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Eddie entered the Getting Ahead Learning Circle through the Schenectady County Drug. He has successfully completed and graduated from Drug Court and Getting Ahead. Currently Eddie serves as the Lead Getting Ahead Facilitator for Schenectady Bridges. In this position, he facilitates Getting Ahead for Schenectady County Drug Court, Youth Build and covers classes when other facilitators are absent. Eddie is a certified Bridges trainer. He actively participates in Bridges trainings, shares his journey, and provides support to agencies integrating Getting Ahead into their programs. Schenectady Bridges is proud of Eddie's personal and professional growth. He is living proof that Getting Ahead works!

Facilitation is not Instructing!

As a facilitator I've learned so much about the difference between facilitating and teaching. It all comes back to when I was an investigator, before I graduated from Getting Ahead. I like to remember how I felt in our learning circle and going through the process of self-discovery. It was an amazing feeling to figure things out with other investigators and co-investigators - being able to come up with my own solutions with the help and guidance of others. The information and resources were provided to me so that I could utilize them in my investigations, so that I could re-write my future story.

Ultimately, it was that feeling of self-discovery that pushed me to continue to investigate more and more. Not being told what to do, or what's right and what's wrong but being allowed to take control and make my own choices. Guiding me to find the right answers on my own rather than giving me the answers. Being spoken to with an adult voice rather than a parent voice gave me the confidence to share my feelings and ideas without the fear of being told "no," or "that's not right," and "do this," and "do that." Instead I was offered many ways to look at things and many different options were made available. I was given the opportunity of choosing the right things for myself.

Now that I am a facilitator, I remind myself of all this so that I won't make the mistake of writing anyone else's future story for them. I know how important it is to feel like – "Wow, I finally have the power and control over how my next chapter begins. I know how important it is to write my story – to control the pen. I no longer need to allow people to write any chapters for me." It is important for the investigators to experience this feeling of self-discovery because Getting Ahead is only sixteen weeks long. After sixteen weeks they need to know how to continue investigating their lives – confident that they can do it. Because they have begun to do it without being told what to do, they have learned to figure what to do utilizing the tools they learned and the resources they have available. When investigators develop this confidence of knowing that they are capable of figuring out how to begin their next chapter, they will never look to be told what to do again. They will never give up their pen. They will confidently keep writing their own story.

As a facilitator, having graduated from Getting Ahead, I also know the importance of respecting the investigators. Using an adult voice is very important because the minute we try to teach instead of facilitating, investigators will detect a parent voice and may shut down as they start feeling like they are being told what to do once again and their story is being written for them. It is very important to keep the pen in their hands. As facilitators we need to remember this when facilitating groups that include different ages and economic classes. We must watch our body language and facial expressions while listening to investigators. Be mindful all the time that they are waiting for our feedback and reactions, and if we are not careful, we can cause them to shut down and lose the confidence to investigate and participate.

We are co-investigators; we investigate with the investigators. When the investigator makes a self-discovery they must own it on their own. It is their aha moment. We cannot take credit for it or take it from them in any way. We did not tell them what to do. The investigator discovered what to do. It is very important that they see and feel this moment of self-discovery and this is where they will look at our expressions, body language and feedback. As facilitators, we must know how to congratulate, motivate, and encourage them to continue to participate in the process of self-discovery. This is how investigators develop the confidence and "want to" to continue investigating, and discovering and writing their own story long after the sixteen weeks of Getting Ahead.

As facilitators, we must remember what Getting Ahead is all about. We must remember how the information, message and tools of Getting Ahead work. Getting Ahead is not a process group. When investigators do share and process something, we must utilize Getting Ahead to help heal the open wound. We cannot allow investigators to process and leave with open wounds. Instead, right away we begin investigating how to heal the wound, using the Getting Ahead material and resources. We do not counsel, become therapist, teachers, parents, etc. We co-investigate with the investigators.

The bottom line is that everyone has their own story. Some may be different or similar in some ways, but everyone has their own individual story. So as facilitators we need to realize that even if we have the answers for them – we don't! We also don't have all the answers to our own stories. We continue to investigate and discover daily as we write our own stories. As facilitators we want to share this process with investigators. Once the investigators start feeling confident and learn to utilize the information and resources to achieve sustainability – we are successfully facilitating!