

“What a gift to help others make their dreams come true!”

These days, it's hard just getting by. So when Susan Jacobs realized too many hardworking people were struggling to even get to their jobs, she became a driving force in helping them become independent—and it's taking them places they used to only dream about!

The keys jingling in her hand sounded like music as Kyana Stewart got into the 2002 Chevy Malibu with a big red bow.

“I wanna drive!” her four-year-old, Kyle, giggled.

“No way,” Kyana laughed. “These are *mama's* wheels.”

Not long before, the single mom and American hero was half a world away behind a different kind of wheel, on a mission driving a truck transferring supplies from Kuwait to Iraq. But after returning home, Kyana had a hard time finding work. And when she finally did, she had to count on unreliable buses that often made her late, putting her job in jeopardy.

Now, though, Kyana turned to the woman she considered an angel.

“It's perfect!” Kyana smiled. And as Susan Jacobs watched her drive off, she smiled, too.

That, the Tampa, Florida, woman thought, is why I do this . . .

Susan herself was no stranger to suffering. A painful divorce left her a single mom. Then, after believing she'd found love again, her relationship turned abusive.

It wasn't easy starting over—especially when she didn't have a car. Then one day Susan struck up a conversation with someone she bumped into.

“I own a used-car lot,” he said. “Why don't you use one of my cars until you're back on your feet?”

Wheels of hope

It was no prize, the slightly dented, out-of-date model. But to Susan, it meant independence.

In fact, that “clunker” helped Susan build a better life. She could make it to her daughter Heather's school plays; she secured a job at a staffing company. So even after she gave it back and could afford a new car, Susan never stopped thinking: Someday I'm going to pay this kindness forward!

In years to come, Susan began hearing a similar refrain at work.

“I wish I could,” one woman sighed when Susan offered her a well-paying temp position. “But I have no way to get there.”

Tip!
Got a car you're ready to part with? Go to DonateACar.com to give it to charity—they'll do a pickup, and you'll get a great tax deduction!

Many others had to leave in the wee hours, transferring bus lines *three* times to make it to their offices.

They must be exhausted before work even begins! Susan sympathized. And

when she learned some folks were spending up to

40% of what they earned just to commute to work, she thought: There has to be a way to help!

Yet when Susan researched transportation assistance programs in her area, she found none.

Then I'll just have to start one myself, she decided. And Wheels of Success (WheelsOfSuccess.org), an organization to provide cars to low- and middle-income folks so they can get to work and take care of family needs, was born.



“For some folks, a car is more than a car. It paves the road to a brighter future!” says Susan, near left, with Jenny, a car recipient.

To begin, Susan contacted a local towing company. “We'll donate two cars,” they agreed. And with the services of several auto technicians, the lemons were rebuilt until they purred like kittens!

Soon after, Susan met a woman named Jeannine, who'd lost her job . . . and then her car.

“I can help,” Susan offered. And when Jeannine not only found a new position but soon got a raise and promotion because of her dependability, she wrapped her arms around Susan.

“I couldn't have done it without you!” she beamed.

The winner's circle

Soon, along with Susan's “pit screw”—car dealerships, mechanics and insurance companies willing to help—Wheels of Success was giving more hardworking folks cars of their own complete with warranties and AAA memberships so they could safely, reliably get to their jobs, children's schools and around the city.

There was Paulette, a grandmother raising her five-year-old grandson, Hunter. Unable to afford a car, they had to walk everywhere in the blazing Florida sun:

church, the Laundromat, doctors appointments to treat Hunter's asthma and her own severe arthritis, aggravated by the heat.

Then someone told Paulette about Wheels of Success. After being presented with their '94 Saturn, Paulette could not only take Hunter to baseball games but she followed her dream of going back to college, too!

“This car was a lifesaver,” she marvels. “A Godsend!”

After losing her home to Hurricane Rita, single mom Tasha had moved to Tampa—only to discover her car was beyond repair. How much more can we take? she wondered as she and her two-year-old waited even in thunderstorms for the bus so she could take him to daycare, then race across town to work . . . until Wheels of Success put her in a '95 Jeep.

“Life is no longer a struggle,” Tasha beams. “Wheels of Success made *me* a success!”

Today, recipients like Jenny—a single mom of two preschoolers who needed a truck to continue her job of hauling boxes—do volunteer service and make payments whenever they can. “So they're paying it forward, too!” Susan says. And in addition to giving away nearly 300 cars, Wheels of Success also helps with repairs and insurance.

“I like to say we give folks the gas they need to make it to the next station in life,” Susan says. “The cars we provide aren't dream cars, but they do help people pursue their dreams—and I know what a gift that can be!”

—Kristin Higson-Hughes

Buy a used car without worry! If you're in the market for new-to-you wheels, follow this checklist to remain lemon-free!

✓ **Do your homework.** The most important thing about buying a used car, experts say, is knowing its history. Use the VIN number to get a report at Carfax.com.

✓ **Enlist a “spy.”** Did you know you're permitted to have your own mechanic take a look before you buy? It's a good idea even if the used car's been “certified” or is being sold with a warranty.

✓ **Hit the road.** Studies show nearly half of used-car buyers don't do this, but it's essential to take the car for a test drive, if only to be certain it feels comfortable to you before signing on the dotted line!

