

Provided by Tracey Backhaus

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Recently 30 people graduated from the **Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' by World** program. Classes were held by Northwestern Ohio Community Action Commission, Defiance, Ohio and funded by the United Way's in the five counties we serve as well as other local establishments.

Some individuals come to receive the stipend, but as the weeks go by, they come for much more. They realize what the class offers and how much they are learning. Some just can't wait until the next time we meet. I once said "you live what you know," and that resonated with all the participants. When back to my office, I said it again in my head and came up with "You Live What You Know....So Learn and Grow." We had t-shirts made with that quote and a few even wore them to their graduation.

The hidden rules and the registers of languages are something that everyone enjoys learning. Many say they look for the hidden rules. The self-assessment is a great tool for them to get a good look at themselves. They grumble when they see how much work there is to do, but are always glad they did it.

I have been privileged enough to see people get a GED, apply to college and start classes, register to vote as well as gain employment, but the greatest thing I have witnessed is to see is how much attitudes change. Their self-confidence goes up throughout the duration of the program. I tell them they "CAN" when they aren't sure if they can. The greatest thing for me as a facilitator of this program...is watching people succeed. I get so excited seeing people accomplish what they set out to do.

I ask participants to do a mental model of their now in the first week or two and a lot of times they are very grim. The last class I ask them to do one again and they are given magazines to cut out words and photos. Wow, what a difference twelve weeks can make. One participant felt she was nothing when we started, and the end model of her life she put a treasure chest and said "I'm treasure, NOT trash!" All she needed to know was that she could be somebody, and she learned she is somebody during the program. My greatest reward is to see peoples grim faces, turn to smiles and watching them realize "they can!"





