

Helping Those Who Need Reliable Cars

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Susan Jacobs hears the same story over and over again.

It's coming from an increasingly broad front in America.

From people who work hard for a living. Who try to do everything "right."

They follow the rules as best they can to keep food on the table, the lights on, the toilets flushing.

But they can't get ahead.

"We were barely making it before," they so often say.

"And then..."

That gust of ill wind—the "then"—that pushes them over the edge is, often, an unexpected car repair.

You can't get to child care, to a competitively priced grocery or drugstore, and most importantly, you can't get to work without reliable transportation.

BEING POOR IS EXPENSIVE

When you're poor, however, you usually can't afford reliable transportation.

The car you can afford to buy—sometimes from a buy here-pay here car lot that charges high interest rates that you must pay because you can't qualify for a traditional auto loan—has high mileage.

High mileage often equals frequent and expensive repairs.

Bus transportation may be no more reliable, particularly if your job is in one suburb and you live in another and/or you don't work during the traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. hours.

Jacobs hears such Catch-22 transportation stories every day in her new role as the founder and volunteer head of Wheels of Success, a start-up, grass-roots nonprofit that assists financially strapped working families by finding them affordable, reliable transportation.

She also lived the story when she fell on hard times awhile back.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Jacobs was lucky. A relative helped her get back on her feet.

The folks who contact Wheels of Success, she says, don't qualify for any government transportation subsidies, nor do they have relatives or friends to fall back on.

Her own financial crisis prompted her empathy for others with transportation problems. Later, as a counselor at a staffing agency that specialized in often low-paying hospitality industry and clerical jobs, her interest was spurred in starting Wheels of Success.

"It wasn't unusual to have to take people to their jobs because their car broke down," she says.

Since Wheels of Success took to the highway in October, it has developed a board of directors and criteria for eligibility.

Its 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status is pending.

It has decided on a "pay it forward" philosophy that will require recipients of vehicles to "buy" the auto with charges based on their ability to pay.

That money will be used to help others in need.

A number of sponsors also have come onboard including Wheeler Auto Wholesale, Tampa Tow and Recovery, Tampa Automotive Service Center and Casual Living, a division of the Thompson Co., Jacobs' employer.

Several families also have been assisted with car repairs or replacement vehicles.

Of course, Wheels of Success needs money, vehicles, sponsors and volunteers.

For information about the program, visit its Web site at www.WheelsOfSuccess.org, or call Jacobs at (813) 417-1820.

If you can help, please do.

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This story can be found at: <http://www.tampatrib.com/MGAV/ZCD30QD.html>