IT’S PUT YOUR CHILD TO WORK DAY EVERY DAY AT THE COOP

October 28, 2025

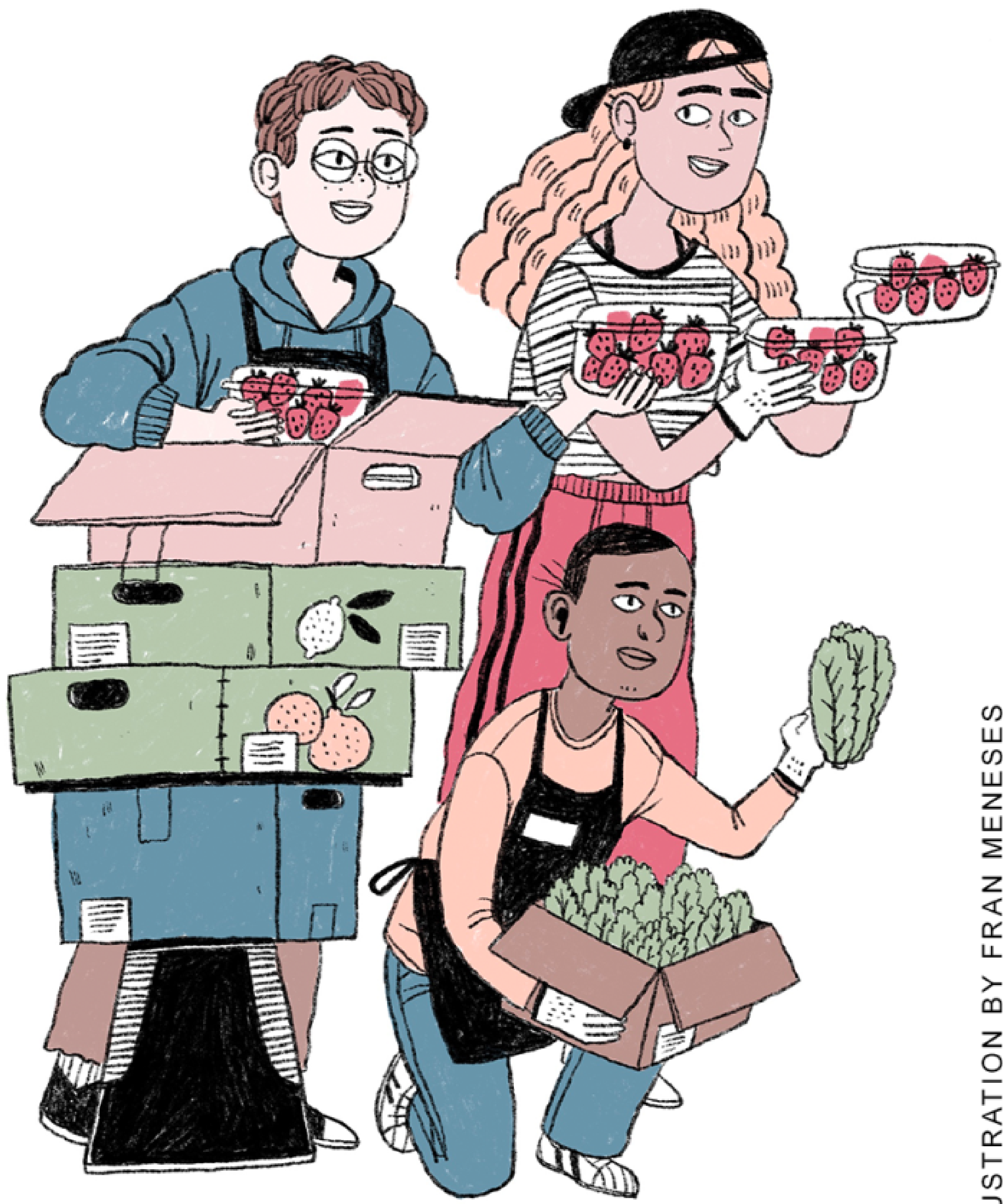

ILLUSTRATION BY FRAN MENESES

YOUNG LABORERS DEVELOP WORK ETHIC AND EARN POCKET MONEY—AND THEIR PARENTS' ETERNAL AFFECTION

October 28, 2025

By Liz Welch

My daughter just turned 14 this past September, and we've already begun exploring what kind of work experience she'd like to try now that she's legally allowed to work in New York State. Up until now, she has earned money caring for neighbors' cats and, on occasion, selling her artwork. I once mentioned babysitting as a possible teen job, to which she quickly replied: "Um, no thank you. I prefer cats to small children."

Fair enough, but not much of a résumé builder.

And then one day I spotted my dear friend Luise's teenage son Anatole stocking shelves at the Coop. "What are you doing?" I asked him.

He flashed his megawatt smile and said, "Working a shift for my parents."

I was flooded with thoughts—ranging from 'his parents are brilliant,' to, 'Wait, does the Coop *allow* this?'—which Anatole must have intuited, as he added: "When Bella turns 14, she can work here too."

Considering my husband just did a weekday 5:30 a.m. shift to avoid household suspension, I thought, "This is a triple-win!" She gets work experience, we get credit—and a break from the constant nail-biting brink of suspension—*and* she becomes a more conscious and connected member of a community where "work for food" takes on so many layered meanings.

My next question was, "How do we sign up?"

I spoke with Membership Coordinator Jana Cunningham who explained, "Any child age 14 to 17 can work at the Coop with working papers—which need to be on file at the Coop. They can get these from the guidance counselor at their school (see "how" in sidebar below), bring them to the Coop along with a parent or guardian and we issue a card that says 'working papers on file' so we know they can legally work."

Once again, I thought, Anatole's parents truly are brilliant. And then I wondered, how many other adults with working-age children are aware of this?

"The policy has existed since the beginning of the Coop," Cunningham says. "Most parents don't seem to know about it."

> THIS IS A TRIPLE-WIN! SHE GETS WORK EXPERIENCE, WE GET CREDIT—AND A BREAK FROM THE CONSTANT NAIL-BITING BRINK OF SUSPENSION

Currently, there are about 230 minors with work papers on file at the Coop. "We mostly have kids coming to work in the summertime," Cunningham adds. "September to June, fewer kids work."

Anatole is a high school senior, and veteran "working-papers-on-file" Coop member. Now 17, he started doing shifts at age 14—and has since clocked more than 20.

He says that he enjoys the work. "You meet so many interesting people at the Coop," he tells me. "And you learn a lot about them by what is in their shopping cart."

When probed, he admits that this was entirely his parents' idea. The incentive? "Snacks," he says. "If I work my shift and shop for the family, I'm rewarded with complete freedom when it comes to buying snacks."

I spoke to another young worker named William who got his working papers in spring 2025, when he was still in eighth grade. Both of his parents are school teachers who thought having him clock shifts would be a good way to learn about responsibility, and William says “getting good work experience” was his reason for signing on. He has worked six shifts thus far and says he likes the Coop’s overall “vibe.”

“The customers are also workers, so everyone has filled the same roles,” he explains. “Knowing that makes me feel secure—no one is looking down on you.”

Cunningham says the staff love working with young people. “They’re more willing, even if they’re not as capable! They’re excited to do anything 99.9% of the time.”

There are rules pertaining to what minors can and cannot do. For instance, they must stay on the Coop property, which means they can’t do cart returns. Nor can they work in the basement, or at the checkout. “We don’t want them handling beer,” Cunningham explains. “It’s not a NYS requirement! But that’s unique to us.”

Max, who is currently in tenth grade, has been working for more than a year. When he signed up, his mother Makela came in to work his first shift with him.

> ‘IT’S A PREVIEW TO WORKING MY FIRST JOB,’ A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SAYS. ‘PLUS, I KNOW MY WAY AROUND THE PLACE BECAUSE I’VE BEEN GOING SINCE I WAS LITTLE.’

“We did a receiving shift together,” she explains. “The receiving coordinator said it was great to do it that way.”

“It’s a preview to working my first job,” Max says. “Plus, I know my way around the place because I’ve been going since I was little.”

Makela pays Max to do shifts as she and her wife view the work as incredibly helpful for their family. “He takes it seriously,” she says.

Max says he has learned that he likes working with people. “On my second shift, the receiving coordinator said there was another kid who was working for the first time,” Max says. “He said, ‘Show him the ropes!’” Max did—and declares, “He was a natural!”

READ BEFORE DELEGATING:

If there’s a child aged 14 to 17 in your household, here is what you need in order for them to work your Coop shift:

- **Fill out a NY Application for Employment Certificate** found in the guidance counselor’s office at your child’s school. If your child is homeschooled, go to your zoned school. The application can also be downloaded from The New York State Department of Education.
- To complete the application, your child needs a **birth certificate** as proof of age

and a **doctor's note** stating that the child is fit for employment.

- Once the application is approved by the counselor, the parent must accompany the child to the Coop to **get the child's own dedicated Coop card and number**. Prior to this fall, the minor's card had the name and photo of one of their Coop member parents or guardians along with a "work papers on file" declaration. That policy has just recently changed so the child can now get their own personal card, with their photo on it. This allows the child to both work shifts and shop. On that note, if your child has an old card with your photo on it, please have them come get a new card with their photo.
- The child must **bring their card when they work**—as the "work papers on file" identification makes their labor legal in the state of NY. As for their Coop "committee" it will be designated as CHILD.
- **Important note:** any child of a Coop member is entitled to shop at the Coop, with or without working papers. If you would like your child to shop independently, bring them to the office to get their own Coop card.
- For those who want to work, once the child's paperwork is on file at the Coop, the adult they're "working for" can **sign them up for shifts** using the adult's number.
- **Once a minor turns 18**, they can continue working shifts for their household as they're no longer required to do their own work shifts as they had historically had to do. That new rule was passed in 2023, as it was too difficult for kids who went to college to keep up with their Coop work commitment. Now, if a college-aged kid (between 18 and 22) lives at home, they must *join* the Coop as a member, contribute the $100 investment fee—either all at once or via a payment plan—and join the work-exempt "Youth Committee."
- **Important caveat:** the "Youth Committee" simply means the member is between the ages of 18 and 22. It does not require shifts. Also, it does not require that the "youth" live with Coop members. So anyone aged 18 to 21 can join the PSFC, get a membership card that designates them as "Youth Committee", and therefore shop without working shifts. When that person turns 22, they are required to start working shifts.

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist, and book collaborator.

NEW AND RESTORED COOP FEATURES: E-CARDS, GUESTS, YOUTH COMMITTEE

October 28, 2025

By Hayley Gorenberg

Recent changes at the Coop—from electronic entry cards, to a retooled guest policy, to a brand new Youth Committee for young adult members—aim to streamline member experiences and address “pain points.” Here are details of the changes:

NEWFANGLED CARD GIZMO FOR ALL!

Flashing a Coop barcode for entry recently got easier for everyone.

Every Coop member can now use their Member Services account to access their barcode and enter the Coop to shop or work. (Any member who has yet to set up the account can register and sign up, as long as they have an email on file with the Coop office.)

As of April 30, 2024, the feature became available to all members, regardless of their smartphone platform or device—a much more egalitarian system than the iPhone-only option that existed for years— courtesy of one member's donated programming. While the intent was to help, "It's a nice idea to move away from this thing we never asked to be made and had no control over," said General Coordinator Matt Hoagland.

> "A COOP CARD IS PROBABLY THE BEST THING YOU CAN CARRY IN YOUR WALLET IN THE EVENT YOU LOSE YOUR WALLET," SAID GENERAL COORDINATOR MATT HOAGLAND.

The web-based feature does not have wallet integration yet, but Hoagland contemplates that aspect in the future. A screenshot will work for entry, and there's also a print-at-home option. Those conveniences are more reliable than the MacGyver tricks some members have tried where they photograph a physical membership card, and then try to scan an expanded image of the barcode.

Further advantages include no need to replace lost cards anymore, which Hoagland noted "cuts down on plastic use, and saves you $3.50 and trips upstairs" to the Coop office.

That said, members can still use their physical cards, and Hoagland is a fan for one particular reason. "A Coop card is probably the best thing you can carry in your wallet in the event you lose your wallet," he said. The Coop's contact information leads to calls from good samaritans throughout Brooklyn—and even from other states.

He estimates the Coop gets a few such calls a month, with variations on the theme, “Can you contact this person, and let them know I have their wallet?” The Coop takes the name and number of the caller and relays the information to the member. “We don’t give away your information,” Hoagland said. “We get in touch, and hopefully everything works out. I haven’t heard that it hasn’t. Typically, people are happy to help their fellow human.”


NEXT MEMBER

Photography by Michael Berman

BE OUR GUEST! (AGAIN!)

The pandemic-era restriction on Coop guests lifted May 1, 2024. Now, members can bring folks to browse the store (and perhaps tempt them to join) on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Due to capacity limits on busier "carrot tag" days, guests are not allowed on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

The retooled policy allows members four guest passes over the course of a year—sprinkled throughout, or used all at once. Unused passes do not roll over to the next year, and members who are on a leave of absence, are dormant, or whose status does not allow access to the Coop cannot enter as a guest.

Members still check in their guests at the second-floor service desk or membership office, where visitors show photo ID. The check-in includes a review of the Coop's database, "making sure the guest is not a member who was put on hold or possibly left under bad circumstances," said Coop Membership Coordinator Karen Mancuso. She added, "There are members who have been kicked out of the Coop for disciplinary reasons."

Guests receive a sticker to wear on the floor, indicating they are guests, and must comply with the rule that only members shop. The sticker makes improper shopping even clearer, and Mancuso and other Coop staff hope it will reduce instances of that infraction, since enforcing the rule is "never fun for us," Mancuso said, adding, "but it's part of our job."

Most guests are visitors from out of town or people who want to join the Coop. Mancuso summarizes the essence of the revamped policy that lets members bring guests to our collaborative venture: "You want to show [the Coop] off!"

YOUTH COMMITTEE ADDRESSES AWKWARD YEARS

After more than 15 years of "bubbling" tension over young-adult members of Coop households whose undone shifts often undermined their household's standing, the January General Meeting voted to assign members aged 18–22 years to a Youth Committee—with no associated work shift.

Going forward, these young people—typically college-aged—won't be "dragging down their households onto work alerts as they get their footing," said General Coordinator Ann Herpel. "It's a pain point for them. These can be tension-filled conversations with members about their young adult in their household."

Membership Coordinators confronting frontline member issues originated the proposal and brought it to the General Coordinators after tough exchanges in which members learned their child was supposed to join at age 18 and the older adults in the household didn't want them to. "It became a point of conflict," said Herpel. While "some parents were fine and [their 18-year-old] would sign up, a lot wouldn't—or a lot would sign up and immediately go on leave." Or, they would depart for college, return for winter break, and look to come off leave for a couple weeks, and then seek to return to leave status when they went back to school. The tracking was a chore.

The work-exempt Youth Committee does not feature an option to "work ahead" and bank shifts before age 22, though young people can work for other members, "just like any member can work for someone else," Herpel said. Youth Committee members can attend the GM and participate in the Coop's decision-making process. At 22, the young person moves into the working pool, unless they leave the Coop.

Youth Committee members are not the youngest people shopping at the Coop. For many years the store has offered a "child-of" card, where a child of a Coop member could get their picture taken. While child-of cardholders don't get their own member numbers, they do receive a card with their picture, identifying them as the child of a parent who is a member, and the card includes the adult member's bar code.

A child under 18 with a card can shop independently without the adult member present. The card expires on the child's 18th birthday. Herpel is aware of a child-of card issued to a Coop kid as young as 6. "I think it's kind of a novelty, in a way," she said.

Child-of cards are also used by Coop children ages 14–17 years old, who can work shifts for others, as long as they have secured working papers from their school. In those instances, the child-of card specifies “working papers on file,” in accordance with state law.