spanish, English, and sometimes Polish)**

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