**A.F. Wood Bursary 2021**

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***Union’s Mentoring Future Leaders***

Many of our youth nowadays choose to be in workforces that are unprotected and cause more harm towards themselves than occupations whose members are represented by a union. I believe most of this mentality stems from being uneducated towards the difference a union can make in the workplace.

I think one of the shortcomings of unions is that they are gauged towards an older audience. People typically learn and start to understand the benefits of unions once they have meaningful employment protected by a union. Unions have many benefits. The fact that there is a collection of elected officers or board members who look out for you and are helping make sure you have a voice in the workplace is truly immeasurable. I think that if we were upfront with the youth of our communities and started steering them towards the benefits of unions, we could really influence and change the way workers work and how productivity can be modeled.

One of the ways unions can mentor future leaders in the union is by scheduling presentations at schools. When I was in high school, I didn't really learn about unions and didn’t have a chance to grasp what types of benefits they gave me until I joined the workforce and experienced why unions are so beneficial. I wish that there was someone who had come by my school to tell us about unions and maybe even steer some of us towards jobs that are unionized. A lot of the minimum wage workforce isn't treated fairly and is typically asked to do tasks by themselves that would safely require two or three people to complete.

I believe that by showing our youth what the workforce could look like, it might assist in steering them in the right direction. Nowadays, some younger people choose to drop out of high school into a minimum wage job just because it offers them money. Some choose not to go to university and instead finish high school and immediately go into a low income earning job because they offered them employment and money. I think that if our youth realized the benefits of a union, it could curb dropouts in the community and help inspire youth to search for unionized employment. They would in turn look at the requirements for the job and might end up going to university because that job position has a degree requirement in order to apply. They also would realize that the position needs a high school diploma.

Having presentations about unions would inform the younger generation that working does not need to be painful and that we all have rights as humans and should be able to voice our rights. Another bonus would be curbing the dropout ratio amongst the youth of this generation and improving the ratio of students going to university.

Another tactic that I think might help inform younger leaders is the introduction of a social curriculum of a mock union board. It would be much like a debate team or a mock senate. It would inform students of unions and how unions can help out workers. It would show all the

benefits of a union and help students start thinking about their futures and what types of jobs they are interested in.

Once the younger generations have entered union based workforces, I think it would be beneficial for unions to gear their attention towards the newer workers. Inform the new workers about upcoming union events and how they can be a part of them. Let them know about upcoming elections, allow them to participate directly if they wish to be on a union board or ask them what types of problems they wish were addressed in the workforce. Also, ask the older generation of workers, ask them what they wish had been part of the workforce when they first arrived at the job. I think the union should also have frequent polls and questionnaires about how its unionized members feel and about what the union could do to improve itself and what types of benefits they wish were added to the list of benefits.

In conclusion, I believe that, in order for unions to help mentor future leaders, they must be involved in the youth’s earlier life and help inform them and pique their curiosity about the workforce. Once they have a chance to grasp the benefits of a union, many will strive to enter a union-based workforce and aid it to thrive in this new modern age.