

Bridges Out of Poverty
January 18, 2013
Questions & Answers Conference Call with Marion Matters

1. *Can you walk us through a timeline of your activities to train, embed, and implement Bridges?*

Marion Matters—in fourth year of initiative. Initial members gave credibility. Initial players: Judges (Supreme Court, Special Dockets, hospital VP, superintendent of schools, director of United Way, Chamber of Commerce. Unique by having high level spheres of influence. Board members MUST be supporting members. Monthly meetings of sub committees. Marion has two Getting Ahead classes per year and wants to do more. Focus on QUALITY not quantity. Need ALL Freds at the table. You need a core set of believers. Community leaders who buy into the program!

3. *How does training and implementation of Bridges impact your effectiveness in working with families and individuals in poverty in the following areas?*

Overall benefits to the community include Action teams, i.e., focusing on transportation issues, felony assistance group. Plans to start program in local penal system.

a. Health Care—Hospital require all employees to be trained. Bridges “101” class, four hour training. Helps with regard to dealing and understanding families. Improved communication. Emergency department more understanding. Success Story: The mother of a gentleman who had struggled for twenty years with obesity wrote a letter thanking the dietician for helping her son lose 150 pounds finally because she was able to relate and communicate with him.

b. Criminal Justice—Many changes in court. Staff trained, two day training. Court room procedures changed. Judge has direct contact. Gives a check list to help with procedures. For example, on what to do to get your drivers’ license back. If a defendant misses a hearing rather than issuing a warrant immediately, gives a day or two for the defendant to contact the court and see why they missed (car broke down, work issue, etc). Had issues in the past with clerk’s being rude and not understanding these issues. One clerk was on the verge of losing their job over being so rude. Clerks were trained and now, the clerk that had been so rude who almost lost their job is a facilitator and has become a new person. The judge, bailiff and three Probation Officers have Trainer certification. The question was asked about how to encourage those in the criminal justice system to get on board. In Marion, it was the Supreme Court, special dockets, that trained the judges. It was a top down to the bottom.

* Judge Ballinger is happy to work with our Judges about the benefits of Bridges and Getting Ahead.

**Marion Community has strong postsecondary collaboration. Ohio State, Marion Technical Institute both train their staff and leaders.

d. Faith-based—hosts’ classes in churches where day care and food is already provided.

e. Service Providers—always there

f. Business—Slow process. Local employers’ familiar with program give Getting Ahead grads a second look. Still working on encouraging businesses.

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g. Government—Chamber, Pam Hall, lots of support. (Invited David to speak to business group. Chamber and Council supportive.)

City government must be involved. Fire Inspector in Marion is on the board for Marion Matters. This helps him be able to communicate in his community from the perspective of understanding poverty, helping with new business startups, knowing where to focus.

5. *How has Bridges and Marion Matters made Marion, Ohio a sustainable community?*

Being a sustainable community means staying on track for a long term change of behaviors. Marion has the highest poverty rate. Out of five school systems it has the only one with all of the students qualifying for free/reduced lunches. Marion Matters is taking a long-term approach, making a difference one person at a time.

7. *Why did you make the decision to become 501c3? What opportunities have being a nonprofit provided Marion Matters?*

As funds began to appear the question about providing tax write-offs for donors and the ability to apply for grants. Application process took 8-10 months to do. But it gives the ability to write grants and receive monetary donations.

8. *How do you keep the momentum going?*

It steamrolls. Spreading. Media Outlets and radio shows have been very helpful in getting the word out. Local community foundation, grant approached Marion Matters and established an endowment fund.

9. *Do you have sub-committees and/or work groups?*

Yes. The original “founding” committees were: Communication, Getting Ahead, and Finances. Getting Ahead generates interest, fill holes. Transportation, felony assistance.

11. *How has implementing Getting Ahead impacted your community? Success stories of graduates?*

Two Getting Ahead classes per year, want to do more—don’t recommend having classes before allies in place.

Funding—membership from employers, churches, other corporate memberships, individuals—board members must be supporting members.

Conscious effort to educate the community so employers and community leaders understand what it means to be a Getting Ahead graduate.

Must be a Getting Ahead Graduate to qualify for Marion Habitat for Humanity.

Court has made changes with regards to procedures. Staff has been trained.

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Churches help with needs such as food and child care.

They think most local employers are familiar with the program and give applicants who are graduates a second look.

Their Chamber is a big supporter of the program.

A local credit union sponsors a Getting Ahead class and opens accounts for graduates with a start up balance of \$25.

The Getting Ahead classes lead to “investigation” of solutions in the community. Need to get other community leaders willing to be facilitator for Getting Ahead classes. “Core of believers”

Action Teams were established to address community issues “holes” and committees were formed to address, example transportation and felony assistance.

Involvement of local university—staff has attended training. Trying to understand their students. Grant writing, interns working with students, provide college prep classes for Getting Ahead grads who plan to attend college. Financial aid—need to explain verbally instead of in writing.

Inmates with short time to go on their sentences are a great audience for Getting Ahead, reduces recidivism. Director of State Corrections was impressed by the Probation Officer who was a Getting Ahead graduate. Started using Getting Ahead at Marion Correctional. Judge Ballinger hires ex-offenders and this has caught on at the city level.

Judge in Marion is very involved, has hired ex-offender in her probation department. Giving this Getting Ahead graduate a chance. She has been very successful. Took advantage of being able to change the rules.

Get those allies in place before classes.

Graduates are the driving force and choose topics for monthly meetings.

Need 3-12 facilitators

Don't have to be trained to be a facilitator (yellow) purple/videos (use these)

Being a Getting Ahead facilitator has been life-changing! Great experience!

Training

Marion Matters utilizes a shared sponsorship to have Jodi Pfarr conduct training in their community (FREE) twice per year.

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Finance:

Membership in Marion Matters ranges from \$10,000 for large employers to \$25 for individuals. Membership is free for graduates of Getting Ahead. Marion, OH has a lot of industry which differs from Santa Rosa.

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