

We're Joining Together to Form a Union!

Q: What is a union exactly?

A: A union is a non-profit employee organization run completely by and for its members and funded solely from member dues. The purpose of a union is to improve wages, benefits and working conditions and to give employees the legal framework to act as one united group. It's a way to balance power in the workplace for the benefit of all.

Q: How will having a union benefit me?

A: Right now working conditions, pay, benefits, hours, and policies all get decided by management. Becoming union changes that lopsided structure. With a union, we gain the right to negotiate, with help from OPEIU 8 union staff, over the improvements we'd like to see for ourselves in the workplace. What issues we want to address at the bargaining table will be decided by us.

Q: Who is included in our union?

A: All employees of Friends of Youth except supervisors, management employees and "confidential employees" (employees who assist management who make and implement labor relations policies) are eligible to be included.

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

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

Q: Can I get in trouble for supporting a union?

A: No. It would be illegal for our employer to question us about our union activity or to fire, demote, discipline, retaliate, 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, and OPEIU is there to help make sure they're enforced if someone did feel retaliated against.

Q: How will this impact the youth we serve?

A: Forming our own employee organization that empowers frontline staff with a clear mechanism to address important workplace issues can improve our morale, reduce turnover and enhance our ability to provide services in a safe and healthy environment. Our program participants are better served when employees are supported and have a say over what happens on the job. recourse to advocate for changes that benefit our staff, programs, and the young adults we serve.

Q: When would we pay dues and how much are dues?

A: No one will pay 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 doesn't make enough improvements (and more than account for dues). Coming out ahead is the whole point of forming a union. The OPEIU Local 8 dues rate was set by the members in 1994 at 1.5% of our gross monthly income. A quick way to calculate this is \$15 for every \$1000. We won't pay any initiation fee or any other kind of fee. New employees hired after our contract is in place pay a one-time initiation fee of up to \$150 depending on income, 50% of which can be refunded for attending a meeting.

Q: What about strikes? Can we be forced to go on strike?

A: No. A strike is very rare. OPEIU settles 99% of its contracts without ever going on strike. There could only be a strike at Friends of Youth if the vast majority of employees voted to do so and even then, there are other steps that must occur. Union officers or staff can't "call a strike" nor can OPEIU members from other workplaces. Only union members at Friends of Youth could make that decision. Although withholding labor to pressure an employer to agree to a fair contract is an important tool for union members, in non-profit human services there are many more effective alternatives to striking, such as engaging the community.

Q: Who is OPEIU?

A: [OPEIU Local 8](#) is made up of over 9,000 workers in Washington State including Solid Ground, Plymouth Housing, YouthCare, ROOTS Young Adult Shelter, Low Income Housing Institute, Crisis Connections, Compass Housing Alliance, Northwest Justice Project, Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Sea Mar Community Health Clinic, Seattle, Tacoma and Pierce County Housing Authorities, Metropolitan Development Council, Senior Life Resources, Coastal Community Action Program, Kaiser - WA, Providence Regional Medical Center Everett, Valley Medical Center, and many other organizations.

Q: Is a union a third party?

A: We, employees of Friends of Youth, are our union. The staff of OPEIU Local 8 will be there to support and advocate for the changes that are identified by our staff through conversations and meetings, surveys, and bargaining team representatives who we will elect. While we can look at ideas that have worked at other OPEIU represented workplaces, ultimately everything in our contract will be based on the specific needs at Friends of Youth.

Q: Can I talk about the union at work?

A: If we're allowed to talk about other non-work topics at work, then we can talk about our union. It's best to limit the time we talk about union activities to non-work time like breaks, lunch or before or after work. Our union activity is protected under the National Labor Relations Act.

Q: What are our next steps?

A:

1. Show support for forming a union by adding your signature to a petition or filling out an [electronic card](#).
2. Have our Union legally recognized through either voluntary recognition by our employer, or a secret ballot election run by the National Labor Relations Board.
3. Negotiate our Contract. Once we win a majority vote to unite as a union, our employer will be required to negotiate with us. We'll choose a representative Bargaining Team of coworkers, survey and identify issues we want to negotiate over and meet with management to bargain our new contract. OPEIU staff will help us every step of the way.
4. Vote to approve our new contract and start enforcing it.

Questions? Contact a coworker who signed onto the letter, or organizer Corinne Cosentino at 425-318-2650 or corinne@opeiu8.org.