

Working Moms Struggle to get by at Cingular

By Pat Ray

Juggling never-ending responsibilities at home, constantly searching for affordable daycare, occasionally being woken up in the wee morning hours by crying children and surviving 40-hour work weeks at Cingular's Bothell campus, many blue collar mothers have trouble with the balancing act working a full-time job to bring in enough income to support their family and caring and spending quality time with their kids at home.

For mothers who cannot rely on daily babysitting help from trusted friends and family or a steady income from another provider, they find it near impossible to make ends meet on Cingular wages, which average around twelve dollars an hour and sometimes have to seek government assistance to help cover all the bills.

"I can't even tell you how hard it is," said Desirae Roberts, Business End User Care Rep. and mother of two young children. "Sometimes, to be honest with you – it's like climbing Mt. Everest. When you're trying to find support with your children."

Quality daycare centers in Western Washington charge around five dollars per hour, which over a month's time span cost parents in upwards of \$800-\$1,000 to provide full-time care for their kids while they work. This kind of fixed cost is just plain unaffordable for most single mothers who bring home between 16 and 19 hundred dollars a month working full-time at Cingular.

In addition, Cingular working moms have very little time for themselves and struggle to lead an active social life due to the hardships they face working full-time and taking care of responsibilities at home.

"Just keeping up with it, you have all these challenges," said Kathy Phongsavath, BEUC Rep. and mother of one-year old Sophia. "If it was a smaller baby, it'd be even worse – like watching them while you're cooking. It's hard when you're in the car and they're like crying and you can't do anything. It's a good thing they have the HOV lanes. It can be mind-blowing, they're hungry, and they need to get changed. When they're sleeping, you have to take care of them and make sure they're not hungry when you take them home."

Beyond the financial and time constraints they wrestle with, many mothers work inflexible schedules at Cingular as shift bids are pre-determined by seniority. This makes it hard to find daycares that are even open if they aren't working the 9-5 shift or something close to it.

"The shift bids are not consistent," Roberts said. "You don't know when they're coming."

"I have no problem with it because I have seniority, but for other moms, the shift bids that are available are ridiculous. The tenured reps. get the good shifts. It's just hard to get a daycare at 5 a.m. and have them watch my kids."

Cingular does waive absences and compensate employees if they need to stay at home with a sick child, as per the contract, call center attendance policy, and applicable law. Representatives with less than 1 year of service may use banked vacation days for such absences, but if they don't have time available they just have to take time off without pay and occurrences are accumulated the same as if the representative was sick.

Cingular Representatives were contacted and a list of questions was submitted for comment on their family-oriented policies and compensation. Nonetheless, after consulting their Legal and Public Relations teams, the company declined to comment on this story.

Many opportunities persist for working parents who are struggling to make ends meet and are unhappy with the status quo at Cingular. Members can make their voices heard and fight for positive change by getting involved with the Local 37083 either on the Cingular Action Team or as a Shop Steward.

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Page Design Help Needed

Have a background in newspaper, web or magazine design? Want to help your union put out a sleeker, hipper newsletter that's eye-grabbing and informs the masses?

Please contact Local President Marcus Courtney at courtney@washtech.org or Steward/Journalist Pat Ray at pbray.truth@gmail.com.

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Under the circumstance that your right to representation is ignored or denied, tell management you are aware of your rights and that you will report the violation to local union leadership if you are not granted a Steward.

If Cingular denies you the right to a Steward during an investigatory meeting, it is a potential violation of federal law as regulated by the National Labor Relations Board. Think you've been wrongfully denied a Steward? Please call the WashTech Local at (206) 726-8580 or contact Staff Representative, Craig Gamble, at craigg@washtech.org.