

## We're Moving Forward to Form our Union at Friends of Youth

We've delivered the letter below 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 of 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.



Left to Right: *April Hernandez Diaz, Rachel Shinabarger, Eric Tilton*

"I have been with Friends of Youth for over 4 years now and have had the privilege to work with some incredible coworkers and even more incredible youth. Sadly, I have watched countless coworkers have to leave due to burnout from lack of agency support. This directly impacts our youth as well because they rely on having caring and competent staff for stability.

In the beginning, I was hopeful that Friends of Youth meant what they said around making positive changes here. However, rather than improve things over the years, I have seen the opposite pattern from Friends of Youth making changes for the worse. The lack of accountability leadership has shown to staff has continued to negatively impact youth, staff and programs. Unionizing will allow us to claim our power over our workplace and hold Friends of Youth accountable to making the changes *we know we need* in order to thrive and offer quality care to our youth."

*Rachel Shinabarger, Residential Youth Specialist*

As we move forward to form our union, *Bilingual Youth Specialist* April Hernandez Diaz reflected on Angela Davis's wise words:

"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change ... I'm changing the things I cannot accept."

"I have been with Friends of Youth since 2017 and have had the privilege to work with a variety of people who are passionate about providing our youth the best support they can. I have also heard countless times from leadership about how important our work is to both our youth and the agency as a whole. Unfortunately, the support we receive from management often does not match how important we are told we are. There is a cycle of management giving out staff surveys, waiting an indeterminate amount of time for management to tell us the results of those surveys, waiting an indeterminate amount of time for

management to implement a change based on those results, and staff being disappointed because the changes still fall short of what we need. And those are just the changes we are told about ahead of time. The recent changes in the New Roads program (first to move the program to Renton, and then to close the program completely) all happened at the Senior Director level and higher. No one who actually works with our youth were involved in these talks, with my supervisor and program manager being told about the decisions one and two days before staff were told.

I know my coworkers to be capable, intelligent people who understand the needs of our program and the needs of our clients. I am looking for more staff representation in the decisions of the company. I am looking for my coworkers to be respected for their opinions and vision, and for our input to be valued. I feel like all current avenues to be heard are ineffective because they are too controlled by the whims of leadership. I am looking for management to work with my fellow coworkers as equals with valuable insights that leadership simply does not have, and more directly affect the direction of Friends of Youth.

Eric Tilton, *Youth Specialist*

It's not too late to [sign a card](#) to confirm your support for forming your union if you haven't already.

**Questions? Want more information?** Contact a coworker signer of the [December 18 Open Letter](#), email our Organizer Corinne Cosentino at [corinne@opeiu8.org](mailto:corinne@opeiu8.org) or call/text 425-318-2650. You can also see this [FAQ](#). All past communications related to our organizing efforts are available [here](#).

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January 8, 2024

Friends of Youth  
13116 NE 132nd Street  
Kirkland WA 98034

Dear Paul Lwali:

We are excited to share that employees at Friends of Youth have come together and reached a majority of support to unionize. This is a joyous moment for staff as we reflect on the cohesive partnership we have built to achieve this goal, which exemplifies our collective strength as employees, community members, and stakeholders in the future of our workplace. We are writing to invite management to accept our decision and voluntarily recognize our union affiliation with the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 8, which we designate to represent us for collective bargaining. Our wall-to-wall bargaining unit includes all professional and non-professional employees and excludes supervisors, managerial and confidential employees.

Join us as we endeavor to create positive change for all. Please respond by contacting our Organizer at OPEIU Local 8, Corinne Cosentino, at [corinne@opeiu8.org](mailto:corinne@opeiu8.org) or 425-318-2650. We look forward to receiving your response to our request for voluntary recognition so we can start bargaining immediately.

Sincerely,

Friends of Youth Employees United