



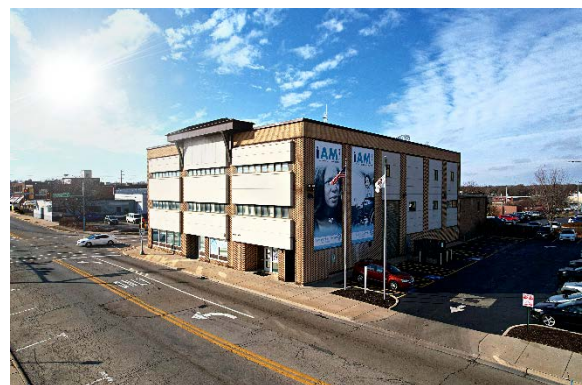
## **Building Coalitions, Trust, and Initiative's with RHA and the Community**

Building coalitions is a crucial step toward achieving common goals. It involves bringing together different groups of people with diverse backgrounds and interests to achieve a shared vision. Creating successful coalitions can be challenging, but it is also rewarding when it leads to effective outcomes.

Being the first female to take on this leadership role for the community since the organization began over 70 years ago comes with its inherent challenges. I overlook any possible biases due to my determination to reach the RHA business goals: take one challenge at a time, deal appropriately with it, and move on! I may encounter more scrutiny than my male counterparts in the housing industry, but being in this leadership role has set the tone and provided a model for other women at RHA today and into the future. Building coalitions at all levels is always important to me. In particular, my top priority is growing existing and new strategic partners that will improve, support, and serve the RHA residents.

One key element of building coalitions is effective communication. It is essential to establish open lines of communication and ensure that everyone has a chance to express their ideas and concerns.

I have accumulated and garnered over the years through my experiences that collaboration is communication.



The word coalition is derived from the Latin '*coalescere*', which means to grow together, to unite into a single body. HUD awarded our agency 2.3 million dollars to help our public housing residents secure employment and higher-paying jobs. By building a coalition, we have collaborated with the Workforce Development Board, The Rockford Workforce Connection, and other vital strategic partners helping our residents overcome several barriers to gainful employment. By listening to each other and responding as a team, staff can better understand each other's perspectives and find common ground.

Another critical aspect of building coalition is building trust. Trust allows us to work together towards a common goal, even when disagreements arise. Establishing clear expectations and goals from the beginning and following through on commitments is essential.

With the manifestation of the coalition, we have developed a locally based, job-driven approach to increase earnings and advance employment outcomes through work readiness, employer linkages, job placement, educational advancement, skills development, and financial literacy for our public housing residents, known as The Jobs Plus Program. We created a multidimensional approach to helping public housing residents work and earn more money. The grant program has established partnerships with key social service agencies within the Rockford community. With over fifty-three strategic community partnerships, we have strengthened program planning and implementation and streamlined access to services for our resident participants. In addition, I feel we play a unique and pivotal role in supporting, developing, and expanding workforce education and employment opportunities through the Lifeforce Development Institute that we had created in-house to help economic resilience for our residents by incentivizing and enabling employment benefitting the entire community and supporting a culture of work.

One of the most significant advantages of our partnerships in the community is the ability to pool resources and expertise. When we all come together, we can combine skills, knowledge and help to achieve something that none could accomplish alone. This can lead to new services and innovations that benefit both partners and residents.

For example, The Rockford Housing Authority had the honor of donating \$10,000 to Fab Fit Dance Academy. While presenting the check, Laura Snyder, RHA CEO, Odessa Walker, RHA COO, Angel Mackey, Executive Assistance, and Jana James, Finance Director, got to take a tour of the studio and hear about some exciting new future additions to Fab Fit Academy. Fabbie Williams, CEO of FAB stated; "We strive to influence our community in multiple ways, & with the RHA Youth Sponsorship donation the academy has started remodeling our 2nd space to provide services to more people in our community!"

In summary, building coalitions is a vital part of achieving common goals. Effective communication, building trust, and willingness are all essential components of successful coalition building. Our team members can work together with these elements to make a positive difference in their communities and beyond. If there is a single lesson to be drawn from my past or recent collaboration experience, there is no single 'right way' to make change happen. I have truly learned from my failures as well as my successes. Instead of following a step-by-step

approach, partners in any given coalition must find the most effective way to knit their local needs, resources, and preferences into a purposeful plan and continually 'work the plan.'