

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 4: Jacquetta Lyles

Welcome to Just Words—the stories of working people in our community.

Have you ever driven by a convenience store in the morning and seen groups of people standing on a corner, waiting for work? What about the people at the sports stadiums who sweep floors, clean bathrooms, and park cars? Have you ever wondered who they are? Jacquetta Lyles is one of them, a mother of four, a day laborer, who works at the downtown sports stadiums. She's paid 7 bucks an hour while working, but is not paid for the hours she must wait to get on each day's list.

This was my first year working down there. I really enjoyed it at first, and then as I started seeing how things was going, I really wasn't liking the way things was being done. It's rough. I clean. Usually get two bathrooms, keep them clean, and the area in between swept up. But its like, you go right in, and clean, and go clean my outside area. As soon as I go back in, trashcan could be right there—trash right thereon the floor...trash on the stalls. It's like, don't really get no respect. We really do work hard. We only making a little above minimum wage, we just making a little bit of money, but they don't set fit to give us a 5 dollar food voucher, and if someone does give us food, we get terminated. The food prices, you can't bring your lunch everyday, cant afford to buy the food there...that's like 5 or 6 bucks for a hot dog.

Jacquetta is only paid 7 dollars an hour, but not by paycheck. Instead, the temp agency pays her with a money card. She gets charged every time she uses it at an ATM. What would be a one-time check cashing fee is turned into something much more complicated.

They give you a money card so, you go to bank machine to us, it's a dollar and fifty cent to get money, but if you use the wrong pin they take 1.50 out of your card and you still don't get any money. They gonna take another dollar and fifty off for calling the bank card. I thought it was cool at first but when I started trying to activate it, I was like, hey, I started out with this amount and then I'm like, shhh. My friend he works for them too, Shoot, every time he uses the card and messes up, he's left with like \$29 or \$20, if that much. And he had \$20 on his card and he couldn't get it off because of the dollar fifty surcharge!

Jacquetta is struggling, but she is hopeful, and optimistic. Her desires aren't extravagant; she just wants decent money and a little respect.

Everyone deserves the same rights and respect as other people. We should be paid enough to show that hey, these people are struggling, they have a life too, they deserve to live too.

Music: Nina Simone, Baltimore

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

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