

# We Can Do It

## Creating a Women's Cleaning Cooperative

Luz Maria Hernandez



The worker-owners of the women's cooperative, We Can Do It! Photo from [wecandoit.coop](http://wecandoit.coop).

### BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Think about the word *cooperate*. What does it mean? (Note: the prefix *co* means *with* or *together*. Think of other words with the same prefix, such as copilot or coworker.) What do you think a worker *cooperative* is?
2. What are some activities in your life you do *cooperatively* with others?

### 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.

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



*The worker-owners at We Can Do It! partnered with an organization to create their own green cleaning products. "Green" cleaning products are better for the environment. Read more about it here: [www.theworkingworld.org/us/si-se-puede-womens-cooperative/](http://www.theworkingworld.org/us/si-se-puede-womens-cooperative/).*

### **AFTER YOU READ:**

1. Learn more about We Can Do It! by looking at their website: <https://wecandoit.coop/>. Share with others what you noticed.
2. What do you think about the cooperative model of working? What would it be like not to have bosses?
3. Learn more about cooperatives by reading the box on p. 13 and following the links.
4. Interview someone in your class or your community who has a job with a cooperative, lives cooperatively with others, or has done cooperative community work (such as working in a community garden). Find out what works well in this model and what is challenging.



## More about Cooperatives



According to [usworker.coop](https://usworker.coop), “Worker cooperatives are values-driven businesses that put worker and community benefit at the core of their purpose. [...] There are over 500 democratic workplaces in the United States, employing over 8,000 people and generating over \$400 million in annual revenues.”

How did cooperatives do during the pandemic? Find out more:

1. Watch this documentary on worker cooperatives:

<https://therealnews.com/worker-cooperatives-prove-your-job-doesnt-have-to-be-hell>.

2. Read this article about how cooperatives adapted during Covid, protecting workers and the public:

<https://accuracy.org/release/how-worker-co-ops-weathered-covid-19-by-prioritizing-people-over-profits>

What happened when the owners of a windows factory in Chicago decided to fire everyone and close their doors? The workers bought it and fired their bosses! Then they turned the business into a worker-owned cooperative, New Era Windows Cooperative. Read their story here: <https://newerawindows.com/>. And watch this 6-minute video that tells their story: <https://vimeo.com/33260810>.



Photo from *The Working World*, published by <https://solutions.thischangeseverything.org/module/new-era-windows-cooperative>.