

# “We Can Fix It”

## A Worker Cooperative that Does Repair Work and Has No Bosses

Victor Rodriguez

### **What is “We Can Fix It”?**

“We Can Fix It” is a cooperative of men and women. We do small construction jobs and repairs. The Cooperative is a support for us as immigrants. We do demolition, repairs, painting, and floor-sanding. We have experience hanging sheetrock and fixing holes in plaster walls and ceilings.

### **Why did you set up a cooperative? Why not an ordinary business?**

We wanted a cooperative so that our salaries would be fair.

### **What was it like working in construction before you were in a cooperative?**

I had to walk the streets looking for work. The bosses abused the workers. Sometimes I got paid. Sometimes I didn't. I had to have my own tools. They did not give us protection from hazards on the job. When I was working with hazardous materials, I had to push them to give me a mask or something to cover my mouth.

### **How has being in a cooperative affected other parts of your life?**

We are learning how to run a business. We are integrating ourselves into society. I feel like a person who can do more important things.

### **What do you like best about working in a cooperative?**

We are independent because we are our own bosses and workers. And we don't have to give information to any bosses or

anybody, only to the members.

### **What is most challenging about it?**

Not speaking perfect English. Sometimes we ask the coordinators of the Center for Family Life for help.

### **Is your cooperative being affected by the economic crisis?**

Yes, it is being affected. There are not enough jobs.

### **What sort of support does your community need?**

It is important for Community Centers to give workshops so that day laborers and immigrants know their rights. Some don't know their rights, and they are suffering discrimination.

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Victor Rodriguez is an ESOL student at Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, NY.



# “We Can Do It”

## Creating a Women’s Cleaning Cooperative

Luz Maria Hernandez

### **What is “We Can Do It”?**

“We Can Do It” is a cooperative of women. We clean people’s houses and offices.

### **What is a cooperative?**

A cooperative is a business that is run by the workers. We make the decisions. We support each other. We work together as a group, and we are getting to know one another. It’s the best thing that has ever happened to me.

### **How did it start?**

We were in an ESOL class at the Center for Family Life in Brooklyn. We wanted to work. Some of us had jobs, but our employers did not always treat us fairly. We wanted a cooperative so we could get fair wages and make our own schedules. The people at the Center informed us that we could create a cooperative business. If we worked as a cooperative business, we could have living wages and flexible schedules.

### **Do you have leaders?**

We don’t have leaders. We have a leadership committee. The committee changes every year.

### **How do you make decisions?**

Sometimes, some of us have ideas. We talk about the ideas, and we go forward with the best ideas. Usually, we agree by consensus that an idea is good, but sometimes we decide by voting.

### **What do you like best about working in a cooperative?**

I work less time, I meet different people, and the clients treat us better. Also, I like to work in a group. I like to listen to the other members.

### **What is most challenging about it?**

The challenge is to get more work for the members in the cooperative that need it.

Another challenge is to find more time to spend with our children.



### **How is your cooperative being affected by the economic crisis?**

Some of our members do not have as much work. They have to look for new clients.

### **What does the cooperative do if a member does not have work?**

We try to share the clients so that everyone has work. We also look at why someone is losing clients. Maybe the clients are not happy because the work is not being done well. In that case, we try to help the worker do a better job.

### **Are you in an English class?**

Yes, I am taking an English class. It’s important to study English, if you have the opportunity. For me, it’s very difficult because sometimes at work I can’t express myself well and I would really like to express myself well.

### **How do you find time to study English?**

I receive support from my husband. He takes care of my daughter when I go to my English classes.

*Luz Maria Hernandez is an ESOL student at Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, NY.*