

# Valley Interfaith Neighbors Empowered



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### 2016 Vision for VINE

As we prepare for our third cycle of Valley Interfaith Neighbors Empowered graduates to enter the next steps of their self-sufficiency journey, we have to ask ourselves two questions: *"What can be done with what we have learned?"* and *"What's next?"*

With those two very important questions in mind, we are developing a long term strategic plan for 2016. Driven by our vision and mission, which strive to create lasting change that strengthens our community, we are focused on three primary objectives for VINE as we move forward. Our first objective strives to deepen our community impact through collaboration with community members, institutions, & agencies, more meaningful relationships, partnerships, & hands on opportunities. Our second objective aims to create additional support for individuals who have graduated or are graduating the initial VINE program. Our third objective endeavors to demonstrate program effectiveness by expanding our ability to report & track the data we generate each cycle.

Our first three cycles, coupled with new national research, confirms the effectiveness of the program model we utilize. A spark lit inside, our graduating members beam with pride & accomplishment, each a potential catalyst for lasting change in our community. The VINE graduates continue to inspire us, and those around them, to fight for brighter futures. We have the deepest honor of creating opportunities for our neighbors in need to break the cycle of poverty and re-write their future stories. We have the fortunate task of partnering with passionate community members to work shoulder to shoulder with our VINE graduates as they embark on a difficult, but beautiful, path to success. The path to success does not lead to one singular destination, rather a journey that will last a lifetime, in some cases many lifetimes, as one generation impacts another.

With that said, we thank you and we hope to continue to partner with each of you in this coming year of growth.



## Cycle 3

In late August 2015, Cycle 3 began their journey with seven motivated women. From the beginning Cycle 3 displayed immense dedication, hard work, and honesty, although the passing weeks were not without struggle. In March of this year, Cycle 3 celebrated their graduation with a sense of accomplishment and tears of joy. Proudly, we report 100% retention at graduation, over 50% new employment from unemployment, and several significant personal goals completed at graduation. When surveyed independently, the group reported an average of a two point increase in self-confidence, a one point increase in feelings of hopefulness/excitement for the future, and a one point increase in feeling their own value/potential compared to data collected at enrollment. Furthermore, a deep bond formed between group members, often supporting one another outside of group.

Cycle 3 serves as a strong motivation to develop of post-graduation programming. In the months following graduation, three engaged cycle 3 members continue to meet every two weeks, including a once a month meeting with a group of individuals from the community. The group, comprised of individuals from diverse economic backgrounds, expresses interest in forming relationships across class lines by working together to improve our community. Through this endeavor, we hope to gain deeper insight on effective post-graduation program structure in addition to the formation of valued relationships & community improvement project initiatives.

### Featured Graduate: "Sue"

Cycle 1 VINE graduate, "Sue", is proud of progress on her journey to self-sufficiency. Upon enrolling in our first cycle of the VINE initiative, Sue faced substantial obstacles to achieving her goals. With two children to care for, Sue deeply desired to provide a safe home for her family, secure stable employment, & pursue her education. Sue often described feeling discouraged by her criminal record, past eviction, & young age. During enrollment in VINE, her confidence & motivation grew. Shortly following graduation, Sue found full time employment. Within a year of graduation, Sue used networking skills developed during VINE to establish a social connection that opened doors to an apartment manager willing to offer a chance regardless of past eviction. Sue utilized the planning skills she built during Getting Ahead to create a budget for affording the apartment in the long term. Sue presented her plan to the VINE staff & received assistance with her security deposit as a result of her determination, motivation, & hard work. Sue moved her two young children from living in their car into a new apartment, with a long term plan to sustain housing and full time employment. She continues to work towards the pursuit of her education goals.

## New National Study Validates Effectiveness of VINE's Getting Ahead

A new national study finds that a program used by Valley Interfaith Neighbors Empowered (VINE) to help individuals in poverty build resources for a more prosperous life results in positive psychosocial benefits and overall improved functioning for participants.

The study finds that participants' mental health, social support, hope, goal-directed behavior, planning and knowledge about poverty increased while participating in the program. Additionally, their stress levels decreased.

"These changes could be quite powerful in the long run for people who are often at the bottom of the social and economic ladder, potentially empowering them to conquer obstacles that lie in the way of improving their circumstances," said Elizabeth A. Wahler, Ph.D., assistant professor at Indiana University School of Social Work and the researcher who conducted the study.

The program, called Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World ("Getting Ahead"), is a workbook and a 45-hour workshop used by organizations across the United States and abroad to help people living in poverty learn about how poverty impacts them and their communities. The program was created by Philip DeVol, who also authored "Bridges to Sustainable Communities" (2010).

Getting Ahead guides participants, called "investigators," in identifying resources and setting goals to increase those resources. Ideally, the program includes community support to help investigators address barriers such as bad credit, unemployment, difficulty with transportation, lack of affordable housing, high debt and physical and mental health problems.

VINE has used the program since 2014, with 17 women completing the program to date. Individuals enrolling in VINE participate for six months, attending a group workshop once a week for the entire duration. Offered exclusively to women, VINE incorporates the Getting Ahead program model, along with other community programs, to offer a holistic approach to breaking the cycle of poverty.

“We have much anecdotal evidence that the program is successful,” said Casey Hinkel, Program Director of Valley Interfaith. “We have seen investigators take the first steps in becoming employed, gaining more education and otherwise improving their living situations. This research validates our experience and will help us enhance the program.”

In addition to the psychosocial benefits, the study found that investigators graduated from the program with a greater understanding about how to begin getting ahead while living in poverty. They gained practical knowledge such as how to avoid financial predators, what kind of rent they can afford, what kind of interest can be legally charged, and how to navigate different systems in their communities. They also gained greater knowledge of themselves and what kind of resources they need to move forward.

Investigators were also asked about overall functioning: how many days out of the last month they had poor physical health or poor mental health and how many days their health prevented them from performing their usual activities. The study found statistically significant improvements in the number of days gained to participate in normal activities. At the end of Getting Ahead they had gained 3.7 days in mental health and 2.2 days in health.

Since “Getting Ahead” was first published in 2004, 64,000 copies have been sold for use in such diverse settings as social service agencies, hospitals, prisons, workforce development, drug courts, domestic violence shelters, housing programs, schools and colleges. It has been used in five foreign countries and more than 40 U.S. states. Additionally, “Getting Ahead” has been translated into Spanish, Slovak and Czech.

While several local studies have found potential benefit in Getting Ahead, Wahler’s is the first large-scale study to examine the program’s effectiveness and the mechanisms by which it may be helping people.

The study asked investigators in 45 Getting Ahead groups at 19 sites across the country to complete surveys before and after the program. In total, 215 investigators completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys. Investigators exhibited diversity in race/ethnicity, gender, marital status, employment status and income levels and were drawn from both rural and urban settings.

The study also found that while race/ethnicity, gender, age, rural and urban subgroups benefited at similar levels, men and investigators with learning problems did not experience the same gains as comparison subgroups. However, the study found that investigators with mental health and/or chemical dependency problems benefited at levels similar to those without such barriers.

“The results of this evaluation demonstrate that Getting Ahead, when used according to the model, appears to be effective with investigators who have multiple and complex barriers to economic mobility and stability,” Wahler writes in the study. Ninety-three percent of participants found value in the Getting Ahead learning experience.

## *What is Getting Ahead?*

**The 45-hour Getting Ahead workshop is conducted over several weeks. Investigators utilize the workbook “Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World” (DeVol, 2012), which was developed with the assistance of people from poverty.**

**The workbook helps investigators understand and use the environments of class, causes of poverty and hidden rules of class to build up financial, emotional, social and other resources. Participants are called “investigators” because they are investigating themselves and the world around them through the lens of economic class.**

**Working in a group with one or two trained facilitators, investigators develop a series of mental models to envision their current life, the life they would like to have (called their “future story”) and the qualities their community would possess if it were a prosperous community for all. They assess their own resources and make plans to develop stability in daily life and resources that are lacking.**

**Upon completing Getting Ahead, investigators have individualized action plans based on the knowledge acquired through the co-investigative process and expressed in new mental models. They also better understand the social, economic, and political barriers that contribute to poverty and are empowered to advocate for systemic change and help others in similar socioeconomic circumstances.**

**In addition, they leave with a network of co-investigators, facilitators and community members who can continue to offer long-term support and encouragement as investigators work to put their plans into action.**

## Thank You!

Because of the financial investment of our generous donors, the opportunities created for our VINE members are possible. Because of the meals prepared with love each week, we are nourished & ready to learn. Because of the many agents of change in our community, advocating for our neighbors in need, lasting change IS possible. With our deepest gratitude, we  
**THANK YOU**  
 for all that you do.

## Partnering for Lasting Change: Be an Agent of Change

In October 2015, Program Director Casey Hinkel partnered with Church of Ascension & Holy Trinity to offer a workshop entitled "Tools for Tackling Poverty". At the end of the workshop, we discussed many ways an individual can become an agent of change. To become an agent of change, you can deepen your understanding & awareness, express empathy in place of sympathy or pity, form real relationships of mutual respect, create, support, or partner with programs that promote long term growth, and get involved with projects that improve community conditions, confront exploitation, or impact the system. By investing in the success of VINE thus creating partnership with an initiative focused on long term growth & improving community conditions, you are an agent of change. We aspire to create more opportunity for inspired community members to be agents of change.

### COMING SOON: A NEW VISION FOR VALLEY INTERFAITH!

The VIFCC Board of Trustees recently announced the creation of the **Visionaries in Action Committee**, a group of trustees tasked with assessing the "state of Valley Interfaith" and casting a new vision for the future of the organization. This is a very exciting time at Valley Interfaith, a time of new ideas, new faces, and renewed energy and commitment. Together we can truly make a difference in the lives of our neighbors and we look forward to a bright future at VIFCC. VINE is a valuable component of our organization and plays a crucial role in the future direction of VIFCC and defining best practices for helping our neighbors in need. As Valley Interfaith emerges "new and improved", VINE will continue to play a valuable role in our vision & mission. Although the schedule for the start of new cycles in 2016 may be altered as we navigate this time of renewed growth and inspiration, our VINE work will continue and we will remain deeply committed to our VINE initiative, VINE graduates, and community partners.

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