

Learn English and Join a Union

Amina Jama

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a union? Share what you know about unions.

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 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 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 and to join unions if possible. Education gives you more opportunities, and unions defend workers against unfair situations (like the one I had).

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. This piece was originally published in Issue #45, "Career Pathways," p. 41.



Advice for the Workplace

What did Amina and Carolyn do?	What happened?

Fill out the chart. List the strategies that Amina (p. 9) and Carolyn (p. 8) used to address problems in the workplace. Then list the results of those strategies. What would you do?