



FACT

Family Action Teams

THE MOVEMENT

Erie Together is a movement of hundreds of local individuals and organizations working together in very strategic ways to make the Erie region a community of opportunity where everyone can learn, work and thrive.

The initiative was launched in 2009 through a partnership of the Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC), Mercyhurst University, and United Way of Erie County. These three organizations came together in response to in-depth local research regarding the prevalence and impact of poverty in our community. Erie Together's role is to help better align local resources to prevent and reduce poverty, elevate prosperity, and ultimately help strengthen local families and our local economy.

POVERTY

People who are living in poverty have many challenging decisions to make on a daily basis that effect their very existence. Perhaps they need to decide how to feed their children at the end of the month when they are out of money and food stamps. Perhaps the car will not start and they need to get to work so they can hold on to their job. Or, their childcare arrangements have broken down threatening their livelihood. These types of decisions and many more are very real for persons in poverty.

This situation is called the "tyranny of the moment". This keeps many people from planning for their future because they cannot control today let alone tomorrow.



FAMILY ACTION TEAMS

Erie Together is attacking poverty through various initiatives that are focused on the elimination of poverty in the Erie area. One of these programs is the Family Action Teams (**FACT**).

The **FACT** program helps low income families move from dependency to self-sufficiency through education, self-assessment and a mentoring experience.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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THE MODEL

1. Understanding Poverty

The FACT program uses a curriculum called *Getting Ahead in a Just Getting by World*. It allows people to step back from the very concrete world in which they live and begin to enter the abstract world where they plan for their future. This is called developing a Future Story. Without a plan for the future, people in poverty will continue to live the same crisis-filled lives without change.

The curriculum is delivered over a 10 week period by a **trained facilitator**. During this time the participants will investigate poverty, its causes, and look at how society sees poverty. We call the **participating families** “**investigators**” because they are learning about the very situation in which they are living.

2. Developing Plans for the Future/Self-Assessment

Once the investigators have an understanding of poverty and its causes, they are asked to do an honest self assessment of their own situation. The curriculum provides a guided format for the self assessment asking the investigators to look at numerous domains such as education, employment and housing. From the assessments, the investigators are asked to develop real plans for their future. They are for the first time—developing a Future Story for themselves and their families.

Just having a Future Story is a very real accomplishment but it is not enough to change a family’s life. For this to happen, more help is needed. When the families have completed the curriculum, they are matched with Community Partners.

3. Providing Support for Getting Ahead Graduates

Community Partners are people who are living in the middle class who are asked to make an intentional friendship with one of the investigator families. They provide the bridging capital that will help the family reach their goals. We are not asking for financial support from the Community Partners but rather their understanding of how the world works; unconditional support for the families and guidance on how to reach their goals. Once a goal is met, the family and the Community Partner begin to build a new set of goals.

Families and Community Partners are asked to talk at least once a week either by phone or in person. Additionally, they are asked to come together once a month for a dinner meeting known as a “Big View” meeting. At the Big View meeting, each Family Action Team shares what they have collectively accomplished during the preceding month. Other Family Action Teams can offer support and advice to the team that is presenting. Community Partners have a time to meet on their own as do the families. Big View meetings continue for 18 months after the families complete the Getting Ahead curriculum.

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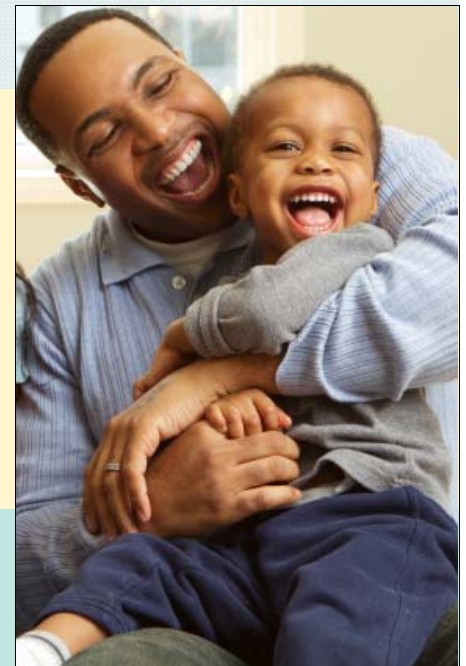
Sponsoring Agencies

The FACT program can be offered by churches, social service organizations, educational institutions, prisons and businesses—any group with an interest in helping clients, employees or community members move from poverty to self-sufficiency.

When you offer FACT to people in poverty, you make a promise that the sponsor and community will provide long-term support while graduates transition out of poverty.

People participate in FACTS for a variety of reasons. Most want to find solutions for their problems. They are looking for a better way—a way to start over. As a sponsoring agency, you can move them to that **aha moment** and help them change their lives!

1. **Sponsoring Agency** will identify one FACT Facilitator or two Co-Facilitators who would serve as the main contact and work to facilitate and sustain the program at their organization. FACT Facilitators will:
 - A. Attend training for *Getting Ahead*
 - B. Be responsible for keeping group attendance records
 - C. Assure the delivery of the *Getting Ahead* Program
 - D. Oversee the sustainability of the program thereafter
 - E. Gather quality documentation of outcomes
2. **Sponsoring Agency** will provide: *(Some financial assistance is available if needed.)*
 - A. Meals and printed materials
 - B. The meeting facility
 - C. Stipends to family participants
 - D. Recruitment of families and Community Partners
 - E. *Getting Ahead* books for 15 families
3. **Erie Together/GECAC** will provide:
 - A. Technical assistance and training
 - B. A jump drive containing curriculum
 - C. Mini-grant funding
 - D. Curriculum updates



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FACTS PROGRAM IN ACTION

Fred's Goal: To get a job.

Progress: Fred is now employed.

"I am nervous but excited about the next steps of this project. I know I can reach my goals. It will be nice to have someone there to give me that extra push I need."

Frances' Goals: To get her driver's license and a job.

Progress: Frances passed her driver's license test, purchased an automobile and is employed.

"Next I am going to try and get my own house!"

(Frances is currently living in public subsidized housing.)



"The Erie Together (FACT Program) is one of the most inspiring and beneficial programs anyone could participate in. I realized that there is real power in the unity of people who are caring enough to help one another. In this lesson I have grown so much as a person and a member of the Erie Community. I can't thank everyone enough for all they have done for my family and me and I am sincerely grateful for the support they gave us unconditionally."

—Michele

Roxanne's Goal: To obtain her GED.

Progress: Roxanne has obtained her GED and has received post secondary training. She is employed and has secured an apartment and an automobile.

"My Community Partner and I find our Family Action Team VERY rewarding to both of us."

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