



UNITED METHODIST HUMAN SERVICES

BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER
WINTER/SPRING 2022

LEARNING TO REST

By: Cheryl Bedick Keafer, MSW
Executive Director

How are you doing these days?

It doesn't take much to see we are weary from handling things! Two years of a pandemic. Conflict and controversy over how things should be managed – right wing, left wing, conservative, progressive. I know it has made my head spin. Now the heartbreak of war in Ukraine and worldwide tensions caused by this Russian aggression.

Stress, anxiety, fear, conflict. Loss of loved ones and loss of our “normal” way of life. I have more than once thought to myself, how much more of this can we take?! As I have prayed over these last two years, one lesson consistently keeps coming back to me. Rest.

In Matthew 11, Jesus invites us to rest when He says, “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Increasingly in our hectic world, rest has become quite foreign to us. Our identities have become wrapped up in what we can produce. We may know how to do leisure, entertainment, recreation even. But truly resting is so much more. It is a way to live.

Rest implies letting go. There is so much that we do not control but feel like we should. We need rest so our minds stop obsessing, stop fretting, stop worrying. The verse implies that we can carry a burden that is not difficult. So when it feels like I'm striving and carrying a heavy burden, I practice rest. Rest also reminds us that the world can function without us. If we think things will fall apart if/when we rest, then we think a bit too highly of ourselves!

Rest reminds us that God has called us into relationship first, not production. When we live and work in a posture of rest, we experience the yoke that God has uniquely designed for us, out of His strength. Learning to rest is life changing. His gentle teaching can lead you there.

AMANDA HERDMAN

FEATURE GETTING AHEAD GRADUATE

With all of the remarkable success stories of our Getting Ahead (GA) graduates, it was hard to choose just one to feature in this edition. However, Amanda Herdman's story was too good not to share.

Amanda (Spring 2021 GA cohort) started a new job on October 12, 2021. What is so amazing is that it was her first job since 2006!

Amanda put a lot of thought and planning into her pursuit of a job. One thing she admitted was that she had to get over her fear and learn how to be more open with people. She realized that her volunteer work with juvenile kids over the years prepared her for this new step in life.

This involved supervising the juveniles in cleaning up after area events and teaching them life skills. Amanda felt that since she could do that, she could manage a paying job!

Deciding it was best to find a job within walking distance of her home, Amanda applied at Koch's store in the West End of Johnstown. Once in the interview, she did not take no for an answer. She even offered to volunteer just one day to show that she could do it. She was also prepared to accept working just one day a week if necessary. She was honest about her past mistakes and explained that she had also been a stay-at-home mom over the years. Amanda believes her truthfulness benefited her and says communication with potential employers is a big key.

Amanda's job is to work in the deli. Her responsibilities include opening the store and making sub sandwiches. Having proved a faithful employee, she will soon be starting as a cashier. Ironically, she finds that her regular customers will readily talk to her about their day and their problems. She finds satisfaction in getting to know them and also the community.



Amanda Herdman

NETWORKING EVENTS COMING SOON!

MONEY TIPS & TOPICS WORKSHOPS

- SHOPPING AND MEAL PLANNING ON A BUDGET
- EXTREME COUPONING

These are one-session classes led by Getting Ahead graduates that provide tips on stretching your money to get the most out of what you have! They are open to GA graduates and to the public.

COMING THIS FALL FOR GA GRADUATES!

BRIDGES FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (Financial Resources)

Learn from financial leaders in our community about credit repair, interest rates, budgeting, paying off debt and more!

TAKING OUT YOUR EMOTIONAL TRASH (Emotional Resources)

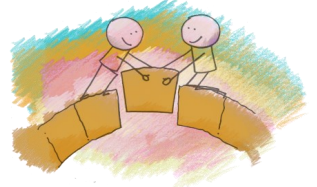
Learn to recognize and let go of unhealthy, toxic emotions and lies, then replace them with Godly truths. You'll discover how to handle life's ups and downs more easily, and introduce more hope and joy into your life.

EMOTIONALLY DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS (Relationship Resources)

Based on the book by Leslie Vernick, learn how to recognize destructive relationships in your life and what to do about them.

LAUNCHING A NEW BRIDGE

In 2020, God began to bring together new pieces for our **Bridges to Success** (BTS) program, that we believe will have wide reaching implications for our community.

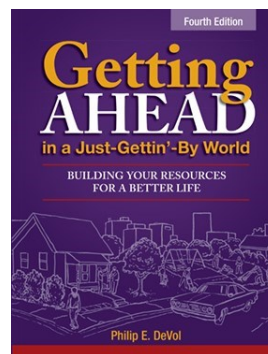


Bridges challenges all of us to see people for their potential and empowers them to make changes to improve their lives. It is an approach that works in relationship with individuals to help them build resources and make changes over time. It is also an approach that is firmly grounded in Biblical principles: seeing people as valuable and capable; seeing the need for work that will enrich a person's life; operating in unity; and creating justice in a world that teaches us to look out for our own interests. The Biblical call to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8), inspires us to find creative ways to address complicated problems.

Poverty has been a very complicated problem in our community. BTS was born out of that inspiration.

Our newest Bridge in BTS will address Workforce and Workplace stability. We will provide specialized training for job seekers to improve stability as an employee, with **Job Readiness Workshops**. At the same time, we will help employers create a more stable workplace, with **Workplace Stability Workshops**, understanding their employees from the lens of economic class. Finally, it will take **Community Partnerships** to make it all possible. At its heart, it is an effort to help us all live out what it means to be good neighbors, creating a community in which everyone can thrive.

We will have more to share in the months ahead!



APPLICATIONS ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED FOR THE FALL GETTING AHEAD COHORTS

If you know of someone who is ready for a change and who could benefit from the program, please contact Carolyn at 814-418-4336. Thank you!

NEWS FROM OUR GRADUATES!

Mellanie McDowell (Fall 2016) has nearly completed her master's degree in Church Management at Regent University. She began her online studies for "something to do" during the pandemic. She remarked that never before had she experienced so many instructors praying over her! Mellanie is looking forward to graduating in August 2022, finishing her two-year program in just one year!

Cynthia Borgella (Spring 2017) has temporarily relocated to Florida for her job. She realizes that this move presents a good opportunity to move up in her company.

Sonja Freeman (Fall 2019) started a better paying job at McGee Women's Hospital in Environmental Services.

Alissa Borow (Spring 2021) became a mother! Aurora Honey Raelee came into this world on January 8. She weighed 6 lb. 5 oz.

Judy Diamond (Fall 2020) has started volunteering twice a week at the Moxham Food pantry.

Betty Black (Spring 2021) started a new job in December driving a school van. Betty stresses that when you get a new job, it is important to leave your former job on good terms in the event that you need to go back to that job for some reason. One good way is to provide a two-week notice before leaving.

Jeff and Lexia Zungali (Fall 2018) have started a business buying and selling rare collectibles on eBay. Lexia says, "It's never too late to start, it's never too late to strive, and never let anyone tell you no." Her goal this year is to involve her grandchildren in buying and selling so she can put their earnings into a bank account for them. Jeff and Lexia's extra income has enabled them to do some traveling. They have been taking advantage of very affordable rates to fly from Johnstown to North Carolina to visit family.

George and Megan Heit (Fall 2017) Bought a food truck for their "Roots" business and expect to hire extra staff this summer. They are also serving meals at the Slovenian Hall in Patton.

Pattie Vazquez, CPS (Fall 2016) started a new job with Peerstar LLC as a Certified Peer Support Specialist on February 3. Working for Peerstar was a goal that Pattie had for some time. Her previous six years' experience in peer support and certification enabled her to qualify for this job. She is making \$3.42 an hour more than her previous job and has the opportunity to move up to full-time.

AMANDA HERDMAN

FEATURE GETTING AHEAD GRADUATE

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Sometimes work can get busy and hectic, but Amanda has figured out a routine that works for her.

During the past two months, Amanda has also been a great resource for the new UMHS Getting Ahead in the Workplace cohort. Begun in partnership with Goodwill Industries of the Southern Alleghenies, this cohort consists of young adults who are participants in the YouthBuild Johnstown Program. Amanda has a gift for developing relationships with young people. She shares her own story, which helps to encourage them.

Amanda's advice to others is to "not have fear, to go forward, focus on the positive, and trust in yourself. You gain much strength when you realize you can do it."

2022 ANNUAL WINTER GATHERING

In January 2022, GA graduates were treated to great food, service, and comradery at the Boulevard Grill. Having missed hosting the annual gathering in 2021 due to the pandemic, it was good to catch up with graduates who we haven't seen in quite a while. There were 20 in attendance, including several who graduated in 2016!



GA graduates at the 2022 Annual Winter Gathering

OTHER MINISTRY UPDATES

FUNDRAISING

Thanks to all of you who donated for our second Virtual Banquet! We raised \$6,150. You can still see the 2021 banquet on our website under Events/Annual Events & Fundraisers.

Thanks to all the churches who hosted a Mini Love Tree at their location over the Christmas season. They raised \$3,712!

Thanks to all the Partner Schools who had fundraisers for Project Shoes in 2021! They raised \$4,029!

Thanks to Rod Horner for his work in coordinating the Community Christmas Service at the Franklin Street Church. The music was amazing, and more than \$500 was raised for UMHS!



Community Christmas Service at Franklin Street Church

UPCOMING EVENTS

The next **Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community** is scheduled for Sunday, June 12 at People's Natural Gas Field in Altoona. Consider making your own Team, joining one, or contributing to raise funds for Project Shoes!

Visit www.walkforahealthycommunity.org to register on behalf of UMHS.

We are excited for the support of **H.F. Lenz Company** who has chosen UMHS for their **18th Annual Charity Golf Tournament!** It will be held at Bedford Springs Resort on Monday, August 22. More information will be shared soon on how you can support us.

GRANTS

Many thanks to the following for recent grants:

- **The Mission Support team of the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church** for their generous support of our general budget for 2022.
- **The Fund for the Future of Community Foundation for the Alleghenies** in support of Bridges to Success.
- **Elizabeth A. Bradley Foundation, United Methodist Women** supporting Project Shoes.
- **Independent Order of Odd Fellows Alma Lodge No. 523** for their recent gift supporting our growing programs.

OTHER PROGRAM UPDATES

Our Direct Aid programs continue to minister to those in need. In 2021:

The Franklin Street Food Pantry served about 4,200 people.

We helped around 425 kids get shoes or boots with Project Shoes.

We provided 181 instances of other direct help in 2021, with Bundles of Joy, the Care program, Emergency Food Supply, and Emergency Financial Assistance. That impacted 471 individuals when you consider household sizes.

Thank you for helping us provide such immediate care to those who are struggling!

*Cheryl Bedick Keafer, MSW
Executive Director*

OBSTACLES TO FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

*By: Carolyn Varchol, MA,
Program Director*

In the Getting Ahead cohorts, participants (called investigators) are considered the experts in their own lives. They are amazing problem solvers. They know what they have tried...what worked and what did not work. They can speak about the obstacles they and others in a similar situation have faced and perhaps overcame. Sharing their stories around the table serves to help and inspire one another. It also opens discussion for ideas and possible solutions from their perspective.

As we begin building our newest bridge to address employment needs in our Bridges to Success Program, it seemed fitting to ask some of our Getting Ahead (GA) graduates for their thoughts on gaining meaningful employment.

The question the graduates were asked was:

“What do you think it would take for someone in poverty to get a full-time living wage job? What obstacles would they have to overcome?” Here are their answers.

Sonja Freeman (Fall 2019) The biggest obstacle is finding a resource to point you in the right direction for such a job, like an employment agency. Getting help with resume writing is necessary and possessing sufficient motivation to find a job is important as well.

Sonja added that the very first thing to do is to pray for direction, especially for the best fitting job. Know your interests and what you are passionate about, but also keep your options open. Sometimes you must crawl before you walk – maybe it’s volunteering or working part-time first before you can get full-time.

Peggy Albus (Fall 2019) Secondary education and transportation are necessary. Sometimes moving out of the area helps. Displaying a good work ethic is important to move up in a company.

Amara Fayette (Fall 2019) For someone in generational poverty, they need to obtain a skill, an education in a vocational school, community college, apprenticeship program, or even online learning. Financial support for education is important, and the expense of childcare is a consideration.

Transportation can be an obstacle, especially if your shift starts at 6:00 a.m.

Julie Peterman (Spring 2016) Childcare and transportation are major obstacles. Where you live makes a difference. If a person earns \$15 an hour but pays \$12 an hour for childcare, is it really worth it? There are agencies that offer role-playing for interviews and assistance in obtaining work attire for folks who have mental health challenges. Lack of motivation can be an issue. A person does need to possess the willingness to work, especially if other family members are receiving SSI.

Jennifer Stape (Fall 2017) believes one needs higher education – either vocational training or a degree. Situations that can keep you trapped in poverty are not having a car, being a single parent, or having a criminal record. Family support is important (for survival). One difficulty for working folks who are under resourced is accessing online paystubs. If one cannot afford home Internet service but has to provide proof of income to qualify for low-income benefits (i.e., LIHEAP, P-CAP, etc.), it is time-consuming and difficult to find a place to access and print them.

Rebecca Freeman (Spring 2016) “Some things that helped me to overcome generational poverty were understanding the need for some sort of education or training moving forward. I came from a mother that had me at 15 and wasn’t the best educated woman, so I had to find mentors in different people, particularly teachers and counselors. I think that money management skills are incredibly important and learning how to prioritize oneself and their goals is imperative.”

Jennifer Hautz (Spring 2016) “There’s no substitute for motivation and drive.” Some folks may grow up in an atmosphere where they feel they can’t do any better. There could be transportation or financial challenges (if pursuing a job that requires higher education), but if you are driven to do something and have determination, you’ll find a way to do it. If a person has a high school diploma or GED, there are plenty of trades that can provide a good job, but it all comes down to motivation.

To summarize, five of the seven respondees believe higher education (i.e. vocational/trade school or college) is necessary to obtain a living wage job. Several noted that obstacles include transportation. The cost of childcare was also mentioned. Lastly, three respondents stated that motivation is a key factor in obtaining a living-wage job.

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We would love to continue to keep you informed of UMHS news, but if you would like to be removed from our newsletter mailing list you may call the office at 814-539-2633 or send an e-mail to carolyn@umhumanservices.org. Thank you!

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