

Attleboro District Council graduates Six Getting Ahead Investigators

Cheered and supported by a group of Vincentians who believed in them from the start, a class of six beaming graduates celebrated the completion of their journeys through the **Getting Ahead** program on Thursday evening, July 7, 2016. A crowd of about 60 Vincentians, community leaders, and family and friends of the graduates gathered for the outdoor ceremony and dinner held under a festively decorated tent on a beautiful summer evening.



Getting Ahead facilitator Kathy Jaaskelainen shares an onlooking graduate's story (right) while coordinator Irene Frechette (left) looks on.

The event marked the culmination of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Attleboro District Council's first Getting Ahead Program, and the first Vincentian program in Massachusetts. Many community and business organizations collaborated with the District to get the program off-the ground, offering financial and in-kind assistance. Leaders of these organizations also attended the ceremony. For each graduate, the ceremony signaled a new beginning as they plant their own seeds of confidence and hope, more prepared now to face life's challenging voyage.

Three Vincentian leaders – Irene Frechette (coordinator), Diana Reeves (facilitator) and Kathy Jaaskelainen (facilitator) – introduced the six individual graduates and their stories, and two graduates shared their own personal thoughts. The mutual respect and rapport that these Vincentians had developed with the graduates were obvious, and the graduates all had profuse words of praise for the Getting Ahead Program and its three leaders. Some very impressive self-exploratory class work completed by the investigators (as they are called during the Program) was displayed under the tent, demonstrating the positive impact of this experience on its participants. As the Vincentians and other attendees visited with graduates and their families and enjoyed dinner together, the graduates shared more personal stories in quiet and moving individual conversations. Those present found the evening a remarkably inspiring and humbling experience. Seven SVdP Conferences were represented at this memorable event.

While Irene Frechette was serving as Fall River Diocesan Council president, she introduced many Vincentians to the Getting Ahead Program, designed to bring true systemic change into the lives of the friends we serve. Steve Meaney, Attleboro District Council President at the time, had dedicated a District meeting to introduce the Society's Systemic Change principles through a thoughtful and eye-opening presentation. Irene then coordinated *Bridges out of Poverty* video viewing sessions, and several participants then continued with online national SVdP Getting Ahead facilitator training. From this training arose two willing volunteers, Diana and Kathy, to lead the Attleboro District's first Getting Ahead program.

Irene relentlessly sought financial support from the community, worked with Conference presidents to identify investigators among the friends their conferences serve, and collaborated with the local

YMCA who generously hosted the 16-week Getting Ahead sessions at no cost. These efforts came to fruition, first with the initial program launch, and many weeks later with the graduation of the District's first six Getting Ahead investigators. Plans are now in full swing for the next Getting Ahead Program this fall or winter. At least one new graduate plans to attend an upcoming Getting Ahead training session to become a future program facilitator.

Local media coverage of the program told more of the story in the Fall River diocesan newspaper [*The Anchor*](#), as well as [*The Sun Chronicle*](#) local newspaper.

Mary Dwyer
President, Attleboro District Council
Society of St. Vincent de Paul



A Getting Ahead graduate shares his story while coordinator Irene Frechette (left) and facilitator Diana Reeves (right) listen and reflect on his words.