

Initially, the Getting Ahead class interested me for many reasons. I was completing drug abuse treatment and thought this would be a positive transition. The facilitator of the class, Chris Parsons, said a few phrases in her presentation to drug court that really sparked my interest. “Nothing changes if nothing changes” was one such phrase. It was so simple yet roused so much thought. I figured that there was nothing to lose if I took this opportunity, and by the sound of it, a lot to gain. After graduating from Getting Ahead, I realized that I did gain knowledge, some friendships, and a very valuable resource. I enjoyed the experience so much that I decided to do a second round of classes. Knowing that the course was fairly new, I was curious to see how it would evolve from one round to the next. Also, I wanted to learn more. There was so much useful information the first time, I was bound to have missed something. Another reason for my return was the group dynamic. Getting Ahead was full of people from different walks of life. I enjoyed seeing how other people viewed life in our community, as well as discussing all of our misconceptions and solutions for them. While not instantaneous, Getting Ahead has caused me to change the way that I think about my future. For this reason, after my second graduation, I am considering co-facilitating the class. It would be a good opportunity for me to give back some of what I’ve learned.

Getting Ahead has touched upon so many topics. Nothing was safe from our discussions. It started with the definition of poverty, and the realities of it. It really opened my eyes to see how common poverty is. I am fortunate to not fit the description of poverty today, but I have lived through it. To some degree I have fit into most of the economic statuses at one point. Because of that, this class was a good fit for me. I knew some things that I didn’t even know I was aware of. One discussion that made a large impact on myself and others was our exploration of integrity. The idea of doing the right thing while nobody is looking is a profound one, and I find myself asking in my head if this is the right thing to do. The most important lesson that we had to learn was about resources that we could gain. Through my own self-discovery, I was much richer in resources than I knew. I just was not taking advantage of them. Knowing where I am strong and where I am weak has helped me to prioritize my long- and short-term goals. For me, the most important lesson learned has been the new way I think about my goals. I have learned not to set my sights too far into the future because I become overwhelmed. I have also learned how to break things down into more manageable steps. This has and will always help me to get the things I need to do done, and hopefully get ahead.

My future story changes every day. Part of what I learned in Getting Ahead is that I’m always going to have to adapt my plans. One major goal I have for myself is to become mobile. I am going to get my driver’s license and eventually a vehicle. Though a major one in itself, many other future goals are on hold until I work that out. Graduating from drug court is another top priority. It is similar to acquiring my license in that I would need to accomplish this before moving on to other goals. It has already become clear to me that having an education will be vital for me to do more than get by. With three semesters completed, I’m very close to a degree. This degree would open doors for me down the road. The three aforementioned goals are to be accomplished in the next year. I also have some long-term goals set out for the future to work toward. A steady career, home, and family are the ultimate goals, the American Dream.

In order to reach all of these goals, I have to continually need to build up resources. I have learned that they are always available to me; we all just need to learn how to recognize and

utilize them. One such resource lies in the city mission. I never would have thought to visit for resume help. Maintaining my recovery is also instrumental in staying on course with everything I'd like to do. My sober mind is much more focused and determined than my impaired mind. Getting Ahead has also taught me the importance of bridging capital. It really is all about who you know. By participating in community functions and going to meetings, I can network myself. The most important lesson that this class has taught me is proper goal setting. I have learned how to expand an idea into steps and set timeframes for these steps. The importance of prioritizing has been made blatantly obvious to me, which was something that I used to struggle with. Getting Ahead really teaches tools for life, lessons that aren't taught in any school classroom, but should be.

The idea of Getting Ahead is great. In order to improve [Schenectady's](#) program, we need to raise the community's awareness. My second round through the course really suffered because of the lack of participants. Without a diverse group of people, the flow of ideas becomes restricted. I think the course would also benefit from a more structured course outline. Some things from my first round didn't make it into the second, and vice versa. Not to say there wasn't structure, I just think we need to decide what is most important and how much time to spend on the important issues. Overall, Getting Ahead is a course that needs to reach more of our community. No matter where someone comes from, where they're at or where they're going, the ideas expressed in this class could benefit everyone.