

Research Evidence Supporting Getting Ahead

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We know many of you have witnessed firsthand the effectiveness of Getting Ahead in the lives of investigators and your communities, and you look forward to the day when Getting Ahead is considered evidence-based by scholars. The goal of this report is to provide an overview of what *evidence-based* means and give you an update on the progress Getting Ahead has made towards achieving this status.

What Evidence-Based Means in the Research World

To be considered truly evidence-based, a program must meet multiple criteria:

- 1) The effectiveness of the program must be studied and observed across multiple studies and diverse groups of people. The more a program is studied and benefits are observed across different groups of people and different evaluations, the more confidence we can have that the benefits observed are because of the program itself.
- 2) It must have had its effectiveness demonstrated through rigorous research studies and evaluations. These studies ideally include multiple independently conducted randomized controlled trials, which means that individuals willing to participate are randomly assigned to either the program being studied or a comparison (control) group. These evaluations help to establish that any benefits observed in the program's participants are greater than those observed in the control group. Without a control group, researchers cannot tell whether the gains observed in the program participants are occurring because of some factor other than the program being studied. The random assignment to the program or the comparison group is an important step because it helps to ensure that there is no systematic difference between people participating in the program being studied and the comparison group. If participants voluntarily choose to be in the intervention or the control group, then it is impossible to tell whether gains observed in the program being studied are due to the program itself or because there was a different level of motivation, interest, etc. present in the group who voluntarily joined the program.
- 3) Studies on the program show that the program leads to long-term positive effects after the program ends, and these findings are replicated across multiple studies.

As you can imagine, these steps take many resources and much time. Researchers sometimes spend their entire careers studying the effects of a single program or intervention to understand more about how it is helpful, who it helps, and under what circumstances it is best used. Research is a systematic and sometimes slow process, with early research on a specific program helping to establish lower levels of evidence and progressing to establish higher levels of evidence as time goes on.



Current State of Getting Ahead

There have been a number of recent studies of Getting Ahead, and the research team doing this work agrees that Getting Ahead is progressing toward evidence-based status and is now considered a “promising practice.” This means that research has established lower levels of evidence of its success but has not yet demonstrated the higher levels of evidence. Details about the recent research and links to the peer-reviewed published articles are included below, and many of the researchers will be speaking at the 2019 Addressing the Challenges of Poverty conference. We hope you will attend the research update session to find out more. Their studies have been completed with diverse populations across a variety of sites as described below, and they demonstrate that Getting Ahead appears to lead to positive changes in investigators’ poverty-related knowledge, perceived stress, mental health and wellbeing, social support, self-efficacy, hope, and goal-directed behavior and planning.

Recent, Current, and Ongoing Getting Ahead Research

Recently completed and currently ongoing Getting Ahead research is mentioned below:

Dr. Beth Wahler, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor in the Indiana University School of Social Work, completed a [national study on Getting Ahead](#) in 2015. She has published two peer-reviewed articles from this work, including “[A Group-Based Intervention for Persons Living in Poverty: Psychosocial Improvements Noted Among Participants of Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin’-by World](#)” and “[Barriers to Program Completion of a Voluntary Capacity-Building Group Intervention for Individuals Living in Poverty.](#)”

In addition, she partnered with **Bonnie Bazata**, currently the Ending Poverty Now program manager in Pima County, Arizona, which includes Tucson, to evaluate changes in single mothers who participated in Getting Ahead. They also partnered on an earlier evaluation of Getting Ahead in South Bend, Indiana. The current study of investigators in Arizona includes follow-up after completion of Getting Ahead to examine longer-term benefits of the program. Dr. Wahler is also currently further analyzing the national evaluation dataset to examine gender differences in the Getting Ahead outcomes measured across the country.

Dr. Michael Jindra, research scholar with the Boston University Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, and **Dr. Ines Jindra**, Associate Professor in the Gordon College Social Work Department, published “[Connecting Poverty, Culture, and Cognition: The Bridges Out of Poverty Process](#)” after interviewing Getting Ahead investigators. They also published an article titled “[Poverty and the Controversial Work of Nonprofits](#)” that places Bridges and Getting Ahead in the context of poverty work in the U.S.

Dr. Heidi Gullett, assistant professor in the Center for Community Health Integration and Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at Case Western Reserve University, is currently studying how Getting Ahead is useful for reducing health inequities and improving wellbeing in primary healthcare settings.



Dan Jennings, New Mexico Corrections Department of Adult Education, is using Getting Ahead While Getting Out to help address the needs of returning citizens and make the educational process inside New Mexico prisons more meaningful. They are partnering with a number of outside organizations including a local university to try to reduce recidivism and to evaluate the use of Getting Ahead in their local context.

Dr. Phyllis Panzano, president of Decision Support Services, Inc. (DSS), is an industrial/organizational psychologist whose research and practice focuses on the adoption, implementation, de-adoption, and sustained use of evidence-based and promising practices. She is the lead evaluator on a Health Professions Opportunity Grant (HPOG) awarded to the Zepf Center, Inc. in Toledo, Ohio. She and the project director, **Craig Gebers, MRC, LSW**, are currently examining the effect of Getting Ahead on employment and financial outcomes of participants. The preliminary findings are encouraging and suggest participation in Getting Ahead may be linked to success in real-world training and employment contexts.

Jennifer Hedinger, senior manager of community initiatives in workforce development at OhioGuidestone, is examining Getting Ahead and Getting Ahead While Getting Out with the City of Cleveland Recreation Centers and the Ohio Division of Youth Services. They are using Getting Ahead to try to increase stability, build resilience to ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) in participants, decrease recidivism, and improve employment outcomes. They are currently pursuing additional funding for expanding the programs and studying the outcomes of Getting Ahead investigators.

In addition to the peer-reviewed published articles mentioned above, there are many smaller-scale outcome studies that have been independently completed by Bridges/Getting Ahead sites. Some of them can be found [here](#).

Finally, many Getting Ahead sites are using [CharityTracker](#) to follow the development of stability, resources, and financial (ROI) outcomes of Getting Ahead graduates. The research team mentioned here had their first group meeting last month and are planning ongoing meetings to build synergy, collaborate when possible on multi-center projects and grants, and develop some consistent measurement instruments and metrics for Getting Ahead researchers to use moving forward. These studies will continue to help Getting Ahead move toward evidence-based status if the findings continue to be as positive as they have been so far.

How You Can Help

Many of you would like to become involved in research or develop evaluations of your own sites and investigators. Here are some things you can do to help move the research forward:

- 1) Adhere to Getting Ahead model fidelity. Any changes to the Getting Ahead model affect whether or not your site could be included in future research, and whether results from your site can be generalized to other Getting Ahead sites.



- 2) Partner with a local university research scholar or one of the researchers mentioned above to evaluate your work locally, if possible. Many of the people mentioned above, including Bonnie Bazata and Dan Jennings, are working in their communities and have developed partnerships with researchers to conduct evaluations of their work. They were able to inform the researchers about the work being done, and the researchers then consulted with them about measurement instruments and research methods to evaluate what they are doing.
- 3) Come to the research session at the Addressing the Challenges of Poverty conference. You will meet members of the research team and hear more about how to move the work forward. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions about research and evaluation and explore how you can find an independent evaluator to help you study the work you're doing in your own community.