LISTEN TO THIS EPISODE

BRIGID SCHULTE: I'm Brigid Schulte. You're listening to A Better Life Lab. I'll admit it. The COVID pandemic often has left me feeling like I'm desperately seeking a silver lining. Any silver lining. A few months ago, it looked like we might have found one. The migration of so many jobs into the virtual realm finally proved to the world that many industries can function just fine without a daily commute, and flexible schedules actually don't hurt productivity. Many employers had to admit they'd been wrong about the need for workers to show up in person every day. It looked like the American workplace might emerge from the pandemic with some basic changes that made it easier for people to combine work and family care responsibilities. Finally.

MICHELLE HOLDER: Employers have to reckon with this. If they continue to ignore the real needs of workers, it's to their peril.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Then came a dramatic shift in the American workforce. It went by many names: The Great Resignation, The Big Quit. In one year, more than 47 million people left their jobs. The majority were women. Some had jobs that wouldn't allow them to work remotely. Some needed flexible schedules or childcare. And that's where the silver lining comes with a pretty ominous dark cloud.

MICHELLE HOLDER: It is horrible, for our economy and any economy, when millions of women exit the labor force.

BRIGID SCHULTE: While men have regained all the jobs they lost during the pandemic, we're still missing nearly 2 million women. So where have all the women gone? To grapple with that essential question, we're joined on this episode by Michelle Holder. She's an economist and CEO of the Washington Center for Equitable Growth. We'll also hear the stories of two women whose thriving careers were turned upside down by the rigidity, and, let's face it, sexism, built into the American workplace. That's coming up right after this.

It's Better Life Lab. I'm Brigid Schulte. Where have all the women gone? To get a handle on what's really happening for women during the Great Resignation, I'm talking this episode with Michelle Holder. She's been named one of 19 black

economists to watch by Fortune. Michelle is author of two books, and she recently published an important paper on the impact of COVID -9 on job losses among Black women in America. We started with something that's been obvious to - women, at least - for decades, something that many employers fail to even see until COVID.

MICHELLE HOLDER: For a very long time, women have been quite vocal about their need to have work that takes into account the fact that they have other responsibilities outside of work. But the pandemic really showed and proved that this is this is the case. You know, employers typically don't see workers as workers plus everything else that they are. They see them as someone there to produce something, to do something. But the reality is, fully a third of women who work in this country are mothers. And so, it's not just a financial manager, an accountant, a cashier, waitstaff. Women, particularly women who are mothers or caregiving for other family members or loved ones, have a lot going on outside of their productive work for an employer. And so I think the pandemic showed that they come with many other roles, particularly if they are working parents.

BRIGID SCHULTE: So, you know, so much of the workforce, so many women have these additional lives outside of work, so to speak, and these heavy, heavy caregiving responsibilities. And you're right, it's been decades that primarily women and mothers and caregivers have called for better supports at work, more flexibility, you know, more support with with childcare or caregiving. And I guess what I would ask is how what did COVID show in terms of how business and and society and policy has responded to women?

MICHELLE HOLDER: I think there was this other need that was not quite acknowledged, and that was where children and other individuals who require care - what do we do when the structures that are in place to provide them care get disrupted? And so, one really big example was school closures. And so we want to think of school as a place we send our children to get educated, to get socialized, you know, but it's also a place where we send our children that we know they will be safe. We know that they will be fed. We know that they will be away for 6 to 8 hours. And then we, if we are gainfully employed, can go to work with the understanding and the relief that our children are in a place where they're not only learning and being socialized, but they're also being cared for.

And so with the pandemic and with disruptions in schools, it became clear to me that the next thing that would happen is a disruption to workers' lives,

primarily women, which is essentially what happened. And so what can we do to ensure that our economy is functioning at full steam? One of the things we can do as a society and as a you know, a government on behalf of our society, is make it *humane* for us to care for our loved ones, you know, make it affordable, make it accessible, ensuring that families don't spend double digit percentages of their household income on childcare. And so certainly the American Rescue Plan was absolutely beneficial with regard to the Child Tax Credit. What the government was trying to do, and I think did not succeed, was to really recognize how critical a solid caregiving infrastructure is for the smooth functioning of our economy. It was unfortunate that what the government was trying to do and didn't, you know, didn't make it to the finish line, was to really recognize that not only did we have a health crisis, but we had a caregiving crisis.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Yeah. And at the same time, caregivers earning poverty wages, the system being so very broken. You know, if you ever needed care, you already knew, but, you know, for all of those who didn't, the pandemic certainly showed it. One of the things you've been writing about is as we're going on now into the third year of the pandemic, there are still nearly 2 million women missing from the workforce. And so we're trying to get a handle on where have all the women gone? So this episode, I'd like to listen together to the stories of two women who are part of the missing 2 million. First, let's hear from Kari McCracken, a mother from Lexington, Kentucky. She had a job she loved and managed close to 100 employees. She was really going places. And then the pandemic hit.

KARI MCCRACKEN: I worked in the beverage industry in various leadership roles and, due to a standstill in business from COVID-19, I was furloughed in April [2020]. And that summer time, my manager came back and said, 'Hey, if we can keep your job, when can you return?' Kind of knowing that I couldn't return based on the childcare needs. I am a mom of five, and you can imagine with five kids, it's very busy. It's very crazy, chaotic, and due to schools closing, we could not get childcare because what they were running at about 20% capacity just due to COVID restrictions. And so that caused a shortage of childcare in the state of Kentucky. And it caused a lot of parents like myself not to be able to go back. I mean, there's women that are losing their jobs left and right. It just set us back so far - years and years and years. And so on top of having childcare issues, now we have four of my kids who are being homeschooled, basically.

BRIGID SCHULTE: How old were your kids at this time?

KARI MCCRACKEN: At the time, I had a fifth grader, a third grader, a kindergartner and a preschooler.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Oh, man. So who was doing all the homeschooling? Was that you as well?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Yes. Yeah. On top of having a young baby at home.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Oh, wow.

KARI MCCRACKEN: But I worked extensively to be able to find a solution, and unfortunately, I wasn't able to. And so, I reached out to our H.R. department, and I requested a personal leave. It's an unpaid leave, but you can take typically up to 30 days. It can be extended based on the circumstances. Instead of a follow up from my management team or any type of conversation. I was overnighted a letter the following week telling me that if I didn't come to work within three days, that I would be considered voluntarily resigning.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Within three days.

KARI MCCRACKEN: Mm hmm.

BRIGID SCHULTE: So you had three days to figure out how to find childcare for five children, ranging in age from being a baby to fifth grade.

KARI MCCRACKEN: Yeah.

BRIGID SCHULTE: So, do I even need to ask what happened next?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Well, it led me to not have a job in a in a job that I absolutely loved with the company I absolutely loved, and had a very successful career. And literally, they gave up on me in three days.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Tell me more about it. How has it been for you since then? How does it how do you feel and what have you been doing?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Well, I am still at home with my kiddos. I will tell you that it is, itt's stressful. I mean, it's a lot. It was a lot less stressful managing 100 employees than it is, you know, managing the day to day with my children.

BRIGID SCHULTE: I think just about every parent out there would completely understand that sentiment.

KARI MCCRACKEN: And it's hard to say that, because I do, I love my kids, but it's stressful. I have a few more gray hairs than I did, you know, having to kind of take in what happened and kind of losing yourself, losing your identity in a way, because, prior to COVID, I was able to go to work and kind of step away from it. Whereas I'm I'm home 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and there's nothing behind that other than mom.

BRIGID SCHULTE: You know, to kind of play devil's advocate here, you know, there are some in the country who believe, well, you know, you have five children. Why don't you just stay home? You know, what would you say to them in terms of why it's been important to you to be able to do both?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Yeah, I had a co-worker, who was a male, tell me the same exact thing, what you just said, is, I have five children, I should be at home with them.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Hmm.

KARI MCCRACKEN: And I've never thought that way that, you know, just because I'm a mom, that I should be a full time stay at home mother. I enjoy working. I'm almost a workaholic at times,

BRIGID SCHULTE: I hear you.

KARI MCCRACKEN: But I was almost what you would call supermom. So I was able to have a successful career and then also be a parent as well. And, you know, we'd have hiccups here and there, but I feel like I was a better parent having both a career and being at home, too, as opposed to just me being home full time.

BRIGID SCHULTE: How, how were you able to do it? What made that work for you in a way that you kind of miss now?

KARI MCCRACKEN: I was lucky that I had somewhat of a flexible schedule. I would take my kiddos to school in the morning so I could, you know, spend some time with them or get them ready for school, and then sometimes go eat

lunch with them at school or go to ballet rehearsals that they have or a soccer games or basketball game, whatever it may be.

BRIGID SCHULTE: I can't get over that, you know? I mean, your employer must have known you had five children. Your employer must have known.

KARI MCCRACKEN: Yeah, I was very appreciative of a lot of the morals and values that my company stood by. And one of those things was having five kids. Everyone understood it. And so there was never an issue with me to go, you know, take my kiddos to the doctors. You know, my kids would kind of sometimes show up to work. You know, people would ask me about my kids and things like that. So they were very aware that I had a family that I was providing for as well. And so, that was the shocking part of it, is that it was just kind of like you're thrown to the wayside. And I will tell you, as not only a mom, but as a female, I've worked in a male-dominated industry and I never felt at any point in time that I was any different than anyone else. And I felt that I was respected. And so, to be thrown this and that and it and you can't help but think it's well, I'm a mom, you know, did I let go get let go because I was a mom?

BRIGID SCHULTE: Do you think you were? Or did you try to pursue any kind of legal action? And, you know, was there any recourse that you could take?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Yeah, absolutely. I believe it was because I was a mom. And, you know, the company has specifically said, if childcare was an issue, then if you don't come back in three days, you're gone.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Were there others who were furloughed who were able to come back because they did not have those same kind of care responsibilities?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Yes. Yes.

BRIGID SCHULTE: And were they mostly men?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Yes.

BRIGID SCHULTE: What do you think about that?

KARI MCCRACKEN: It tells a story. At this point, I don't think I even have to talk about it. I mean it. The proof is right there, you know? Women are impacted the most in this. And it's unfortunate. And this was at one point in my career that I

felt less than, and I felt that there was nothing I could do to fight it. I actually did reach out to an organization called A Better Balance and spoke with some of the senior attorneys there just to kind of see if there was any recourse, anything I could do from a legal standpoint, because I felt that it was wrong. I didn't understand it, how my company had the right to do this. And unfortunately, what they did was absolutely legal.

BRIGID SCHULTE: How how could that be absolutely legal that you basically give somebody three days to find care and you let her go and you bring all the men back? How how on earth could that be legal?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Well, in the state of Kentucky, it's a right to work state. And so they can let me go for any reason, basically.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Have you thought about going back to paid work?

KARI MCCRACKEN: Absolutely. I have looked. But unfortunately, I haven't been able to find anything that would work with my family. Nothing is remotely close to the type of flexibility that I had prior. And, you know, you think about it, the reason why I worked is to be able to provide for my children and my family. And I have three daughters. My girls have always been so proud of me, of what I've been able to accomplish. And being a mom and working, you don't you know, you don't see that a whole lot. And so, I was so proud to be an example for them that you *can* do both and you don't have to stay at home. You can do whatever you want. And I know when this all came down, my you know, my girls were under the assumption that I lost my job because I was a mom.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Mmm.

KARI MCCRACKEN: And that broke my heart because they blame themselves for it.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Kari McCracken in Lexington, Kentucky. We'll talk about her story with economist Michelle Holder after this.

I'm Brigid Schulte. You're listening to A Better Life Lab. I'm talking with economist Michelle Holder, CEO of the Washington Center for Equitable Growth. Before the break, we heard from Kari McCracken in Kentucky. She relished combining being supermom with a successful career in management. She loved being a role model for her daughters. But her company let her go when she

found it impossible to find childcare for her kids in the early days of the pandemic. So, Michelle, is this a common story?

MICHELLE HOLDER: I mean, I would, I would say that it's probably a lot more common than we think. And, you know, as you mentioned, Brigid, over the course of this pandemic that we're now, you know, going into the third year, millions of women have left the labor force, more so than men. And so I think for those millions of women, this woman's story, it's probably resonating quite intimately because much of the issue has to do with her caregiving responsibilities. She found a position that provided the flexibility she needed to be both a full-fledged worker and a full-fledged mom. And and then she was told if she didn't return in a really short amount of time, she would lose her position. And so it feels as if employers and the employer in her case is not really either recognizing, or refusing to recognize, that she is more than just a worker at the firm, that she also has another identity which is as important, if not more important than being a worker, and that is being a mother. Although the details might differ slightly from person to person at the heart of her story, and I'm pretty certain millions of women who have voluntarily left the labor force over the course of the pandemic, there's a caregiving issue.

BRIGID SCHULTE: So, Michelle, you talk about a lot of companies not recognizing that workers are workers-plus, that they are more than just their job. As we look toward the future of work, is this something that employers really do need to address if we're going to get those millions of women not only back, but but flourishing in a way that doesn't lead to more work-family conflict.

MICHELLE HOLDER: I think we have to, Brigid. But, you know, if there's anything that came out of this massive human tragedy that was the corona virus, at least in this country, is perhaps a real kind of reckoning in the society about what is needed to have people be full participants in the economy, as workers, and particularly women workers. I think employers have to change their business-as-usual model. It's certainly a time in our history where workers are feeling and experiencing more leverage, more bargaining power, more negotiating power. You know, whatever you call this period, the Great Resignation, or the Great Churn, I've heard many different words used

BRIGID SCHULTE: Right. The Great Reassessment. Yeah.

MICHELLE HOLDER: Absolutely. Re re is.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Re Whatever Rethinking.

MICHELLE HOLDER: Rethinking the whole gamut. And so, employers have to reckon with this. And I would go further to say they wouldn't reckon with it if they didn't have to. So, if they continue to ignore the real needs of workers, it's to their peril. And also, you know, you mentioned this, Brigid, it is horrible for our economy and any economy when millions of women exit the labor force. It is bad for productivity. It's bad for the growth of our economy. It's not good for GDP, our Gross Domestic Product. It's absolutely not a good thing for economic growth when you have millions of women leave the labor force. It's not good for the country, but it's also not good for the women who made that difficult choice, because any gaps in one's work history, you know, has a deleterious effect on wages going forward, on employability going forward. We know that employers tend to look disfavorably upon gaps in employment, even though everyone knows we've gone through this pandemic.

BRIGID SCHULTE: I've seen. How you've you've written about it. You've called it the "scarring effect."

MICHELLE HOLDER: Yeah. And it's. Not my terminology. I mean, that's economic terminology. There is such a thing as scarring in the labor market. And so with women leaving in hundreds and thousands and millions, you know, these women are going to have impacts on their earnings ability going forward. So it's not good for the women. It's not good for the communities they come from, and it's not good for our economy if we want a growing and prosperous one.

BRIGID SCHULTE: So, Michelle, you're talking about the Great Reassessment, or the Great Resignation or the Big Quit. You know, but it strikes me that for many women, for many caregivers, for many people who are experiencing this really intense conflict between work and family responsibilities, it's not a choice. It's almost like the system has failed them, and has has made it *impossible* for them to be able to work. And so when people talk about that narrative of choice that people have chosen to drop out or opt out, I think of stories like Kari's, and the next story that we're going to hear is a woman named Kiarica Shields. So let's listen to Kiarica's story together.

KIARICA SHIELDS: Okay. Stay here. I'm going to go in the closet. [child's voice] No, you're going to go in the living room, OK? [child's voice] Mom? Can you call Cash?

March 2020 I was working as a hospice nurse. I did home health, so I would go to people's homes. I liked to interact with people. That's one of the reasons I became a hospice nurse, because I always wanted to at least make somebody's way out, you know, a little more special.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Mm hmm. And, you know, was it a good life for you able to support yourself, your family?

KIARICA SHIELDS: Yes, ma'am. I would say it was a great life. Yes, I had savings. My car. My place. My kids were really good. So I thought that everything was going well.

BRIGID SCHULTE: So then the pandemic hits and what happens?

KIARICA SHIELDS: A few of them were so high risk that they decided to just cease all of it for the moment until everything died down. Then after that, the schools closed and the daycares were closed.

BRIGID SCHULTE: How many kids do you have and how old are they?

KIARICA SHIELDS: I have four children. I have a 12 year old, a seven year old, a six year old and a almost three year old. At that time, we stayed in a small, small town, just me and the kids.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Do you have a partner, anyone else that you can rely on?

KIARICA SHIELDS: And have a partner. My youngest father. But he's an engineer. He's from Spain. He was working over here in Georgia, but he went to go check on his mom and then the travel ban came. He was stuck in Spain. So he missed our son's first birthday and everything. We ended up moving during that time period because I was thinking, if I'm closer to family, maybe I can get back to work, you know, I could get a job at the hospital or something. But my plans didn't really go like I planned, because if you know how the hospital generates, it's like 12-hour shifts, 7 to 7. Like that. So that was too long to be away from my kids or to even have them in daycare, because you only get like 8 to 9 hours, I think, at certain daycares. So that was pretty tough. When we stayed in the country. I paid about $100 per kid. Once they moved up here, it was more like $325 for my youngest. $195 for my middle son. And $195 for my middle daughter. That was a lot.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Wow.

KIARICA SHIELDS: I started to get behind on my rent. Behind on my car note. And then, on top of that, my unemployment stopped. Out of nowhere. So. I've just been out here doing little odd jobs. I would pick up shifts here and there. What my schedule for my kids will allow. Because at the end of the day, I'm a mother first, and I don't play about being a mom. I have to work around their schedule. And then even when you get a job, sometimes things just come up. Like I got back to the work scene the beginning of 2021. I think I worked three months of the year. And my daughter got Covid. Then they started doing that contact thing. So if somebody in her class had Covid, and they were close to her, she would have to quarantine, so then I would have to pay extra for daycare, or I had to take off work and sit with her. We got evicted this year. And so, now I'm at my mom's house. It's just one thing after the next. I don't know how I ended up here because I'm like, I didn't go to school and get degrees for this.

BRIGID SCHULTE: What's that like living with your mom? Does she have enough room for you and your four kids?

KIARICA SHIELDS: Definitely not. It is like the worst nightmare. I haven't lived with my mom since the kids. I mean, I love my mom. I love being close to her. But not only are me and my kids here at her home, I have a brother here and a niece. She doesn't have that much space. So, me and my children are in her room with her. And then my brother is in his own room and my niece is in the living room.

BRIGID SCHULTE: You know, you talked about you also had a car, you know, and that that can be so critical to get to and from work. Were you able to continue paying your car note?

KIARICA SHIELDS: It was actually repossessed right before Christmas 2020.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Mmm. So you were evicted. Your car was repossessed. Unemployment dried up. What kind of toll was that taking on you and, you know, kind of your stress levels, your mental and physical health?

KIARICA SHIELDS: So before all of this, I would get therapy. And Covid kind of messed that up so I didn't have therapy visits. So I'm having panic attacks. I still have kids to raise and I never want them to see me. So, I would try to hide it as best as I can. But it got so stressful that I could be driving and just break down

crying. And I'm just like, Why? you know? Like, how is this happening? This is like the lowest that I've ever been in my life. And I've been working since I was about 13, actually.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Wow. So how are things going now? What's going on in your life now?

KIARICA SHIELDS: Well. What's going on now is, things are starting to kind of look up. I just got a job. It's at Waffle House Corporate. For now, it's just temporary tax season work. They said they usually hire on their people. Everything is going well so far because my mom is watching my youngest son. But I know she won't be able to do that too long because she's a nurse as well.

BRIGID SCHULTE: What's that like not being a nurse or doing something that you really love now?

KIARICA SHIELDS: I'm sad, but I'm okay with the break from nursing right now. Last year I lost a few of my patients that I love so dearly. So it's my passion. But I don't know really where to start right now. So now I'm doing something totally out of my field and I'm just here. I'm just here for my kids. And that's just the truth. [weeps] I told myself I wasn't gonna cry. I'm sorry. But yeah, most days, I'm only here for my children. I'm so sorry.

BRIGID SCHULTE: No, I'm sorry.

KIARICA SHIELDS: It's just, I don't know about you. Usually I'm so organized and I'm so focused on my future to make sure that I'm setting my kids up. So when they grow up. And now. I don't even know, like I just, I, honestly, just feel like. My faith is running low. Oh, I don't know.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Kiarica Shields, a hospice nurse and a mom in Georgia. Michelle?

MICHELLE HOLDER: You know, as a human being, I'm hearing the despair in her voice and it has a familiar ring. And the familiarity is - working mothers with few options. And so, we've got to think outside of the box in terms of our caregiving infrastructure in this country. A woman who wants to work, who loved working, who wants to make sure she is taking care of her children - she should be able to both find gainful employment and care for her children. It shouldn't be either/or. And in this country, we have to look at what new structures, what new

mindsets do we need? I think the work world has to begin to recognize that in order to get the best out of people who are working, we have to enable them to be the parents they want to be and need to be. I mean, you know, prior to the pandemic, employers would regularly resist the notion that business as usual could go on if everyone wasn't in person. There was so much insistence that everyone has to be together. There are synergies involved, we riff off of each other. We get ideas, you know. And and so what we saw with the pandemic was, Hey, wait a second, you can actually be incredibly productive and not have to all be in the same building from, 9 to 5 every day, Monday through Friday. And so we've got to, in our reimagining, in our zeal and our zest to make sure that business as usual continues in setting up systems where workers could still get work done, could still work with each other, you know, could still communicate with each other. We have to also think, analogously, as to what would allow working parents, particularly working mothers, what do they need in order to bring their full selves to work every day? And a big part of that is caring. What needs to happen with our caregiving system, such that working moms can go and do their best stuff at work and come home and do their best stuff at home. We just have to do that as a society.

BRIGID SCHULTE: You know, it's interesting. There's a concept in the work-family literature. It's called work-family enrichment, rather than work-family conflict. You know, what would it take, building this care infrastructure, talking about reimagining work? I mean, can we get to a work-family enrichment in a future of work, and and how?

MICHELLE HOLDER: Right. I suspect that for those companies that make it much easier for their employees to secure childcare and to afford childcare, they probably have a happier workforce. I would bet any money. And so does that mean that employers should subsidize or provide childcare themselves for their workers? Well, that is thinking outside the box, right. The point of the matter is, we've got to do something differently.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Yeah. Right.

MICHELLE HOLDER: We've got to do something differently.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Let me ask you one last question. You know, you research so much about race and women of color and how all of these trends impact them to sometimes such an incredibly greater degree. You know, when you think

about the pandemic, work-family conflict and then the future of work, where do you see women of color coming out in this very rapidly changing world?

MICHELLE HOLDER: So if we looked at the demographics of children being raised in single parent homes in the United States - this is from the Casey Foundation, these are not statistics that I just kind of pulled out of the air - about 65% of Black children are raised in single parent homes, primarily single mothers. 40 to 50% of Latinxs and Native American children are raised in single parent homes, primarily single mothers. And 25% of White children are raised in single parent homes, primarily single moms. So right there in those statistics, you can see that the need is more acute among black and brown women for solid, accessible, affordable child care. Particularly as regards being able to go out and devote a productive day of work elsewhere. The need is just more acute for Black and Brown women. The need is there for all women, all working women, all working mothers. And as is often the case, if you target policies that will help women of color in this economy, you're going to just help all women by extension. No question.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Yeah. And I hope that as part of the great reimagining, we can bring men into the equation as well as caregivers. Because it's, you're right, we're talking about women and mothers because all you have to do is look at the data and show that's that's who's still bearing the primary load.

MICHELLE HOLDER: Absolutely.

BRIGID SCHULTE: But wouldn't that be a wonderful reimagining, that, as human beings, we all love and care for one another and have care responsibilities, and that we can do both meaningful work and give care.

MICHELLE HOLDER: Absolutely.

BRIGID SCHULTE: Michelle Holder. She's the president and CEO of the Washington Center for Equitable Growth. Her books include Afro-Latinos in the U.S. Economy, and Fortune has named her one of 19 Black economists to watch. Earlier this episode, we heard from former hospice nurse Kiarica Shields in Georgia and from former operations supervisor Kari McCracken in Kentucky. This season on Better Life Lab, we're looking at work stress, and the future of work and wellbeing in America. Next time, we'll look at even more radical changes in the American workforce. It's gigging, and trying to make a living.

CHERI MURPHY: I Started driving live around 2017. You don't have health care and you're sick, so you can't take a paid sick leave off. Workers are forced, like me, are forced to continue working even when they're unwell. That's stressful. The fatigue sets on the body and it could lead to dangerous situations both for the worker and for the passenger and any anybody on the road.

BRIGID SCHULTE: We've got work to do. I hope you'll join us next time on Better Life Lab.

For more resources on fairer healthcare work, go to newamerica.org. Click the link for Better Life Lab. On behalf of myself and my producer, David Schulman, many thanks for joining us for our new season. Please review us on Apple Podcasts if you like the show. Better Life Lab is produced by New America in partnership with Slate. Special thanks to Alicia Montgomery at Slate for all her work with us.

Our podcast is sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which is committed to improving health and health equity in the United States. In partnership with others, RWJF is working to develop a culture of health rooted in equity that provides every individual with a fair and just opportunity to thrive no matter who they are or where they live or how much money they have. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org. For Better Life Lab. I'm Brigid Schulte.