

8 April 2024

Getting involved: becoming a rep and a member of the women's network

Catherine Russell who works for the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency explains how she became a rep - almost by accident - and has gone on to become an active member of her regional women's network.

I grew up with a mum who was a keen trade union member and saw the support her union gave her. I also saw the effects of sex discrimination on working women before it was made illegal. When I joined the civil service, and later re-joined after starting a family, one of the first things I did was to join a union myself.

Union membership is important to me as during my working life, I have seen hard-won improvements to our remuneration and conditions of employment being rolled back, often in very subtle ways. Solidarity is our only chance of maintaining our protections and living standards. Women's rights are also under threat and the situation for the most vulnerable women in society has clearly become worse.

For many years, I never thought I could be a rep; they were very special people. Then I became a rep almost by accident when I joined a meeting to discuss my branch, and expressed an interest in doing something in support. I went on the PCS reps' training course, which was brilliant, and is just the foundation you need for being a rep. It's great to be able to support members when they have a problem and contribute to trade union side discussions with management.

I joined the PCS London and South East Women's Network, which is great for meeting up with women from other branches, learning more about issues that affect women, and hearing women's voices. It is also wonderful for encouraging women to develop within the union.

We need more women, disabled, young, black and LGBT+ members to get active. Your first step could be to join your regional or national equality member network. Contact the PCS equality department at equality@pcs.org.uk for more details.