

We're Moving Forward to



Form our Union at YOUTH CARE!

We've delivered the letter on the other side to management and we hope they will honor our choice and agree to recognize our union. If we don't get agreement, we can also make our union official through a secret ballot election with the National Labor Relations Board, a neutral government agency. That vote would take place in a few weeks. We will let you know as soon as we know more.



This unionizing process has given me hope to stay at YouthCare. If our employer truly believes direct service workers are legitimate professionals with specialized skillsets without whom there would be no YouthCare, then there is no other pathway than giving us full transparency and institutional power.

I've been at YouthCare for 2 years, and have been an employee of other white institutions. At this point, racial justice for black and brown youth and staff at ALL levels cannot be done without infrastructure and accountability measures set by the youth and the staff most impacted. Already I've been so inspired by youth workers across all YouthCare programs who have had compassionate, real talk about what it will take to keep race equity at the forefront in the union process!

—Katrina Go, Care Coordinator

I have seen the impact turnover has on our clients, I frequently hear clients complain about staff leaving, or have had young people be hesitant to enroll and ask, "Are you just going to leave too?" I know this work is driven by outcomes, but whether we are talking about youth counselors, case managers, advocates or therapists, the single biggest predictor of change and success is the relationship, and there is data to support this. That change-creating relationship requires both consistency and time, two things that are challenging when a job is not sustainable for workers, and it is the young people that ultimately pay the biggest price for turnover. I have heard that the agency was working on improving things, but after 5 years, I came to the conclusion that collective bargaining and unionizing is the only way.

—Heather Post, former YouthCare Mental Health Therapist



Stay tuned – we'll keep everyone informed as soon as we know more. In the meantime, if you have any questions, comments, or concerns, or just want to make sure you're on the email list so that you get all the updates, talk with a member of your organizing committee, or contact OPEIU 8 Organizer Corinne Cosentino anytime by calling or texting 425-318-2650.

What can we expect from management in response to us forming a union?

Our goal is to foster a cooperative, respectful relationship with YouthCare management. We hope our employer will honor our right to form a union rather than engaging in behaviors to mislead or pressure us. Many employers don't want to give up any control, and will try very hard, in the guise of "education," to convince employees forming a union is a bad idea. This can include mandatory meetings, letters, 1:1 talks and other tactics designed to weaken our resolve to unite as one strong employee group.

Can I get in trouble for supporting our union?

No. It would be illegal for our employer to question us about our union activity or to fire, demote, discipline or in any way interfere with our right to form a union. The National Labor Relations Act is the federal labor law that protects employees with these rights.

What about union dues?

No one will pay any dues until after we negotiate, review and vote to approve our own union contract. The decision to approve or reject the contract lies with the employees. This way we will see the results of our efforts first before paying any dues. We wouldn't approve a contract that didn't make enough improvements. Coming out ahead is the whole point of forming a union, and we know we all ultimately need wage increases of much more than 1.5% to get to a living wage. With a union we can advocate together toward that end year after year. OPEIU Local 8 dues are on a sliding scale based on 1.5% of our gross monthly income. A quick way to calculate this is to figure \$7.50 for every \$500. We won't pay an initiation fee or any other kind of fee. New employees hired after our contract is in place pay a one-time initiation fee, 50% of which can be refunded for attending a meeting.

The following letter was delivered on Sept. 24:

September 24, 2019

Dear Dr. Melinda Giovengo,

We're very pleased to notify you that a majority of employees at YouthCare have joined together to form a union with OPEIU Local 8. Like you, we believe in the work we do and in the future of YouthCare. We know having our own employee organization will be good for staff, for our agency and for the youth we serve. We look forward to working collaboratively with YouthCare's leadership towards mutually beneficial goals.

We'd like to ask you to voluntarily recognize our union and we're ready to demonstrate our majority support through a mutually agreeable neutral third party. Other OPEIU Local 8 represented non-profit organizations such as Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Solid Ground, Casa Latina, Low-Income Housing Institute, and Sea Mar Community Health Centers agreed to a voluntary recognition process, instead of a government conducted one. However, we're also asking the National Labor Relations Board to hold a secret ballot election in the event you're not willing to go through a voluntary recognition process.

Over the last few months we've been talking about issues important to us and about how a union can give us the opportunity to make improvements. Cultivating equity and transparency around compensation and benefits with wages that reflect the level of responsibility, prioritizing consistent training specific to our jobs, advocating for safe staffing level and reducing turnover's negative impact on youth, implementing meaningful changes to move towards racial equity, improving access to vacation time we've earned, creating a standardized, transparent and fair discipline process, building a culture where we can better advocate for ourselves, each other and the youth ...just a few of the areas we'd like to address.

If you're open to discussing the possibility of a voluntary recognition process, please contact our Organizer at OPEIU Local 8, Corinne Cosentino at corinne@opeiu8.org or 206-441-8880 ext. 113. We look forward to hearing from you!

In solidarity,

Organizing Committee

Will a union disrupt YouthCare's ability to move forward on racial equity?

A union gives the staff a more powerful voice to advocate for our priorities, and implementing meaningful changes to make YouthCare a more racially equitable organization for staff and for youth has been one of our highest priorities since the beginning. So, no, it will not disrupt that work, in fact quite the opposite. The structures currently in place to do this work could be improved, and we can propose in our union contract things to make them even more effective such as timelines for CIC recommendations to be implemented, access to those and other committees for all staff including Youth Counselors, and a budget. Since it's our union and we're developing the first contract, we can work together to come up with and propose exactly what we'd like to see in place. On top of that, because hiring, pay, promotion criteria and decision are more transparent and less subjective for union members, gender and racial bias is minimized. As a result, studies show, for example, that women of color who are union members benefit more in increased wages and access to health benefits than white women.