



VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL  
**HIGHLIGHTS 2020**



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

Victorian Trades Hall Council respectfully acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we stand. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

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**WE ARE  
UNION**

# *Solidarity Stories*

Tell us all about your favourite funny, surprising, or intriguing historical anecdotes about Trades Hall, or the mighty Victorian union movement.

**Submit your story at**  
[weareunion.org.au/solidarystories](http://weareunion.org.au/solidarystories)







## FROM THE SECRETARY

I'm not gonna lie, 2020 was a difficult year.

It started with unions doing a massive fundraising drive to support workers impacted by the horrendous bushfires that ripped through communities in January. The movement got on the front foot - releasing a Trades Hall air quality standard to provide guidance to HSRs about keeping their workmates safe from the haze of smoke blanketing Victoria.

At the end of March, some journos grabbed me as I walked into State Parliament for a meeting, and asked for a comment about the pandemic. On behalf of the movement we raised the idea of paid pandemic leave for those who didn't have access to sick leave. This was the first announcement calling for paid pandemic leave in Australia.

And then unions in 2020 went into full swing. Victorian unions scrambled to save the jobs of their members, scrambled to save entire industries, scrambled to keep workers safe from a deadly and mysterious threat. Unusually, we even partnered with VECCI and were the first group to call for a wage subsidy, which became JobKeeper.

Victorian workers were (and continue to be) on the front line in the fight against COVID-19. They kept our state running. Their hard work and sacrifices kept us all safe and healthy, and, now - they will be crucial to the success of Victoria's rebuild. Despite all the challenges of 2020, workers in union continued to fight for safer workplaces, fair pay and a strong safety net.

When the lockdown of the towers was announced, in a hectic 24 hours we threw our lobbying, fundraising and organising might behind public housing tenants, raising over \$286,000, and the movement physically went to Flemington to deliver food and provisions.

The Migrant Workers Centre, in particular, was a vital resource for migrant communities so shamefully abandoned by the Federal Government and excluded from both JobKeeper and JobSeeker.

The Young Workers Centre organised an entire Union Summer internship program from lockdown - supporting young unionists to learn from experienced organisers in unions. They also launched JobScammer, an online platform that helped catch out employers abusing JobKeeper to rip off young workers.

Candidates for local government who we had trained through Candidate School learned to organise and campaign via zoom meetings, social media, and letters walked door to door. Standing on a platform of worker-centric pandemic recovery, three of these amazing rank and file unionists were elected.

One day longer, one day stronger. It was a brutal 112 day lockdown for Victoria, but an immense act of solidarity which our interstate comrades will never truly appreciate. As Victorians, as unionists, we know our contribution & we can be rightly proud.

While the experience of working from home taught us new ways of organising, it is fair to say our organisers are a little bit excited to get back to talking to workers "IRL" (in real life). We have a choc-full campaigning agenda and a clear vision for how we want to remake the world post-COVID-19. Victorian workers in union are going for glory, and we can't wait to organise, campaign and win change with unions & union members in 2021.

**Luke Hilakari**  
**Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council**



## CAMPAIGNS



**182**  
LEAD ACTIVISTS



**578**  
REGULAR VOLUNTEERS



**2,989**  
VOLUNTEERS.

After increasing activist numbers through the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had the capacity to support and surge affiliate campaigns with train station blitzes, MP office stunts and phone banks including the Metro campaign and No to Privatisation of VicRoads, Hospo Voice actions and others.

### ONLINE FOCUS

We shifted from field-based campaigning to a new online action model, with great results. We achieved several “world firsts” including the online picket line for a wage subsidy for all, resulting in:

- 3,674 RSVPs to the event for the picket

line - there is no way of knowing how many people are “in attendance”

- a nine-hour long livestream calling on activists to call talk-back radio and contact their MPs
- strong national coverage for the #fortheworkers campaign for the ACTU.
- In July 2019, we created 27 location-based groups. Since then, we’ve had 229 events with 1185 attendees.
- In 2020, despite lockdown, we ran 68 online training meetings for local groups with 641 people attending.





## TRAINING WORKERS TO RUN FOR OFFICE - AND WIN!

APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR 2021 INTAKE ON MAY 1  
VISIT [CANDIDATESCHOOL.COM.AU](https://candidateschool.com.au) FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO APPLY

### CANDIDATE SCHOOL

In 2019 we launched Australia's first Candidate school – which we continued to deliver, online, in 2020. Successes to date include:

- Two cohorts of 49 candidates
- 10 candidates ran in local elections
- Three were elected, in Macedon Ranges, Horsham Rural City Council and Central Goldfields.

### CANDIDATES WHO WON ELECTION:



**CR WAYNE SPROULL**  
CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS



**CR ANNETTE DEATH**  
MACEDON RANGES



**CR PENNY FLYNN**  
HORSHAM



## MIGRANT WORKERS CENTRE



**229**

workers helped to resolve industrial disputes



**323**

referrals made to appropriate services



**\$923,946**

recovered for migrant workers

Last year the Migrant Workers Centre strengthened the foundations laid in its first year of operation. Building on these strengths, the centre has grown - not only the size of the team, but the scale and breadth of our work.

Key areas of work have continued:

- assisting migrant workers through industrial issues
- delivering Know Your Rights sessions and
- growing a strong migrant worker led network to advocate for workers' rights.

### KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION AND EMPOWERMENT

- Delivered 26 Know Your Rights sessions to 779 participants
- Participated in 17 panels and special events with 680 participants
- Participated in 32 community outreach events and festivals with 1174 participants
- Held 10 awareness raising actions with 258 participants
- Trained 22 Multicultural Safety Ambassadors who delivered 13 information sessions
- Delivered services in 14 community languages face-to-face and online, including 6 languages spoken by staff

### INFLUENCING FOR A FAIRER FUTURE

- 4 Submissions
- 6,000 petition signatures

### ONLINE PRESENCE

- 20,146 website visits in 6 community languages
- 5058 Facebook likes, 953 Twitter followers and 676 Instagram followers
- 8140 Chinese language Facebook page likes
- 153 members of our Latin American Community Facebook group
- Responding to COVID-19
- Over 2000 workers referred to support and Government services.

### UNION RECRUITMENT

Scores of migrant workers have taken up union membership as a result of their interactions with the Migrant Workers Centre, including:

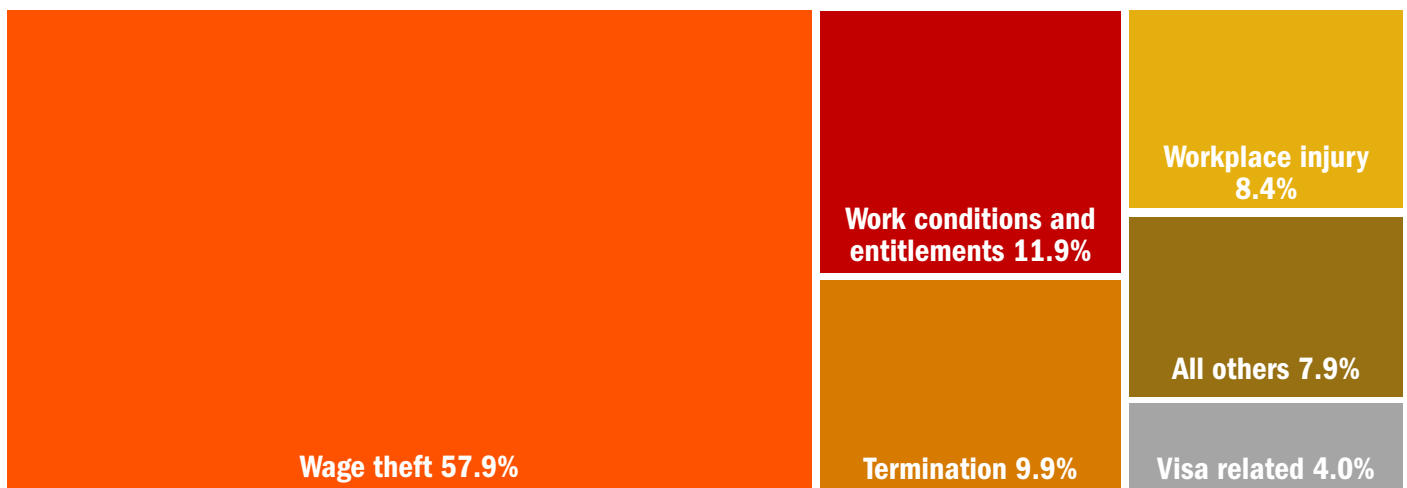
• <b>AMIEU</b>	70
• <b>AWU</b>	19
• <b>CFMEU Manufacturing</b>	2
• <b>CFMEU C&amp;G</b>	3
• <b>HACSU</b>	1
• <b>Hospo Voice</b>	10
• <b>HWU</b>	1
• <b>IEU</b>	17
• <b>MSAV</b>	1
• <b>TWU</b>	11
• <b>UWU</b>	26
• <b>CWU (QLD)</b>	20



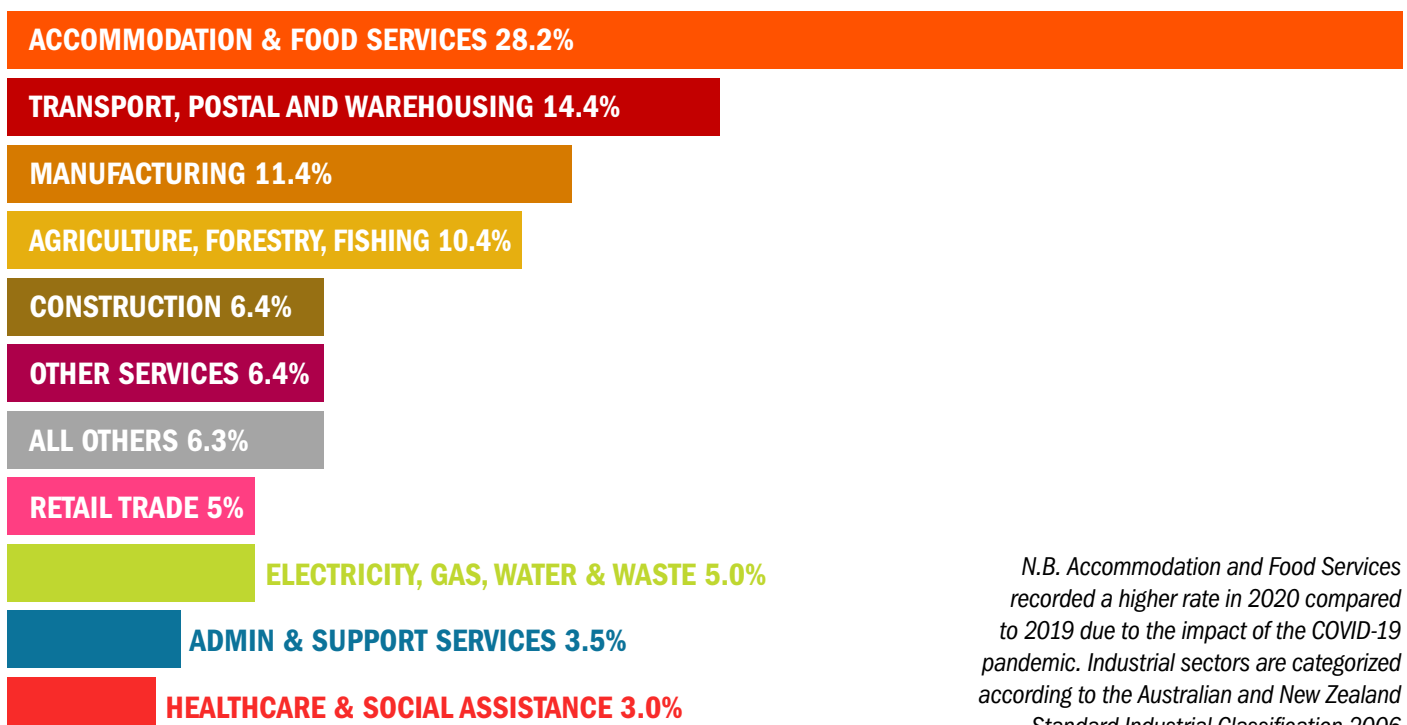
## TYPES OF GRIEVANCE DEALT WITH IN 2020



## CAUSES OF GRIEVANCE IN 2020



## INDUSTRIAL SECTORS WITH HIGH GRIEVANCE RATES IN 2020



*N.B. Accommodation and Food Services recorded a higher rate in 2020 compared to 2019 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Industrial sectors are categorized according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification 2006.*



# CASE STUDY: ANNIE'S STORY

Annie reached out to the Young Workers Centre when her boss stole over \$30,000 from her. Here is her story.

Annie was 19 years old when she started work at an unassuming newsagency in Carrum Downs. Everything started out seemingly normal. They said they'd start her out by doing some trial shifts in her first week, which seemed logical. They wanted to see if she could handle the work. The rate would be \$15 an hour for the first week, which was fine because she'd heard that some places didn't pay at all for trial shifts.

But then the second week came, and the third, and the fourth, without an increase in her hourly rate. Fifteen dollars, regardless of weekday or weekend. No pay slip. No superannuation. No tax withheld, meaning she now has a debt with the ATO.

Annie was a student at the time, and study materials aren't cheap. Once food and rent are accounted for, there's barely anything left. Forget living your life: going out with friends, saving for a holiday, even treating yourself to something small to distract from the endless grind. Colour starts to fade from the world. Everything feels like a struggle.

After two years, with no hope of anything changing on its own, Annie spoke up. Exhausted by the razor's edge balancing act, she submitted a request to be paid what she was entitled to. She did so in writing.

And there her troubles truly began. Bogus claims of complaints against her by customers were levelled at her. In her own words: "I was constantly being yelled at, verbally abused and embarrassed in front of customers and colleagues whenever my boss was there and they also claimed that customers constantly complained about me."

Broken down by months of this treatment, she left. What she imagined would be a liberating experience was anything but. The stress and anxiety followed her out the door, unresolved. She had given two years of her life to an employer who was probably going to just do the same thing to someone else now.

She contacted Fair Work, who rejected her request for assistance. The injustice shadowing her grew stronger, mocked her, sought to envelop her entirely. But her anger grew at the same time.

Unable to afford a lawyer after years of having her wages stolen, she admits she was on the verge of giving up.

The only other place she could find that assisted young people in situations like hers was the Young Workers' Centre. Unlike Fair Work, the YWC are fighters. Cases like Annie's are unfortunately all too common, and the team of solicitors well-versed in wage theft (a term she had not thought to use, despite how obvious it later became) are able to do more for her than any government department.

Her case continues, but progress is being made. Her lawyers, Leon and Oanh, have calculated the total sum of her stolen wages at \$30,000. Even this act of calculation can be so difficult for workers who do not have assistance.

Annie is now able to tell her story in the hope that others do not have to suffer the way she did: she testified in front of the Senate Economics Committee's hearing on Improving Protections of Employees' wages and entitlements: Strengthening penalties for non-compliance. She told the hearing:

*I left the newsagency over a year ago and my case is ongoing, I am yet to see my unpaid wages. It is a slow and arduous process to win back my wages. We need tough wage theft laws nationally to deal with the root of the problem and provide a quick and accessible process for workers to recover their stolen wages.*

It was an incredibly brave thing to do, and something that very few people would have had the strength to do after the ordeal she has been through.







## DATA & DIGITAL



**574**

new petitions in 2020



**405,858**

new signers in 2020



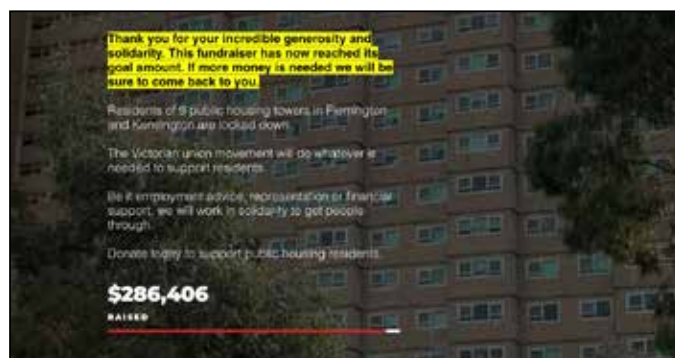
**\$381,645**

funds raised

Last year was our biggest year ever with 574 petitions started (out of 1490 all time) and 405,858 new signers taking us to a total list of 952,629 unique signers.

Throughout the pandemic, unions used Megaphone to help healthcare workers, teachers, retail workers and more win safer working conditions, access to PPE, and paid pandemic leave. Together, with more than 110,000 petition signatures we won JobKeeper payments to support millions of working people.

In 2020, unions used Megaphone not only to win campaigns but also to map worksites and identify potential members - currently 56% of our list are union members.



We also supported affiliates and community organisations to fundraise \$381,645 from 7533 donors, with an average donation of \$48.55.

We worked closely with the TWU to raise \$26,070

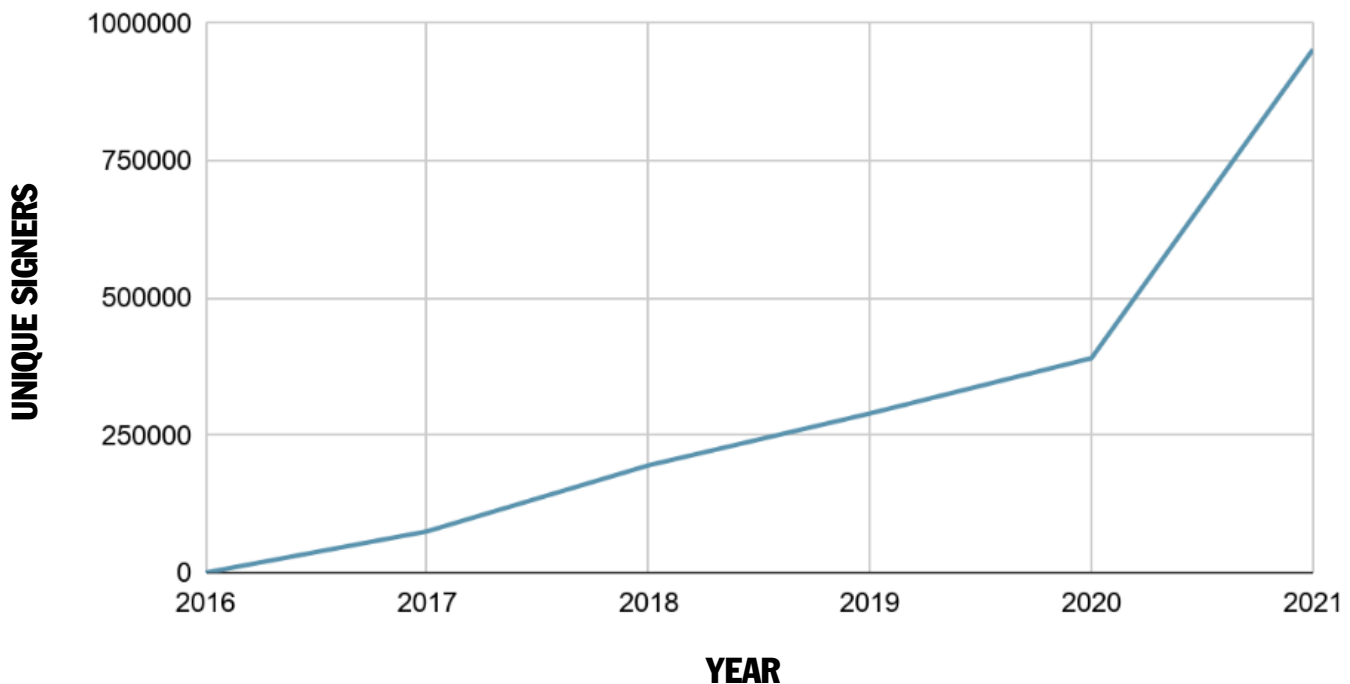
for the families of delivery riders who were killed at work. This money has been fully distributed to affected families. We provided support to CFMEU organisers and members who were unfairly fined by the ABCC. These organisers were able to fundraise a total of \$48,537 to cover their fines.

Lastly, unions and community members raised \$286,406 for locked down public housing residents in just 24 hours. Trades Hall worked closely with a collective of community organisations including ASRC, AMSSA and the Ubuntu Project. Donations were used to purchase culturally appropriate food, transportation and refrigeration, communication infrastructure, safety and cleaning equipment and more.

### PETITION HIGHLIGHTS

- Coronavirus: guarantee special paid leave for all workers (116,081)
- Coronavirus - a guaranteed wage subsidy to save jobs now! (44,372)
- Don't let the Morrison government ruin our retirement (29,440)
- Coronavirus: extend Jobkeeper and Jobseeker (21,012)
- COVID-19: Rent strike pledge (17,550)

# MEGAPHONE.ORG.AU GROWTH



- The Aged Care Retention Payment must be extended to ALL aged care workers (17,529)
- Survivors and Allies demand justice for gendered violence in workplaces including Parliament (16,906)
- Education for all - stop fee hikes (16,697)

- digital training for staff, affiliates and activists

The goal: to harness the power of digital to

- win union campaigns,
- support affiliate organising,
- build membership growth and
- win elections.



## DISRUPTION

Over the last 2 years, we have been working on a project to tackle the rise of the right on social media. During the 2016 American election the Democrats ran and tested 60,000 pieces of paid content on Facebook, while the Republicans ran 6 million. In the most recent Australian federal election we saw a coordinated social media campaign from the right, with Clive Palmer alone spending \$60 million on advertising.

The rise of the organised right has led some union members to vote against their own interests for right-wing populist parties e.g. Clive Palmer, One Nation and Rise Up Australia. This new project is researching the social media techniques, language and content used by these groups to find out how we can use them to disrupt dangerous right-wing narratives online.

## NEW DIGITAL TEAM

To build on this strong work, we are creating a brand new, standalone digital team to work on:

- Megaphone
- digital fundraising
- disruption project
- campaign tech



# Top of the class: which sections of society support climate action

**Miki Perkins**  
Environment reporter

When former Labor frontbencher Joel Fitzgibbon quit the opposition shadow cabinet last year, he said his party needed to reduce its ambition on climate change to win back blue-collar workers.

"Demonising and blaming blue-collar workers will not stabilise our climate," he tweeted at the time.

But it's wealthy Victorians, rather than blue-collar workers, who are least likely to support climate action and the transition to renewable energy, according to new polling commissioned by the Victorian Trades Hall Council, which represents 43 trade unions and eight regional trades hall councils.

The large poll of 3000 Victorian adults found while those who called themselves working class were not as enthusiastic about climate action as those who described themselves as middle or upper middle class, it was wealthy people who were the most unsupportive.

About 35 per cent of wealthy respondents said they were unconcerned about climate change, compared with about 30 per cent of those who described themselves as working class.

Almost 40 per cent of wealthy Victorians said they didn't think the government should take action on climate change, compared with



But he said the views of politicians like Mr Fitzgibbon were "totally out of touch" with working people.

Governments should throw more support behind new industries like green hydrogen and large scale wineries to provide future jobs, he said. "The people in the Latrobe Valley are not stupid, they know everything is changing."

In response, Mr Fitzgibbon said working people cared about climate change and renewable energy but didn't like government policies like carbon tax, or equivalent, which they saw as a threat to job security.

"I don't know what's happened to these trade union leaders who once focused on the rights, interests and aspirations of working people but now spend their time obsessing about climate change and renewable energy," he said.

Conducted last November, the poll is part of the trades hall council landmark *Transitions from Crisis* report, released late last year.

Supported by Environment Victoria, it has policy suggestions on responding to climate change in a way that puts affected workers first.

The poll showed that, broadly, about 60 per cent of Victorians want more investment in renewable energy and 75 per cent are concerned about climate.

Builder's labourer Tom Shields, who lives with his young family in Carlton, has worked on large construction projects in Melbourne's central business district for the past six years.

## CLIMATE ACTION

### TRANSITION FROM CRISIS

In 2020 we launched a ground-breaking climate and economic recovery strategy, *Transition from Crisis*.

- This is the first time ever the Victorian union movement has developed a comprehensive report and action plan for climate justice and just transitions.
- It was endorsed by VTHC Executive and is the culmination of months of collaboration and work with affiliates.
- Polling released alongside the publication of this work showed a promising attitudinal shift away from the false dichotomy of 'climate versus jobs'.
- This polling also attracted strong media, including *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*.

### MOVEMENT-WIDE ACTION

- Trades Hall also provided solidarity and support for climate activism, including School Strike 4 Climate which saw 211 actions state-wide in September.
- We established Victorian Unions Climate Action Committee – also a first, and a major step towards a strong, cohesive, union-led approach to climate action.
- We advocated and wrote submissions to government inquiries on recycling and waste, nuclear power, green hydrogen, and the Victorian Renewable Energy Target (VRET).
- We represented the Victorian union movement at government and industry meetings on Star of the South, Victorian renewable energy zones, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Latrobe Valley Authority and energy cooperatives.





## POLITICS & RESEARCH

- We worked with the Digital Team to create:
  - We Are Renters website to help shape the rental relief schemes and
  - Job Scammer website which drove important reforms to JobKeeper
- At the start of COVID, our proposal for a wage subsidy led the union movement's response to the pandemic. We worked fast to ascertain the global response to relief packages, and we drew on the strongest ideas to advocate for a wage subsidy approach.
- Our comprehensive and persuasive proposals for quarantine payments and test isolation payments (and then getting them doubled) was key in breaking the back of workplace transmission of COVID-19 in Victoria.
- We also did the work on emergency payments for international students and migrant workers who the Federal Government deliberately excluded from support.
- Our advocacy work over several years finally culminated in the passage of legislation to criminalise wage theft.
- Many of our new ideas to improve TAFE for all students - developed with affiliated unions - were picked up and recommended in the Macklin Review.
- Work on the Fair Job Code has driven the Government to a far better position.
- We've developed a proposal to take to Government on workplace surveillance to break the ever-increasing encroachment on workers' privacy by employers.
- Our strong work and ongoing advocacy also helped achieve the huge, ambitious targets for women, First Nations workers, apprentices and public housing residents on the social housing projects.
- Finally, our contributions to the budget led to the ground-breaking Secure Work Pilot Scheme - meaning for the first time ever, casuals in Australia will have access to sick leave.
- The politics and research team also created and established Workmate in 2020. We now have a "chatbot" ready to start providing young workers with their first engagement with unions.

As the east coast of Australia was blanketed by fire at the beginning of 2020, writers around the country banded together as part of the #AuthorsForFireys campaign, to support the fire fighting effort by donating their talents to a nationwide fundraising auction.

VTHC was thrilled to 'win' a poem from acclaimed poet Maxine Beneba Clarke, in return for a donation of \$5,000 toward the CFA's bushfire response.

Her poem, 'We're Union', is presented here.



## 'WE'RE UNION'

No more dark winter nights of blue-cap-in-hand,  
forlorn on the doorstep, saying:  
"We're sorry ma'am."

No ward-sisters let go after forty-five years:  
arthritic, no severance, super  
somehow disappeared.

No: "Come in to work now, or you won't have a job,"  
when your temperature's climbing,  
but you have to click on.

No more unharnessed work falls;  
long-haul sleeps at the wheel.  
We're Union. We're fighting for fair, and for all.

We'll stand for the workers who keep us all safe:  
checking vitals, filing charts at nursing stations,  
or clocking on for cleaning shifts month after week.  
We're for adequate sick pay, and PPE.

We're for the ambos, who stand  
between us and the dark;  
for just work conditions, whoever you are.

We're muddy boots at the door, bang on 6.38:  
hi-vis dumped in the hall: we're for  
reasonable days.

For scrubs-in-machine, and mine-grit showered off,  
calling out to them all: "I'm home now, you lot!"

We're for eager little footsteps  
padding fast, down the hall:  
for the day being done, and home harm-free for all.

We're safety-harness, pulled taut: we're  
hard-hat, and we're warden.  
We're for capped school classes: enough  
masks, gowns, fair warning.

We fought for eight hours labour,  
recreation, and rest—  
for paid overtime, and we'll strike where we must:  
placard-in-hand, or all-tools-down,  
until fair pay is met and the work site's safe ground.  
We've – as all – had our failings,  
but we learn and we grow,  
as we sing, banners high, marching  
shoulder to shoulder.

We're the job still there after babe number three.  
We're for women, in a workforce that's racism-free.

For all abilities, genders, backgrounds, creeds too.  
We will stand for the many, and not for the few.

We're for the 1946 Pilbara stockmen strike:  
holding strong, until August of '49.

We're '73, out at Broadmeadows Ford:  
marching rank and file, with the workers-exploited.

We're the workplace resistance, united in voice:  
we're for each and every, for labourers-all.

We're Eureka-bravado; Sunshine-Harvester rage.  
We stand for dignity, no matter your trade.

Join us, workers-united, fighting-for-lives.  
Be part of the Union, and we'll  
stand for what's right.

There is always a part for your voice, in our chorus:  
waver or bellow, mellow or hoarse.

Cause we're Union: conjunctio - a coming-together.  
The sum of our parts is the might of our whole.





## UNION WOMEN

- Pivoted to an online delivery of Women's Rights At Work (WRAW) Chats and training, with a specific focus on the impact of COVID19 on women.
- The 2020 Anna Stewart Memorial Project achieved the highest number of graduates to date. 72 women graduated, with many more attending.
- We launched our first ever workplace guide, Work-related Gendered Violence Including Sexual Harassment, developed in conjunction with Worksafe Victoria.
- To compliment the guide, we created a brand new, one-day HSR Refresher training day which has been approved by Worksafe. VTHC will be the only provider of this training, in recognition of our expertise and strong track record in this area of work.





## HEALTH AND SAFETY

### COVID-19

COVID-19 sparked unprecedented challenges and risks for Victorian workers. The OHS team responded swiftly and proactively. Throughout 2020 we:

- assisted with many queries and concerns about COVID-19 – Ask Renata alone responded to over 1,000 queries
- published material and information about best-practice workplace controls and the needs of people working from home.
- pivoted to an online delivery of events and training
- continued to provide advice and support to HSRs
- consulted extensively with affiliates and Government (WorkSafe and DHHS).
- continued to advocate for union members in WorkSafe consultative forums
- published two standards on Air Quality and Psychological Health



### TRAINING

- We benefited from being one of a handful of providers offering online courses, meaning we were always at capacity.
- We ran:
  - 'ARREOs' (Authorised Representatives of Registered Employee Organisations): 67 people in total
  - Initial HSR course: 318 people
  - Refresher HSR course: 471 people
  - Comcare (initial): 12 people



## HSR CONFERENCE

- Our annual HSR Conference, on October 27, was entirely online. Over 1500 people attended, making it the largest conference ever.
- The theme was Psychological Health, and for the first time ever, HSRs were asked to survey their workforce on psychosocial risk factors. Over 164 workplaces logged the results of their survey on our website, providing us with valuable data.

- In conjunction with CFMEU, our streaming of the Westgate Bridge Memorial Ceremony on October 15 was viewed by over 11.9K people.
- The OHS team also participated in a number of affiliates' webcasts discussing OHS issues, including the RTBU, ANMF, APESMA and TPAV.

## INJURED WORKER SUPPORT NETWORK

- We helped relaunch the Injured Worker Support Network as a program of VTHC. This included drafting a Mission Statement to more clearly define the goals of the Network.
- The IWSN is running a campaign against dodgy Independent Medical Examiners (IMEs). This progressed with the OHS team submitting a list of some 20 IMEs we feel do not have the interests of injured workers at the heart of their practice.

## SUBMISSIONS

We also wrote a range of comprehensive submissions, including:

- Independent Review into the Victorian Workers' Compensation System (and assisted the IWSN with their own stand-alone submission)
- Independent Review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and Regulations
- Accident Compensation Conciliation Service Arbitration Powers Review
- Introduction of Provisional Payment Model Arbitration at the ACCS



## EVENTS

- The broadcast of our International Workers' Memorial Day ceremony on April 28 was viewed by over 10.4K people on Facebook.
- On June 1, we streamed the Injured Workers' Day, viewed by over 4.2K people.



*Trades Hall's Jobs Team coordinated government funded projects to increase workforce participation for marginalised groups of people and help them into meaningful careers and secure work.*

*Through the Job Ready Pathways Project and Women Onsite, we aim to break down the employment barriers often experienced by First Nations people, workers recently arrived in Australia, and women in traditionally male-dominated industries.*





# **JOBS TEAM**

The Jobs Team runs two DET-funded projects: Job Readiness Pathways and Women Onsite. Both programs:

- aim to identify and remove barriers many marginalised people face in undertaking training or an apprenticeship
- provide a wraparound service for participants wanting to do tickets or pre apprenticeships and then supports them into jobs.
- collect data to guide future policy initiatives.
- have a Steering Committee which includes relevant unions that
  - contribute to the direction of the projects,
  - provide feedback about potential employers and
  - help link participants in with local delegates and union networks.



## **THE JOB READY PATHWAYS PROJECT**

- works primarily with First Nations and recently-arrived refugees and migrants.
- provides in-person educational sessions to get people “job-ready”, such as:
  - What is a union,
  - Know your rights at work and
  - Safe and respectful workplaces
- is initially being rolled out in three regions – South-west, metropolitan and Central Victoria.
- includes a research component that will aim to demonstrate the social return when investment is made in marginalised or excluded workers.

### **Highlights:**

- 85 participants have completed all Job readiness modules through a partnership with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
- Six have obtained ongoing employment, two are in further training
- 17 current active participants
- Currently delivering Job Readiness to 15 Traditional Owners at Gundidj Mirring
- Negotiating First Nations-only regional pre-apprenticeship

## **WOMEN ONSITE**

- supports women to pursue traineeships or apprenticeships in historically male-dominated industries
- focuses on the barriers faced by women entering and remaining in these trades.
- Our work includes:
  1. Building a strong social media presence and campaign, including the [womenonsite.org.au](http://womenonsite.org.au) website
  2. Organising women-only “Try a Trade” days with ETU outlining pathways into pre-apps
  3. Delivering a women-only pre-apprenticeship by an RTO or TAFE and
  4. Providing relevant ‘Respectful Workplaces’ and Cultural Awareness training to all management and employee support workers at a GTO
  5. Undertaking research

### **Highlights:**

- Five participants have been on-boarded with a further 13 being processed
- We have locked in a ‘Try a Trade’ day with Victoria University, with more planned
- We have organised two women-only pre-apprenticeships with ETU



## UNION ASSIST

Union Assist (UA) is an initiative of VTHC, supported with funding from Worksafe Victoria. We have been operating since 1999. Members of affiliated unions are able to use the services of UA as an extension of their members' benefits. We provide information regarding the WorkCover system, including assistance with:

- WorkCover disputes
- preparation and representation at conciliation conferences
- applications to the Workers Compensation Internal Review Service

We have established a good rapport with the Accident Compensation Conciliation Service, Medical Panels and Worksafe. This has allowed issues to be addressed quickly for injured union members, such as ensuring fast tracking for the most vulnerable injured union members.

UA didn't skip a beat working remotely and continued to provide the same excellent service - exemplified by a 95% satisfaction rate.

### **In 2020 we assisted with:**

- 1584 referrals to Union Assist
- 1,162 conciliations with a resolution rate of approx. 75%
- 126 referrals to the Medical Panel with a success of 82%
- a range of presentations, including 21 HSR presentations, five to unions
- the Anna Stewart Memorial Project, the Multicultural Safety Ambassador Program and Injured Workers' Day

- numerous meetings with the Accident Compensation Conciliation Service (ACCS) and WorkSafe

### **Some of the fantastic results we achieved for injured workers during COVID include:**

- a win of free parking at the Medical Panel to avoid vulnerable workers having to use public transport
- Amendment to Medical Panel appointment/examination letters to ensure people attending medical appointments could not be fined for being outside the 5km radius of home.
- Fast-tracked the most vulnerable workers to the Medical Panel, especially those on visas
- Won reimbursement costs for workers using Zoom conferencing for conciliations
- Achieved a cessation of most surveillance during lockdown
- Successfully lobbied for electronic lodgement of claims with a digital signature
- Provided examples of earning reductions impacts on Pre-Injury Average Weekly Earnings (PIAWE) and Current Weekly Earnings (CWE) and Job Keeper impacts which led to policy amendment
- Lobbied hard for three-monthly certificates as opposed to monthly - and this was adopted
- Successfully advocated that workers should not have to apply for a continuation of treatment and/or services such as home help and exercise. These services continued during the pandemic without interruption.

## **CASE STUDY: TAKING ON A DODGY INSURER**

A thirty six year old forklift driver was yelled and abused by a supervisor and became psychologically unwell. He submitted a claim which was accepted in October 2019, but the self-insurer terminated his weekly payments from 11th January 2020.

This worker was not an Australian citizen and therefore has no access to Centrelink and no assistance for housing or food.

In order to get this dispute to the Medical Panel we had to push the self-insurer to pay the \$700 that the GP was asking for a medical report. Once this was done we strongly encouraged the Conciliator to refer this dispute to the Panel as quickly as possible, without the need for conference as the SI was being particularly stubborn and unlikely to resolve the dispute at conciliation. Once at the Medical Panel we lobbied the Chief Medical Convenor for this worker to be seen as soon as possible, due to his circumstances.

The self-insurer submitted a long winded submission saying things that were untrue and had not been tested in conciliation nor court. We forwarded a submission with all the issues the worker wanted raised to the Medical Panel.

The Medical Panel found in the workers favour. He was back paid weekly payments from 11 January 2020, which at that time was nearly eight months wages

## **CASE STUDY: EQUIPMENT FOR INJURED WORKER**

A worker with an back and subsequent psychological injury since 1994 requested exercise equipment as he was unable to use the equipment at the physio due to his weight gain caused by the injury and Covid.

The Agent rejected the request in line with Worksafe policy. UA took the matter to conciliation, but the Agent wouldn't budge, we asked for an adjournment for Worksafe to review, but they came back affirming the decision to reject in line with their policy.

A genuine dispute was obtained. The cost of the equipment was \$76.00, therefore not viable to proceed to court.

Union Assist then lodged an appeal at WICRS. WICRS found that the request was not reviewed correctly, there was no clinical justification to reject and that Worksafe in fact did have an item code for this equipment. They found that the Worksafe policy was not relevant in this case and found the decision was not sustainable and directed the Agent to fund the equipment.

UA sent the decision to Worksafe who have advised that they are reviewing their policy and operational practice of the Agent.







## INTRODUCING MEGAPHONE JOURNAL

Let's be honest. The news - whether in the billionaires' newspapers or on the tech giants' feeds - is not exactly friendly to workers. Workers in unions do our best to capture media attention & share our stories with the rest of the working class, but there are hurdles every step of the way. That's where Megaphone Journal comes in. We're telling workers' stories, keeping you up to date with protests, pickets & actions, and spreading solidarity one email at a time.

The model is based on an audience of primarily union members paying what they think is reasonable to support union news and storytelling. They are able to subscribe for free if they choose,

but there is an option to pay (weekly, monthly or annually) if they want to support the project. Early evidence suggests people are more than willing to do this.

Individual stories are posted on a standalone website throughout the week, with a roundup newsletter sent to subscribers' inboxes every Monday from the previous week. The website is free to access, and will be regularly linked to on social media in order to spread the content. Video content will also be hosted here in order to drive traffic and retain interest.

[www.megaphonejournal.org.au](http://www.megaphonejournal.org.au)

## Get Trades Hall Trained

The Victorian Trades Hall Council's OHS Training Unit is one of the most experienced training providers in Victoria. We have delivered OHS training to tens of thousands of Health & Safety Reps across Victoria since 1983. We deliver high quality WorkSafe Approved training that is practical and solution-focused in multiple locations around Melbourne's suburbs and regional Victoria.

### CURRENT COURSES BEING OFFERED

- HSR Initial OHS Training
- HSR Refresher Training
- HSR Refresher - Work-related gendered violence
- Education Sector Specific OHS Training
- 2-Day OHS Training
- Comcare OHS Training



Scan the QR code or visit [ohsrep.org.au/training](http://ohsrep.org.au/training) for dates and booking information

## BUILDING PROGRESS REPORT



Multiplex, who worked on the award winning Stage 1 project were our preferred builder for Stage 2. Multiplex meet all our required needs.

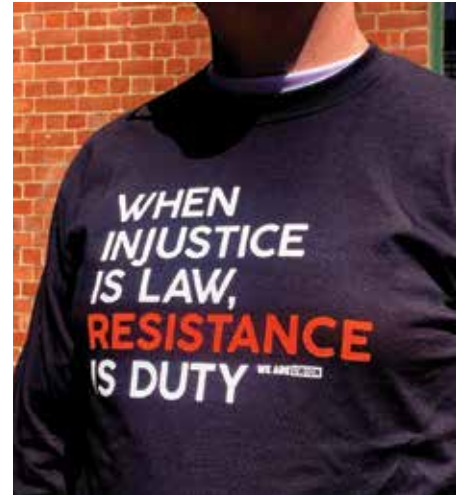
Multiplex directors have visited the site and have established relationships at Trades Hall. There are about 35 people working on the building site each day. Our shop steward, Blackie, inducts new starters with a tour of the Workers Museum so that all workers have an appreciation of the significance of the building.

All Hazmat material is being removed from the critical path areas. This has been a process of positive ongoing consultation with Multiplex, Trades Hall and The CFMEU. The North Wing roof is completed, as is the bathroom roof. The Victoria St wing is ready for the Mechanical works to begin. All services have been roughed into Level 1.

All lighting and window glass in the new works will be energy efficient. Energy efficiency and temperature comfort is a feature of Stage 2.

Works in the Executive Wing will begin in June-July, in collaboration with Heritage Victoria.





## TRADES HALL MERCHANDISE

At Trades Hall, we pride ourselves on producing high-quality gear made right here in Victoria, by working people on good wages and conditions.

We put our money where our mouths are, supporting local textile and manufacturing workers, while producing clothing and merchandise that appeals to the widest possible range of workers.

We keep the prices as low as possible so that everyone can show their union pride, and any proceeds go towards funding campaigns for workers rights and safety.

[weareunion.org.au/shop](http://weareunion.org.au/shop)







## LGBTIQ PLACE OF SIGNIFICANCE

Victorian Trades Hall has been included in *'A History of LGBTIQ+ Victoria in 100 places and objects'*. As the document states, the Hall 'holds specific meaning for queer communities as a reminder of the solidarity between union and LGBTIQ+ advocacy and activism.'

Two plaques erected at Trades Hall marriage equality campaign recognise the long relationship between unionists and queer activism. The design of the plaques echoes the plaques celebrating the referenda of 1916 and 1917, in which unions campaigned and Australians voted to reject military conscription for World War I.

Trades Hall holds specific meaning for queer communities as a reminder of the solidarity between union and LGBTIQ+ advocacy and activism.

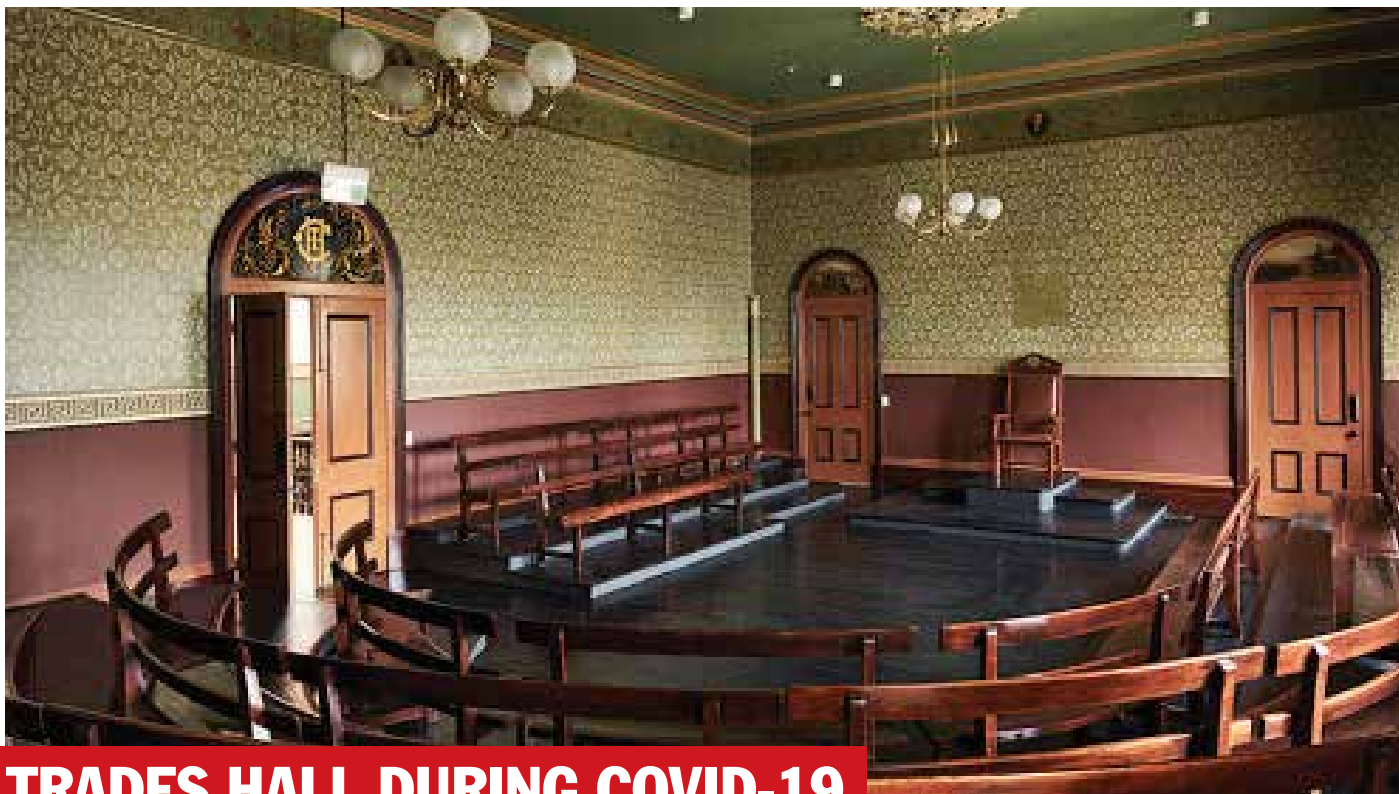
LGBTIQ+ activists started to organise in their various unions in the mid-1970s and frequently found a receptive audience – notably the three Victorian teachers' unions, which in 1977 and 1978 adopted pro-gay policies in response to intense advocacy by the Gay Teachers and Students Group. In 1978 the first Gay and Lesbian Trade Unionists Group was formed out of Trades Hall to coordinate activism across the union movement in opposition to all forms of discrimination.

Australian unions played a vital role in the fight against HIV/AIDS, with the nurses' union taking the lead in educating its members, the hospital workforce and patients, as well as lobbying governments and the medical profession to take action.

Tramways union members made panels for the Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt Project in honour of their workmates and Trades Hall offered a room – which became known as the Quilt Room – where people could gather to make quilt panels for their loved ones.

Unions were major contributors to the campaign for marriage equality and VTHC coordinated the Victorian arm of the campaign for the 'Yes' vote, which was based at Trades Hall. Many union officials were seconded to the campaign. VTHC also designed and produced a large quantity of supporting material – most notably the 'Yes!' poster featured across Australian homes, businesses and community centres. Trades Hall was also the location of Australia's largest celebration of the result of the postal vote, in favour of marriage equality. To mark the occasion, the road outside Trades Hall was painted with a giant rainbow flag.

Equality is union business.



## TRADES HALL DURING COVID-19



Campaigned, and won Jobkeeper for millions of workers across Australia – including a huge online picket line event with 39,000 visiting online throughout the day – alongside the ACTU.



Unions fundraised \$286,406 for public housing tenants placed in hard lockdown with Trades Hall contributing an additional \$110,000 to cover costs of food, refrigeration and transport.



Union Assist lobbied and won a range of entitlements for injured workers, including acceptance of electronic forms, exemptions to travel outside 5km radius for meetings and compensation for online conciliations.



Trades Hall building stayed operational throughout the Stage 4 lockdown, operating safely as a building site with strict COVID safe plans in place to ensure staff, construction workers, tenants and unions could continue to function.



Enquiries to Young Workers Centre increased by 36% as we worked to help young people who had lost their jobs, had their hours axed or had their JobKeeper payments ripped off.





## SOLIDARITY WITH PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS

When 9 public housing towers in Flemington and Kensington were suddenly pushed into hard lock down in a desperate attempt to prevent a series of localised COVID-19 clusters spreading last year, the union movement and the wider community responded with a wave of solidarity and support for affected residents.

The burden of public crises is usually shouldered by those already in precarious situations, and COVID-19 has been no different.

The Victorian union movement facilitated a massive fundraising effort, which ultimately raised \$286,406. This was provided by 6363 individual workers providing an average donation of \$44.95.

Staff from Trades Hall also assisted on the ground, working closely with the Australian Muslim Social Services Agency (AMSSA) and other community organisations. These groups do amazing work to ensure residents were and are still being supported.

Trades Hall also provided an additional donation of \$110,000 - to cover the costs of the ready-made meals prepared by the ASRC and Moving Feast - on behalf of the wider union movement.

Donations were put to work immediately in providing culturally appropriate food and other material needs directly to the residents of the towers. It also went to provide an immediate boost to the logistical capacity of organisations on the ground such as cold storage, delivery vehicles and communications equipment.

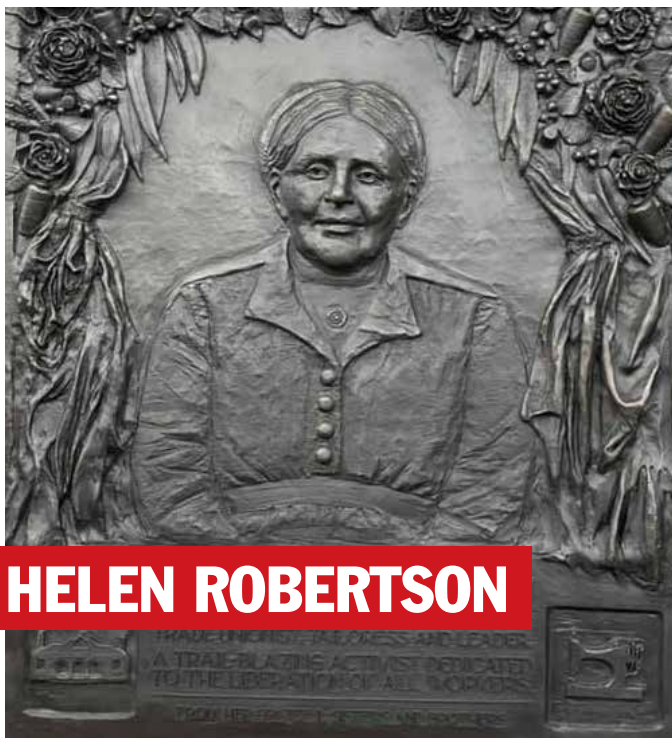
### HOUSING SUPPORT GRANTS

Remaining funds not spent during the lockdown and its aftermath have now been committed to grant for programs that support the needs of the different communities, build community infrastructure and capacity.

A Grant Assessment Committee made up of residents, representing the different demographic groups will consider the applications against agreed criteria. This committee will be responsible for assessing the merits of the grants against the eligibility criteria.

Grant applications for \$5000 or more (capped at \$30,000) will be assessed against the eligibility criteria and will be subject to mandatory reporting guidelines. Grants of over \$10,000 will be subject to additional reporting requirements.





## HELEN ROBERTSON

As you walk into Trades Hall from the Lygon street entrance (currently closed due to building renovations), generations of unionists have been greeted by the beady eyes of John Dias, Secretary of the Carpenters Union. The inscription reads, “A man whose every endeavour was in the cause of the worker, and to uplift humanity. As a token of respect from those who knew him.”

The union movement has a long, long history of presenting men with official recognition like this.

Meet Helen Lothan Robertson. At 14, she began work as a tailoress, and by age 26 she was already known

to be active in trade union activity, long before the formal establishment of the Tailoresses union.

In 1880 she was leading fellow tailoresses in campaigns against “sweated labour” – today known as sweatshop conditions. She and some workmates established an association, and finally in 1882 they cornered the Trades Hall into supporting their efforts. The THC, naturally, responded by forming a “Tailoresses Union” with an all male executive, but with a committee of which Helen was a member. That union of women workers went on to establish a “catalog of claims” – a fashion catalogue with suggested improved piece rates – that was accepted by most prominent employers by 1883.

Helen and her comrades kept organising to such an extent that the Trades Hall felt they needed to establish a women’s organising space, the Female Operatives Hall. Helen Robertson continued her work as a union official, and as vice-President of the Federated Clothing Trades Union (later known as the TCFUA), she was also the first female executive member of the THC.

This was a powerhouse woman. But until recently, our magnificent Trades Hall has not recognised Helen, or indeed any real-life woman, in a permanent artwork.

Now, finally, that changes. When the Lygon Street entrance to Trades Hall reopens, workers will still walk past the watchful eye of John Dias, but they’ll also be greeted by a relief of Helen Lothan Robertson, not just another union secretary from years past, but an ongoing source of inspiration to every unionist who hears her story today.



## WORLD HERITAGE

Victoria has been invited to join an international World Heritage nomination bid that would recognise our globally significant Melbourne Trades Hall, the world’s oldest continuous-use workers hall.

The nomination proposal arises from an international collaboration coordinated by the Workers Museum in

Copenhagen, funded by the Museum and the City of Copenhagen and supported by the Danish Government. The international collaboration aims to achieve an international serial listing of workers halls on the World Heritage list by 2024-25. It is widely accepted that the Melbourne Trades Hall is one of the most significant and intact in the world, and would be integral to any successful World Heritage nomination.

The case for a World Heritage listing of workers halls, and the centrality of the Melbourne hall in it, is very strong. Australia’s trades halls are a globally important reflection of a number of the cataclysmic social and economic tendencies of the 19th and 20th centuries. The continuity of use, intactness and scale of the Melbourne Trades hall make it globally significant.

Substantial work must be undertaken to prepare for the World Heritage bid. We are currently seeking support from the Victorian Government to develop and drive the Victorian side of the World Heritage listing nomination, and to progress heritage tourism development opportunities for Melbourne and Victoria through the World Heritage process.

Not every  
workplace  
killer makes  
a noise,  
but every  
killer can be  
stopped.



Wherever you work, whatever hazards you encounter,  
health and safety is a fundamental workers' right.

**International Workers' Memorial Day**

**10.30am Wednesday 28 April 2021**

At Victorian Trades Hall and online. RSVP at [ohsrep.org.au/iwmd2021](https://ohsrep.org.au/iwmd2021)

**WE ARE UNION**

