

**A New Angle**  
**MTPR Episode 24**  
**Katie Deuel**

**Justin Angle** This is A New Angle, a show about cool people doing awesome things in and around Montana. I'm your host, Justin Angle. This show is supported by First Security Bank, Blackfoot Communications and the University of Montana College of Business.

Hey folks, welcome back and thanks for tuning in. Today's guest is Katie Deuel, executive director of Home Resource, a nonprofit Community Sustainability Center in Missoula, Montana. Home Resource offers reused building materials, job training, education and zero waste programs.

**Katie Deuel** Home Resource is this beloved institution in our community and people know what it is, and we're really a trusted messenger. And the work that we do every day at home resource is very much about protecting our natural resources and protecting the environment.

**Justin Angle** Katie joined the organization in 2013 and previously worked in outreach for the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. She is a prominent voice for conservation and climate action in Montana, and Home Resource sits at the intersection of many of the issues currently stressing Montanans. Katie, thanks for coming on the show.

**Katie Deuel** Thanks for having me here.

**Justin Angle** So tell us, where did you grow up and what did your parents do?

**Katie Deuel** Well, I grew up mostly in St. Louis. That's where I graduated high school, so I feel like I have the most ties there. Both my parents are physicians, they're MDS. They both did research. And so they were really academics.

**Justin Angle** And so they were research physicians in St. Louis, and it was like growing up in St. Louis?

**Katie Deuel** I always say St. Louis is a great place to grow up. But I did leave. But I mean, we had great neighbors and I had good school and plenty of culture.

**Justin Angle** And yeah, and where did you go to university?

**Katie Deuel** I went to Princeton University.

**Justin Angle** OK, very good. So let's get into it. Give us kind of a, you know, your potted bio. You're with home resource now. But what was your path to kind of getting into this?

**Katie Deuel** Yeah, it's a it's a winding path. Sure. When I graduated from college on the East Coast, I did know I'd spent enough time in the West that I just knew I needed to go west. So the first thing I did was go to work for the National Outdoor Leadership School. Was it based in Lander, Wyoming. And I had done a little bit with them, but I spent maybe five years with them wandering around not just the western United States, southwest, northwest, also Alaska. I went to Kenya with them for a year, and at some point on that journey, really, I was always felt connected to the natural world, but really felt like I needed to give back.

I was using this landscape to work with students and adults and to give them leadership skills, and that that was really a privilege and that we all needed to do something to make sure that we protect those landscapes so other people would have that opportunity in the future. So then I did an internship in Jackson Hole with the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, and then I was the interim public lands director after my internship. Didn't land the job as the actual public lands director and but decided that while I guess I just need to know more. So then I

came to the University of Montana Environmental Studies program, and then I got to learn everything I ever needed to know.

**Justin Angle** Very good. That's what we like to hear.

**Katie Deuel** Yeah, I highly recommend it. And then I always say I got stuck in Missoula. It's easy to get stuck here.

**Justin Angle** Indeed. Yeah.

**Katie Deuel** So I worked for a couple of conservation groups. The first one was the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, and they had a really large landscape vision for protected areas that included core protected habitat buffer zones and then connectivity areas. And I tend to think at a big picture scale, system scale, ecosystems make a lot of sense to me in all their complexity. So that was really a fun, a fun job. I worked for a little bit just a year for Wilderness Watch, which was all about just protecting protected wilderness, which sounds funny. It already has a designation, but it was just making sure that the both the intent and the law were followed and how those records are managed. Yeah.

And then I had an opportunity to work for the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, similar to the Alliance of the Wild Rockies, but a much bigger scale and also really engaging the communities and the people in the process of protecting that. And that really appealed to me to taking it to that broader scale. And I did that for a long time. I really enjoyed it. I worked with a lot of people across the U.S. and Canada, tribes, state, provincial, federal government agencies, other nonprofits. And was both just deeply humbled by the people across these landscapes in these tiny little rural places, what they do, but also frustrated with the disagreements about the means to the end. I still firmly believe that we all had the same, you know, we need to protect the critters, we need to protect the spaces for them, we need to make

sure that these communities are thriving, but just people are sort of at each other at times in order to how we were going to do that.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, a lot of complex relationships between groups and sort of deep seated dimensions to those. Things that I assume.

**Katie Deuel** Yeah, and I think people were really starting to talk about climate change at that point. Before that, you hadn't heard as much about it. Clearly protecting landscapes at that scale is a really important climate piece.

**Justin Angle** Sure. And we'll we'll kind of circle back to climate, I'm sure, in this conversation. But now you're at Home Resource. And folks might not think of home resources directly tied to the climate, but I'm sure you'll try to counter that assumption. You've been there since 2013. What prompted you to move into that organization?

**Katie Deuel** So started working on contracts with Y to Y (Yellowstone to Yukon) and doing a couple of other little things and then decided to go back to school. So I got another master's here at the University of Montana and social work, and that was really about how people work together and how they communicate. And this program has a real social justice bent. Yeah, and that was a really important piece to me. Also to fit in. During that time, I did a contract on climate change. I In a contract on getting kids outside in nature and using all their senses, which is interesting because it was also before phones really blew up. But that remains the antidote for one of them to too much screen time. I worked for families first doing family mediation, and I did a lot of mediation, which I had done large landscape multi-party mediations and I was working in family systems, same same principles. And then when the job came open with home resource had to sort of look at it, but recognized from a conservation point of view, Home Resource, this beloved institution in our community and people know what it is, and we're really a trusted messenger. And the work that we do every day at home resource is very much about protecting our natural resources and protecting the environment.

**Justin Angle** Yeah. So let's just pause there for a moment. For listeners not familiar with the organization. And what is home resource and what is it? You do so many different things.

**Katie Deuel** We do.

**Justin Angle** Maybe, kind of, give us the basic buckets.

**Katie Deuel** So we are a community sustainability center are visible and largest piece of our budget, shall we say, is our building materials where you store in which we collect materials from the community. Everything we sell has been donated to us from the community and sell it back at affordable prices. Sometimes we fix things up. Sometimes people use something creative reuse for something that you never thought it could be used for. And it's also really does have this nice community feel. People come in, they get good customer service. We're always a little gritty and funky, and we try to have fun. And so that's the basis, or I always think of that as the foundation of our work. We move about two and a half tonnes of material a day. We keep about 900 tons of material a landfill every year. Yeah. And part of that is it's like a giant mandala. It is created and destroyed and recreated every day. And just this realization that we need to work at a systems level if we're not going to keep doing that beautiful mandala every day into eternity until we run out of natural resources to make those materials. So we started a zero waste program set of programs. So the goal there, we worked with the city, we set a zero waste resolution that states that we will reduce our waste 90 percent as a community by 2050. That's a very realistic goal.

**Justin Angle** And that's defined by the city as as the, we say, community as being the city of Missoula?

**Katie Deuel** Yes, the city of Missoula. So we helped write the resolution and then it was passed by City Council.

**Justin Angle** And what does it mean to have zero waste? How do we even account for that?

**Katie Deuel** We sometimes say zero waste or darn near and because we can't actually get to zero waste, but we can get pretty close. And what zero waste is really about is creating a circular economy. So right now we have this linear economy where we take materials from the natural world and extract them and manufacture them and transport them. And then we use them often for a short period of time and then we throw them out.

**Justin Angle** Discard.

**Katie Deuel** Straight line. And in a circular economy, you make those materials and then they're used, and then they're repaired or reused or changed a little bit, but continue to stay in the economy. That reduces very significantly our drain on our natural resources. And it builds, when we have a circular economy that allows, a whole bunch more green jobs. So it builds a very strong, local and sustainable economy because we're not constantly demanding things that then we throw out.

**Justin Angle** Sure. So can we maybe work through like a case study of how this would work? I mean, I sort of think of like, you know, we did a small project in our home and did a demo and brought a bunch of stuff over and then used a bunch of new stuff. But yeah, tell us kind of what the typical pathway is for some of these circular arrangements.

**Katie Deuel** I don't know how typical it is, but if we take your small project at home, for example, let's say the House build materials that your house is built with probably were extracted from the local I don't know how old your house is, but if it's old enough, all the wood that's in your house was taken from the hills around Missoula at some point.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, chopped down at some point.

**Katie Deuel** Yep. They were milled here and then they went in to build your house. And then if you take it apart by hand, if you deconstruct instead of demolish, and then you can take those materials to home resource, or you could keep them right there on site. And as you rebuild, then you use those materials again. So some of them stay right there. Others go to Home Resource. Maybe you pull out some cabinets, some windows, some lumber. We take all of that. The lumber goes back into someone building something. The cabinets go from maybe your kitchen to someone's garage because they're not maybe as high quality, but they're still very useful. And then the windows get turned into a greenhouse. And then after a while, people aren't gardening anymore, but they have chickens. So then they turn it into a chicken coop and so it keeps going and just stays right here.

**Justin Angle** And this probably occurs at some scale as well, like big project, like renovating the Merc, for example. I'm sure you're involved in those sort of larger scale projects. And how do you kind of get into the mix as an organization working your way into these arrangements?

**Katie Deuel** I mean, the Merc we had a deconstruction service in in house at that time, so we had put in a bid and were accepted as the bid.

**Justin Angle** So, at the time, you would send a team in to do the deconstruction? OK.

**Katie Deuel** Yep. And we actually worked with another local deconstruction contractor as well. There was a massive amount of material in there. I don't know how much. And all of it, well, it was old growth, big beams, definitely from our local community. So it's really neat to see where a lot of those materials went. Yeah, a lot came to home resource. A bunch of it was reused right there in the Merc. We sent some to Hellgate High School for their remodel. Some went to the Moon Randolph homestead to be used more decorative lead, but their period pieces. So it really did get somewhat turned into incredible furniture, from being structural wood to being fine woodworking.

And then at a larger scale, we do always think about sort of systems. What I have been talking about is re-use. I realize that's the highest and best use. Those materials just keep getting used. It's still part of a circular economy to recycle some things, which really means your remanufacturing them or to compost, which is another way of remanufacturing food. It goes back into being soil and then eventually being food as well. But a larger scale. I think the systems of that we need. You know, we want to construct buildings that we can deconstruct. And we also want to construct buildings that are maybe simple enough in their design that they could be used for something else at the end of their life. It's actually remarkable talking to people like, I think buildings turn over every 25 or 30 years, which sounds long to me. But in the big picture, you know, those buildings are built to last much longer than that. And then we can retrofit them with energy efficiency or other pieces that they need. But if they're built in a way that they're a little more modular or a little more flexible, that makes those systems move to.

Another example to me of a system is we passed a bond, we redid our schools, which was really important and needed. At that moment in time, we missed the opportunity to put kitchens into those schools with durable wear. So right now we feed all our kids on disposable wear. So the food is cooked in a central kitchen. But if all the dishes can be reused every day, that's a system level that would make a huge difference. And we'd be using more water but the water also does circulate back in.

**Justin Angle** Sure. And so those sorts of things all roll up into this kind of zero waste ethic.

**Katie Deuel** Yeah. Another I'll just throw a little thing about zero waste, and that is apparently zero waste these days has a bit of a reputation as being something you have to you have to buy the right materials to be able to do zero waste. People have this impression like you have to buy, you know, a fancy klean kanteen, water bottle, or there's a whole market that's grown up around zero waste items. But just a reminder that zero waste is accessible to everyone and

that we all have materials that are in our life all day, every day that we can reuse. And it doesn't have to cost money. It can actually save a lot of money.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, I would suppose that's, you know, typical of most sort of concepts and sustainability. There's people trying to brand them and monetize them in various ways, and those shouldn't be seen as barriers to entry. That's maybe a great opportunity to transition to, you know, you mentioned social justice is a passion area for you, but it's also deeply embedded within the ethic of Home Resource in your organization. Talk about that concept because I'd love to then sort of bridge into some of the housing issues that there are community and other places in the state are facing. But yeah, what is? But how does justice fit into the mission?

**Katie Deuel** So I guess the other piece that I really saw when I came to Home Resource, in addition to taking our work to a systems level with the waste. We believe that we're there to realize the potential of people, community and materials. So it's all of those things. And if we're realizing the potential of materials, we don't want anyone to sort of fall off this cliff edge person or materials and this sort of linear way and just disappear and that our community means everybody. And that when we're including everybody and finding their sort of highest and best uses, that's the way that we're all going to thrive together going forward.

And at Home Resource because we do have such a big operation and it is gritty, we we also have a lot of work. We sort of have in this work that can be done. So another piece that we started was our work programs, where we hire people experiencing barriers to employment from youth to elders, people with developmental disabilities, people of all ages, all across almost all the spectrums that you can think of and give them a work experience with mentoring and dignity. And we just believe everyone is part of building this strong community. And we do, as parts of politics have gotten more divisive, we still really work across all those boundaries. You know, everyone can come into our store. Everyone is part of creating the solution and the future that we want to see.

**Justin Angle** We'll be back to my conversation with Katie Deuel after this short break.

Welcome back to A New Angle. I'm speaking with Katie Deuel, executive director of Missoula's Home Resource, about her commitment to a more sustainable Montana.

I'm sure some of the housing issues that we're having in western Montana are having interesting effects in your organization, whether it's simply demand for materials or high turnover. Why don't you just take over describe like, how is this kind of housing boom building boom growth? All these things happening in western Montana? How is it kind of coming to life at Home Resource?

**Katie Deuel** Yeah, it's been really interesting because I think it's landed in ways that we didn't expect. When COVID first hit and never was we were sheltering in place and everyone was stuck at home, people were doing a lot of DIY projects. They were doing a lot of gardening, all sorts of things. We were less available, but as soon as we reopened, we were incredibly busy. And I think there was a lot of turnover. But then as this, the demand for housing and so many people are buying houses and remodeling them are just taking them down completely. So we were expecting to see more materials. And in fact, I think we've seen less because people are, one, I think they're just so busy. And timelines are so tight. And this tail in the supply chain issues, so the tail end of that material's inability to get materials means people are some keeping materials more, which is a hundred percent in our mission. And we're just delighted if people are keeping things onsite and reusing them. That's the goal all the way. But I also think people are probably moving pretty fast and they get things and they're more likely to just throw it out instead of taking the time to maybe remove it slowly and carefully and bring it to Home Resource. Or they're just selling it on Craigslist or somewhere else, which is also understandable. But we are trying to get the word out that, you know, when you make a donation to home resource of materials, it not only keeps out of a landfill, but it keeps our whole operation moving forward and it makes those materials available for others at affordable prices.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, and we should probably note that those donations can be tax deductible.

**Katie Deuel** Absolutely, yep.

**Justin Angle** So we're doing a large-scale project. Yeah. You know, it can be can have a significant effect.

**Katie Deuel** Yeah. And we'll keep track of them if you let us know when you start, we'll keep track of all those materials. So you have a nice, neat package to take to your tax advisor.

**Justin Angle** Yeah. And then on the back end, I'm sure there's a range of sorts of folks that come to home resource for materials. From folks that are building like a super fancy house and want some sort of funky, reclaimed period piece or somebody who, you know, maybe their budget is tighter and they just need to figure out a way to get the materials we need to make this happen.

**Katie Deuel** Yep.

**Justin Angle** And how do you kind of navigate those waters and create a pricing policy that is accessible to the folks?

**Katie Deuel** Yeah. Generally, our policy is that everything we sell is 50 to 90 percent off of what new would be, depending on the condition that it's in. And then other than that, we just we love the diversity of people who come into our store and everyone gets the same treatment. They get the same advice, they get the same price. So it's really fun. It's really fun to be engaged in the community and all those different ways. But we did. When we were closed for COVID, for example, we heard from a lot of people who wanted us to open. One person said Home resource in my therapy, I just need to come walk the walk the store. But someone

else said, you know, my manufactured home, the plumbing broke and I can't afford to get it fixed. I just need to come in and get materials from you. So those are the things that really compelled us to say we have got to open again and just be available for people.

**Justin Angle** Were you close during at the peak of the pandemic?

**Katie Deuel** Six weeks. That's our busiest time of year that spring. So it was it was big hit.

**Justin Angle** So let's talk about climate, and we sort of touched on it in a variety of dimensions. But aside from or inclusive in creating these closed loop systems and zero waste, you know, how do you all think about climate and what are some particular passion areas for you? I know you do a ton of collaboration with with Climate Smart Missoula and other organizations.

**Katie Deuel** When I think of what were the things that we need to do for climate to make a genuine transition to a thriving economy and community, and I believe that is possible. We are, you know, we're far enough along that there are going to be a lot of bumps. I'm already feeling them. Summer Smoke and all of those things. Clearly, all this is urgent. At the same time, I tend to break it down. You know, we need to address our energy use. We need to address transportation, which is partly an energy issue. And then we need to address consumption. And when we pull all three of those things in together and we can create a closed loop systems for all of those pieces. But we're really focused on that materials piece of it.

But we're also focused, I think, uniquely on unless we have a just transition that that the transition will fail. But home resources in a unique position to provide, one, really small but tangible and meaningful and valuable important things that people can do every day to help us move in that direction and also to include all people in that. So all people have access, they have things that they can do. They feel like they're part of the solution. And we're building community as we go. We're building our diversity, our sense of ever and being engaged together in this project. So it's a it's a pretty neat place to be on that climate scale and just

working hard with institutions and individuals, and, like I said, kids and elders to help make this transition as quickly as we can.

**Justin Angle** And you seem hopeful.

**Katie Deuel** I think I think it's going to be really bumpy, but I think we are still in a place where we have a choice about how we make this transition. And if it's going to be relatively smooth and we all work together and or whether it's going to be really divisive and ugly. And as long as we're holding power and resources in small, concentrated spots, we can't make this transition successfully. We all need to pool our resources and give what we have to make it work.

**Justin Angle** So as a leader in this community on several of these issues, all of these issues. How are you sort of what other leaders or organizations or sources are you drawing inspiration and education from or how are you learning and expanding your space?

**Katie Deuel** It's pretty big. I did little bits of input from all over. I would say a really important source of inspiration for me is everyone I meet who's putting their shoulder to the wheel in any way that especially if it's just sort of genuinely who they are and they're acknowledging like, this is what I have to give. We say like to say at Home Resource, like we give what we have and we ask for what we need. And I think that's in general in that philosophy is how we're going to get this done. And so when I see anyone from, you know, high school student who's carrying the compost to the roof so that it can be composted to someone who just someone with a lot of resources who bought a Tesla and is going all electric with their current put solar panels on their house, you know, like there are options available to all of us. And as long as we're all doing what we can with the resources that we have, I find that very inspirational.

And then I also find it inspirational. We have just all the ways that we're reaching out across borders. I think the and borders, I mean, racial borders, the sort of internal created borders that

we have in our society that don't need to be there and we really need to break them down. So when I see people doing that and just pushing themselves and acknowledging that we don't know everything and we really need to keep learning from people. But we've had a big one source of inspiration. It is our youth. They push all the time and sometimes you're like, stop. But they have so many good ideas and they're taking us in the right direction and they do have energy. And I think that the more we can empower and engage them and trust them to lead into the future, that's really theirs.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, I mean, I think that's that's well put in the sense that like, if these problems don't get addressed, it's our our younger folks that are going to be bearing the disproportionately the kind, the unfair burden and cost. Yeah, that that our generation and generations prior to us created.

**Katie Deuel** Yeah, we work with a lot of high school students in various ways, and I've heard many of them say that they just they don't they don't believe in the future. They don't. So they're in a tough place. School is hard with COVID and they see their world falling apart and they're not sure what to do. And that's why I think if we can focus on really empowering them, it's it's going to help us a lot.

**Justin Angle** Yeah, there's so many dimensions to that despair.

**Katie Deuel** Yeah, yeah there are.

**Justin Angle** Economy that affordability of housing jobs. What I love about your organization is, you know, not only are doing things to address some of those problems, but also giving easily accessible pathways for people to get involved. You know, a high school kid can just pitch in and work down at home resource and just sort of understand, OK, there is a way I can, as you said, put your shoulder to the wheel and get involved and help be a part of the solution.

**Katie Deuel** Yeah. And I think the way we look at the future to those, you know, there is a way to move to a place where we have a strong local economy where we have less stuff, but we have more connection. Or there are just things like that in which I think we can have a really meaningful future. It's really hard to envision, especially from the place that we've come from and that whole path that you just described. But I see that it's out there. I don't know what it looks like. I guess if I have hope, that's where my hope lies and when I don't have hope, then I just we need to just keep going, keep connecting with people, right? Because we still have work to do.

**Justin Angle** So you can't you strike me as a person, you grew up in a pie achieving super well-educated family, a great education yourself. Access to great resources in many ways, and worked for so many different organizations. You've decided to commit your life's work to addressing these large societal problems. How would you kind of for a younger person listening who's investing in themselves and their education? What would you say to as advice?

**Katie Deuel** I think following your passion and trusting yourself in that there are so many skills that are needed. There's so many styles of learning. There are so many ways that people can contribute. And if you're trying to put yourself, a square peg in a round hole, you know, if I just tried to be an academic and just write out all night, you know, I don't think I would be able to provide the sort of passion or impact that I have. So I think people who can know themselves and are willing to really stay open and connect with a lot of people and then just like use the skills of everybody has really important skills and characteristics and we need them all. Every single one. And I think if young people can trust themselves and trust the future just enough to not give up and just keep moving into the spaces that feel empowered to them, that's how we're going to make a difference.

**Justin Angle** Well, well-put, Katie. So if people want to learn more about Home Resource, check out the store, get involved, pitch in?

**Katie Deuel** Website —[homerresource.org](http://homerresource.org).

**Justin Angle** Home Resource dot org. Yeah, OK. Yeah. Katie Deuel, thanks so much for joining us. Thanks for your work.

**Katie Deuel** Thank you.

**Justin Angle** Thanks for listening to A New Angle. We really appreciate it. And we're coming to you from Studio 49, a generous gift from University of Montana alums Michelle and Loren Hansen. A Wew Angle is presented by First Security Bank, Blackfoot Communications and the University of Montana College of Business, with additional support from Consolidated Electrical Distributors, Drum Coffee and Montana Public Radio.

Aj Williams is our producer. VTO, Jeff Amentt and John Wicks made our music. Editing by Nick Mott, and Jeff Meese is our master of all things sound. Thanks a lot. We'll see you next time.