

# THE CHANGE AGENT

**Adult Education for  
Social Justice: News,  
Issues, and Ideas**

## Doing Our Jobs and Caring for Our Children



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**AN ENGAGING, EMPOWERING, AND READY-TO-USE MAGAZINE & WEBSITE**

Student-generated, multi-level, relevant content. Designed to teach basic skills & transform & inspire adult learners.

*The Change Agent* is a publication of The New England Literacy Resource Center. Coming out three times per year (starting in September 2021), each issue of the paper helps teachers incorporate social justice content into their curriculum. The paper is designed for intermediate-level ESOL, ABE, GED, and adult diploma classes. Each issue focuses on a different topic that is relevant to learners' lives.

In New England, online access to *The Change Agent* is available free of charge through NELRC's affiliated state literacy resource centers. Email [changeagent@worlded.org](mailto:changeagent@worlded.org) to learn how to access the site.

Submissions: For the theme of our next issue, see the "Call for Articles" at [changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us](https://changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us) or contact us at (617) 482-9485 or [changeagent@worlded.org](mailto:changeagent@worlded.org).

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No information in this magazine is intended to reflect an endorsement for, or opposition to, any candidate or political party.



## Big Changes at *The Change Agent*:

### Three issues per year (instead of two) + more remote-friendly resources

You spoke. We listened. Starting this school year, *The Change Agent* will come out more often, and include more easy-to-use lesson packets, more remote-friendly teaching tools (including Google slides versions of articles!), and more beginner-level adaptations. The publishing schedule for the school year is designed to make each issue available enough ahead of the upcoming semester to help you integrate the content into your planning:



#### Issue #53, August 15, 2021:

"Doing our Jobs and Taking Care of Our Children"



#### Issue #54, November 15, 2021:

"Advocating for Our Communities and for Our Safety on the Job"



#### Issue #55, February 15, 2022:

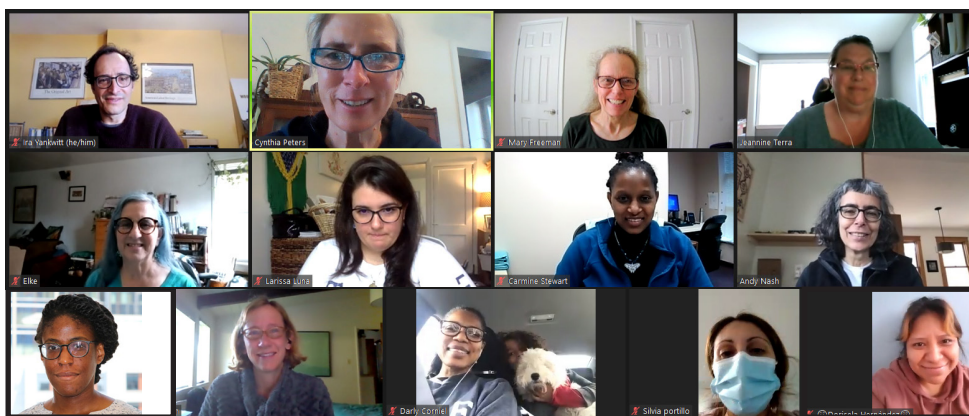
"Re-Training Ourselves and Re-Making Our Work"

## In this Issue: Focus on Career Exploration and Math Activities

Special shout-out to Eric Appleton, Ellen Baxt, Sarah Lonberg-Lew, and Mark Trushkowsky – math and career exploration curriculum developers – who developed many of the activities in this issue.

## Please Subscribe! We Need you!

The cost is just \$30 per teacher per year. Teachers can share their online access with all their students. Have 25 or more teachers? The price goes down to \$20 per teacher per year. Subscribe [here](#) and instantly receive your username and password. Or [contact us](#) and provide a PO#.



## Big Thanks to the Editorial Board:

From left to right, starting at top: Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center, NYC; Cynthia Peters, *Change Agent* editor; Mary Freeman, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, Detroit, MI; Jeannine Terra, teacher at Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA; Elke Lerman, teacher at We Make the Road/NY; Larissa Despier, student at Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA; Carmine Stewart, Seeds of Literacy, Cleveland, OH; Andy Nash and Ebony Vandross, World Education; Alison Ascher Webber, EdTech Center at World Education; Darly Corniel, Consortium for Worker Education, New York City; Silvia Portillo and Dorisela Hernández, both students at We Make the Road/NY.

# Part 1

# Doing Our Jobs



# Sacrificing for Others during the Pandemic\*

## A Nurse Tells her Story

*Bethie Jean Merci*

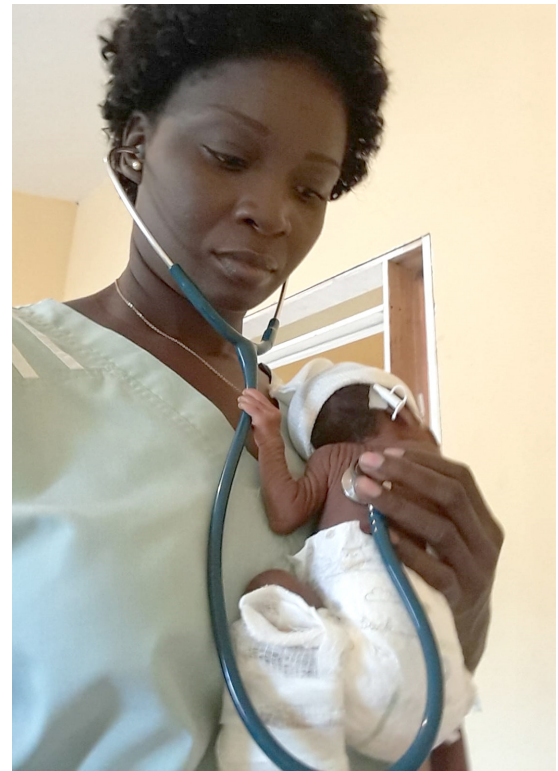
**BEFORE YOU READ:** Think about the words *pre-mature* and *malnutrition*. What do the roots and the prefixes mean? Have you heard of Plumpy’Nut? If not, look it up.

I am from Haiti. In my county, I was a nurse. Before the pandemic, I worked in a clinic where we treated cases of *malnutrition* and cared for *premature* babies. The children we treated were in critical condition. A family can have 12 children, the majority of whom are malnourished. In the nutritional program, we gave milk, rice, and Plumpy’Nut, depending on the age and the level of malnutrition. We also gave medical care to the children.

When the Covid-19 pandemic came to Haiti, the head of the clinic sent a message to the staff.



*These are some of the little babies I cared for who were premature and malnourished.*



*I am listening to the baby’s lungs. She was premature and her lungs were not fully developed yet.*

“Sorry to announce that because of the Covid-19, you cannot wear your own clothes. Therefore, we will be deducting 15% of your pay to buy new nursing clothes for the staff.”

The message continued: “Unfortunately, some of our funders have died. We have to find other funders. We don’t know when you can have your pay. If you want to stay with us, it is okay, but if you want to leave, no problem.”

All of us on the staff remained because it was hard to find a job, and the community really needed us at the clinic. I remember once when the entire staff went on vacation, we had to close the clinic for two weeks. Several children in the nutritional program died during that time. Remembering this, we decided to stay.

However, it was difficult for the staff and families because we had to deal with drug and food shortages. In addition, the number of children increased because other clinics and hospitals

\* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 4-5) and beginner (p. 6).



*In this picture, I am taking the baby's temperature because he was sick.*

closed due to the pandemic. The majority of the children were in critical condition. I could not leave them with their parents.

Our schedules changed as well. We often worked 24-hour shifts. We were all exhausted. When I had to eat, I asked another nurse to watch my patients. Sometimes, it was difficult to take a break. The emergencies came at any time, and I could not delay the treatment, especially for those who needed oxygen. Sometimes, I took a nap on a chair in the room, other times, it was not possible. When I got home after a long shift, the only thing I could do was sleep. I did not have enough energy to take a shower or to eat.

Nevertheless, I loved my job. The well-being of the children was my priority. However, due to the long hours spent in the clinic, I had to find someone to help me with my two school-age children, who were in remote school because of the pandemic. Fortunately, I found a wonderful adolescent who needed help. I opened our home

to her. I taught her how to cook, to take care of the children and the house. When I had to come to the U.S., she was the trusted person, who stayed behind to care for my family.

This has been a difficult time, but we were able to continue helping these children at the clinic. We did it! The clinic is still open and helping children to this day.

*Bethie Jean Merci is from Haiti where she worked as a nurse with Doctors Without Borders. She is a student at the Center for New Americans in Northampton, MA. She came to the United States in the middle of the pandemic, and she plans to continue her studies to become a registered nurse in the U.S.*



#### **AFTER YOU READ:**

1. What are some of the ways the author made sacrifices during the pandemic? Be specific.
2. Who helped her so that she could help others?
3. Read more articles about nursing and explore career pathways in healthcare. See the box below.

### **Explore a Career in Nursing**

We put these materials into **one packet** to help you explore a career in nursing.

- Sidonie Gbazale, a student from Rhode Island, describes how she got her nursing degree in the U.S.: "From Impossible Journey to Successful Career."
- Hoai Do, a student in Arkansas, worked as a nurse in her home country: "My Beautiful White Blouse."

**Plus:** sample career pathways in the field of health care.

Find more career exploration activities under "Extras" for **Issue #53**.

# Sacrificing during the Pandemic\*

## A Nurse Tells her Story

*Bethie Jean Merci*

1



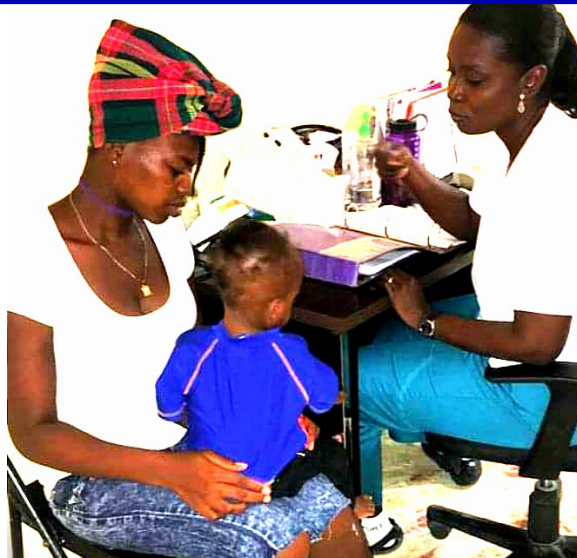
I am from Haiti. In my home country, I was a nurse. I took care of babies and children. Some of them were very sick.

2



Their families were poor. They did not have enough food to eat. We gave them food and took care of them.

3



When Covid came, we worked many hours each day. We did not get paid. We could not leave the children. They needed us.

4



I had to find someone to take care of my children. Now I live in the U.S. I study English. I would like to become a nurse here.

\* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 4-5) and beginner (p. 6).

# Working in a Nail Salon\*

## A Nail Technician Wants to Support His Family

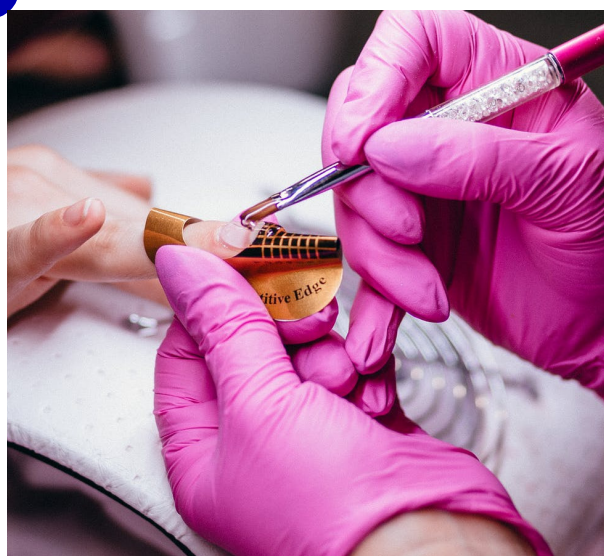
Vuong Cao

1



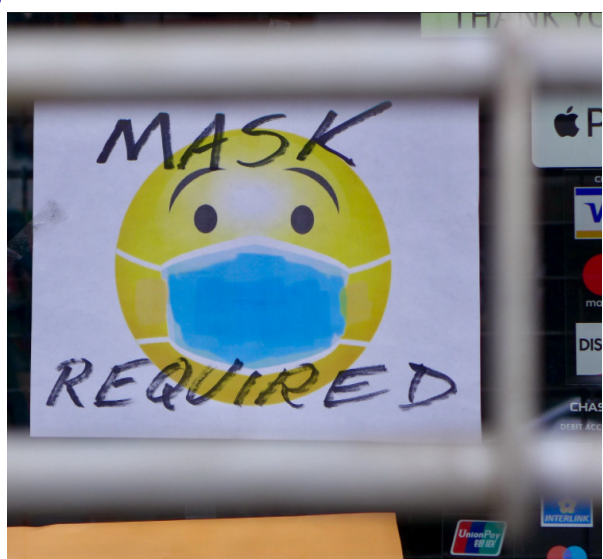
When Covid started, I could not go to work. The governor said many businesses must close.

2



The nail salon opened a few months later. But we did not have many clients. I could not earn much money.

3



Some clients were angry and rude. They yelled at us. They said they did not need to wear masks.

4



I hope everyone gets vaccinated soon. I want to make more money. I want to take care of my family.

Photo by Peter Burka, Flickr.

\* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 8-9) and beginner (p. 7).

# Working in a Nail Salon\*

Vuong Cao



**BEFORE YOU READ:** Have you ever been to a nail salon? How much did it cost? Did you leave a tip? How do you think the nail technician gets paid?

## My Job Closed at First

I'm a nail technician, and my job has changed a lot as a result of Covid-19. I still remember on March 13, 2020, when we had to lockdown for four to six weeks to try to control the pandemic. For many reasons, that was a terrible time for me, but worst

of all: I couldn't go to work because the governor ordered all non-essential businesses to close.

## Then We Re-Opened

The nail salon reopened in May, but the job feels different. The main problem is that I have very few customers. I used to have 20-30 customers every day; now I have fewer than ten a day. Some days, we have no customers at all. Because I get paid per customer, there are many days when I make very little money.

The other problem is that I am constantly worried about being exposed to the virus because I am in close contact with clients, and I handle items (like cash) that could carry germs. Even though I wear a mask or face shield at all times, there is still the risk of infection. Most clients come into the nail salon with a mask. However, some clients enter the nail salon without masks, and they feel angry when we ask them to wear one. One time, a client yelled that he would not wear a mask because he thought he wasn't sick and he didn't need to wear it. I was scared of him because he was so mean. Finally, he left angrily.

## How Do You Get Paid?

**Salary** – You get paid a certain amount. That amount stays the same even if you work more than your regular hours.

**Per hour** – You get paid for the hours you work plus time-and-a-half if you work more than 40 hours in a week.

**Per “gig”** – You get paid per client or per delivery or per piece. Your pay is not connected to how many hours you work.

\* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 8-9) and beginner (p. 7).



## Still Hoping to Be Able to Support My Family Again

I hope everyone can be vaccinated soon so that everything can go back to normal. When that happens, I should be able to earn more money. Before the pandemic, I earned enough money to help my family out. Since Covid, I have not been able to help my family as much. I will feel better if I can help my family more.

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. What has the pandemic been like for Vuong? Share at least three specific details of his experience.
2. Study the yellow box on p. 8. What kind of a worker is Vuong? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the different ways of getting paid? Learn more by doing your own research online or by interviewing people you know. Use the grid below to organize your thoughts.



HaLaVuong Cao has been taking ESL and GED classes at the Fort Smith Education Center in Fort Smith, Arkansas, since he emigrated from Vietnam in May 2019. He is grateful for the opportunities he has had to learn and make friends at school.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Salary		
Per hour		
Per "gig"		

# A Hotel Worker Navigates Covid-19

*Eva Tejada*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What do you think happened to hotel workers during the pandemic? Why?

## Cleaning during Covid

Covid-19 started in March 2020 and people were scared. People stopped taking plane flights and stopped staying in airport hotels. I work at the Hilton Hotel at Logan Airport in Boston. The hotel has stayed open even though we have fewer customers. Because of the pandemic, cleaning each room takes much longer. We must wear a mask and gloves, and it gets uncomfortable. We do extra cleaning in each room to guarantee 100% cleanliness. We can't enter a room until three hours after a customer leaves. It is stressful if a customer leaves later in the day.

In June 2020, I got Covid-19 when I was working at the hotel. I had to stay home for six weeks. I was laid off, and I applied for benefits. I live in a house with my daughter, my husband, and another renter. I had to quarantine from my family. We stayed in separate rooms and used the kitchen at different times. My husband got Covid-19 after me, but both my daughter and the renter did not get sick. My husband and I had fevers



and felt tired, but we got better in a few weeks.

## What Benefits Do You Get?

**A living wage**—You earn enough to support yourself and your family.

**Health insurance**—Your job covers all or some of the cost of insurance.

**Retirement**—Your employer provides a pension or contributes to a retirement fund.

**Job security**—You have some guarantee that you won't be fired without cause.

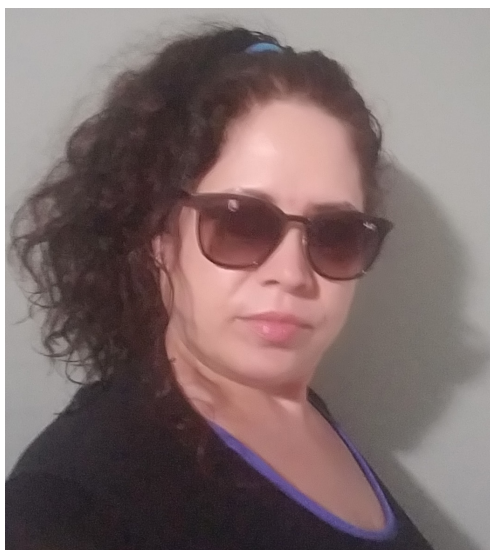
## A Hard Year for My Family and Many Others

My mother, who lives in El Salvador, was sick before the pandemic started. I wanted to see her, but I was scared to travel. I finally visited her a year after the pandemic started. She was very sick and in a coma. After a few days, she passed away. I had to take a Covid-19 test to get into El Salvador and to leave El Salvador, but it was worth it. I saw my mother one more time. We said goodbye.

This year has been hard for my family and me, and for many people. I hope that things will get better in the future.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. Using evidence from the text, what are three ways Eva's work was affected by the pandemic?
2. What other ways was the pandemic year hard for Eva?
3. Eva Tejada is paid by the hour. Compare her experience to Vuong Cao (pp. 8-9). Which kind of job would you rather have? Why?
4. Read Eva's bio. (below). Note that her English class is provided by her union, UNITE HERE, Local 26. What other benefits do you think she receives as a union member? Learn more at [unitehere.org](https://unitehere.org) and watch short videos of UNITE HERE members sharing their experience in the union.
5. If you are exploring careers, does it make sense to consider the role of unions in that career? Why or why not?
6. Learn more about unions by studying the graphs created by Mark Trushkowsky (pp. 12-13).



Eva Tejada is in the Intermediate English Class at BEST Hospitality Training, a project of the hotel workers union, UNITE HERE, Local 26. She is from El Salvador and immigrated to the United States in 1987. She works at the Logan Hilton Hotel in Boston, MA, and lives with her husband and daughter. She enjoys cooking, jump-roping, and singing Christian songs with her karaoke machine.



Workers of the Palace Hotel (part of Marriott Hotels) in San Francisco strike for higher wages, workplace security, and job safety in October 2018. Photo by Bastian Greshake Tzovaras from [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org). What do you think of the slogan, "One job should be enough"?

### What Is a Union?

Workers form a union so they can bargain *collectively* for better pay, benefits, and conditions. If you don't have a union, you bargain *individually* with your employer.

As a worker, what are the pros and cons of bargaining collectively?

As an employer, would you rather negotiate collectively or individually with your workers?

# The State of Unions in Four Graphs

Mark Trushkowsky

A union is a group of workers. They come together to protect their rights and fight for their interests. These four graphs each tell part of a story about the history of labor unions in the U.S.

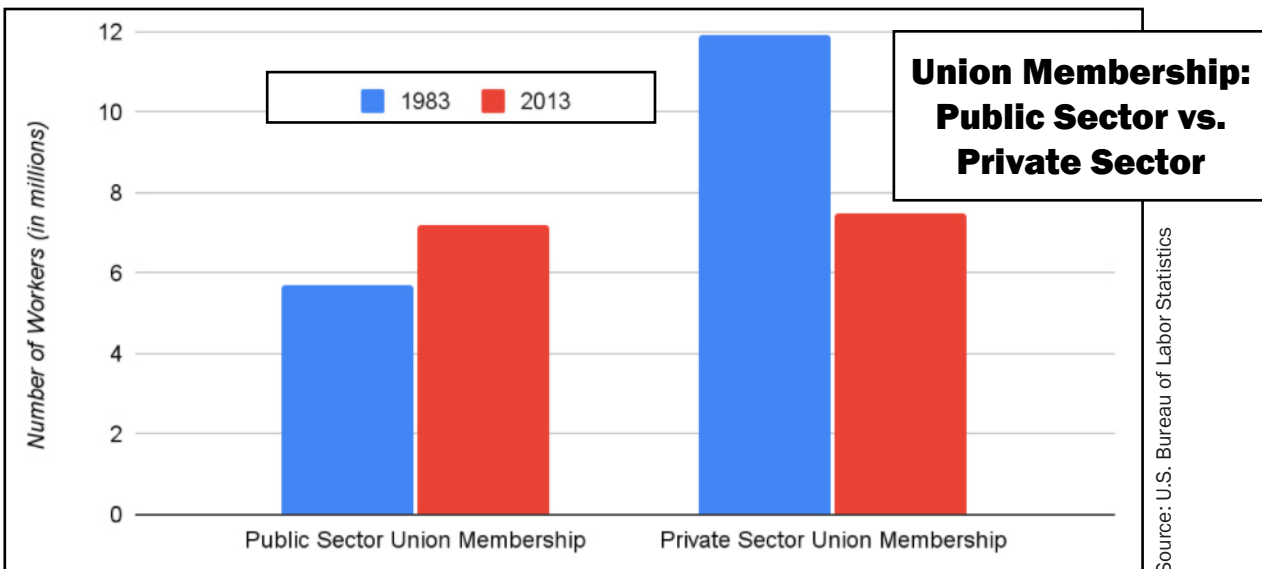
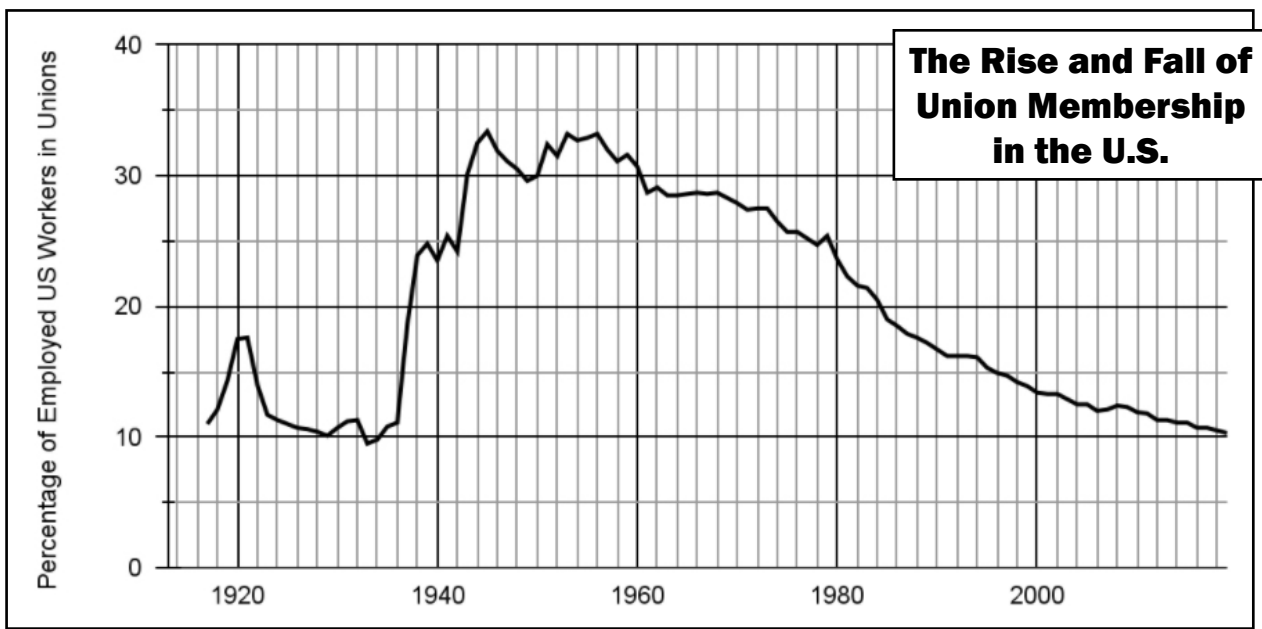
For each graph, talk with another student and complete the following sentence starters:

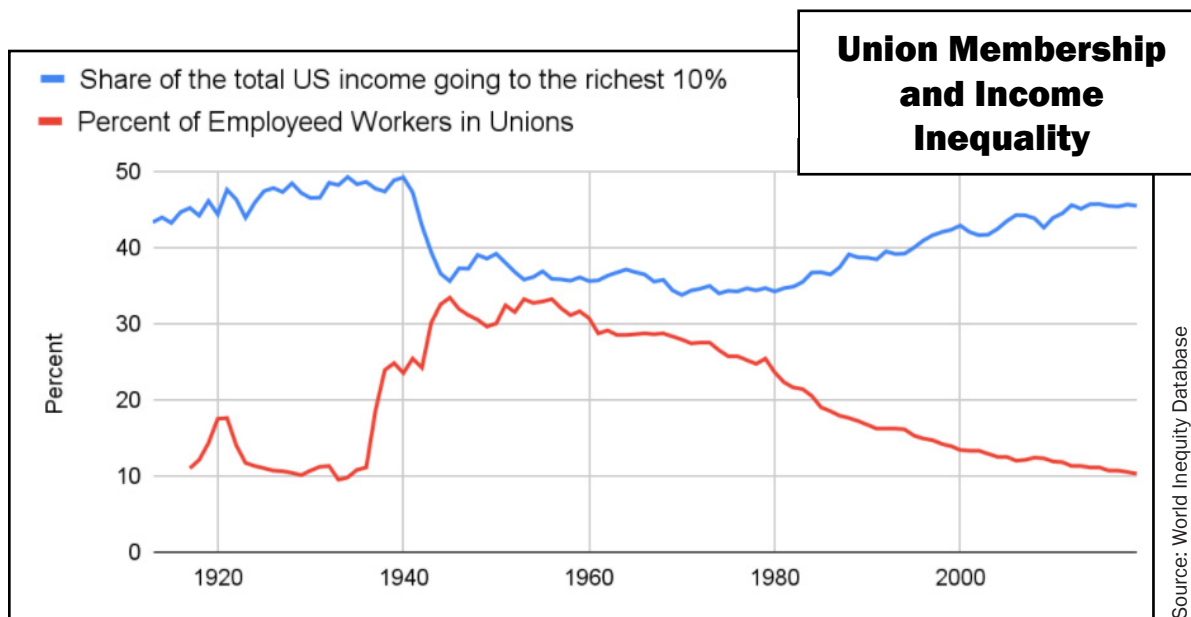
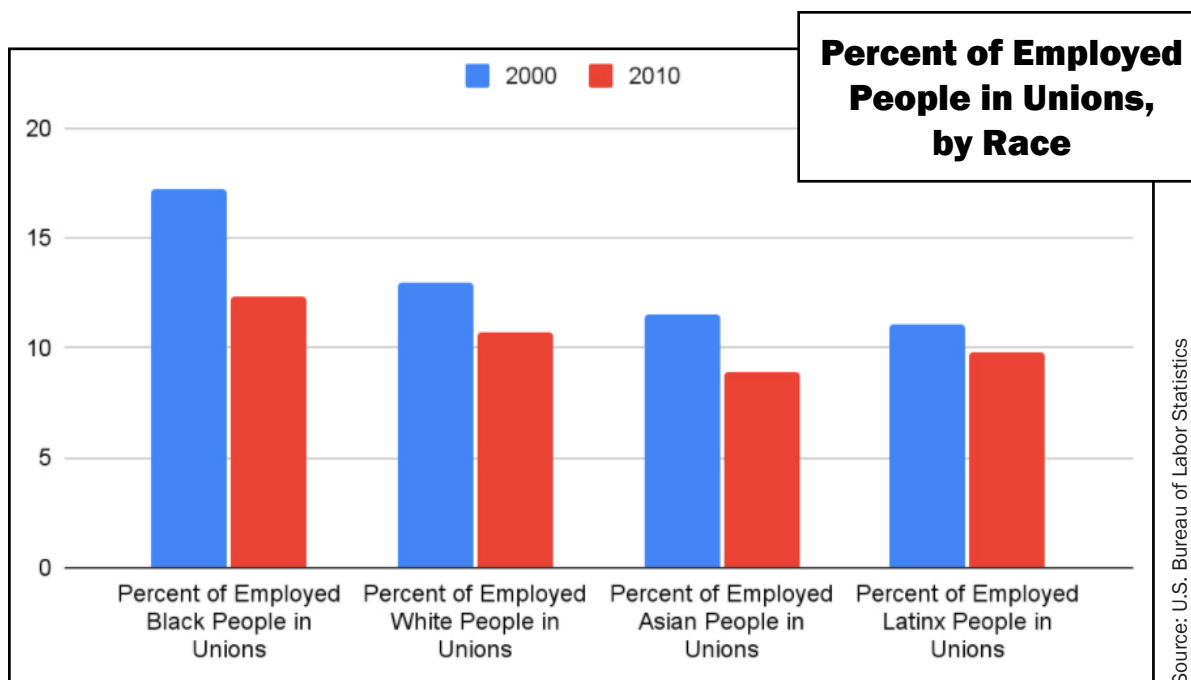
One thing I notice is \_\_\_\_\_.

One question I have is \_\_\_\_\_.

One thing that surprises me is \_\_\_\_\_.

One thing that confuses me is \_\_\_\_\_.





Choose one of the graphs and complete the following sentence:

I would like to show this graph to \_\_\_\_\_  
 because \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_.

*Mark Trushkowsky has worked for the CUNY Adult Literacy Program since 2001 as a teacher and as teacher trainer/curriculum developer. He enjoys gardening, hiking, the brilliance of all adult education students, and exploring the joy and creativity of math with everyone. He is grateful for the home and community of lifelong learners he's found in adult education. He was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, and lives in Minneapolis, MN, with his wife, daughter, four chickens, and a dog named French Fry.*

# Back to Work and Couldn't Be More Grateful

## A Certified Peer Specialist Helps Others—and Himself—Stay Well

*Sergio Hyland*

Before Covid-19 took over the world and changed the way we do... EVERYTHING, many of us held the kind of jobs that allowed us to mingle, move around, and experience something different every day. That was especially true for me.

I am a Certified Peer Specialist (CPS); and I am a prisoner.

Being incarcerated for such a long time can be depressing. I mean, let's face it, prison isn't a happy place. Due to my many years of incarceration, I took on the typical view of the average prisoner. I was unhappy, depressed, and very

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**This job helped me to wake each day with hope, excited about what I might hear, and whom I might be able to help.**

---

short on hope. Then I was selected to be a CPS, and everything started to change.

As a CPS, I'm given certain liberties that most prisoners don't enjoy. For instance, while most prisoners are confined to their

respective housing unit, I get to walk around the prison, talking to staff and prisoners alike, hearing stories and listening to people reminisce on better days. My job was to support others, but I found it to be therapeutic for me too.

This job helped me to wake each day with hope, excited about what I might hear, and whom I might be able to help. Then, in March of 2020, everything changed. First, our in-person visits



were suspended, then school; before we knew it, all prisons were on an enhanced lockdown. All prisoners were confined to their cells for 23½ hours per day.

I was devastated. I never realized how much I depended on my job for the maintenance of my mental health. After a few days of this enhanced lockdown, I found myself slipping back into a deep state of depression. To make matters worse, no psychologists were available on the inside.

I was on the verge of a mental health crisis. Now, more than a year since this pandemic began, I sometimes wonder how I made it. Things aren't back to normal yet—and they may never be—but I'm back to work, and I couldn't be more grateful.

Since I've been around so long, I'm well known, and prisoners call day and night from every unit to speak with me. I feel a sense of freedom each time I put on my green shirt that says "CPS" on the back. When I'm walking down the long, empty hallways to do my job, I know that I'm on my way to provide support for a fellow human being. The only real difference now is that it isn't just a green shirt anymore, it's also a green mask!

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**I never realized how much I depended on my job for the maintenance of my mental health.**

---

Still, working during this pandemic has its challenges. For instance, because of the potential for spreading Covid-19, I'm only allowed to provide support for those prisoners who reside in the same tower as me. I understand the need for caution, but I still miss talking to those whom I used to assist regularly.

One of the skills I learned as a CPS was to help someone recognize the difference between what it feels like to be well versus unwell. That way, you can see the signs of a potential crisis, and implement measures to avert it. Being back at work has enabled me to see the difference between what I look like when I'm well, and what I look like when I'm unwell. I never thought that a job would contribute so much to my wellness. If my own mental wellness is attached to my abil-

ity to help others be well, then I believe I play a critical role in the overall wellness of my community. And I hope to be able to continue playing that role when I'm out of prison.



**AFTER YOU READ:** According to the author, how does his job support his mental health? Describe the ways your job supports or detracts from your mental wellness.

*Sergio Hyland has written many articles for The Change Agent. He edits the prison newsletter, he has a podcast at [Prison Radio](#), and his Instagram is [Uptown Serg](#). He is incarcerated in Chester, PA.*

## Learn about Careers in Peer Support

Read more stories by adult learners who found careers as peer support specialists. Alex Tingler (below left) is a recovering addict who works at an addiction treatment facility in Maryland. Zenaida Garcia (center), who suffered depression and abuse, works as a Peer Recovery Specialist in Rhode Island. Sergio Hyland is a trauma survivor and Certified Peer Specialist at the prison where he is incarcerated in Pennsylvania. Explore a career in peer support by looking at [this collection](#) of stories and career ladders. Find more career exploration activities under "Extras" for [Issue #53](#).

### I Got Help And Now I Help Others

*Alex Tingler*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Look at the subheadings and the chart. What will this article will be about?

**Raised by Parents with Addictions**  
Growing up I never had a stable home. My parents were both addicts. My dad left when I was a child and my mom would randomly leave me with people while she was out using drugs. When I was six years old, my aunt finally took me in as one of her own, but she was an addict as well. Next thing I knew, I was that girl living in a house with drug paraphernalia scattered all over, and random strangers

**Next thing I knew, I was that girl living in a house with drug paraphernalia scattered all over, and random strangers coming in and out all hours of the night**

outside watching us. She opened the windows so no one could see us. As a child, I had to feel a lot more mature than you. I never celebrated holidays, have toys like other children, late to what they did for any specific group of people, drugs destroy my family, that little girl who swore all my life I just wanted to

be accepted, so I started hanging out with the older cool kids and partying. My dad passed away from an overdose when I was 13 years old. During that time, my aunt would go on binges. She would disappear for days, sometimes weeks at a time, which meant I needed to stay home and watch her kids.

I missed so many days of school, I failed my classes. I dropped out of the eighth grade, my partying took off from there. It went from occasional thing to an every-chance thing. I was from smoking weed, to smoking weed and drinking, to doing anything I could get my hands on. I found freedom in getting high and for the first time in my life, I was comfortable. I was no longer

mentally, I fell in love with it. I absolutely became. I was just the two people I resent

**Scared**  
ous times for possession to distribute. I was sentenced to a completed my year, I was Arundel County Circuit Court. I was sent to treatment. I was angry and her I wasn't planning asked me to complete I acted on impulse and my life be like if that question interrupt could think for a mur

### My Couch, My Walls, My Hair What to Do (and Not to Do) for your Mental Health During a Pandemic

*Zenaida Garcia*

**My Work and My Wacky Moments**  
Part of my job is to be well and to help others find wellness. But sometimes we all lose the sunlit path. We find ourselves wandering into darkness. In this essay, I'm going to take you on my journey into the darkness of depression and show you how I found my way back to the path.

Like many Americans, before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, I was more or less fine. Then, things changed. Because of Covid-19, the city bus became a scary place, a strange condition, and I induced anxiety. At work, I would see my clients except through myself isolated. I hit a low.

I work as a Peer Recovery mental health center. As part of people and support them in the them know that they're not alone there is a better life out there. I me, too. It gives my life purpose.

But sometimes my clients share their innermost secrets with some of my own. I know how to be to do things that we're not times, such as the one we're in out strange feelings. Here are some out pandemic moments. I share here so you can see you are not have to throw away your furniture. I did, you don't have to cut off did. You can learn from my failures, as well as from my success

### I Am a Survivor and an Advocate

**Peer specialists in prison help others and themselves**

*Sergio Hyland*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Think about the meaning of peer. Who are your peers? Why might you be helping each other?

**on Prison Staff**  
Covid-19 pandemic hit, prisoners all over the world have been suffering from undiagnosed mental health issues, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and thoughts. I witness these issues firsthand, suffered from them myself. Most prisons that we can't rely on prison staff and officers to treat our mental health needs. So we have Certified Peer Specialists help mitigate the depressing consequences.

prison, I work as a Certified Peer Specialist (CPS), and I enjoy my job. It's very challenging, but it's also very rewarding. As a CPS, my objective is to focus on a peer's recovery in any given year. It's likely that 20% of Americans are diagnosed with mental health issues, too. Therefore, it's in all of our best interests to support those who are so that they can begin the process of

**Foundation of Love**  
From a standpoint, recovery means to re-learn who you are, and use your strengths to help that you were meant to be. Sometimes, a person is diagnosed with some form of mental health condition, they start to feel as though their life is who they are; they begin to feel like they "lose their self." In the recovery process, we counter that narrative by reminding of their good qualities. They are more

than their diagnosis. We also make it clear that recovery isn't our job; it's up to each peer to embark upon their own path of recovery. However, we play a role in helping them find their path. My job is to be with a peer who is suffering or headed toward a crisis. Sometimes a person just needs to be validated as a human being.

The CPS approach to recovery is based on a foundation of love. We offer these key recovery pathways:

- We instill hope, partly by modeling our own recovery.
- We remind peers that they have choices.

# Volunteer Tutor Finds the New Normal

Hande Guzey

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Share a time you worked as a volunteer. What did you do?

It was late January 2021 when I received a text asking if I would be available to work on Monday. I couldn't believe my eyes. Did I read the message correctly? After all these months of remote school, was I finally being called in as a substitute teacher? I looked at the message again. It said I needed a Covid-19 test, and if the result was negative, I could start next week.

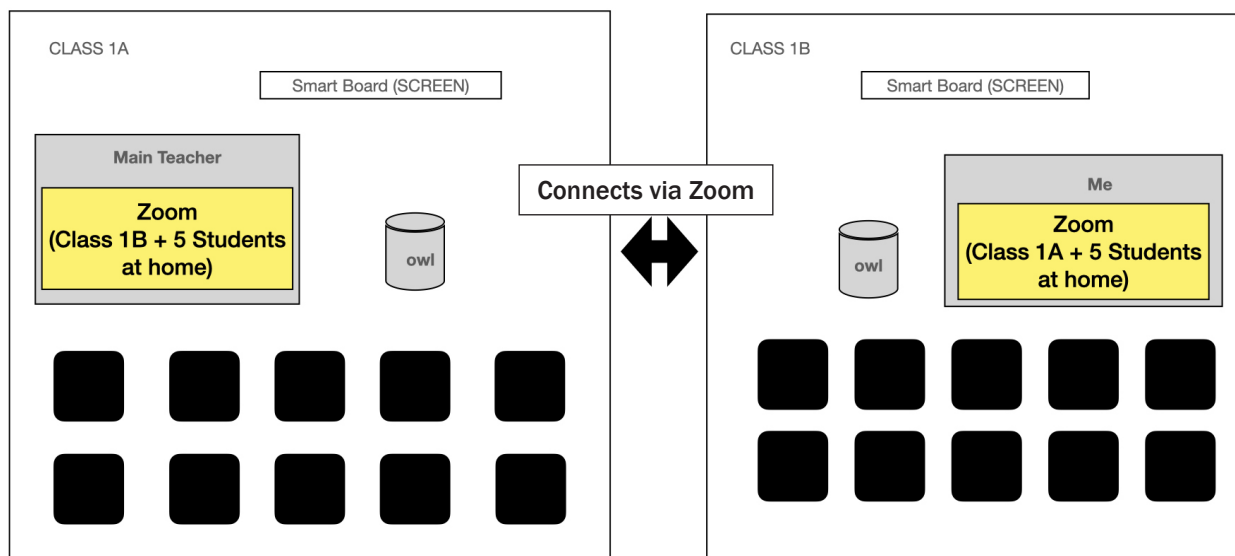
My heart was beating so hard! It felt like it was going in and out of my chest like in a cartoon movie. My soul couldn't fit in the small room where I was sitting. There were no words to explain my feelings. Working with children in-person again! My eyes filled with tears of happiness. How I missed the good old days!

Very quickly, the happiness was replaced by apprehension. Where was the nearest testing point? Would it be free? Would I get the results in

time? I searched online for the testing points near my home.

The test that the school required was not free, but I didn't let myself sink into despair. I talked to the agency that scheduled the substitute teachers. Good news! If I could get to the school before 4:00 pm, they would pay for the test.

I quickly walked to school and gave my documents to the person at the table. I watched children getting tested. How brave they were! When it was my turn, I closed my eyes as if I were in the



Let's say this class has 25 students. During the pandemic, about 20 attend in person. They are split into two classrooms. Five students attend by Zoom. The two in-person classes connect with each other via Zoom and with the students who are attending from home. They study all together at the same time. Owl is a 360 degree camera, mic, and speaker.



dentist chair. The nurse made me feel relaxed and calm. Her confident voice explained what she was doing. It was quick. My nose tickled a bit afterward. I took a deep breath and walked back home with my excitement continuing to grow.

The test result arrived the next night, which was on Friday. I tested negative for Covid-19. The weekend couldn't finish soon enough! I couldn't wait to be back at school again.

On Monday morning, I woke up early and checked my bag of school supplies, which were different from any other year: masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes. And then I was off to the school, lots of butterflies fluttering in my stomach.

When I arrived, the security guards checked my ID and took my temperature. Then they let me in with smiles on their faces. During the pandemic year, I have learned how to see someone's smile behind their mask. We have all learned the new skill of hearing the smile in someone's voice and seeing the smile in the wrinkles around the eyes.

At the office, the school director came out to meet me. He asked me to teach kindergarteners instead of first-graders. Of course I accepted immediately. "I miss all of them so much. I can't wait to teach *anything* to *any* children! The age is not important." Being at school among the children made me feel alive again. The feeling was like a bear waking up from a long winter sleep.

Everyone was wearing a mask, even kindergarteners. It was challenging, but also it was adorable to see how they adapted to the new normal. We did most of our lessons outdoors, and it was quite chilly. None of them complained, even when it was rainy one day. We all just wore more coats, and sometimes we did lessons in the gym.

The following week, I was with first-graders. A boy crossed his arms and gave me an annoyed look. He said, "I hate wearing a mask."

"Me too!" I responded. "None of us likes it. But it's just temporary. We all need to be patient and do our best to take care of each other. Your mask protects your friends and our masks protect you from the virus. The good days will come soon

## Why Volunteer?

Volunteering can be a useful way to explore careers and gain work experience. Learn more with this packet of articles and activities under "Extras" for **Issue #53**.

if we all follow the mask rules." He sighed, and continued with his day with the mask on.

In the past, I welcomed students either with a handshake, or a high five, even with a hug. However, in this new normal, I welcomed them with a squirt of hand sanitizer. In the past, they sat together at tables, but in the new normal, they settled into individual desks surrounded by plexi-glass dividers. Each class used to be a large and noisy group, but now, some students participated from home, some were with me in one classroom, and some were in another room with the main teacher. Those three parts connected to each other via Zoom (see diagram, p. 16). We all did our best to connect with each other. It was hard work, but it was also exciting — to be back in-person with the children, in our new normal world.

*Hande Guzey takes Adult Literacy Zoom classes from volunteer tutors at the Los Angeles Public Library. Hande is originally from Istanbul, Turkey. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics. She works as a substitute teacher and a mathematics tutor in Los Angeles, California.*



### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Using details from the text and from the graphic on p. 16, what are some elements of the new normal in classrooms?
2. We underlined three examples of Hande's use of figurative language. Explain what she means in each of those sentences. Does figurative language help get her message across? Why or why not?

# It Struck Like Lightning

## A Delivery Driver Weathers the Pandemic Storm

*Hercules Preval*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** The title is a *simile*, and the subtitle is a *metaphor*. What does “It” refer to in the title? How do you know? “Weather” is usually a noun, but here in the subtitle, the writer uses it as a verb. Explain the meaning and try using it yourself in a sentence.

### Before the Storm

No one expected the coronavirus pandemic. It struck like lightning, stopping the regular daily lives of almost everyone in the world. To stop the spread of the virus, governments shut down businesses. Many people lost their jobs, and only essential workers could go to work. As a driver for Aramark, I deliver food for the train passengers. I drive the food from the warehouse to the train station, where it is loaded onto trains.

I live with my wife, who is working, and two adult children, who are currently in college. Living in Boston is expensive, and both my wife and I have to contribute to our children’s college tuition. Before Covid-19, I worked a 40-hour week, and I would take overtime whenever possible.

### Calculating Overtime

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was passed in 1938. One of its provisions was that workers should get time-and-a-half for any hours they work over 40 in a week. One way to calculate time-and-a-half is to multiply your hourly rate by 1.5. What’s another way to calculate it? Try calculating your hourly and daily rate at time-and-a-half.



This allowed me to make extra money to put in my savings accounts and help my children continue their college educations. At Aramark, I had many co-workers working with me, which made the job easier and faster to do.

### During the Storm

During Covid-19, due to social distancing guidelines, there have to be fewer workers in the warehouse. The work is lonely and more difficult. Wearing the mask made it more difficult to breathe. I would be sweating in the mask, and I had to switch masks often. Similarly, we have to wear gloves when handling objects. Even though I wear gloves, I am afraid of touching my face or eyes, so I have to switch gloves constantly. I also have to wash my hands all the time. All these small annoyances cause me to work much slower than before the pandemic.

I am working fewer hours, and I am not earning any overtime. Because I am working less, my boss offered to lay me off and let me collect unemployment benefits, but I decided not to take the unemployment. If I stopped working, it would be

my first time being unemployed. I was unfamiliar with unemployment services, and I thought that they would be unreliable. I assumed that the unemployment benefits would be less than my full-time wage.

My wife also works at Aramark, but in a different position. During the pandemic, she was also not able to get overtime. With less money every month, my wife and I have to be more thoughtful about our household budget. Our priority is to pay our bills and send money to our families in Haiti. We don't have anything left over for our savings account, which we keep for emergencies.

### The Sun Is Coming Out

When the pandemic is over, my life will return to how it was before. My wife will be returning to work full-time and I will be able to work more overtime. I don't know if I will have to return to face-to-face classes at the Jewish Vocational Services, but I would prefer to continue having classes online because it is just more convenient. Lightning struck and a storm came. My family and I have weathered Covid-19 and the sun is coming out.

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Using the metaphor of the storm, describe Hercules's life before, during, and after the pandemic.
2. Why did Hercules turn down unemployment? If you were to explain to him about how unemployment works, what would you say? (If you don't know, look it up.)
3. Describe your experience (or the experience of someone you know) on unemployment during the pandemic or at any time. What was it like applying for it? What did you have to do to keep it going? Is it a worthwhile benefit?
4. Read the box on the previous page. Research the FLSA. What was the historical context for the passage of this law? Who fought for it? How did they win it?

*Hercules Preval is a student at Jewish Vocational Services in Boston, MA. He immigrated to the United States in 2009 and has been living in Boston since with his family. He attends school while working full time to learn English in order to get a better job.*

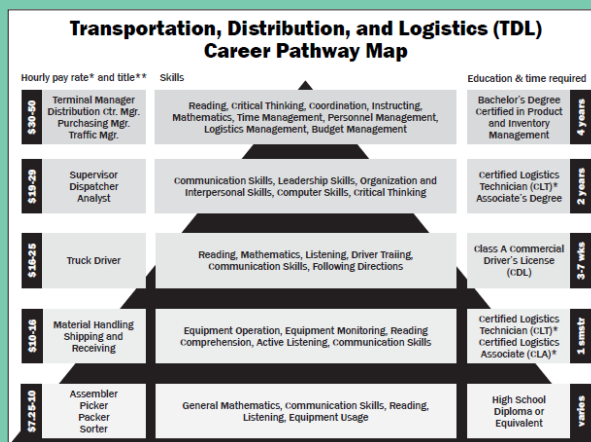


## Consider a Career in Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics (TDL)

For another perspective, read the article by a warehouse worker on p. 20.

Find out more about this career pathway. Read "Getting Ahead in Transportation" (pp. 46-48) by Sandy Goodman in [Issue #43](#) of *The Change Agent*.

Look at this [CareerKit](#), especially the section on Transportation and Warehousing, developed by Ellen Baxt at CUNY for HSE and ESL students.



# We Miss Greeting Each Other

## A Warehouse Worker Tries to Keep a Positive Mood

Svetlana Bitkova

**BEFORE YOU READ:** How do you greet co-workers? How has that changed since the pandemic?

I work at a clothing warehouse. Even though we are not an essential business, our company stayed open during the pandemic, which helped 200 people keep their jobs.

The company has made some changes during the pandemic to make work less dangerous. For example, we are required to wear a mask at work. If we forget to bring a mask, we don't have to worry because there is a box of masks at the

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**We want to be able to greet each other at the entrance, eat together during lunch, and talk without wearing a mask.**

---

front door. Wearing a mask is not easy because it is more difficult to breathe when we are constantly doing physical labor. Sometimes it is difficult to understand co-workers

because the mask distorts their voice. It's frustrating to have to ask them to repeat directions.

Another thing that has changed is the schedule. Different small groups start their shifts every two hours. The effect is people have different start times, break times, and end times. For this reason, we have less contact with each other. I miss greeting my coworkers at the entrance or in the lunchroom.

The Human Resources (HR) department tries to provide a positive work environment. On holidays and birthdays, we receive small gifts such as a t-shirt. We celebrate birthdays each month by holding a drawing for gift cards that we can use to purchase items from our company. HR provides sweet snacks for all workers. My favorite is a chocolate cupcake. We also have a festive Christ-

mas and Thanksgiving dinner. HR orders food from a restaurant that delivers throughout the day. A few restaurant staff stay with us all day because we have different lunchtimes. They serve the food in small batches to keep it hot.

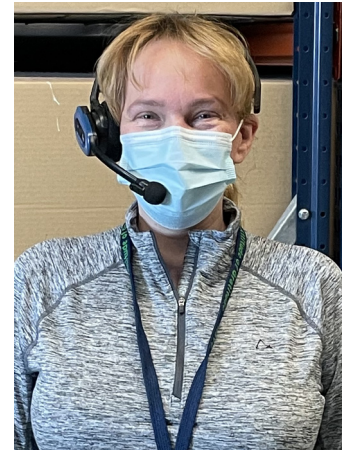
Despite the fact that we are grateful to HR for these practices, everybody wants to return to normal life. We want to be able to greet each other at the entrance, eat together during lunch, and talk without wearing a mask. The pandemic has changed work, but we didn't give up and we have tried to keep a positive mood in our company.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. What changed at Svetlana's job?
2. Interview your classmates to find out what changed at their jobs.
3. Read about the Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (TDL) career pathway on p. 19.

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*Svetlana Bitkova is a student at SouthWest Metro ABE in Shakopee, MN. She is originally from Russia and has lived in the U.S. for five years. Svetlana lives with her husband and stepson. One of her favorite hobbies is reading books, and her favorite author is Stephen King. She now reads his books in English but finds the slang difficult to understand. She also enjoys gardening and knitting toys, which she donates to a children's cancer hospital.*



# Essential Workers

## Pay Them, Protect Them, Empower Them

Adriana Herrera López

### BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does *undervalued* mean? Do you think certain workers are undervalued? If so, who?
2. What does *fair share* and *proportionate* mean? (Add the prefix *dis* to *proportionate*. Now what does it mean?)
3. What does *overrepresented* mean? Can you name an occupation in which men or women or people of color are overrepresented?
3. Consider reading this article in conjunction with the one by Ellen Baxt (available in two levels: pp. 37-38 (level 4) or pp. 39-42 (level 8)).

### Essential Workers Have Been Undervalued

The virus affected my family. My cousin, who worked in a hospital in Colombia, got Covid. He gave it to his parents. They all almost died. My sister, who works as a cleaner in New York City, did not get Covid, but her workload increased a lot. Now she has severe back pain. These family members did essential work during the pandemic, and they paid a price.

Without a doubt, 2020 taught us many things, including: the people who do the vital jobs for society are often *undervalued*. These workers are



A woman holds a sign listing the Covid fatality rates for different ethnic groups in New York City. Why might the fatality rates be different for different groups? Share and discuss the reasons you can think of. Read the box below about health disparities. Photo used with permission from <https://protectnyheroes.org/>.

our essential workers. They are more exposed to infection. They work longer hours. Many of them do not get paid more for the extra risk they take. I am talking about women and people of color—particularly Blacks and Latinos. Society has long undervalued these workers. Now the pandemic has reminded us how important they are!

### Essential and Frontline Workers Are Mostly People of Color

In New York City where I live, people of color do more than their *fair share* of the essential work. They are *disproportionately* represented. According to one report from the city, 75% of all frontline workers are people of color. Black people are *overrepresented* in public transit, trucking and

### Health Disparities

A *disparity* is a great difference. What does the term *health disparities* mean? To learn more, see [Issue #28](#) of *The Change Agent*, especially “Unequal Access to Health and Wellness,” pp. 10-12. Also, explore the [Pandemic](#) and the [Mental Health](#) issues.

delivery services, healthcare, and childcare, food and family services. Latinos are *overrepresented* in cleaning services and as grocery store workers. In the U.S., 76% of the healthcare workers are women. Many of these women also take care of their families, so they have a double workload, which is especially difficult during a pandemic!

### Now They Are More Visible

The pandemic has made frontline workers more visible. Now, some people call them heroes. We should not hit the back button and go back to how it was before when these workers were invisible. They are the ones who take care of our health and our children. They make sure we have food and transportation. They drive trucks and deliver our mail and our packages. We should have laws and policies that make sure these workers earn a living wage and have safe working conditions. We should make their work visible. Life would not be possible without them. We should pay them, protect them, and empower them.

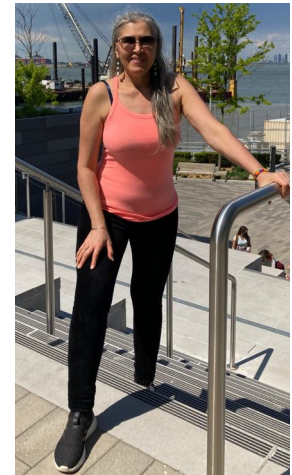
**Sources:**

- <https://Comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/new-york-citys-frontline-workers>
- <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/newyorkcitynewyork>
- <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/08/your-health-care-in-womens-hands.html>
- <https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-policy-manifesto-for-paying-protecting-and-empowering-essential-workers/>

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. What is the author’s main point? What evidence does she offer to prove it? Check her sources. Do they seem reliable? Why or why not?
2. Share your own perspective about who is under- and who is overrepresented in certain jobs.
3. What is the difference between making observations from your experience and collecting actual data? Why is it important to do both—observe what is around you *and* collect data about it?
4. To study more data and learn more about proportion in the context of frontline workers, read “Is It in Proportion?” on pp. 24-26 and do the activities.

*Adriana Herrera López is a student of the Queensborough Community College/CUNY Adult Literacy Program in New York City. She was born in Cali, Colombia, and studied at the Santiago de Cali University. Her hobbies include swimming, dancing, traveling, and reading.*



### Heroes Act!



“On May 5, 2021, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the New York Health and Essential Rights Act (NY HERO Act) into law. The law mandates extensive new workplace health and safety protections in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the NY HERO Act is to protect employees against exposure and disease during a future airborne infectious disease outbreak.” — <https://dol.ny.gov/ny-hero-act>

Many unions and community organizations joined together to fight for this state law. Find out more at <https://protectnyheroes.org/>, including videos and infographics in English and Spanish.

Read the text on the next page and watch the video. What laws exist on a national level to protect essential workers? Find out more [here](#). Write to your legislator to let them know what you think.

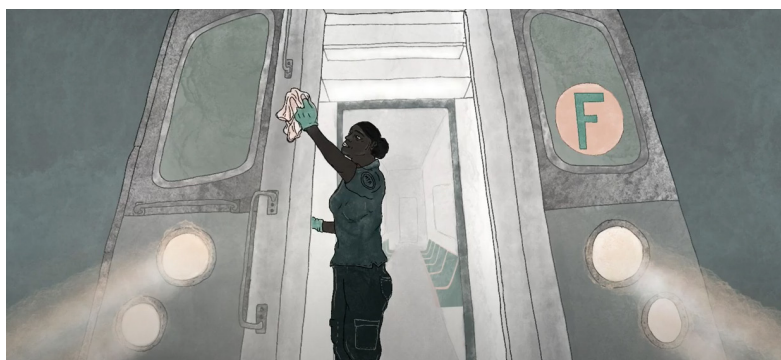
# Who Will Protect Essential Workers?

<https://protectnyheroes.org/>



Dear New York,

In March 2020, we all tried to stop the spread of Covid-19. Some people stayed home from work.



Some of us went to work. We showed up early and we went home late. We took the risk of getting Covid. We worried we would bring Covid home to our families.



As essential workers, people called us heroes. We risked our lives to take care of you, New York.



New York, we took care of you. Now will you take care of us?

**Source:** The images are screen grabs from a [video](#) produced by [protectnyheroes.org](https://protectnyheroes.org). Animation by McKenna Ryan. Text is adapted from the narration. Used with permission.

# Is It in Proportion?

Eric Appleton

When we read, write, and talk about statistics (the study of numbers in the world), the idea of *proportion* is often an important part of the conversation.

Based on the information we have, a proportion tells us what size or share we might expect in a different situation. For example, if oranges cost \$1.50 for one pound, we would expect two pounds of oranges to cost \$3.00. Paying \$3.00 dollars for two pounds of oranges is *proportionate* to paying \$1.50 for one pound of oranges. If we had to pay \$4.00 for 2 pounds of oranges, that would be *disproportionate*; we would think it was unfair.

Here’s another example. Let’s say Ndeye works 10 hours and earns \$150. Her co-worker, Moise, has the same job. He works 15 hours and earns \$300. Is the pay Ndeye and Moise received *in proportion*? You could also ask, “Is this fair?” What do you think?

Let’s practice thinking about proportions and populations of people. In 2020, the U.S. Census counted all people living in the United States. The population data in the Census is often used in proportions.

Approximately what proportion of people in the U.S. do you think identify as “white alone”?

- A. 20%
- B. 40%
- C. 50%
- D. 60%

Approximately what proportion of people in the U.S. do you think are Black?

- A. 15%
- B. 25%
- C. 35%
- D. 45%

Approximately what proportion of people in the U.S. do you think are female?

- A. 49%
- B. 50%
- C. 51%
- D. 52%

**Answers:** Of total U.S. population, people who identify as white alone: 61.6%. People who identify as Black (alone or in combination): 14.2%. People who identify as female: 50.8%.

Source: <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/race-and-ethnicity-in-the-united-state-2010-and-2020-census.html>

## Learn More about Proportion

**Proportion** (noun): The size of something compared to something else

Example: A large **proportion** of essential workers are employed in health care.

When you look at the word *proportion*, you might notice that it includes the word “portion.” A *portion* is part or a share of a whole.

Example: At the end of the shift, each worker took her **portion** of tips.

Related words: *share, percentage, ratio*

The size, share, or cost we expect	Larger or smaller size, share, or cost than we expect
proportionate	disproportionate
in proportion	out of proportion
representative	overrepresented or underrepresented

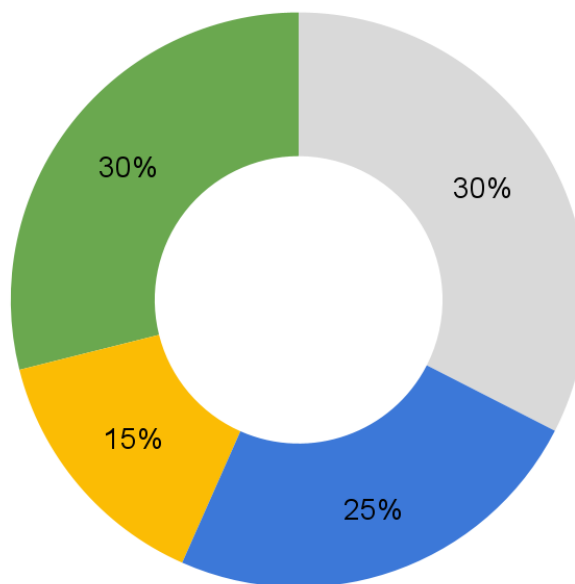


### Race and Ethnicity of Frontline Workers in New York City

Let's compare different populations of people. About 8 million people live in New York City. On the right, you can see the approximate percentages of New York City's population by race and ethnicity. Now look at the chart below. What do you notice? In her piece, Adriana Herrera López writes, "In New York City where I live, people of color do more than their fair share of the essential work. They are disproportionately represented." Based on the data from the charts on this page, do you agree or disagree with Adriana? Can you use the data to prove your point? Write several true sentences based on the information in these charts.

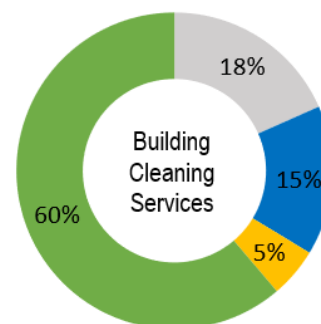
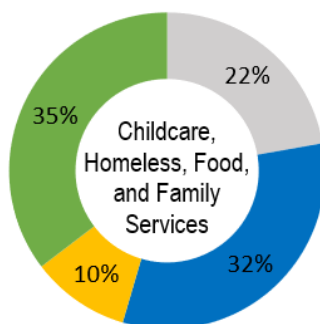
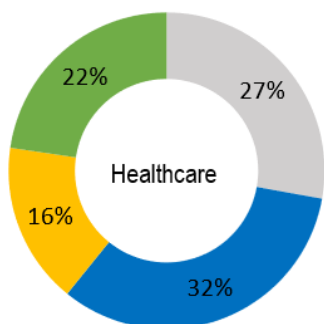
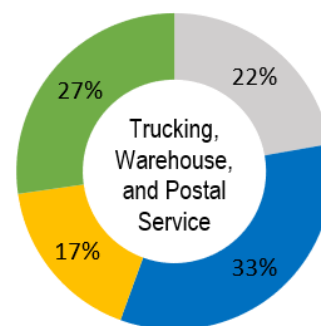
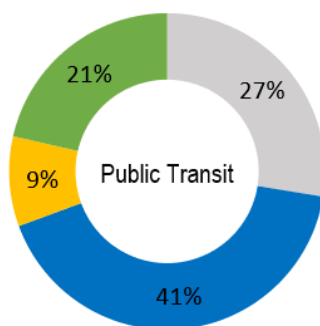
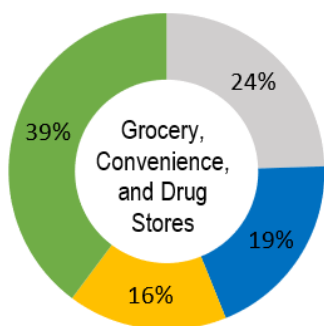
### New York City Population by Race and Ethnicity (Approximate Percentages)

● White ● Black ● Asian ● Hispanic



### New York City Frontline Workers by Race and Ethnicity

■ White ■ Black ■ Asian ■ Hispanic



### Female Frontline Workers in New York City

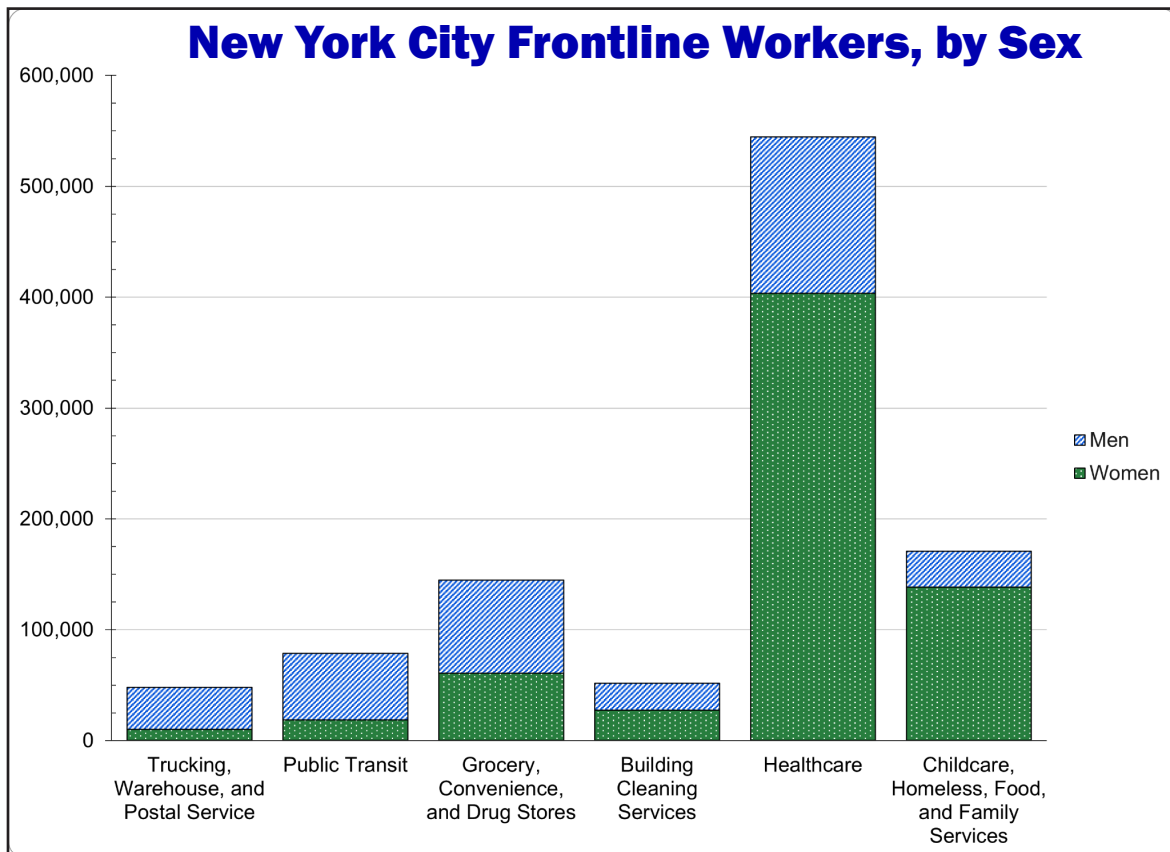
According to 2019 Census estimates, 52.3% of the population of New York City is female. Based on this information and the chart on the right, write three true sentences about women as frontline workers in New York City. Use terms like *under-represented* and *overrepresented*. Now look at the bar graph below. What do you notice when you compare the table of data with the bar graph showing the same data? The bar graph gives a visual representation of the data. How is that helpful (or not)? Why is it important to look at *both* percent differences *and* differences in hard numbers?

*Eric Appleton is a math professional developer for the City University of New York (CUNY) Adult Literacy/HSE Program. Before coming to CUNY, he taught in an education program for formerly incarcerated people. Eric is a founding member of the Community of Adult Math Instructors (CAMI), which meets monthly to do math and talk about teaching. In 2018, he became president-elect of the Adult Numeracy Network (ANN).*

### New York City Frontline Workers, by Sex

Industry	Women	Men	% Women
Trucking, Warehouse, and Postal Service	10,381	37,638	22%
Public Transit	18,788	60,037	24%
Grocery, Convenience, and Drug Stores	60,732	83,968	42%
Building Cleaning Services	27,375	24,448	53%
Healthcare	403,546	140,912	74%
Childcare, Food, & Family Services	138,360	32,594	81%
Total	659,182	379,597	63%

**Sources:** United States Census Bureau. American Community Survey 2014-2018 5-Year Estimates; <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/new-york-citys-frontline-workers/>



## Part 2

# Caring for Our Children



# Suddenly, We Are Teachers

*Fabiola Santos*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Tell a story (from your own experience or not) about supporting school-age children during the pandemic.

## A New Full-Time Job

I am a parent of three children in grades three, five, and six. The remote school was hard for my family. We had to teach our children, and we were not prepared for it. It takes a lot of time to watch children while they are in school at home. It was a full-time job!

## Tablets, the Internet, and Zoom

Each child needed their own tablet for online school. At first, we didn't have any tablets. The kids had to use my phone. But it was only one phone for three kids. The city started providing tablets to families. I filled out an application, and the city sent me three tablets.

It was good for each child to have their own tablet. However, there were other problems. I live in a basement apartment where the internet is not strong. I was sometimes running from child to child when they lost internet access.

There were other challenges too. It was hard for my son to focus on his tablet. He got distracted. I spent a lot of time trying to keep him focused on school. The little one wanted to learn her lessons, but she needed a lot of help. Fortunately, my oldest daughter didn't need much help. She is a very responsible. But sometimes, she missed school because she couldn't get on to Zoom. She felt upset. I tried to help her. I called the teacher.

## Helping Other Families

Many parents had to work. Many parents did not know about how to use tablets or how to connect to the internet. They needed to buy internet access. It was even harder if they could not speak English. I tried to help them. I helped them apply



for tablets. I was a volunteer in my kids' school, so many parents knew me.

The worst thing about remote school is that, in my opinion, the children don't learn as much as they do in regular school. As a parent, I believe school is important for my children and for all the children in our community. I worked hard to make sure the children kept getting their education during the year of the pandemic.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Fabiola says that parenting three kids at home in remote school was a full-time job. Write a job description for someone in this role. Draw from her experience and your own if you like.

---

*Fabiola Santos is from Mexico. She is an ESOL student at We Make the Road/New York in New York City.*

# My Job Is to Take Care of My Children

*Lilit Abrahamyan*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What do you think was hardest for families with small children who had to adapt to the pandemic?

When my older daughter was a baby, our favorite place was the Tompkins County Library where they had baby story time every week. Ithaca is a small city and there are not too many places to go with children. In the library, she could play and communicate with other children. However, the library closed due to the pandemic.

My daughter became a little bit nervous during the pandemic because she did not have her usual activities, and I mostly kept her inside. When we did go outside, she did not understand

social distancing. The pandemic took away many of the little joys of being a child.

My husband, a researcher at Cornell University, started working remotely from home. Of

course, it is good when he is close to me and we can see him anytime. However, at home, it is very hard for him to concentrate and work effectively. It took my daughter a whole year to understand that when Dad is working, she shouldn't disturb him. But she still interrupts him and insists on him playing with her.

My second child was born in 2020, and he brings a lot of happiness to our life. When he was born, I was alone with him in the hospital. My husband and daughter weren't allowed to visit us because of the pandemic. However, the doctors agreed to allow my husband to see our son for a few minutes.

Even though I am unemployed, the pandemic has touched my life as well. My job has been to take care of my children. I tried to keep them safe



from the virus, but I could see that the pandemic was hard on them emotionally. How has the pandemic affected small children? How will it change the future of our children? These questions do not yet have answers. We need more research about the impact of the pandemic on our children.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. Based on the text, how was the pandemic emotionally hard on the author's children?
2. Discuss the questions that Lilit raises in the last paragraph.

*Lilit Abrahamyan is an ESL student at Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga BOCES Adult Education, in Ithaca, NY. She is from Armenia where she worked as an accountant. Her husband is a researcher at Cornell University; he works in the field of accelerator physics. Her goal is to improve her English and find a job as an accountant.*

# Stay-at-Home Mom

Fei Qiu

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Have you heard of the job title, “stay-at-home mom.” List some of the responsibilities for someone with this job.

## Arriving in This Country Was Hard... and Then It Got Harder!

I remember arriving in the U.S. at the end of 2019. It was a cold night. Every family was preparing to celebrate the New Year, and we had come to the unknown world. At that time, my daughter was two-and-a-half years old, and my son was six months old. We did not have any relatives or friends in the U.S., and we couldn't speak much English. In those early days of 2020, it was hard for us to adjust to being in a new country. We had no idea how much harder it was about to get.

When I was in Japan, I had a full-time job. My daughter went to daycare starting at six months old. She spent almost the whole day there until 6 pm. Every year, my mother came from China for a few months to help me with the children.

In the U.S., my life is very different. Every day after my husband goes to work, my main task is to take care of the children and do housework.

I did not adapt well to being a housewife. Facing the endless washing, cooking, cleaning, and crying children, I was exhausted.

During the first two months of 2020, I could still take my children to nearby supermarkets or parks. I did not have a U.S. driver's license, so I took the children out in the stroller. Even though it was winter, being outside in the fresh air was the happiest time for us.

## Crafts, Cookies, and Dumplings

As Covid-19 infections increased, and people here did not have the habit of wearing masks, we spent less time outside. My daughter did not know why she could not play outside. Sometimes, she cried and had a rebellious attitude with me. To distract



her, we made crafts, cookies, and dumplings together. This made the time go by faster. I was always carrying my son on my back and playing with my daughter while he was sleeping. Over time, I began to feel pain in my lower back.

### Fear and Anxiety

The days went by, and we watched the increasing number of infections and deaths in the news. We also saw more and more discrimination against Asians. I spent every day in fear and anxiety. I

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**We also saw more and more discrimination against Asians. I spent every day in fear and anxiety.**

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wanted to return to Japan or China, but it wasn't safe to travel. My mother was very worried about my mental condition. Although there is a 12-hour time difference, she still insisted on video-calling me every

day. She would "watch" my children on video while I cooked or did housework. At that time, we used WeChat. To add to our anxiety, the U.S. government was planning to ban WeChat. This threat cast a shadow on our lives. If WeChat was banned, how would I contact my family?

### A Break from the Isolation

By May 2020, the weather was getting warmer, so the children could play a little on the patio. I planted some mini tomatoes and cucumbers to please them. It was my first time gardening. At the same time, my Japanese neighbor introduced me to a program that provided online story time. The teachers were very gentle and kind. Although my children could not speak English, the teachers always prepared several interesting stories and songs to teach them. When my daughter showed her paintings or crafts to them, they gave her great encouragement and praise. This activity brought hope into our daily life and gave us a chance to communicate with others. It greatly relieved my fatigue and depression of parenting alone.

When my daughter started attending in-

person pre-school, I registered for adult education English classes. My daughter sensibly said that since neither of us could speak English, we should study together. My English classes are fantastic. My teachers and classmates are patient and friendly. Every day feels meaningful now.



### A Great and Respected Occupation

I learned something very important in my first English class. When people introduced themselves, they said their profession. When it was my turn, I didn't know what to say. The teacher told me that in English I am a "stay-at-home mom," which is a great and respected occupation. Her words moved me deeply.

Life is a journey of practice for me. The road can be difficult, but I try to learn everything on the path. To be honest, when I had a full-time job, I thought that being a stay-at-home mom was not hard work. However, when I became a stay-at-home mom, I learned it is very hard work. Sometimes, I need time to breathe. I wish I could go to the cinema, read a novel, or just talk with friends.

After coming to the United States, I have experienced many firsts in my life, and I have gradually adapted to my new job as a stay-at-home mom. Looking at my healthy and happy children, I think I am doing well in my new job.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Who and what was helpful to Fei Qui during this challenging time?

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*Fei Qiu's home country is China. She moved to Japan to attend university, and she worked for a Japanese power company for six years after graduating. She came to the U.S. at the end of 2019 due to her husband's job transfer. Now she is a stay-at-home mother and a student at Shoreline Adult Education in Branford, CT.*

# A Mom, Writer, and Small Business Owner

*Farah Ejaz*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Note the labels that the writer uses to describe herself in the title. What are some of the labels you use to describe yourself?

I am the mother of five children, a housewife, a writer, an amateur poet, and a business owner, and this is my story of survival. It is a story that is still in process.

## Mom Is the Mask Enforcer

You ask me how the pandemic is affecting my work life. Well, the answer is simple. It has been a nightmare. One of my jobs is to be a mom. During the lockdown, the kids had no social activities, and they could not play outside. Instead of going to school, they were doing virtual classes at home, which is not a good experience. It is not easy to keep an eye on your kids all the time during virtual classes.

My husband and I have a small restaurant in Ann Arbor called Once Upon A Grill. We had to close it for three months. My whole family was stuck in the house. At times, my house felt like a cage to me, where I was trapped with five kids,



a husband, and a mother-in-law. If we went out, then I had to enforce the mask rule! A mother already does so much to keep her children healthy and teach them to do the right thing. This task only grew during the pandemic! (Watch this [Dhar Mann video](#) of a patient mother persuading her daughter to wear a mask, all the while her daughter is getting pressure not to wear a mask. Who is the hero here?)

## Needing Time to Write

The pandemic made life much harder for me, and I did not have time to write. Writing is important to me. It makes me feel positive and productive. When I don't have time to write, I feel anxious and frustrated.

## Keeping the Business Going + More Mask Enforcing!

In addition, there are the frustrations of being a small business owner during the pandemic. We closed our restaurant during lunchtime because people were working from home. They were scared to go out to eat, and there was no delivery option for us because the cost of delivery is too high. The delivery companies charge 25-35% of the sale. We are staying open during limited hours to bring in enough money to manage overhead



and stay in business. We are not sure how we are going to deal with our financial setbacks.

Now that people are eating in restaurants again, we face another problem: scarcity of labor. People are making more money by staying unemployed. It's hard to find labor because the state and federal government are helping the unemployed people. Also, some workers are scared to come back to the restaurant because Covid is still dangerous.

Meanwhile, customers are not always happy to follow the rules. They don't keep social distance, they come in without masks, or they don't wear them properly. It is hard for us to manage

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**Please, everyone, if you read my article please follow the directions; masks protect you, as well as everyone else.**

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the customers who don't want to follow the guidelines. Please, everyone, if you read my article please follow the directions; masks protect you, as well as everyone else.

It is hard work being a mom, a writer, and a business owner. The pandemic made it even harder. In the end, I am thankful to God and to all those who worked to make our lives easier. I am thankful to those who gave their day and night in research to make vaccines to get rid of this monster. Because of their efforts, we are now able to fight this virus. I hope we will succeed against it and take back what this pandemic has seized from us.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. What are some of the challenges Farah has had to deal with? Compare and contrast them to the challenges you have faced recently.
2. Farah mentions a "scarcity of labor." Discuss what this means and why it is happening.

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*Farah Ejaz is an ESL student in the Dearborn Public Schools in Dearborn, MI. She is from Pakistan, and she is an Urdu writer. She enjoys reading and writing fiction. She loves to travel and to watch Dhar Mann videos and travel vlogs.*



In this [Dhar Mann video](#), a mother teaches her daughter why it matters to wear a mask. What "work" is this mother doing here? Do you think it is work? Why does it matter to the rest of society for parents to do the work of raising children? How much should society support parents in this work?

**Make a list of some of the additional tasks that parents have had to take on during the pandemic:**

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**Look at the chart on p. 41 to see which countries offer paid time off to parents to take care of children.**

# Singing, Talking, Reading

*Lucy Soto*

I am a mother of two children. My son is 24 months old and my daughter is 4 months old. I help my children grow and learn by playing with them.

With my son, I sing the ABCs to make learning fun. I say funny, interesting-sounding words, so that he can learn how to say them. I make circles on paper with crayons to show him what the colors are. I also draw shapes and numbers. My son likes to point towards things so that I can tell him what they are. Then he will try to repeat my words back to me.

I talk to my daughter while she looks at me and giggles. I play music for her. That helps with her development. She likes to make talking sounds, and she makes herself laugh. She is learning how to sit up. It is funny when she tries.

As I read books to my kids, I have my son sitting next to me and my daughter in her swing. My son loves pointing to the pictures in the book. He tells me what he sees.

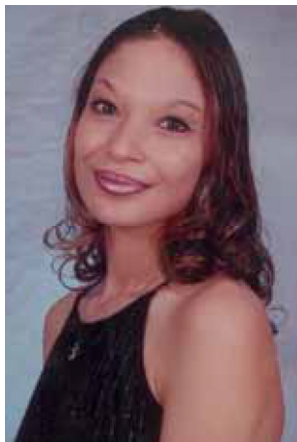
Being with my children is a blessing and brings me happiness, so I take the time to do it. I'm excited to see how much they grow and learn. I'm surprised at how much my children can do. That's why I so enjoy helping my children grow and learn.



*A woman and baby play together. Photo by Meruyert Gonullu, [pexels.com](https://pexels.com).*

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*Lucy Soto attends GED classes at Lorain City Schools ABLE/ GED Program in Lorain, Ohio. She has two children, Enrique and Yuliana. This article was originally published in Issue #24 of The Change Agent, "Caring for Our Children."*



## **AFTER YOU READ:**

- 1.** How does the author help her children learn and grow? Be specific. Refer to details from the text.
- 2.** What do you do to support your children (or any children you know) to learn and grow?
- 3.** What did your parents do to help you learn and grow?







# Responsibilities of Parents

Cynthia Peters

Use this graphic organizer to take notes on the five articles on pp. 28-34. (The first one is done for you.) In the last row, add some notes about your own experiences. Study your notes and discuss them with others. Can you describe a few basic categories that parents' responsibilities fall into? (Compare your categories with those on p. 36.) Organize your notes into an outline and write an essay about the responsibilities of parents. Use quotes and details from various texts; cite your sources. Share your essay, get feedback, and re-write.

## Your Résumé!

Which parenting skills could you add to your résumé? Include volunteer work you have done in your child's school or in the community.




p. #	Author	Title	Notes about Parents' Responsibilities
28 	Fabiola Santos	"Suddenly We Are Teachers"	this mother helped her children keep up with school; she applied to the city to get them tablets; she helped them when they got distracted, needed help with their lessons, or lost their Zoom connection; she helped other families too; "I worked hard to make sure the children kept getting their education during the year of the pandemic."
29 			
30-31 			
32-33 			
34 			
			

# Parent/Family Role Map

*Excerpted from Equipped for the Future*

According to *Equipped for the Future*, “Effective family members contribute to building and maintaining a strong family system that promotes growth and development.” The chart below shows some areas of responsibility for parents and lists some key activities in those areas. Look back at the articles on pp. 28-34 and find specific examples from various texts that describe key activities. Write them in the space provided.

**Job Skills!**  
 Parenting skills are job and career skills. Use the language here (and from p. 35) and list some skills you might add to your résumé.

<b>Broad Areas of Responsibility</b>		
 <p><b>Promote Family Members' Growth and Development</b></p> <p>Family members support the growth and development of all family members, including themselves.</p>	 <p><b>Meet Family Needs and Responsibilities</b></p> <p>Family members meet the needs and responsibilities of the family unit.</p>	 <p><b>Strengthen the Family System</b></p> <p>Family members create and maintain a strong sense of family.</p>
<p><b>Key Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make and pursue plans for self-improvement</li> <li>• Guide and mentor other family members</li> <li>• Foster informal education of children</li> <li>• Support children's formal education</li> <li>• Direct and discipline children</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide for safety and physical needs</li> <li>• Manage family resources</li> <li>• Balance priorities to meet multiple needs and responsibilities</li> <li>• Give and receive support outside the immediate family</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a vision for the family and work to achieve it</li> <li>• Promote values, ethics, and cultural heritage within the family</li> <li>• Form and maintain supportive family relationships</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for each family member to experience success</li> <li>• Encourage open communication among the generations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples from articles on pp. 28-34:</b></p>	<p><b>Examples from articles on pp. 28-34:</b></p>	<p><b>Examples from articles on pp. 28-34:</b></p>

Source: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED437557>

# Women & the Economics of Childcare\*

Ellen Baxt

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Who did the childcare in your family during the pandemic? Why?
2. Think of some jobs you have had. Are men and women equally represented in those jobs? Or are women *overrepresented* in some? Try using *overrepresented* in a sentence.
3. What does the phrase *on average* mean?

## Women Do More than their Fair Share of Low-Wage Work

This section of *The Change Agent* is called “Caring for Our Children.” Here is a question: Who do you think wrote the stories? Men or women or both? The answer: five out of five stories are by women. That is 100%! Why are women so *overrepresented* in this group? Maybe it is because they spend more time than men caring for children in the home.

Why do women do more of the childcare work in the home? One reason is that, *on average*, women earn less than men. In fact, they make 82



Photo by Allison Shelley, [Flickr](#).

cents for every dollar that a man makes. They are *overrepresented* in jobs that make less money. (See the chart on the left.)

Men, on the other hand, are *overrepresented* in jobs that pay more. Did you know that only 11% of people in all construction jobs are women? So, if you are in a family with a mother and father, there is a good chance the father earns more than the mother. If one person has to leave their job to take care of the children, whom would you pick?

## The Pandemic and a Childcare Crisis

During the pandemic, many schools and daycare centers closed. This meant that women had to do more childcare. Without a safe place for their children, many mothers quit their jobs to stay home with their children. Some mothers worked from home while they took care of their children. (That’s what I did, and it did not work well at all.)

The U.S. did not have a plan to help parents keep working during the pandemic. Many of us

Low-wage Jobs by Gender, 2013	
The 10 largest low-wage occupations	% women
Childcare workers	95%
Home health aides	89%
Housecleaners	88%
Personal care aides	84%
Cashiers	72%
Waiters	70%
Food preparers and servers	65%
Bartenders	58%
Food preparers	56%
Hand packers and packagers	49%

Source: BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics, 2013; Current Population Survey, 2013.

\* Two versions of this article are available: [beginner intermediate](#) (pp. 37-38) and [advanced intermediate](#) (pp. 39-42).

already knew we have a childcare crisis in this country, but the pandemic made it even clearer. Soon, politicians started creating plans to get moms back to work. I couldn't believe that in 2021, the U.S. did not have a plan to help provide childcare so that mothers who wanted to could work.

Well, better late than never! Politicians are thinking of new ideas that will support families. In New York City, where I live, the mayor has a plan to provide more free or low-cost daycare. On a national level, President Biden wants free pre-school for 3- and 4-year-olds. These plans would help provide childcare so that parents can work, instead of having to stay home caring for children.

Biden's policy would also increase the pay of childcare workers to at least \$15 per hour. That is a good step! Women are often the ones taking care of children. We should pay them well for this important work!

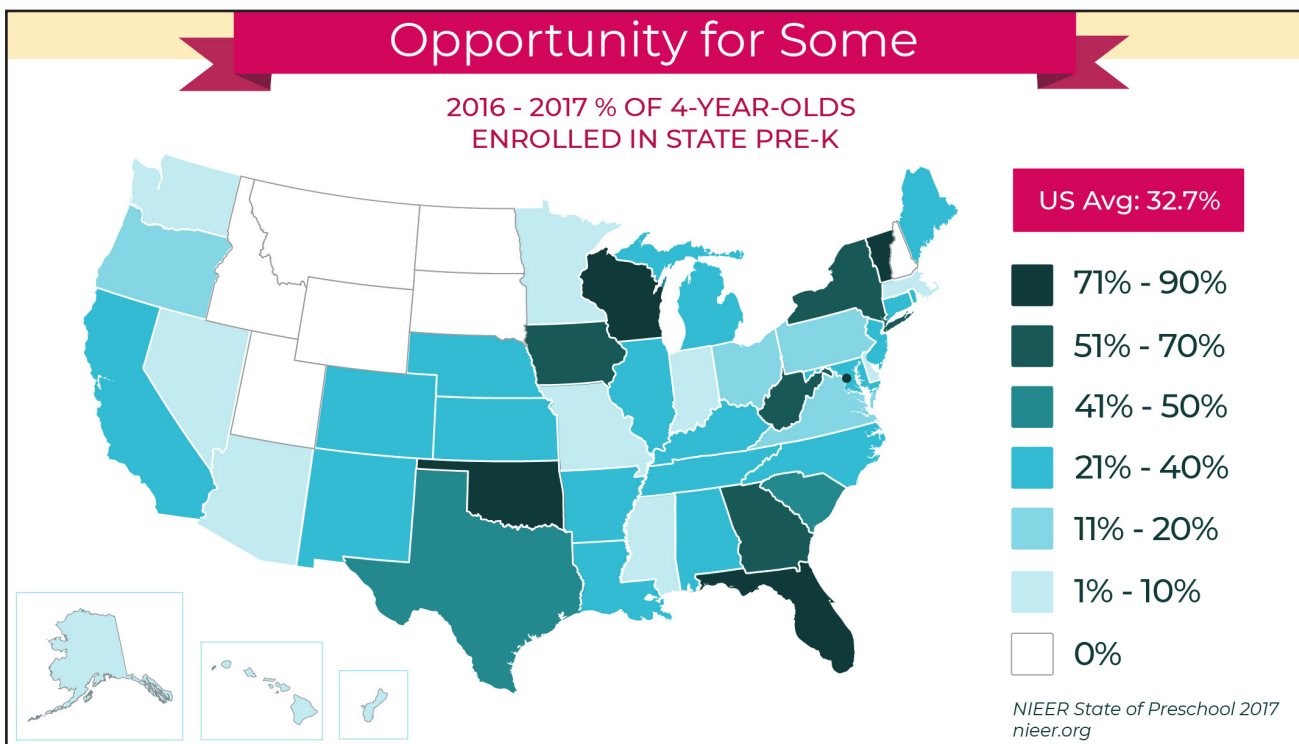
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*Ellen Baxt writes lessons and trainings on incorporating career exploration into basic education classes. She lives in New York City.*

**Sources:** <https://blog.dol.gov/2021/03/19/5-facts-about-the-state-of-the-gender-pay-gap>; <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2018/05/18/450972/unequal-division-labor/>; <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/401-21/recovery-all-us-city-expand-child-care-working-families>; <https://www.nytimes.com/article/biden-rescue-family-plan.html>

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. According to the author, what is one reason women might do more childcare than men?
2. According to the author, how did the pandemic affect women's childcare responsibilities?
3. Does the author approve of new policies that will support families? How do you know?
4. Look at the map below. What percentage of children in your state attend state-funded preschool?
5. Have your children attended state-funded preschool? If so, what was your experience?
6. What do you think about universal, state-funded preschool? Do some research to learn more and then write a letter to your legislator and let him/her know what you think (see the p. 43).



This map shows which states offer state-funded preschool and what percentage of children receive the benefit. <https://nieer.org/>

# Women and the Economics of Childcare\*

Ellen Baxt

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Think about the terms *overrepresented*, *underrepresented*, *in proportion*, and *incentive*. What do they mean? Try using them in sentences.
2. Consider reading this article in conjunction with the article by Adriana Herrera López on pp. 17-18, along with a math lesson on proportion, written by Eric Appleton.

## Women Do More than their Fair Share of Low-Wage Work

This section of *The Change Agent* is called “Caring for Our Children.” Here is a question for you: Who do you think wrote the stories? Men or women or both? The answer: five out of five sto-



Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages, [Flickr](#).

Low-wage Jobs by Gender, 2013	
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Food preparers and servers	65%
Bartenders	58%
Food preparers	56%
Hand packers and packagers	49%

Source: BLS, Occupational Employment Statistics, 2013; Current Population Survey, 2013.

What do you notice about the data in this chart? Make several true sentences about it. Source: [nwl.org](#).

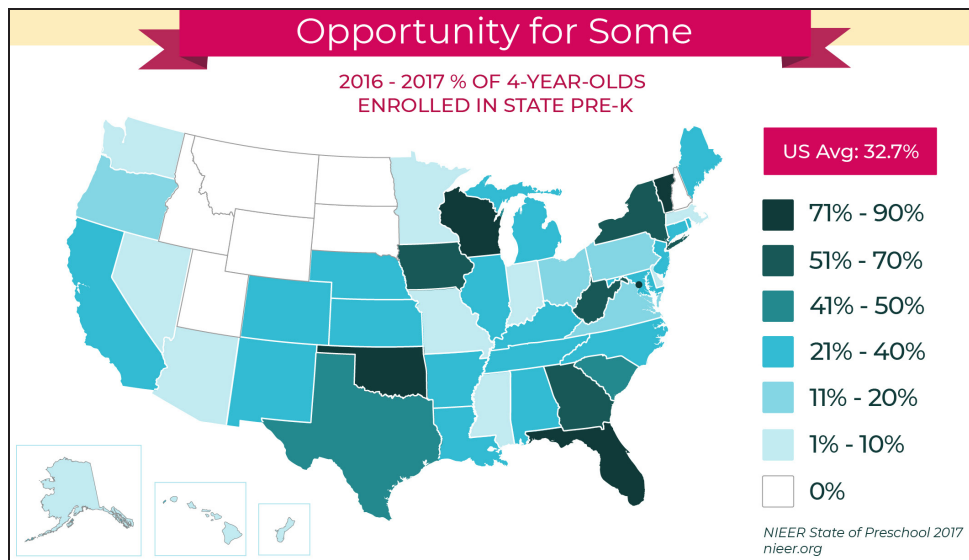
\* Two versions of this article are available: [beginner intermediate](#) (pp. 37-38) and [advanced intermediate](#) (pp. 39-42).

ries are by women. That is 100%! Why are women so *overrepresented* in this group? Maybe it is because they spend more time than men caring for children in the home.

Why do women do more of the childcare work in the home? One reason is that, on average, women earn less than men. In fact, they make 82 cents for every dollar that a man makes. They are *overrepresented* in jobs that make less money. (See the chart on the left.)

Men, on the other hand, are *overrepresented* in jobs that pay more. Did you know that only 11% of people in all construction jobs are women?

So, if you are in a family with a mother and father, there is a good chance the father earns more than the mother. If one person has to leave their job to take care of the children, whom would you pick?



This map shows which states offer state-funded preschool and what percentage of children receive the benefit. <https://nieer.org/>

In many families in the United States with a mother and father, where both parents work, the father often earns more than the mother. This creates an *incentive* for men to work and women to stay home to take care of children and relatives.

### Support for Families

Of 41 wealthy countries, only one does not ensure paid time off for parents. (See the chart on p. 41.) The one hold-out is the U.S., where there is no federal law giving parents paid time off when they have a new baby or need to take care of a child. However, people have fought hard for new policies, and some states are starting to pass laws that give parents paid leave. (See the chart

**Did You Know?**

69% of U.S. families are two parent households. This means that 31%, or almost one third of U.S. families are one parent households, or households with shared custody. Many U.S. families include parents who are single or are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

on p. 42.) These benefits are important because they help keep families out of poverty, they give families more support, they keep women in the workforce, and they allow parents to bond with their babies, a necessary component of healthy infant development.

### The Pandemic and a Childcare Crisis

During the pandemic, many schools and day-care centers closed. Some workplaces closed, but

others stayed open. Essential workers, those who worked in grocery stores or hospitals, for example, kept going to work every day. Without a safe place for their children, many parents, especially mothers, quit their jobs to stay home with their children. Many parents worked from home, while at the same time taking care of their children. I did, and it did not work well at all!

The U.S. did not have a backup plan to help families continue working while making sure their children were cared for. Many of us already knew we have a childcare crisis in this country, but the pandemic made it clear to everyone. Soon politicians, like mayors and city councilmembers, started creating plans to get mothers back to work. I couldn't believe that in 2021, the U.S. did not have a plan to help provide childcare so that mothers who wanted to could work.

Well, better late than never! Politicians are considering local and federal proposals. For example, in New York City, where I live, the mayor has a new initiative to expand childcare by raising the income threshold so that more families qualify. This could mean 15,000 more children would have access to affordable daycare. On a national level, President Biden wants universal free preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds. If your children are



younger than that (and you earn up to 1.5 times the state average), he proposes that you not have to pay more than 7% of your income on childcare.

Biden’s policy would also increase the pay of childcare providers to at least \$15 per hour. That’s a step in the right direction! We leave the work of caring for children to women; we should compensate them for this essential service!

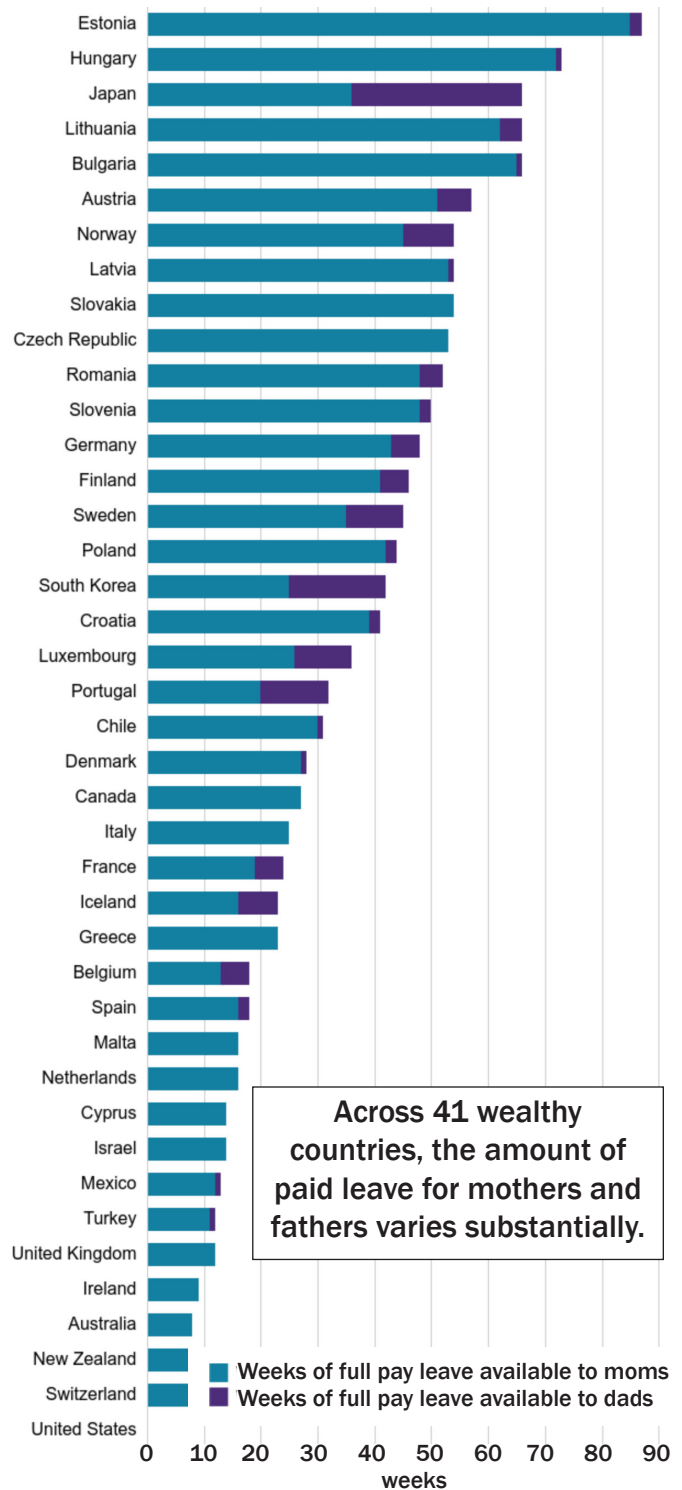
**Sources:** <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/401-21/recovery-all-us-city-expand-child-care-working-families>; <https://www.nytimes.com/article/biden-rescue-family-plan.html>

*Ellen Baxt writes lessons and trainings on incorporating career exploration into basic education classes. She lives in New York City.*

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. According to the author, what is one *incentive* in families for women to do more childcare work?
2. Look at the chart on the right. In most wealthy countries, who gets paid time off to take care of children? What *incentive* does this create?
3. Who was your primary caregiver when you were a baby? Did they take time away from work to take care of you? Did they receive pay while they took care of you? How did that impact your family’s finances and wellness?
4. If you are a parent, write or tell the story of whether you took paid or unpaid leave when your baby was born. How did family leave policies impact your family’s finances and wellness?
5. Parental and family leave policies are being discussed by local and national politicians. What recommendations do you have for parental and family leave policies? How could you persuade lawmakers to pass your bill? (Study the chart on p. 42 to learn more about different states’ parental leave policies.)
6. What do you think about the idea of universal, state-funded preschool? What are the pros and cons of a national policy? Do some research on the internet to learn more about it.
7. Write a letter to your state legislator. Use the guide on p. 43.

## Time off for caregiving



*Of these wealthy nations, the U.S. is the only one that does not give paid time off of work for parents to care for newborn babies and young children.*

### Paid Parental Leave

The U.S. government does not guarantee paid leave for parents, but some states do. Often, certain conditions have to be met in order to be eligible. When I had a baby in 2014, even though my state offered paid parental leave, I was denied it because my employer said I didn't meet all the conditions. Like many mothers, I quit my job in order to take care of my baby.

Is your state in the chart below? What do you think of your state's parental leave policy? What is missing from the policy that could help families?

### Unpaid Parental Leave

Some states offer parental leave *protections*, meaning that a parent can take unpaid leave and still return to their job. Some states say how long the leave can be. Others leave it up to the employer. In some states, it applies only to pregnant workers. Who does this leave out? What message does this send to families? Over half the states (26) do not provide any parental benefits or job protection for parents. If your state is not in the chart below, find it at <https://www.policygenius.com/blog/parental-leave-by-state/> to learn more.

State	Weeks of Paid Leave	Max. earning potential	Eligibility
California	6	\$1252	Must have earned \$300 in wages in California to receive paid leave.
Colorado	12	\$1100, beginning in 2024	Must have worked at least 180 days and earned \$2,500 in wages.
Connecticut	12	60 X minimum wage. At \$15/hr this would amount to \$900	Must have worked for the same employer for at least 12 weeks.
Hawaii	26	\$1088.08	Must have worked at least 14 weeks in Hawaii.
Massachusetts	12, beginning in 2021	50-80% of weekly income with \$850/wk maximum	Must work for employer with at least eight workers.
Michigan	Workers can accrue 1 hour for every 35 hours worked. Hours can roll over from year to year.		Employers with 50 or more workers Federal employees are not eligible
New Jersey	12 weeks, as of 2020	85% of salary, up to \$650/week	New parents who have worked 20 weeks or earned \$8,600.
New York	12 weeks, as of 2021	\$746.41/wk, which is 55% of average state wages	Must have worked 26 consecutive weeks for at least 20 hours a week, or 175 consecutive days for less than 20 hours a week.
Rhode Island	4 weeks, paid 13 consecutive weeks, unpaid	60% of earnings, up to \$852 weekly	Employer must have at least 50 employees. A worker must have earned at least \$12,600 in the base period.
Washington (State)	12 weeks paid, 20 weeks unpaid	Workers with average weekly wages 50% or less than the statewide average weekly wage receive 90% of their weekly wage. All others receive 25% of the average state weekly wage + 50% of their average weekly wage (max of \$1,000 per week)	Workers must have worked for the same employer for one year for at least 1,250 hours to qualify for unpaid leave. Workers at companies with 50 or more employees who have worked more than 820 hours during the qualifying period are able to receive paid leave. Federal employees are not covered.
Washington, DC	8 weeks paid	\$1000/week	At least 50% of employee's work must have occurred in the District, under a covered employer.

Find your state in the charts below. What do you think of your state's parental leave policy?  
<https://www.policygenius.com/blog/parental-leave-by-state/>

# Write a Letter to your Legislator

## Tell them what you think about your state law.

*Cynthia Peters*

### BEFORE YOU READ:

**1.** Learn about your state's parental leave policies. Use the information on p. 42 to get started. Discuss the policies with others and develop your opinion about it.

**2.** Look up the name and contact information of your state representative and/or senator. There are various ways to find this information. Here is one source: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>.

**3.** Draft a letter to your representative. Clearly state what policies you support or do not support. Include personal details to help make your point. Use the template below if it helps to organize your thoughts.

**4.** Mail your letter or send it by email. You could also consider calling your elected official to let him or her know how you feel by phone. Prepare a list of key points you want to make and practice making the call with a friend or classmate.

Date: _____
Dear _____,
My name is _____ and I live in your district. I am your constituent! <i>[Say whether you vote.]</i> I am writing because I care about our state's parental leave policies. <i>[Say what you like or don't like about the policies your state has.]</i>
I hope you will ... <i>[Say what you want the legislator to do. Support existing legislation? Create new legislation? Replace current laws with other laws?]</i>
<i>[Add some personal details about why this matters to you.]</i>
Sincerely,
<i>[Add your name and contact information]</i>

# Write for The Change Agent

## CALL FOR ARTICLES

**THE NEXT CALL FOR ARTICLES** will be published on our website in February 2022. Please look for it then. The deadline for that “Call” will be in early May, and the articles we select from that set of submissions will be published during the following school year. Learn more at: <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us/>.

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## A small selection of the themes we have covered:

