

Thank you Chair, Vice Chair and Ranking member for this opportunity.

Several years ago I interviewed Phil DeVol, co-author of the original Bridges Out of Poverty books and creator of the Getting Ahead program, and as a former member of the Cave Man Caucus, the most conservative wing of the conservative party, my mind was shifted on poverty as a result of that chat. Phil said he was having trouble getting a face to face with the Ohio Banker's League, so I arranged a coffee with him and Mike Adelman. During this meeting, I get a text from Ron Amstutz, then Chair of House Finance, wondering where I was, I

told him, and he came on over to sit in. After 20 minutes he turns to me and whispers “Healthier Buckeye Program” and I in turn told him my telepathy had failed me and I had no idea of what he was talking about. It turns out that he had been looking for an alternative to our broad scale one size fits all approach to poverty. From that meeting Healthier Buckeye came about in the next state budget.

It took a couple of years for the program to get up and going and now you need to know of my biggest mistake; we had placed ODJFS as the agency to do the evaluations. When I met with the then Director, I was stunned to find out that

her agency simply was not setup for this type of analysis. So...I forgot my own cliché that an assumption is the lowest form of knowledge.

Ron left the House with term limits, and I got distracted by PUCO, COVID, and coauthoring two books for aha publishing on poverty, first *Bridges Across Every Divide* and the new fifth edition of *Bridges Out of Poverty*. It was my fault that the idea lapsed in Ohio.

Then a month ago, my good friend Sean Logan, who served with me in the House and later as Director of ODNR under Ted Strickland, was at a Chamber of Commerce event in NE OH and met the vice chair. When she revealed she had a

background in social work, he told her about my books and how as a Columbiana County Commissioner he had undergone the Bridges training, and how it rearranged how he thought about poverty. This is a remarkable statement, as he jokes that as a Democrat he thought he knew all there was to know about poverty, but didn't. Sean gets the credit for putting me in touch with the Vice Chair and her staff, and for my being here today.

So what is this Bridges model? It is being used in just under 200 communities across the US, in several foreign languages, and several countries. For example, in Central Europe it is used in

assisting the Roma aka the Gypsies in moving out of poverty.

What makes Bridges so effective is that it meets those in need where they are, treats them with respect, and understands that when you know why one person is in poverty, you know only why that particular person is in poverty. Yes, there are broad statistical trends, but everyone is unique and has their own story, which you must respect. But their success lies in their changing their own behavior, while understanding the community situations that can keep them low resourced, and we recognize that telling people what to do is like pouring water on a rock; it looks wet but

nothing soaks in. The Getting Ahead Program is a process where the person sits with others in poverty and they fill out a workbook where they investigate their own lives over a several weeks long course. At the end of the class, to certain degree, they become their own social worker. They have agency.

This model is non-ideological and can't be labeled as either conservative or progressive. As we say on the farm it shouldn't matter what the barn cat looks like as long as it can catch mice. This model is used by secular groups like the United Way, faith-based groups such as The City Mission in Cleveland or Bridges to Prosperity Northern Illinois, Saint

Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army. There are also governmental bodies involved, as you will hear later.

Bridges in Ohio is used in wraparound programs that include workforce such as Marion Matters or Lucas County, or is more narrowly focused such as in The Glen at St. Joseph in Dayton.

In addition, there other groups such as Cincinnati Works, which are very similar in philosophy, but not international in scope.

The ask is for you to fund the Healthier Buckeye program this time with \$11.5 million of TANF money, which is a different source but the same amount as

previous, and to divide the amount so that half is available each fiscal year. In my own county of Preble, the success of the Healthier Buckeye program the state funded was so impactful that after the funding ended, the school districts in Preble pooled their money to keep it going. In short, the state provided capacity building.

Another change I would also suggest is to have each county at the end of their funding cycle to do a report back to the appropriate agencies, copying the respective Finance Chairs, and including the Supreme Court's Ohio Sentencing Commission when needed. Why them? Because this program is often used by

judges and/or prosecutors to reduce repeat offenders, and assist those coming out of prison. Once again, think of WD-40.

I apologize that my testimony has run three minutes long.

Below you will find some data points provided to me by Ruth Weirich of aha! Process, and you can contact her for further help at

rkweirich@ahaprocess.com

Thank you and for really good answers to your questions, I would urge you to direct them to true experts following me.

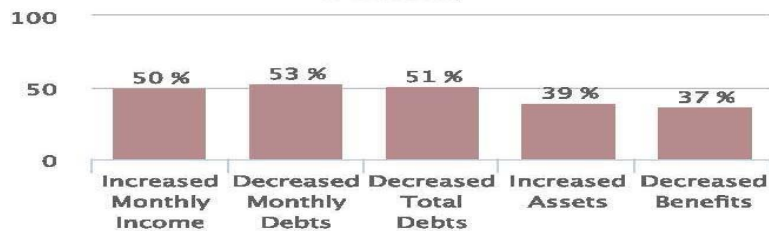
Ohio: Healthier Buckeye Council

Grant Awards: \$11.5M, 21 Counties

Belmont County \$334,000	Hardin/Auglaize, Van Wert \$945,157	Washington County \$513,000	Lorain County \$187,225
Butler County \$667,994	Lucas County \$749,580	Some Bridges Work	Preble County \$411,835
Cuyahoga County \$748,520	Marion County \$170,882	Athens County \$485,000	Richland County \$749,163
Fairfield County \$402,685	Ottawa County \$85,872	Highland County 723,242	Sandusky County \$561,734
Fayette County \$342,837	Summit County \$437,761	Huron County \$204,962	

ROI Indicators for Graduates

(baseline to most recent assessment – 622 Graduates)



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Muskogee, Oklahoma

519 Graduates

266 English 199 Spanish 54 Felon Re-Entry

85% Increased Income
88% Decreased Debt
81% Increased Education
76% Opened Checking or Savings Account

73% are now Self Sufficient

Muskogee, OK

Outcomes

Out of 225 graduates surveyed

SINCE THE CLASS:



47% have registered to vote

97% feel the class was helpful



40 people have gotten their GED

22 people have gotten a college degree



49 people have purchased a home

64% have improved their housing



Many have car, life, health, renters,
home and pet insurance



AVERAGE INCOME

\$10.46 an hour at the beginning of class

\$18.12 an hour after the class



Hope Scale of 1 -10

4 Average level of hope at the
beginning of class

9 Average level of hope after the class

Muskogee, OK

Return on Investment

For every 1 dollar spent on Muskogee's
anti-poverty initiative there is a ROI of \$9.00

Getting Ahead has saved our community 1.5 million in taxpayer dollars in social services EACH YEAR.
Reducing the burden on emergency rooms, the crime rate, and social services!

Our graduates are generating an
INCREASE of 2 MILLION
in taxable income
EACH YEAR by getting
and keeping better jobs.

This is an additional \$100,000 in sales tax
for the City of Muskogee each year.



Omaha, NE

- **RESULTS:**

- 90% graduation rate
- **1,303 graduates so far**
 - **Eventually we want to graduate 2,500 individuals per year**
- Metrics reassessed at 6 -month intervals & tracked in Charity Tracker software:
 - Positive change in all 15 areas of Stability Scale
 - Graduates increased net income \$1,500 per month
 - Debt-to-income ratio decreased 60%.
 - Assets increased an average of \$7,201
- **There is a 20:1 return to the community for every \$ invested in Bridges**

Getting Ahead Foundation

Lewisburg, PA <https://www.gettingaheadfoundation.org/about>

Started offering Getting Ahead in 2017. Currently have 200 graduates.

92% graduation rate, 19 week program

100% of the graduates attend the financial literacy follow up class

70% of the graduates attend the nutrition follow up class

95% of graduates state they've increased resources

82% report a reduction in anxiety and depression

93% report a better financial standing and a positive relationship with a banking institution

69% report better health, more frequent doctor visits and take medicine on a regular basis

88% reported learning more life skills to getting ahead and staying ahead.