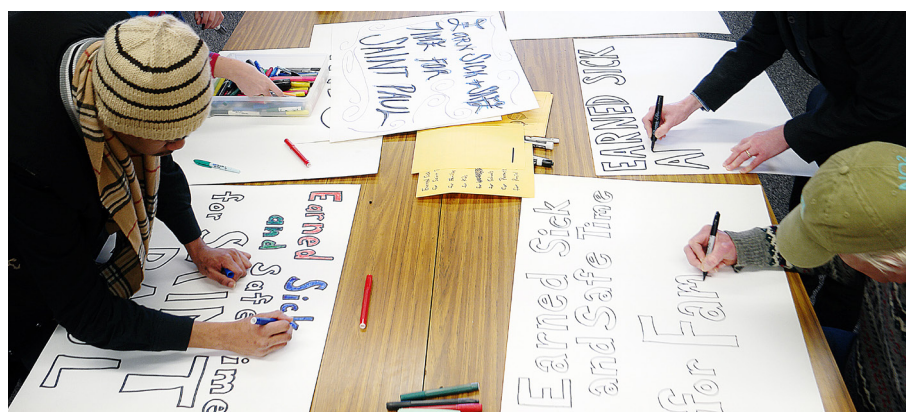


Organizing Workers to Overcome Barriers to Good Jobs: TakeAction Minnesota

By Victoria Blanco



TakeAction Minnesota gives low-wage workers a platform to speak out about their challenges and work toward change.



A hub for community organizing, TakeAction Minnesota empowers and trains low-wage workers to organize others, raise awareness for issues, and build a movement to improve job opportunities that help people get ahead and stay there.

Better Policy for People with Criminal Records

When James Badue was recently released from prison, the only employment he could find paid low wages. A friend recognized James' passion and willingness to describe the barriers he faced and urged him to join TakeAction Minnesota. Through TakeAction, James told his story to large groups of people and was glad he spoke out.



James Badue

Most formerly incarcerated people find it difficult to get work. James was able to land a job delivering pizzas, but it barely provides for his fiancée and infant daughter. Adding to this burden, his young family needed a place to live. He filled out many housing applications and was starting to feel hopeful about one of them. But the landlord denied him housing after seeing his felony record. As a last resort, James turned to a family shelter, which would only provide him housing in exchange for all of his meager income.



HOW IT SERVES WORK OPPORTUNITY



TakeAction's advocacy demonstrates how organizing low-wage workers can impact workforce development and opportunity. Job training to develop new skills can help hardworking people overcome barriers to getting and keeping good jobs. But to create more effective job pathways, employment systems need to have better responses to other barriers such as having a criminal record or trying to care for a family on low wages. TakeAction's work has helped low-wage workers to uncover these and other challenges, and it has convened them to find their voice and build a movement to develop policy options that open the door to better opportunities.

James felt defeated. “How am I supposed to get out of this when they’re taking away my options of having anything better?”

James shared this story at a TakeAction Minnesota meeting because he liked the organization’s dedication to using stories like his as catalysts for organizing communities into broad-based coalitions for change. James felt a momentum beginning to build and he believes that a body in motion stays in motion. By continuing to speak out, he taps into this energy; he rallies others and unifies their voices as they seek better opportunities for all low-wage workers.

How an Issue Ignited Advocacy

One freezing night, Gloria Coles attended a single mom’s march organized by TakeAction Minnesota to advocate for an increase in the minimum wage. “Moms are working two or three jobs to make ends meet. With no sick time, missing a day might mean not being able to pay a bill.” She believes increasing the minimum wage will provide stability for mothers who work multiple jobs, opening the door to training for better careers.

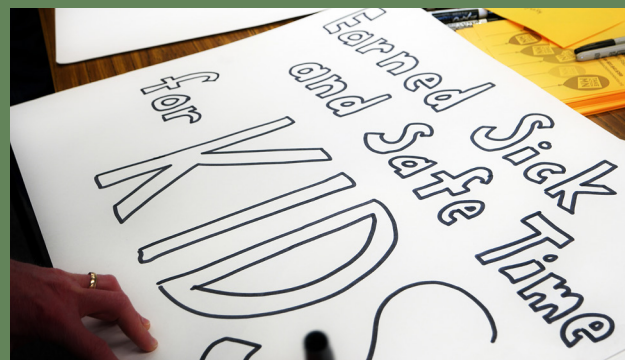
Gloria recognizes the impact of policy change, but informing people about the issues is most urgent. “You can’t change something you don’t know anything about,” she says.

Inspired by her parents’ struggle as African-Americans living in the South, Gloria worked as a community organizer in Chicago, but didn’t know the job’s terms: phone banking, door knocking, rallying. Training at TakeAction Minnesota made her more intentional in her community organizing. Gloria now leads the Women of Color team at TakeAction,



Gloria Coles

TakeAction Minnesota connects individuals and empowers them to tell the story about the barriers they face, uniting their voices and turning their stories into public action.



advancing the organization’s mission to identify policy ideas that affect meaningful change. She conducts town hall meetings and feels it is her role to keep her team inspired as they turn their individual needs into a statewide public agenda.

Empowering People to Create Their Own Policy Solutions

TakeAction Minnesota builds movements by investing in people impacted by the issues. By providing training and helping workers to organize, TakeAction Minnesota connects individuals and empowers them to tell the story about the barriers they face, uniting their voices and turning their stories into public action. It is dedicated people like James and Gloria who offer ideas that pave the way for new policy.