NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK: MEET THREE OF THE COOP’S NEWEST HIRES

June 11, 2024



As told to Liz Welch

A commitment to mission and community were the common denominators behind three newcomers’ decision to take full-time jobs at the Coop.

DELPHINE SELLES-ALVAREZ, 53

Membership Coordinator

Start date: March 2024

PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

“I wanted to be part of this community!”
I joined the Coop in 1997, and it has played an important role in my life—for both the food and the community. I love it so much that, over the years, whenever I saw job postings, I thought about applying. My kids were smaller then, and so the timing was not right. I finally applied for an opening as a membership coordinator and was delighted to get the job.

As a longtime member, I knew how special the Coop was—but I had no idea how much work goes into keeping this place going! I’ve only been here for two months, so I’m still learning all the systems. I spend my days asking questions and listening to how my fellow coordinators handle situations. I get to work with an incredibly bright group of people who are all dedicated to the Coop’s mission, and to working with lots of different personalities, so I learn a lot from them.

So much of my job is responding to members’ questions: Why am I suspended? Can I take a leave of absence? What happened to childcare? (On that note, everyone is sorry that we can’t bring it back! Insurance is just not possible.)

Everyone I work with has the best intentions in mind—the goal is always to find a solution. Years before I was hired, I worked the office shift, which prepared me for this type of problem solving. One thing I have noticed is how much calmer the office is [than it was a few years ago]. The online membership work system is so much easier to navigate—members are not as stressed as they used to be. Remember FTOP when you had to call in or go fill in those paper forms? And how you never knew your status? Newer members still complain—but they don’t understand how much easier it is now!

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Overall, interacting with all these people—whether my colleagues or the members—is my favorite part of the job. It enforces the feeling of what a special place it is.

FRANCISCO REYES, 36

Receiving coordinator
Start date: February, 2024

PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

“When I was looking for a job in advertising, I knew I could run into horrible humans and a lot of ego. Here, the worst you can get is someone who is having a bad day—but is not a bad person.”
I am from Chile but moved to New York one year ago from Mexico City with my husband who is from Germany. We were looking for a place to live in Park Slope, and the broker who helped us find it, also showed us the Coop and said, “I believe this is a place you might like!” We joined in May, 2023.

I’m a gardener and I do ceramics. I was able to make a living doing both in Mexico, but it was harder in New York. I started looking for other jobs—at the botanical garden, as an assistant in pottery studios, even I considered to look for advertising jobs as I used to do that as well back in Chile, when I saw a job listing at the Coop! I learned that I had to be a member for six months—this was July, so I had to wait. When the same job was listed in December, I applied. It was my first interview in English, so I was nervous. But it was an easygoing interview and I got the job!

The biggest challenge, especially after the pandemic, is being constantly surrounded by so many people. I was used to working in my house, or as a gardener talking to plants. Here, my job is half social skills, half organization, and lots of physical labor, too! You walk stairs, carry boxes. I’m trained to know how to write all the aisles and while we each have our favorite—I love doing yogurt—we also need to know how to write everything else.

What I love most about the Coop is it does not feel hierarchical. Everyone is treated with the same respect and curiosity. The idea of being higher or better really does not feel like it exists here. I appreciate that so much.

MAE FRANKEBERGER, 36

Membership Coordinator
Start date: September 2023

PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

“I love having opportunities to creatively solve problems for a huge community of people.”
Prior to my job at the Coop, I worked in the live entertainment industry. I stage managed, produced, coordinated all sorts of live events, from Off-Broadway productions to BBQ Tastings to the Mermaid Parade. I love the nature of people gathering to celebrate art, food and each other—so the transition to working here felt natural.

The Coop is an anomaly. Especially in the US. Nowhere in this country is there a food co-op that has more than 16,000 members and runs on unpaid labor to keep costs low. I love getting to be part of an organization like this. It literally blows my mind daily!

> “IT HAS STRETCHED MY COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN WAYS I DID NOT ANTICIPATE, AND HELPED ME REALIZE THAT THIS IS NOT JUST ABOUT WORK; IT IS ABOUT COMMUNITY.”

My job is to constantly re-orient people to spaces and tasks in order to set them up for success. I really enjoy working with members and helping them navigate the systems within the Coop. I also like being able to be a part of the group of people who help build and make those systems better. It’s an ever changing process. Of course, there are basic rules for how things are done, but sometimes I’ll ask my veteran colleagues, “Okay, but how would you handle this particular situation?”

Half the time, members are coming into work shifts with no knowledge of the job they’re being asked to do, which is why there is so much emphasis on creating guides to help members navigate these systems—whether they are manuals, or step-by-step guides. Inevitably, people will still have questions, so I’m often fielding those inquiries from members who have different ways of communicating. So I have to decipher what it is they need to know, in order to do their job. And I always want to make sure I convey that information in a way they can understand. It has stretched my communi-

cation skills in ways I did not anticipate, and helped me realize that this is not just about work; it is about community.

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist and book collaborator.