

THE HERALD

OF GADSDEN COUNTY

CAPITAL AREA COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY
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Breaking the cycle of poverty



Pictured left to right are: Cynthia Valencic, Family Services Department director and instructor for the Getting Ahead program; students Anastasia Ward, Krystal Johnson, Cortez Fleming, Tariana Gibson, Tiffany Redding; and Sylvania Jones, family services case manager.

By Byron Spires, Herald Editor

How do you break the cycle of poverty?

Capital Area Community Action Agency has a way that works. It is called "Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World."

The program is a research-based, anti-poverty workshop developed by Dr. Ruby Payne and Phil DeVol. Based on the 'Bridges Out of Poverty' concepts, the overarching idea is that people in poverty are experts

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in their own situation.

Last Friday five individuals received certificates after completing a 15-week course based on the Getting Ahead concept, which included discussing what resources a person needs in order to move out of poverty.

Getting Ahead not only focuses on what people in poverty need to do to change, but it also explores the interactions between the classes of poor, middle class and wealth. It explores how everyone needs to work together to make positive changes in their community.

Each one of the graduates of the program spoke before a crowd of about 50 people and talked about what they had learned during the 15-week program.

To a person all five stated that the program had made a difference in their lives and was a motivation to break the cycle of poverty they had found themselves in.

Participants, called Investigators, work in groups to examine the impact of poverty on themselves and their communities and to explore the world through the lens of economic class.

During the classes, investigators discover why poverty exists and discuss what resources a person needs in order to move out of poverty.

The first male to graduate from the Gadsden County course, Cortez Fleming, was all smiles about his experience.

Fleming said he had been very shy prior to taking the class. Now, however, he had made some dramatic changes in his life which include gaining con-

fidence in himself.

He now plans on getting his GED, becoming a Pharmacy Tech and going to college. These comments came from someone who had quit school in the 11th grade.

Anastasia Ward, who holds a master's degree, found herself trapped in poverty as a single mother with several children.

The program, she explained, helped her to realize her goals in life.

She now plans to open her own antique shop, which has been her passion. She likes refurbishing furniture and has a number of photos that show the outstanding work she has done.

It is a huge undertaking to complete the classes for this program and each of the five investigators had to make a commitment to finish the class.

But, it is not over. Unlike some programs that end with training, the Getting Ahead program now moves

into the "Staying Ahead.

Each participant will be assigned to a mentor who will help them through the next phase where the students move into a self-sufficiency program designed to help support the individual's education, job training and job placement needs.

Each student will be paired with two Allies/Mentors. They will meet regularly for six months. During that time, the allies become advisors, counselors and cheerleaders for the person Getting Ahead.

"The program works," Community Action CEO Tim Center stated at the event about what he has seen from the participants in the program

If you are interested in learning more about Getting Ahead or becoming a mentor for someone starting the Staying Ahead program, contact Sylvania Jones at 850-875-4250.