



People. Power. Change.

2025 Annual Report

GROWW & GROWW Education





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Our Mission Our Mission Our Mission Our Mission **Our Mission**

To build power together to create
the change we need for everyone
in our communities to make ends
meet, live with dignity, and have
a voice in shaping the decisions
that impact us.

Our Mission
Our Mission
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Our Mission



A Letter from Our Executive Director

Dear members, funders and community,

Six years in, GROWW celebrates 2025 as a year defined by significant victories, growth, and learning. We are holding the ground we've won locally and driving that power upward into state and national fights. In order to build the world we want to live in, we have to understand the full playing field and act with courage to win for ourselves and our families.

Our work for safe, healthy homes and local control over corporate agribusiness has made one thing unmistakably clear: our opponents are highly organized and deeply committed to holding onto power. They are determined to wield this power in ways that extract every possible resource from our communities. And now, the threat is drastically increasing at the federal level. Although we were promised better lives and cheaper groceries, we are seeing a corporate agenda play out with the largest shift of wealth away from our community into the hands of billionaires and soon-to-be trillionaires. But we have the ability, the savvy to meet these challenges - we are not pawns in someone else's game. We are taking the wheel and fighting for a world where all of us can trust a glass of water, have a safe place to call home, afford groceries and live with dignity, freedom and opportunity.

In this report, you will see the power we've built, the victories we've won, and the challenges that shaped our learning. We are advancing our interests while building a political home at GROWW. In 2025, we launched our membership program, now more than 500 members strong. We also formed the GROWW

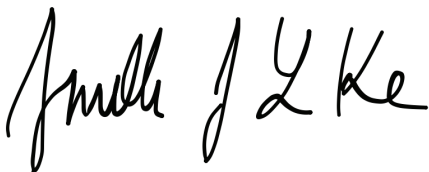
Leadership Team, a strategic body made up of our most central leaders. As we chart our path to power together, progress has shown we can navigate the interests that surface in our campaigns while building political muscles that make us stronger.

What we are building at GROWW is only possible when regular people step up and take the risk to lead in the ever-changing public arena. It isn't easy. But this year, we have trained 178 leaders in grassroots organizing skills. Also this year, we stepped onto the federal stage, recognizing that Congressional decisions are deeply harming our communities. Courage and risk are intimately connected with power building and winning.

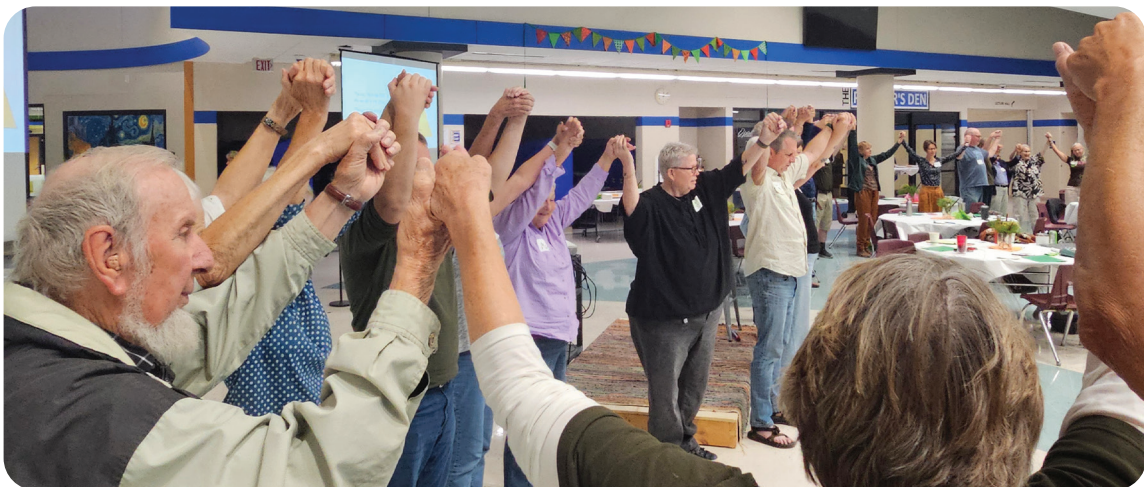
As we enter 2026, we know we will face new challenges and will be required to lead in new ways. How will we put our agenda for Wisconsin front and center and make it the vision of what is possible? How will we use the Spring and Midterm elections to build power so that we can advance our agenda?

Just as generations before us organized to end slavery, build the labor movement, protect our land and water, secure the right to vote, and dismantle Jim Crow, we are forging our path to win an economy and a government that works for us.

With gratitude for being on this journey with each of you,



Jenelle Ludwig Krause, Executive Director





Our Theory of Change

GROWW believes that we, the people who live in our communities, should have the power to shape what happens here — not corporations, not lobbyists, not corrupt billionaires determined to protect their own wealth. Real, lasting change begins when ordinary people come together to take collective action, rooted in shared values and a vision for Wisconsin where everyone belongs and all our communities thrive.

We organize in rural and small-town communities across western Wisconsin, building local teams that identify problems, develop leaders, and take action to win concrete improvements in people's lives. We believe power is not something given — it's something built. Through membership, training, and campaigns, we connect with our neighbors and transform what we care about into wins and change in our communities.

Our work bridges divides: people gathering together in living rooms and town halls across differences of income, place, and party to find where they align. We are farmers, teachers, and students; retirees and new parents; workers and business owners, and we are united.

Our theory of change is simple: when people have the tools, relationships, and courage to act together, they can reclaim local control, challenge corporate power, and create a Wisconsin where all of us have the dignity and freedom to take care of our families, our land, and one another.

2025 Highlights

Launched Membership in January
500 Active Members
today

6 new GROWW-Endorsed Candidates
Elected to County, School, and Town Boards

178 of us trained at GrassRoots School,
Weeklong, and all our Organizing Trainings
throughout the year.

2 more Operations Ordinances PASSED,
with 5 more close behind, to protect Wisconsin
roads, water, and small farms from unchecked
corporate factory farms expansion.

SHIELD:
Renter Protections poised to
PASS in Menomonie.

More than 700
of us turned out at GROWW meetings,
public events, and trainings.

Organized 25 people from 8 organizations
across Wisconsin to align our priorities
to win statewide.

More than **900 grassroots Wisconsin**
contributions, organized over **\$200,000**
- keeping us strong *and* independent.



People Protecting Pierce:

From Defense to Offense

“We thought power meant stopping bad things from happening,” said Margaret C., “Now we understand it also means shaping what happens next.”

In 2025, People Protecting Pierce (PPP) entered a new phase in its fight to protect rural Wisconsin from corporate agribusiness. What began with resistance to Ridge Breeze Dairy’s plan to expand from 1,700 to 6,500 cows, a proposal that would have produced 80 million gallons of untreated manure each year, has become a disciplined campaign for community control. After forcing public scrutiny of Ridge Breeze and helping secure Governor Evers’ veto of Assembly Bill 957, PPP shifted from defense to offense.

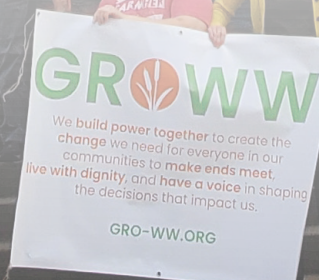
Assembly Bill 957, backed by large agricultural lobby groups, would have stripped towns and counties of their authority to regulate factory farms. It sought to prohibit local governments from adopting local Operations Ordinances requiring industrial factory farms to disclose or mitigate risks. That bill was vetoed in 2024 after PPP members mobilized 800 people across the state to call on Governor Evers to veto the legislation. This year, PPP members proactively organized meetings with state legislators and policymakers to build relationships and encourage them to oppose the proposed reintroduction of the bill. These meetings sent a clear message that rural residents deserve the right to protect our water, roads, family farms and public health. In November, PPP members organized with 125 others across the state for a call-in lobby day, asking state legislators to oppose any preemption of local control around factory farms.

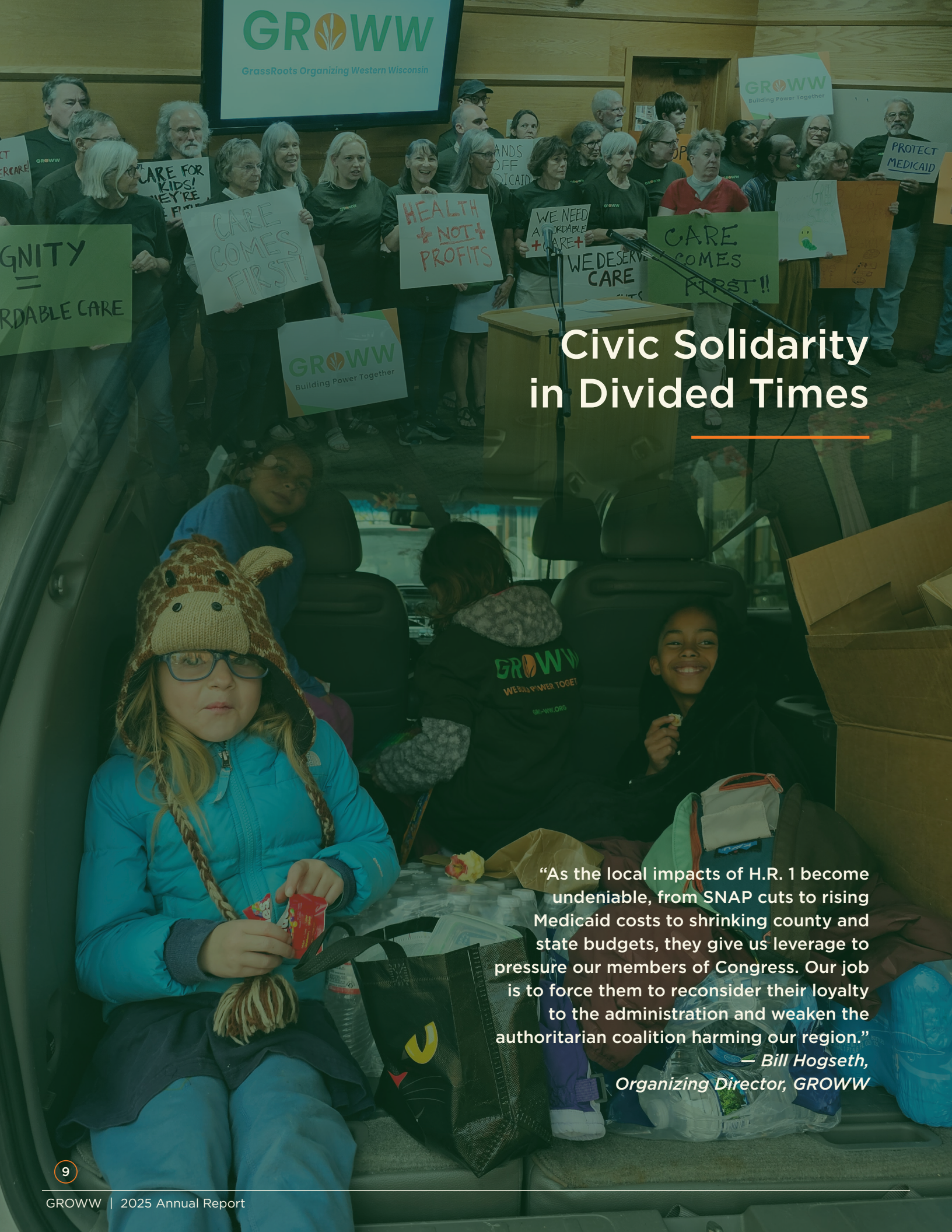
BREAKTHROUGHS IN 2025

- **We joined 5 Pierce County Residents to file our Contested Case with the DNR challenging Ridge Breeze Dairy's massive expansion permit from to 6,500 cows**, provoking the ire of industry groups.
- **PASSED our second and third Operations Ordinance in the towns of Isabelle and Gilman**, modeled after others adopted in Polk County and by the Town of Maiden Rock in 2024, transforming it from a local victory into a regional movement for accountability in industrial agriculture.
- **Organized residents in five more towns, to build teams to pass their own Operations Ordinances in 2026** expanding the wall requiring corporate livestock operations to present detailed plans for road use, manure management, and emergency response before beginning operations.
- **Mobilized 422 residents to attend the public hearings, base meetings, and events** across western Wisconsin.

The campaign's strategy crystallized when industry groups tried to intimidate town officials and flooded meetings with misinformation in an attempt to stem the tide of local oversight and accountability over growing factory farms. Instead of retreating, People Protecting Pierce team members stepped up: organizing with their neighbors to meet with town board members, correct the record, and turn out in force to demand action at local meetings. As local leader Larry Brenner put it, "These aren't our Grandfathers' farms. With so huge a scale, there has to be proper oversight. Local oversight can help protect our homes, businesses, and the Rush River Valley and all of its beautiful creeks and rivers."

From the early outrage over Ridge Breeze Dairy to the disciplined organizing of 2025, PPP has shown that our rural way of life can thrive even under pressure. Farmers, small business owners, and residents who once saw corporate expansion as inevitable are now asserting the right to set the terms.





Civic Solidarity in Divided Times

“As the local impacts of H.R. 1 become undeniable, from SNAP cuts to rising Medicaid costs to shrinking county and state budgets, they give us leverage to pressure our members of Congress. Our job is to force them to reconsider their loyalty to the administration and weaken the authoritarian coalition harming our region.”

— Bill Hogseth,
Organizing Director, GROWW

As conditions across Western Wisconsin grow more volatile, with rising economic pressure on working families and increasingly aggressive efforts by corporate and political elites to strip authority from local governments, GROWW members have stepped into a new role in public leadership. In 2025, leaders across four of our counties began organizing not only around discrete campaigns but around a broader commitment to defend one another, protect the public good, and ensure that government at every level remains accountable to the people it serves. We call this work Civic Solidarity, the disciplined practice of standing together in moments of crisis, naming the forces harming our communities, and demanding the policies and resources required for our people to survive and thrive.

The urgency of this shift became unmistakable with the passage last summer of H.R. 1, the deceptively named “One Big Beautiful Bill.” The law represents the largest transfer of wealth in a generation from working families to corporations and the top one percent. It forces local governments to absorb rising costs for Medicaid and SNAP while ending extended ACA subsidies for nearly 300,000 Wisconsinites. It will raise local taxes, strain county budgets, hasten rural hospital closures, and ultimately, leave more ordinary people isolated, going to bed hungry, and unable to see a doctor when they are sick. In a moment when federal policy is designed to extract from rural communities and consolidate power in the hands of national elites, GROWW members moved quickly to protect their neighbors and expose the harm being carried out in our region.

That clarity sparked visible action. As team confidence grew, so did their willingness to act publicly:

- Across the region, county teams strengthened their research muscles by holding **100 research meetings with sheriffs, county board chairs, administrators, and other decision-makers**. As their confidence grew, so did their willingness to act.
- In Dunn County, leaders organized a press event calling attention to the **4,266 neighbors who lost SNAP benefits on November 1**. They lined the sidewalk outside Rep. Van Orden’s office with 4,266 empty lunch bags, making the impact of H.R. 1 visible to the entire region and directly challenging elected officials causing the harm.
- Under the longest ever US government shutdown, **more than 55 farmers, doctors, small business owners, parents, and working people stood together to demand members of Congress break partisan gridlock and take action** to restore funding for Medicaid, CHIP and the Affordance Care Act vital for healthcare access for working families.

This work is now building toward the first regional confrontation over how H.R. 1 will reshape county budgets and strain the services families rely on. By standing together, calling out extraction, and organizing across lines of difference, GROWW members are forging real civic solidarity. That solidarity is our most important tool for weakening the pillars of support that make authoritarian practices possible in rural areas, insisting that government actions serve our communities, and protecting our state and country from deeper breakdown while we build the future our people deserve.



Housing Justice in Dunn County

A good home is the foundation for a good life. It affects whether people can stay healthy, find steady work, and build roots in their community. But across Wisconsin, too many people are paying more and getting less. In Menomonie, where nearly two-thirds of residents rent, stories of unsafe and deteriorating housing are common—mold, broken heat, collapsing stairs, and landlords who neglect to make repairs. These conditions persist because state law favors landlords over tenants, leaving residents with little real way to demand better living conditions. This is a widespread problem, but people in Dunn County have decided to do something about it.

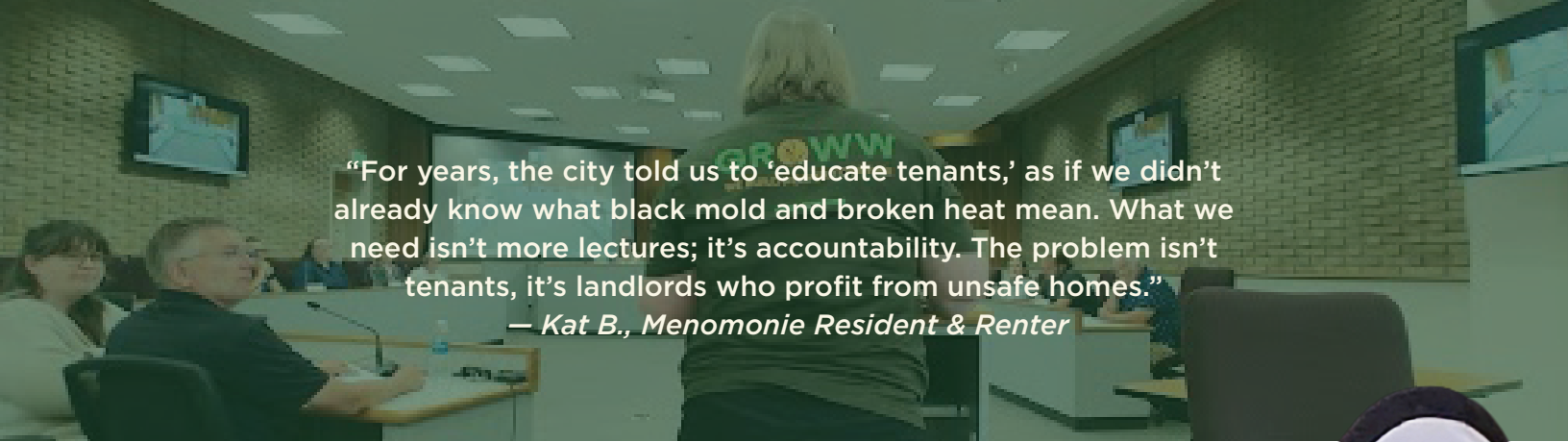
In 2024, GROWW members took a closer look. Through hundreds of one-on-one conversations and listening sessions, we heard the same message: people love this community, but they

are being priced out or pushed into unsafe housing. That effort led to a first win when we passed a countywide rule that allows small homes and backyard cottages, creating more affordable options for local families.

In 2025, our leaders drafted and introduced a new local ordinance called SHIELD (Safe and Healthy Inspection Enforcement Landlord Development Ordinance), modeled after successful programs in Racine and Eau Claire. The proposal would let Menomonie create a local rental inspection program targeting unsafe units, while staying within the limits of Wisconsin’s restrictive Act 317. It also bolsters protections against landlord retaliation, a provision that remains particularly important to tenants and strongly resonates with our base. The idea is simple: when landlords are required to meet basic standards, everyone in the neighborhood benefits.

“When GROWW knocked on my door, I realized I wasn’t powerless. I’d spent years thinking this was just how it is, but organizing showed me our town doesn’t have to accept neglect as normal. We can hold power to account and win the housing we deserve.”

— Sox M., GROWW Member



“For years, the city told us to ‘educate tenants,’ as if we didn’t already know what black mold and broken heat mean. What we need isn’t more lectures; it’s accountability. The problem isn’t tenants, it’s landlords who profit from unsafe homes.”

— Kat B., Menomonie Resident & Renter

Momentum built quickly. When the City Council began debating whether to create a Housing Committee, GROWW mobilized more than 50 residents to show up in support, many attending a city meeting for the first time. Through the summer and fall, more than 30 leaders packed City Hall for the committee’s biweekly meetings. Workers, families, and students living in apartments and rental houses described black mold, broken heat, and stolen security deposits, underscoring how little oversight remained after Act 317. According to the Menomonie building inspector, the city has 3,654 rental units, yet only 178 have been inspected in the last five years, evidence of how dramatically the inspection system has stalled. Our organizing and testimony compelled city staff to take action, and for the first time in a decade, Menomonie is poised to pass a proactive rental inspection program.

BREAKTHROUGHS IN 2025

- **In Menomonie, we launched a public conversation that had been avoided for years:** leaders organized a community meeting with the city’s building inspector, drawing 60 people into the room to confront unsafe housing.
- **Officially introduced the SHIELD ordinance** to the City Housing Committee, giving Menomonie residents the tools to inspect unsafe rentals and require repairs, expected to pass by year’s end.
- **Reached more than 1300 Menomonie residents,** expanded our core team, and turned out dozens of first-time public speakers at packed Council meetings demanding accountability for rental occupants with little to no say in their housing quality.

Every community across the state needs the power to protect the health, safety, and dignity of our families and neighbors. These efforts are changing what’s possible in small-town Wisconsin. Before the end of the year, GROWW leaders are poised to pass our SHIELD Ordinance and restore local authority to enforce safe, healthy rental housing in Menomonie.



Building Power Together
GROWW



All in Favor:

Electing Our Local Leaders

Part of our organizing strategy is to build a groundswell of support for leaders who have a positive vision and are ready to lead here in our communities. That strategy took hold in Menomonie, where renters and university students transformed years of frustration into organized action for safe and healthy housing. When Sydney Brennan, a recent college graduate, expressed interest in serving her community, GROWW trained her to run for office and mounted a campaign on her behalf that aligned with our broader housing agenda. Through deep outreach and dozens of one-on-one conversations, our team brought new voters into public life and made housing a shared public concern. After she won by 71 votes, Sydney helped create a new Housing Committee and worked with council members, including GROWW leader and renter Cody Gentz, to draft Menomonie's first proactive rental inspection ordinance. Their success showed how civic power grows when those most affected help write the solutions.

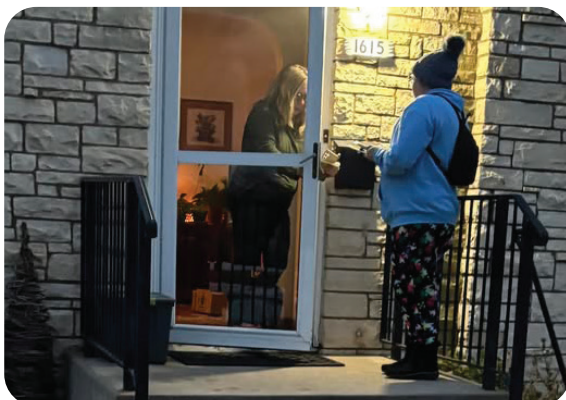
Across the region, this approach has begun to reshape local leadership. Of the eight candidates we endorsed, we helped successfully elect five. In River Falls, Michael Page, a newly elected councilmember, helped revive a shelved sustainability plan and bring clean energy priorities back into public view. As organizer John Calabrese said, "When we organize our neighbors and step into leadership together, we stop waiting for permission and start showing our communities what

real solutions look like.” These gains demonstrate what becomes possible when organized residents bring their values into governing arenas once closed to them.

The All In Favor (AIF) campaign pushed this momentum further in 2025. County teams in Dunn, Pierce, Polk, St. Croix, and Pepin expanded their listening work, held public sessions that drew new people in, and built a stronger base of leaders ready to act. AIF’s endorsement program also grew. In 2025 alone, AIF endorsed eight candidates and helped five win their races, adding to ten endorsements and six wins the previous year. These victories strengthened our credibility

and widened the circle of local residents ready to run, lead, and take responsibility for governing their communities.

Leaders like Wendy DiPeso embody this shift. Once unsure about stepping into public action, she began knocking doors, hosting house meetings, and anchoring the 2024 phone bank team. She then helped launch four new county teams and now leads the Pierce County team, crafting agendas, facilitating meetings, and building her own base. As Wendy puts it, “When the people who live closest to the problem take the lead, communities rediscover their power to solve it together.”





Training and Leadership Development

Our leadership, our learning, and our collective skills as GROWW members determine our ability to win across our campaigns and our state. Only five years ago, just seven neighbors sat around a farm table and chose to shape a different future for western Wisconsin with the power in their own hands. By 2025, that small circle has become hundreds of active leaders, thousands of engaged community members, and a living network that continues to deepen and expand.

This growth is not accidental. We invest in building our relationships and building our capacity: as renters, farmers, small business owners, and parents we are the ones who will act when the stakes are real. Through one-on-one conversations, research and house meetings, narrative work, and team-based training, we help each other understand power, recognize the pressures shaping local decision-makers, and practice the skills needed to act with clarity and purpose. Mobilizing crowds may create a moment, but organizing people and developing leadership creates capacity that endures.

Over the past year, more than 1,500 residents joined house meetings, public hearings, and community conversations across western Wisconsin. More than 160 leaders moved through GROWW's training pipeline, including Grassroots School, daylong organizer sessions, one-to-one and research-meeting workshops, public narrative training, and house meeting host preparation. Eleven leaders attended the Weeklong organizer intensive in Minnesota. Our trainings are a way to develop judgment, test courage and teach one another how to navigate conflict, read power, and take principled action. Leaders learn by stepping

into real responsibility on small teams, making decisions, reflecting with peers, and understanding themselves as actors capable of shaping public life.

This fusion of leadership development and organizing is transforming what is possible in western Wisconsin. GROWW's leaders are demonstrating that power built through relationships can move from porches to public hearings, from street actions to city hall, from community forums to governance itself. As leader Tina Lee shared, "Our campaign to improve housing in Menomonie started when members of our core team attended Grassroots School. Since then, we have brought in new team members and collectively supported each other in becoming strong leaders. As we all step up and take on roles that scare or challenge us, our capacity grows. We are strengthening our local democracy in ways that will have a positive impact on everyday people."

Our approach reflects a broader tradition of what the Freedom Together Foundation has recently named Bigger We Organizing: building a diverse cross-section of people who exercise collective agency toward a shared future. Their research affirms what we see on the ground. Strong organizations cultivate a culture of agency, create culturally relevant on-ramps, put belonging before ideology, grow through a honeycomb structure of small teams, build bridges across the commons, and commit to long-term power projects rooted in real communities. Our work in western Wisconsin carries this spirit forward. By investing in people, strengthening relationships, and expanding the circle of those who lead, we are constructing a Bigger We that can meet this moment and shape the future our communities deserve.

River Falls Action:

Expanding local Access to Mental Health Support



The River Falls mental health campaign is an example of what becomes possible when we develop leaders and build power through training. After attending GROWW's GrassRoots School in early 2025, Linda Vivoda-Sadée returned home with a sharper sense of purpose and the skills to take public action. She launched what became River Falls Action: a team whose goal is to confront the growing mental health crisis facing young people, families, and communities across western Wisconsin.

She knew she would not be alone for long; she was already connecting with and recruiting others to join her. Leaders like Taylor Stevens-Nudd stepped forward with her, bringing lived experience with anxiety and OCD and determination to make sure no one else has to navigate care alone or wait months for support. For Taylor and others, the stakes are deeply personal and urgent. Training helps transform

"Right now, people in western Wisconsin are forced to wait an average of six-weeks to get access to the care and support they need - even facing mental health crises. People in pain end up in emergency rooms or the back of police cruisers, instead of in a counselor's office. That's not good enough. We're organizing to close the gap for all of us."

Linda V.S.

a private struggle into public courage, giving people the tools to translate their experiences into organized action. The RF Action team recognized that far too many people today face the same barriers as a decade ago, with weeks-long waits for counseling and few options in moments of crisis, so they are taking matters into their own hands.

What began as a training project quickly grew into a full campaign. The RF Action team meets weekly to study successful crisis-response models, collect community data through surveys, and meet with local businesses and civic leaders. Their goal: establishing a community-based response team in River Falls that connects social workers, counselors, and trained crisis-intervention professionals to ensure people get help quickly, compassionately, and close to home. Their work reflects the kind of judgment, strategy, and collective ambition cultivated through GROWW's leadership pipeline.

The results are already visible. After sharing testimony at city council meetings, the team was invited to present their research and recommendations directly to city officials. Their work exemplifies what GROWW leaders across the region are doing: stepping into real responsibility, taking public action grounded in community relationships, and demonstrating that ordinary people, when trained and organized, can reshape systems that have long felt beyond our reach.

Taylor, Linda, and their team show the trajectory we strive to create across western Wisconsin: a pathway where individuals develop their leadership, form teams, build shared purpose, and turn lived experience into community power. This is our organizing in practice - neighbors discovering their own agency, supporting one another, and creating the public institutions our communities deserve.



Looking Ahead:

The Next Chapter of Power in Western Wisconsin

Over the next two years, GROWW will move from proving what organized people can do to demonstrating that organized people can govern. The foundation has been laid: hundreds of trained leaders, county teams ready to act, campaigns that deepen public trust, and a network that stretches across western Wisconsin. The next phase is about scale, discipline, and ambition. We will transform our growing base into a force capable of shaping county decisions, state policy fights and organized resistance to the authoritarian intrusions in our lives.

This moment demands more than defending what we have won. It requires us to define what comes next. Our Civic Solidarity teams will expand their power-mapping and research operations, meeting with sheriffs, superintendents, business owners, hospital leaders, and county officials to understand precisely where power sits and how it can be moved. As more leaders step forward, we will not simply respond to federal policies like H.R. 1. We will build the local and regional muscle needed to confront and reshape them.

At the same time, All in Favor will deepen its role as the engine of political leadership in the region. Residents who once spoke out only at public hearings are now hosting forums, drafting questionnaires, mobilizing voters, and running for office themselves. In the coming cycle, these leaders will anchor a broader political program that links field organizing, data, narrative, and governance. Elections will become opportunities not just to win seats but to test our power, sharpen our strategy, and build the governing capacity required for long-term change.

By 2027, GROWW will enter the state budget fight and the battle to end harmful preemptive laws that hold back what we can win and how we can govern locally – with a level of organization the region has never seen. County teams will be larger, better coordinated, and more capable of turning local knowledge into statewide influence. Our agenda will be visible, our leaders will be prepared, and our base will be ready to take collective action. We will shape decisions at the Capitol, not chase them. Western Wisconsin's working families will no longer be spoken about but spoken with, and increasingly, spoken for by leaders who emerged from their own communities.

As Jenelle has shared with all of us: “The future is not something we wait for. It is something we build.” That building is already underway in farm kitchens, town halls, campus apartments, and union halls across the region. It is underway every time a renter speaks publicly for the first time, every time a farmer challenges a corporate lobbyist, every time a parent hosts a house meeting, and every time a leader decides to run for office.

OUR STAFF



Jenelle Ludwig Krause,
Executive Director



Bill Hogseth,
Organizing Director



Danny Akenson,
Organizer



John Calabrese,
Organizer



Nichole Manson,
Organizer



Reba Krueger,
Senior Communications
Manager



Karen Zacharias,
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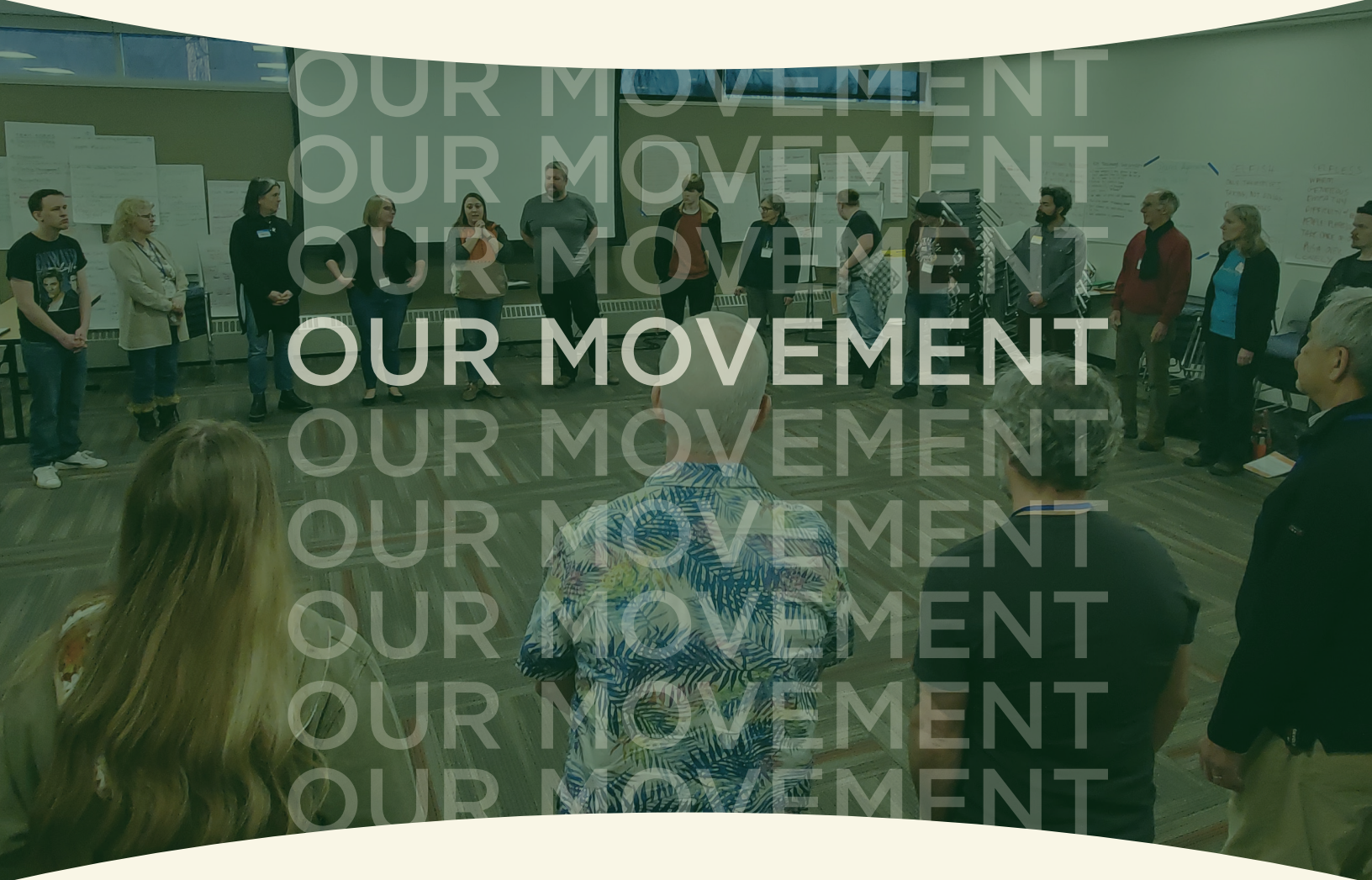
Grace Coggio, Treasurer



Sara Church



Amy Middleton



GROWW's work is powered by people — neighbors, organizers, members, and local leaders who invest their time, skills, and heart to build a powerful Western Wisconsin. Every campaign we run, every ordinance we pass, every training we hold exists because ordinary people choose to act together and fuel our movement through donations.

None of the wins and the power we are building would be possible without each of us investing both our time and our money into GROWW and GROWW Education.

You can support this work by becoming a member, making a donation, and subscribing to our newsletter to stay connected with local stories and opportunities for action. Together, we're building the grassroots power that can protect what we love and shape the Wisconsin we all deserve.

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