

## What Being a Member of a Union Family Means to Me

How does being in a Union Family affect my life? Prior to knowing what a union was, I've always thought it seemed insignificant. However, now that I have reflected on my past experiences, I now know that it has affected me in a multitude of ways, specifically through higher wages and a shorter workweek. Even though I am not directly in a Union, having a parent associated to one brings evident signs of change in my daily life.

To start, higher wages had a significant impact on my family. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median weekly income for workers who were union members was \$917, while non-union workers were \$717. That is approximately an increase of 28%, which is considerable given the responsibility of caring for a family. My Dad was born in the Philippines and he was not as fortunate to have the same opportunities that I have been given because he grew up in a developing country. With a better pay, I did not need to worry about having a meal in front of me or having a place to live. I'm also able to go to school, which most students may take for granted. Here, I was able to be a part of numerous clubs that have significantly shaped me into the person I am today.

One club I participated in my school was Habitat for Humanity which is involved in the organization that build homes for low-income families in the community of Winnipeg. In this group, we ran fundraisers to raise money for the build and we helped on a day for construction. As I was participating in this club, I learned a goal that may seem insurmountable can be accomplished with a group of passionate people striving for the same objective.

I was also a part of Hamper Time, which is a project that runs annually in our school. Our intent is to collect non-perishable food items that is then given to support numerous local families in need. I participated as a hamper leader that assisted in the delivery of the non-perishable food items to the families within the community. Through this project, I also helped at Siloam Mission where I helped in the food preparation for homeless people in Winnipeg.

Likewise, Black and Gold was a student group that I am involved in, which volunteers for the community of Winnipeg. One highlight is an event that we run where we invite seniors from the community to our school where we host a night of fun which is accompanied with food. The main goal of this event is to spread love during the holidays, which is a time where people may feel lonely. Another highlight is an event we run for local children where we host a Christmas party. Our objective was to spread joy to kids who may not be fortunate enough to be able to celebrate the holidays.

Additionally, I was able to be a part of the SHAD program where I spent a summer at a university campus experiencing STEAM-based lectures and activities. I was able to learn concepts outside the regular classroom environment through hands-on labs and workshops. I did things that I never would think I would be able to do like climb a 50ft tower or hold a human heart. Most importantly, I met some of the most talented, genuine and interesting people during this month of transformation. I learned so much from this like-minded group who lived in different parts of Canada and the friendships made in this program is unlike any other. Through all these opportunities I have learned fundamental skills and have experienced things I will never forget.

Lastly, I was part of the Youth in Philanthropy group in my school, which is responsible for the task of allocating money to local non-profitable charities. We do site visits to have a deeper understanding of their goals by asking questions pertaining to their principles. In addition, we not only limit ourselves to just our community but also internationally, specifically in Africa. We assisted in the Little Travelers HIV/AIDS project that raises money for poverty and the people affected by HIV of Hillcrest, Africa. Being in this group showed me that considering different perspectives is important to make decisions.

Having a reasonable work week allows my father to be home more often and be a parental figure rather than just a source of income. I have always been taught that family should come first, as it is our golden rule. Since my dad is in his 60s, I am fortunate that I can see him more often in my day because I am also busy with school and extracurricular activities. Looking back at all the times we spent together, I am very grateful because I know some parents have to work long shifts or even juggle multiple jobs, but my dad being in a union, allows him to be the figure that brings us all together. My parents have taught me that hard work and determination lead to success and to also approach life in an optimistic and open-minded view. From this, they supported me through music by buying me musical instruments and supporting me in musical theatre. The reason I may be fond of music is that my dad sings in the living room very loudly, which can get annoying. Aside from music, they have also supported me through my love for the visual arts. This admiration for art also stems from my parents because I was fortunate enough to be exposed to a variety of art forms at an early age. They fund me with art supplies and encouraged me to always strive for improvement, which is essential for any child. My family is my biggest critic, but at the same time, my number one supporters and I wouldn't ask for a better family.

What does being in a Union family mean to me? To reiterate, it means much more than what I can express in a few words. To me, it means that I can pursue whatever my heart desires and it means that my family can still be connected given a busy schedule. Unions have greatly affected my family, but also the lives of millions of workers and their families. In essence, when you are in a Union family, you are in a bigger network of like-minded people who strive for the same goal.