Learn English and Join a Union

Amina Jama

When I came to America I didn’t speak English at all. I got a job at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital as a Housekeeper. The Supervisor always gave me a hard time because of the language barrier. He gave me bad evaluations. He would not help me because he couldn’t talk to me.

For my second job, I was hired by a food service company. As a worker at this company, I am a member of UNITE HERE (the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union). Two months into my new job, my Supervisor told me to do a job that was not my responsibility. I explained my problem to my union and they spoke to witnesses and corrected the situation. They spoke to the Company Manager, who fired the Supervisor.

Because I was able to communicate in English and because I had a union, I received justice. My Manager gave me a promotion because he saw that I was a hard worker. Now, I work three jobs while also going to school. I earn more money and have a better life, all because I can read, write, and speak English better.

I advise everyone to get an education. It is also important to join unions if possible. Education gives you more opportunities, and unions defend workers against unfair situations (like the one I had).

Unions Provide Training

A union is an organization of workers who collectively bargain with their employer for pay, benefits, and working conditions.

Many unions provide training to support workers to reach their career goals. For example, in Boston, BEST Hospitality Training offers classes to union members and job seekers. Read more about union apprenticeships on p. 23.

Amina Jama is a student at the Notre Dame Education Center in Boston, MA. She is originally from Somalia, and she has been in this country for 15 years. Her educational goal is to finish the HiSET and start her own business.