

Program Summary July 1, 2008-June 30, 2009
Kent State University Salem Workforce Development and Continuing Studies
Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World
Funded through a TANF Grant
from the Columbiana County Department of Job and Family Services

PROGRAM SUMMARY

"Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World" is a community outreach program designed to provide a group experience for those who are living at or near the poverty level -- a program designed to help individuals build resources and create a plan for making a stable and secure life for themselves and their families.

The goal, according to Phil Devol, author of the workbook for the Getting Ahead workshop and a "Bridges Out of Poverty" author and national trainer, is to help "people on the lower rungs of the economic ladder build their own path to a good-paying job, stable housing, and saving for a rainy day and old age".

The Workforce Development and Continuing Studies Department of Kent State University's Salem campus was funded to provide services for the Getting Ahead program through a TANF grant from the Columbiana County Department of Job and Family Services.

The WFD&CS Department of Kent State University Salem organized and delivered four (4), 30-hour, open-enrollment, facilitated groups between August 2008 and May 2009 for TANF-eligible individuals residing in Columbiana County. Because remaining grant funds were available at the end of the four (4) original sessions, an amendment was submitted and approved to offer one (1) additional, 30-hour, Getting Ahead Program. Fourteen individuals graduated from this final program. Due to time constraints, no Resource Network was provided and follow up statistics were not gathered.

A monetary incentive of \$8.50 an hour was paid to each participant based on attendance of at least 75% of the 30-hour course. Fifty-seven (57) participants out of a total of sixty-two (62) registrants successfully completed the program and made a plan to build resources; a 92% completion success rate. The benchmark was established at 90%. The additional program brought the total of Getting Ahead graduates to 71 in 2008-2009. This is the same number of graduates as recorded in the previous year's project, when a total of six (6) programs were provided.

In the four original programs, the gender breakdown was 88% female and 12% male. Program participant's average age was 33.4 years. And the groups' ethnic composition was 96% Caucasian, 2% Black and 2% Asian. Average attendance per session was 14.

These sessions equipped participants with the tools to move from poverty to middle class by becoming familiar with the "hidden rules" of economic class and by learning how to build resources -- not only financial resources, but 10 additional resources that affect quality of life and can help put an end to the cycle of poverty.

Participants explored the impact poverty has had on them, investigated economic realities, completed self-assessment of personal resources, made plans to build resources, and developed mental models of personal and community prosperity.

As Getting Ahead participants successfully completed the program, they were given the option to continue on their transition to positive outcomes by volunteering to attend a weekly, "Resource Network" led by a trained Getting Ahead facilitator.

During each 6-week, Resource Network, participants joined in round-table discussions and speaker presentations designed to develop employability skills as well as learning about the opportunities and funding available to further their formal education. Presentations also focused on community resources,

available programs, and initiatives designed to help build knowledge and resources and to foster personal growth.

Topics and speakers were selected based on information gleaned from self-assessment surveys completed by participants in the Getting Ahead programs. Community-based speakers who made presentations throughout the course of the Resource Networking programs included representatives from Columbiana County One-Stop, The Counseling Center of Columbiana County, Ohio Valley Career and Technical Center, Community Legal Services, Consumer Credit Counseling of Columbiana County, Small Business Development Center of Kent State Tuscarawas, Family Recovery Center, Columbiana County PRC Program, Columbiana County Child Support Enforcement Agency and Kent State University East Liverpool and Salem.

Kent State University believes that feedback from program participants is one very important method to determine if the program has been successful or if there are specific things that need improved. At the end of each Getting Ahead class, graduates completed a program evaluation and presented their comment sheets to the Workforce Director to be reviewed. The results were compiled and listed below.

***GETTING AHEAD PROGRAM
PARTICIPANT EVALUATION REPORT***

6/19/2009

For evaluation purposes (4 = Strongly agree; 3 = Agree; 2 = Strongly Disagree; 1 = Not applicable)

Course Information:

Course met my expectations.	3.80
Training accomplished objectives.	3.74
I would recommend to others:	3.92

Facilitator Information:

Facilitator communicated material well.	3.90
Facilitator demonstrated knowledge of topic.	3.90
Facilitator's teaching methods were effective.	3.96

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

At the beginning of the Getting Ahead program, participants are asked to complete a registration form. As well as listing demographic and contact information, participants are asked to identify if they are pursuing education or training. If they answered yes, they are asked about their specific program choice. If they answered no, they are asked if they are interested in pursuing further education and specific interest areas.

Getting Ahead graduates are followed up at approximately six weeks to two months after the completion of the 30-hour program. At the follow up we ask if they had set specific educational goals and/or had enrolled in a specific training program.

Also during registration, the following questions are asked with an option to explain in more detail.

1. Do you have transportation problems?
2. Do you have credit issues?
3. Do you have stable housing?
4. Do you have court or legal issues?
5. Are you participating in counseling?

At follow up Graduates who identified having problems are asked if they had made progress in the 5 identified areas listed in the questions above. They answer the question, "have you made progress" with a yes or no response requested.

Of the 57 original, Getting Ahead program completers who were contacted, 30 responded to the above questions, a 53% response rate. The attached pie charts show the percentage improvement from the beginning of the program until the follow up contact for the 5 questions above as well as educational status.

** See Pie Chart Attachment*

During the final meeting of each Getting Ahead program, participants use a check list to decide which two to three (3) resources they considered most urgent and had placed them in a vulnerable position. When asked to identify their lowest resources, Getting Ahead graduates most often identified financial, emotional and physical as lowest.

During the follow up, graduates were asked to rate their progress in their low resources. Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being no progress and 5 being a great deal of improvement, the participants noted more than a little progress in physical (2.88) and financial resources (2.85), with more than some progress noted in the emotional resource area (3.88). For the 9 Getting Ahead participants that rated emotional resources as low at the end of the program, this resource showed the largest improvement at follow up, next to Integrity and Trust. Emotional resources are described in Getting Ahead as "being good at choosing and controlling emotional responses and engaging in positive behaviors towards self and others".

**See Resource Info Summary Graph*

Although employment and education are two goals graduates are encouraged to achieve, it is not unusual for these more ambitious goals not to be fully realized at the time of the post program follow up.

Getting and maintaining a job requires ongoing support and multiple steps and resources that many of our Getting Ahead graduates are just beginning to develop. Having provided a framework and the encouragement to begin to work toward greater self sufficiency, smaller steps are likely to be witnessed, as indicated in the five questions and associated pie charts above.

Of the 30 respondents, 22 unemployed at beginning of the program, 6 were employed part time and 2 were employed full time. At the follow up, 16 were unemployed and 12 were employed part time and 2 were employed full time.

Getting Ahead graduates had these comments at the follow up

"Getting Ahead gave me the communication skills and confidence to obtain a job. It gave me the realization that there are others out there like me and I am not alone. Also, there are ways to get through it. I'm paying the bills now".

“A very helpful workshop, especially learning about the Hidden Rules of Class. There were also so many other things I didn’t know about that I got to learn. I learned, too, that I have more resources than I thought I did.”

“Getting Ahead was instrumental in getting me through the educational process. It gave me the knowledge to get into training and consider more education”.

“Getting Ahead has encouraged me to go on to a Bachelor’s Degree after receiving my Associates. The workshop was very educational and enlightening. The facilitator’s did a very good job”.

“It absolutely helped me to obtain a full-time job by giving me so much motivation and confidence. This workshop was very open and uplifting and gave me a lot of guidance”.

As this summary report illustrates, the program has been effective in presenting the knowledge, tools and motivation for people in poverty to take the first steps toward building resources for a better life. A completion rate of 92% indicates engagement in the program offerings. Most graduates express that they come to the program to get the incentive payments, but stay for the knowledge, tools and support for moving forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to train 142 Columbiana County residents in Getting Ahead program concepts over the past 2 years, through the use of TANF funds. We have been able to acquire local expertise and develop best practices, as a sustainable outcome from facilitating these groups. Your confidence in this program’s impact on our county and Kent State’s commitment to this offering, has allowed us to gather good, though obviously, short-term, outcome data.

Graduates need ongoing support to achieve the longer term goals they set, especially for education and employment. Kent State will continue to look for opportunities to spread the Bridges and Getting Ahead concepts to other areas and other audiences.

Thank you,

Report prepared by Diane Kloss, Director
Kent State University Salem and East Liverpool
Workforce Development and Continuing Studies
June 2009