

# Latinas Reaching the Green Dream



Photo: Irene Florez

Gloria (center) attended the 2008 National Federation of U.S. Worker Cooperatives Conference along with four other members of WAGES' co-op network. While at the conference they led a workshop on building inclusive cooperatives that fully engage Latinas as co-op members.

## Gloria

Benefits Before joining Emma's Eco-Clean: 0

Benefits Today: Health & dental insurance paid for by the co-op

As a single parent coping with a thyroid disorder, Gloria knows about the advantages of decent health care better than anyone. Of all the benefits that her cooperative provides, health care is the most important to her.

Every morning, she must take prescription medicines that would be financially out-of-reach without her insurance.

"Thanks to my monthly check-ups and my green job," she said, "I feel healthy and I'm able to work hard every day to provide for my daughter Stephanie. With my co-op's health insurance plan, I know that, should something happen, I can see my doctor within 30 minutes and I won't have to pay out-of-pocket to cover health bills."

As a member of Emma's Eco-Clean, one of the green-cleaning co-ops started by WAGES, Gloria also revels in the fact that she is able to use products that are just as

effective as toxic ones, yet do not negatively affect her health.

"At first, I switched to green cleaning with my health in mind," said Gloria, "but now I think about the energy savings and the environment. You begin to think about saving water, using cold instead of hot, being energy-efficient in general, and making sure you use less toxic products. Today, I notice fewer headaches, the absence of allergies, and that my skin isn't mistreated. And of course, I also have the peace of mind of knowing that my work is not aggravating my thyroid disorder."

Six years ago, Gloria was struggling to make ends meet as a part-time cashier at a Smart&Final superstore where she received no benefits.

"All of my work before WAGES

lacked support and adequate training, but here I have my cooperative standing behind me," she said. "Today I am happy and comfortable. After four years, this is the job I've kept the longest."

As her daughter grows, Gloria wants to be sure to impart to her the lessons she's learned as a co-op member.

"I want to give her the tools and *fortaleza* [strength] that working in a cooperative provided for me."



Photo: Ivette Meléndez

Gloria works hard to provide for her 6-year-old daughter and is at ease knowing that she has a stable job with benefits.