My parents moved to the southeast side (South Deering) when I was 7 yrs. I've been in this community for a number of years. I shop, attended school in the community- I'm an alum of Bowen High School, and now I'm an advocate for whole community- South Chicago, South Deering, Jeffery Manor, and a little bit in Hegewisch. I'm a member of the Coalition for a South Works CBA, which is made up of 40+ community organizations, schools, churches, businesses, and block clubs pursuing a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA).

I'm fighting for a CBA for the U.S. South Works Site, which is the old U.S. Steel site, because the things that attracted us- our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, are being taken away. Before, everything was easy to get to. Everything was in one location. Neighborhoods were quiet with plenty yard space. Family members were nearby. Now, the South Chicago YMCA closed on October 31, 2017, and Metra has made service cuts in the community. We have continued cuts in education. It's not just at the beginning of the school year, but during the school year, too.

Years ago, we built up this area. Things have been strategically taken away to push us out. Our grandparents worked so hard to get their homes. For some people, the only thing they have to hand down to their children and grandchildren are their homes. They're pushing us out and we are being pushed into areas where we don't want to live in. Areas that are polluted. We are pushed into areas where we are slowly dying. Can you say... Gentrification? Because that's what it is.

The southeast side is unique in its diversity, which should be preserved and celebrated. Many families have been in the community for 20, 30, 50, or even more than 70 years. We know what we want and what we don't want.

A CBA is a legally binding, written agreement between the developer and members of the community. A CBA will give community residents a way to be ensured that the community will get the benefits we want, and what we need to prosper- to live the American Dream.

A CBA means that the people who are going to be directly impacted by the development will have a say in what they want and not be displaced. At the South Works site, we are demanding affordable housing, environment protections, ensure local jobs, education, training opportunities and support the local businesses.

With the CBA, it's a strong insurance that we will have what attracted my parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. We want to bring back a sense of community, with everything in one place, prices that are not out of reach, and everyone is free. Something that my children, and my children's children will be able to benefit from in years to come.

I can remember we used to shop locally. For us, it was on Commercial Ave, get our clothes and our shoes. I went there to get my hair done for my 8th grade grad-
Anna Johnson is a member of the Coalition for a South Works CBA and member of the Coalition’s Jobs Committee.