



Office of Family Assistance (OFA)
Rural Communities Initiative



North Dakota Rural Communities Initiative Team
Minnesota Car Ownership Program Site Visits

Program Profiles

1. **Organization Name:** Free to Be, Inc.
Primary Contact/Title: Cliff Korkowski/Executive Director
Location: Blaine, Minnesota (18 miles north of Minneapolis)



Organization Description:

Free To Be, Inc., (Free2B!) seeks to help residents in Anoka County, Minnesota who are TANF participants, immigrants, unemployed, under employed, disabled or senior citizens, by providing assistance with car repair, car donations, vehicle maintenance, resource management, and basic budgeting. The Free2B! Car Care Program includes components of repair, replacement, and provides initial transportation for individuals in need.

Free2B! does not offer financial loans for either repairs or purchase. Repairs are done by Free2B! volunteers. Free2B! repairs cars twice a month during Car Care Saturday and provides up to \$300 in repair parts to eligible individuals in Anoka County. Financial support for vehicle parts is provided by foundations, faith communities, businesses, individuals, and service clubs. Parts and labor are provided at greatly reduced prices through arrangements with several repair shops and parts suppliers.

In addition to car repair and donation, Free2B! provides basic budget training so participants can eventually plan for and pay their own repair bills and purchase cars when needed. As a requirement for getting cars repaired during "Car Care Saturday", participants must attend a one-hour Basic Budgeting Seminar and a one-hour Car Maintenance Seminar during the time their cars are being repaired.

2. **Organization Name:** People Responding in Social Ministry (PRISM)
Primary Contact/Title: Elizabeth Johnson/Executive Director
Location: Golden Valley, Minnesota (6 miles west of Minneapolis)



Organization Description:

PRISM began as a collaborative effort among local service providers, PRISM's Family Car Initiative, and the Wheels to Work programs. It was put into place to help low-income individuals acquire reliable transportation as part of a strategy to find and maintain good employment. These initiatives take in reliable, donated vehicles, repair them, and make them available for working families at a reduced rate. Both programs ascribe much of their success to the creation of a donor-friendly car donation model that offers extensive tax benefits to donors. Through collaboration, participating social service agencies have also been able to maximize advertising efforts and compete more efficiently in the car donation market.



Office of Family Assistance (OFA)
Rural Communities Initiative



In addition to receiving a donated vehicle, families in the program also receive car care education and ongoing budget counseling services. As an on-site employee in PRISM's Automotive Repair Shop, a certified PRISM mechanic gives participants basic car care and maintenance instruction for their newly acquired vehicles. Participants also receive information on car insurance. Referrals to these car care classes are made by local service agencies. Budgeting counseling is provided primarily to help participants reduce debt, repair credit, and establish greater financial independence.

3. **Organization Name:** Minnesota Valley Action Council (MVAC)
Primary Contact/Title: John Woodwick/Executive Director
Location: Mankato, Minnesota (82 miles south-west of Minneapolis)



Organization Description:

MVAC's Wheel Get There (WGT) program began receiving donated vehicles and offering tax deductions to donors in March 1998 through a grant from the McKnight Foundation. Vehicles are reconditioned and then sold to people receiving public assistance from MFIP (Minnesota Family Investment Program). People purchase the vehicles through a guaranteed loan of up to \$3,500, which helps build or rebuild a positive credit history. The goal is to provide reliable, affordable transportation so people to get to work and become self-reliant. Over 500 families have a received a vehicle car since the inception of the WGT program.

Building on their experience with providing personal transportation for low-income individuals, MVAC is now operating a car program that is not reliant on grant dollars. Under this revised program, low-income participants lease a vehicle and meet monthly with a WGT Vehicle Advisor. These individuals receive experience and education in managing their vehicle maintenance needs, and every car used in the WGT program comes with a 30-day warranty. In 2004 Wheel Get There! was given the Peter F. Drucker Award for Non-profit Innovation.