

Mercy Connections
Burlington Vermont
Report from October 2011

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Mercy Connections is an educational values-driven non-profit organization living the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy with an enduring concern for women. By compassionately nurturing self sufficiency through education, mentoring and community, people are empowered to make significant life changes. Learn more by going to: www.mercyconnections.org

Since Sister Lindora and I started this program two years ago, we have done 7 Getting Ahead classes. I am getting ready to start an 8th one. Sister Lindora started Getting Ahead with the State's Attorney's Office. That is how we got our funding; we take women that have mostly retail theft crimes. (No crimes that are related to a victim and no major crimes.) At the end of the course the State's Attorney comes to the graduation and hands them their discharge papers stating that their charges are dropped. This is how we got most of our grants. The majority of our participants come from this route to keep our grants coming. We have a few each class that does not come from the Court System, but the majority does. February we branched out and started a Men's Getting Ahead. They come on their own and are not from the court system either. I am hoping to bring Getting Ahead more into the community, and have one just for community members. But we have not received a grant for this yet. Until then we are going forward with Sister Lindora's vision she started two years ago.

Results: 2009-2011

- We have had 42 participants start Getting Ahead.
- 27 of them have graduated the program.
- 6 went back to jail during the program. 7 dropped out on their own and 2 were asked to leave.
- Of the 42 participants we have heard from 30 of them in the past couple of months.

Out of the 27 graduates...

- Four are currently facilitators.
- Two are currently getting their college degree and two are seriously thinking about going in January, 2011.
- Only three went back to jail.
- And we have only lost contact with three graduates (12 I see at Dots (corner store) every now and then. Three I connect with on Facebook. Two email me. Five we heard from when we were getting the picnic ready.)

Out of our 6 dropouts...

- Three left during the self assessment piece.
- I still hear from three of them.

Out of the 6 that went back to jail

- we hear from three of them still. One is enrolled in our current Getting Ahead class

For our Getting Ahead reunion picnic we got a hold of 16 of the 27 graduates in some way.

For us these statistics are great, and we are saving the government thousands of dollars by keeping these women out of jail. I will hopefully have more up to date data soon for you, as we are starting more and more programs.

I have also started a leadership class with a lot of graduates from Getting Ahead. I am in the middle of this round right now. The Leadership class is called Vermont Community Leadership. The goal of the class is that in the first ten sessions they look at where they are in the community personally. The second ten sessions is about teaching them how a community and government works and where they can see themselves in it.

This seemed like a perfect course for Getting Ahead graduates. Throughout the Leadership course they work on a final project. Right now the projects are having a block party and starting a support group for Getting Ahead grads. Some are still thinking about what they would like to do. In the past, a lot of Leadership grads are currently on boards and were elected into office. I am excited to see what happens with having Getting Ahead right before this class. I will keep you posted.

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