



Bridges to Opportunity: Five Year Overview

Established December 8, 2014. Based on the identification of poverty as a priority need in our community, representatives from Ruby Payne's aha process team were invited to share their model with community leaders. Western Maryland Health System serves as the anchor institution for the community initiative. Partners include economic development, education, social services, housing, faith-based communities, banking, law enforcement, funders and people with lived experience.

Bridges to Opportunity was designed to have the following outcomes:

- Move individuals from poverty to self-sufficiency
- Reduce social costs related to crime, poor health and welfare
- Strengthen educational attainment and job skills
- Enhance economic development and revitalize neighborhoods

Building Resources & Creating Opportunities

Individuals:

- Getting Ahead – 18 facilitators trained and 95 Getting Ahead graduates
- R Rules- 75 completers through the After- School Program in Allegany County Schools and Burlington UM Family Services in West Virginia. Students demonstrated recall of program concepts.
- Getting Ahead Gathering – 41 participants increase social networking and get continued support.
- Updates from graduates include the following successes:
 - Overcame the Cliff Effect and is no longer dependent on agency assistance!
 - Worked with our partners to achieve the driving hours necessary and then obtained driver's licenses.
 - Started her own business, bought a car and is completing childcare classes.
 - Completed a driver's education class and got her permit.
 - Bought a house and purchased car.
 - Mother and son who were unemployed and living at the Union Rescue Mission are both now employed and looking for housing.
 - A graduate with immense social anxiety now plays in a band and attributed her achievement to Getting Ahead.
 - After getting a job, graduate with severe social anxiety went through the court process and was awarded visitation with his son.
 - While working full-time at Archway Station, graduate achieved her LMSW from WVU.
 - Completed their degrees in Human Services from Allegany College.
 - Visited Capitol Hill as part of local Adult Basic Education program to meet with members of Maryland's federal delegation to advocate for program funding. Graduate specifically told by Senator Cardin's office to reach out to them for help with grants for entrepreneurial efforts.

Agencies/Institutions:

- Child Care Pilot implemented to offer low income and single parents the opportunity to complete a certificate based education program while developing a career path in the child care industry.
- HRDC Section 8's application was revised to enable the applicant to apply for either City, County or both. Preference is given based upon residency and employment.
- Housing Task Force explored scattered tiny houses, Homesharing, Renovation/Rehabilitation, and Rent-to-Own/Community Land Trust.
- Spearheaded discussion to start drug court.
- Allegany County Public Libraries revised their computer use policies. Patrons who may owe too much money to borrow materials can now get a "visitors pass" to use the computers inside the libraries.



- Allegany Law contacted Bridges about ways to collaborate on expungement opportunities.
- Promoted HRDC Financial Literacy course.
- Getting Ahead while Getting Out offered at Allegany County Detention Center.
- Getting Ahead classes are offered to students seeking GEDs as part of their course work.
- Allegany College has implemented campus food pantries for students who are food insecure.
- WMHS held program for WMHS Behavioral Health employees regarding how people from different economic classes experience the health care delivery system differently and techniques for communicating effectively with all patients.
- Development of Path2Help- online community resource directory.

Community

- Focus groups to identify barriers and future hope facilitated by FSU Social Work Students in community, and with 1088 Middle and High School students.
- Presentations to increase awareness of getting by vs getting ahead reached 798 people.
- Poverty simulations aimed at providing a “real life” understanding of what those living in instability face on a day-to-day basis reached 581 people at WMHS, FSU, ACPS, CareFirst-CUW and DSS.
- Scholarships have been established at ACM for graduates wishing to take the driver’s license course.
- First Presbyterian Church of Cumberland has established a pool of volunteers willing to supervise the driving hours needed by the Getting Ahead graduates trying to get their license.
- Bridges to Transportation B2T committee is evaluating the idea of a donated vehicle program, like that of Second Chances Garage, in Frederick, MD.
- Little Pantries were built and remain filled through shared efforts by County United Way, Carpenter’s Union, Wellness Ambassadors, Allegany County Public Libraries, and several community groups
- The Community Trust Foundation created a video about Bridges and how transportation and child care support has enabled Getting Ahead investigators to progress.
- Collaborated with Al-Gar Federal Credit Union to implement a small dollar loan program for graduates.
- Advocating for 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Collaborating

- Obtaining input from GA grads regarding barriers to success.
- Funding has been provided by: Allegany County, Allegany College of Maryland Foundation, Betsey and Doug Schwab, City of Cumberland, Community Trust Foundation, County United Way – Impact Grant, DelFest Foundation, First Presbyterian Church of Cumberland, Frostburg State University, Local Management Board of Allegany County (Governor’s Office of Children), Western Maryland Health System, Women’s Action Coalition and Standard Bank.
- Bridges to Opportunity continues to gain the in-kind support of over 30 organizations and hundreds of community residents including: Allegany County Human Resources Development Commission, Allegany College of Maryland, Western Maryland Health System, Allegany County Public Schools, Frostburg State University, Allegany County Health Department, Allegany County Department of Social Services, Cumberland Housing Group, City of Cumberland, My Bank, AHEC West, County United Way (Allegany County), Allegany County Public Libraries, ACT Personnel, Al-Gar Federal Credit Union, City of Frostburg, Friends Aware, Allegany County Government, North Branch Correctional Institution, Maryland Dept. of Education/Division of Rehab Services, and Allegany County American Job Center, First Presbyterian Church of Cumberland, Gateway Church West Campus, YMCA, St. John’s, United Methodist Church, Union Rescue Mission, and Salvation Army.