

125 SOLUTIONS TO FIGHT INEQUALITY: Minnesota Asset Building Coalition

By Meher Kahn



Minnesota Asset Building Coalition's fight is simple: reduce inequality. The enemy is the myth of scarcity. Their ammunition is resources; there are plenty to go around.



The leaders of the Coalition, Anna Odegaard and Dave Snyder (pictured above), want everyone, regardless of racial, cultural, social, or economic background, to have access to long-term financial success. Assets are key to stability. The Coalition is home to 125 asset-building organizations, and each offers a solution to fight inequality. Dave believes in community organizing to shift power, not just one community—but many. In the last year he put 45,000 miles on his car traveling across Minnesota to find out what poverty looks like statewide. The miles traveled introduced multiple perspectives and made Dave see how careful he must be when representing diverse communities. “We can’t presume to speak for any community,” he states. “We must only harness and amplify voices.”





HOW IT SERVES FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Minnesota Asset Building Coalition is one of eight asset-building groups working as a cohort to improve financial capability policies at a state and tribal level. It advances policy and advocacy solutions that:

 INCREASE ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SERVICES	 EXPAND FINANCIAL EDUCATION
 REGULATE PREDATORY LENDING	 ENCOURAGE SAVINGS

Hear One of Those Voices.

Picture a personal care attendant with custody of her young granddaughter. She has car troubles. She is not just driving to work; people's lives depend on her ability to get there. When her car breaks down for good, she loses her income and it begins a domino effect of lasting repercussions.

When Dave looks at a problem like this, he convenes a diverse learning circle of Coalition members, all with boots on the ground working on poverty. In the case of transportation issues, some members offer low-interest car loans, some offer affordable repairs, some donate vehicles.

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Each member brings important insight and experience that Anna uses to create a plan of action. When she originally wrote the “Getting to Work Bill,” Anna was able to pitch it back to the Coalition’s transportation experts for feedback from such members as: Cars for Neighbors, The Lift Garage, Jump Start Duluth, and Wheel Get There.



Finding Allies Builds Collaboration and Impact.

Currently, Anna is focused on the upcoming legislative session and finding allies. Her hope is that as the Coalition rises in prominence, potential allies will take note, looking to the Coalition to help drive a course of action. Long-term, Anna wants to see the Coalition play a part in creating a piece of legislation that makes a real difference in people’s lives—and they are close. Last year, the “Getting to Work Bill” almost passed through legislation, and still has a significant chance of doing so in the upcoming session.

Remember that personal care attendant? A friend told her about the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties. It provides the Car Ownership Program, offering low-interest car loans to low-income people who need a car to get to work. With its help, the personal care attendant was able to afford a car that made sense for her income. Not only was she able to get back on her feet, but she also advanced her career and income potential. She is now starting her own business, and has even employed two people.

The “Getting to Work Bill” strives to change lives in many ways beyond transportation and getting people to their jobs. It would fund nonprofits to also offer financial literacy education, credit counseling, car maintenance and repair instruction, or job training—critical skills and resources that can help people achieve long-term financial stability.

By coming together as a diverse coalition, with a multiplicity of perspectives, the 125 organizations united behind Minnesota Asset Building Coalition offer hope.