

BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY

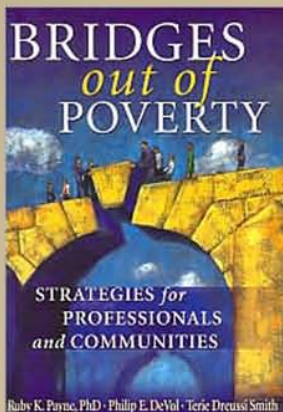
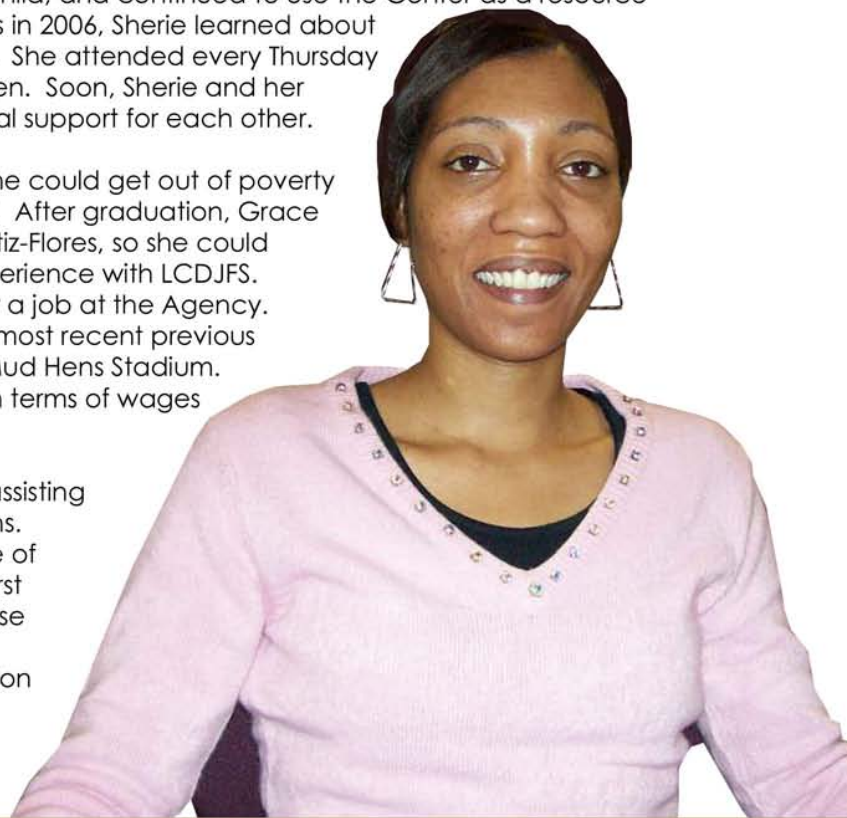
Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World is a program for adults in poverty that shows them how to use the hidden rules of class to build up financial, emotional, social, and other resources. Understanding the hidden rules of the middle class and wealth, and choosing to use them, can open doors to such resources as new relationships and new jobs.

Working in a group with a facilitator, adults who use this curriculum develop a series of mental models to examine their own lives and create new future stories. In 15-20 sessions the participants explore the impact that poverty has had on them, investigate economic realities, and complete a self-assessment. Getting Ahead does not provide answers to the participants on how to establish economic stability; motivation, insight, and plans come from the participants themselves.

Sherie Butts was familiar with the Grace Community Center, located at 406 West Delaware in Toledo. She received tutoring at Grace when she was a child, and continued to use the Center as a resource for her own children. While attending GED classes in 2006, Sherie learned about Getting Ahead and enrolled in a 15 week course. She attended every Thursday from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. with seven other women. Soon, Sherie and her classmates became friends who provided essential support for each other.

The curriculum gave her the self-assurance that she could get out of poverty and the confidence to stay focused on that goal. After graduation, Grace Community Center set up a meeting with Deb Ortiz-Flores, so she could listen to feedback from the group about their experience with LCDJFS. After the meeting, Sherie was inspired to apply for a job at the Agency. She interviewed and was hired in June 2007. Her most recent previous employment had been as a seasonal worker at Mud Hens Stadium. Her new position was a significant improvement in terms of wages and benefits.

Sherie's first job at LCDJFS was at the Front Desk, assisting clients with appointments and answering questions. "I know what that feels like to be on the other side of that desk," she said, "Front Desk workers are the first people clients see before they meet with their Case Worker. I try to be patient and understanding." Since her first assignment, Sherie bid into the position of Casework Aide in the Training Unit. A smiling success story, she says "I look forward to coming to work everyday."



People in poverty face challenges virtually unknown to those in the middle class. The reality of being poor brings out a survival mentality, and turns attention from opportunities taken for granted by everyone else. Commissioner Peter Gerken has been the driving force in support of nearly \$1 million of LCDJFS funding for Bridges Out of Poverty and Getting Ahead, a national educational program that contains concepts and strategies for understanding and improving services for people who live in generational poverty. "By implementing this program, we've given our front-line staff the knowledge and the empathy to work with people in poverty effectively," stated Commissioner Gerken. He also pointed out that "over 1,600 social, health and legal services professionals from 140 organizations in Lucas County have taken the Bridges Out of Poverty training."