

# Understanding People Living in Poverty

Donna Beegle is an inspirational figure who worked her way out of poverty. She was illiterate and eventually obtained her doctorate degree. She attributes her success to “caring people” and a pilot program that showed her the way and continued to provide support through her difficulties even after the formal program ended. Today, she tries to help others identify the resources they need to work their way out of poverty. You can locate the youtube video with Donna’s keynote address at the 2014 St. Vincent de Paul Society’s National Assembly in Atlanta in its entirety if you Google Donna Beegle, st. vincent de paul or by entering the address below into your browser.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxPunFbnyAI>

(Additional materials from Donna Beegle will be made available online by the St. Vincent de Paul Society in the near future.)

**SOME ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETIES HOSTING GETTING AHEAD PROGRAMS REQUIRE THEIR VOLUNTERS TO ATTEND A 6-7 HOUR POVERTY EDUCATION TRAINING SESSION. IN THE INTEREST OF TIME AND CONVENIENCE, WE ARE INVITING OUR VOLUNTEERS TO ACCESS THE MATERIALS BELOW AT THEIR LEISURE TO VIEW THE BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY DVD SERIES.**

## ***Self Study***

Link to Bridges DVD series online where you can watch the DVD series for free:

<http://www.ahaprocess.com/svdp/>

#1 Introduction and Mental Models (30:31)

#2 Research Continuum (19:38)

#3 Key Points (16:34)

#4 Hdden Rules of Class (37:41)

#5 Family Structures (34:27)

#6 The Role of Language and Story (38:23)

#7 Resources (27:29)

Notes & activities designed by another conference to accompany the Bridges out of Poverty DVDs follow.

If you have questions, contact us: St. Dorothea SVdP Help Line @ 732-939-6225.

(Web site: <http://stdorothea-stvincentdepaul.org/> )

# **Hope Takes Action**

**Bridges Out of Poverty**

**Education Workshop**

**St. Patrick Church, McHenry**

**IL**

**April 23, 2016**

## ***Understanding Those Living in Poverty***

### **Introduction**

When dealing with people we serve, we sometimes struggle to:

1. **Understand** what is being presented or requested
2. **Discern** the truth of the situation
3. **Accept** their life style
4. **Attitudes** –ours and theirs
5. **Their inability** to follow a plan of action.

This is only a partial list. We do our best with who we are and the situations we find ourselves in.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul's vision is "**End Poverty through Systemic Change.**" And one of the first things we have to understand about systemic change is that **it has to start with us.** We have to adjust the way we look at things and the way we do things. **If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always got. If you want to get what you've never got, you will have to do what you've never done.** The definition of insanity is "doing the same thing over and over, and expecting different results." We cannot expect different results if we continue to do things the way we have always done them.

One of the first things we have to do is **gain a better understanding** of the individuals and families we are trying to help. The presentation today is focused around the principles set forth in the book "**Bridges Out of Poverty**" by **Ruby Payne, Phil DeVol and TerieDreussi Smith.** This workshop will provide a better understanding of different economic classes – of environments of wealth, middle class, and, especially, poverty. The workshop will be a combination of viewing videos, discussion groups, and Q and A sessions.

A few things to keep in mind while viewing this material: **our focus here is on economic class,** not race/ethnic group or social standing. We often make generalizations whenever we try to understand a particular group of people. This information is not intended to allow us to put people in nice, clean boxes but rather to soften our hearts and give us a bit more insight into people and situations we encounter – to learn more about what the human experience looks like for a variety of our brothers and sisters. And, of course, there are always exceptions.

Finally, it's helpful to keep in mind that any change that takes place for those in poverty must be a choice they make, not one we make.

Let's begin.

***Bridges Out of Poverty***  
***Constructs***

**Ten Core Constructs from Bridges Out of Poverty:**

- 1. Use the lens of economic class to understand and take responsibility for your own societal experience while being open to the experience of others.**
- 2. At the intersections of poverty with other social disparities (racial, gender, physical ability, age, etc.), address inequalities in access to resources.**
- 3. Define poverty as the extent to which a person, institution, or community does without resources.**
- 4. Build relationships of mutual respect.**
- 5. Base plans on the premise that people in all classes, sectors, and political persuasions are problem solvers and need to be at the decision making table.**
- 6. Base plans on accurate mental models of poverty, middle class, and wealth.**
- 7. At the individual, institutional, and community levels: Stabilize the environment, remove barriers to transition, and build resources.**
- 8. Address all causes of poverty (four areas of research).**
- 9. Build long-term support for individual, institutional, and community/policy transition.**
- 10. Build economically sustainable communities in which everyone can live well.**

## ***Bridges Out of Poverty Video 1***

### ***Introduction and Mental Models***

The first of seven videos that we will view today is a basic introduction and explanation of mental models. After viewing the video, we will have time for group discussion related to the material presented.

**NOTE: In the middle of this video it will ask you to stop the video and draw your mental model. We won't take the time to do this today, you can draw it later on your own.**

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Main Points of the Presentation:

1. In order to **create sustainable communities**, it is not only people in poverty who have to change; it is also people in middle class and wealth.
2. An **accurate mental model of poverty is needed** to do good planning.
3. Mental **models affect your behavior**.
4. No significant **change** occurs without a significant relationship.
5. Visible/Invisible: no problem can be solved if it is not seen. **People in poverty are invisible** when it comes to planning and decision making, even when institutions and communities are dealing with poverty issues.
6. The **poorer** you are, the **more stress** you feel, the **sicker** you are.
7. Education is not in the mental model for poverty.
8. In order to **change** one's life, **one must experience social coherence**, a sense that you are an important part of the society around you and that the goods and structures of society are for you. Otherwise even the best information comes across as just noise.
9. You must **create a plan** in order for change to take effect. Planning is very difficult in an unstable environment in which you constantly **live in the tyranny of the moment**.
10. **People in poverty are problem solvers**. People solve concrete problems using reactive skills and relationships.
11. **Instability is a key feature of poverty environments**. People are afraid for today because problems fly at them from everywhere. The less stability, the less time for the abstract, the less time for learning.

**Group 1 Discussion:**

**Give some additional examples of how mental models affect your attitudes and behavior.**

**Group 2 Discussion:**

**Without pointing fingers, give examples of how we treat people differently depending on how well they fit our mental models of what we think they should be.**

## ***Bridges Out of Poverty Video 2***

### ***Research Continuum***

The second video discusses research that is being done related to poverty and some of the conclusions that have been drawn from that research.

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Main Points of the Presentation:

1. Working towards the **stability of a community requires understanding and addressing all the causes of poverty.**
2. This comprehensive use of research on the causes of poverty **attracts people from various political persuasions to the work.**
3. **Discourse** about poverty in the U.S. **tends to be divided**: some emphasize that **behavior alone** is responsible for poverty; others emphasize that **political and economic structures** are the sole reason for poverty. In order to be effective, **we must realize that both individual behavior and societal structures – and other factors in between – cause poverty.**
4. Poverty research - - Causes of Poverty:
  - a. **Behavior of Individuals**: dependency, single parenthood, values/work ethic, breakup of families, addiction/mental illness, and language experience
  - b. **Absence of Human and social capital in communities**: lack of employment, lack of education, inadequate skill sets, declining neighborhoods, middle class flight, lack of career ladders
  - c. **Exploitation**: exploitation of dominated groups for profit, exploitation of dominated groups for market, exploitation of regions for resources
  - d. **Political/Economic Structures**: de-industrialization, globalization, increased productivity, shrinking middle class, economic disparity, corporate influence
5. **Whole system planning**, measures of accountability and intellectual capital **must be implemented**  
across Individual, Institution/Agency, Community and Policy arenas.

**Group 1 Discussion:**

**You can make a lot of money off of people in poverty (exploitation – predators) – give examples.**

**Group 2 Discussion:**

**Absence of human and social capital in communities: lack of employment, lack of education, inadequate skill sets, declining neighborhoods, middle class flight, lack of career ladders. How do you see this in your community?**

## ***Bridges Out of Poverty Video 3***

### ***Key Points***

The third video focuses on setting some ground rules in our understanding of people living in poverty.

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Main Points of the Presentation:

1. **This material is all about economic diversity, not just poverty.** We need to understand middle class and wealth too. **People in poverty may need to make some changes, but no more than anyone else** working toward sustainable communities.
2. There are other lenses through which to analyze poverty: race, gender, age, disability, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, immigrant status, religion, and region. All of these are important and legitimate, but **the economic lens casts the widest net.** People who are in poverty see their lives and their environment through more than one lens.
3. **Poverty is relative.**
4. **Generational poverty is different from situational poverty.** An individual in generational poverty has two generations before him or her who have been in poverty, so it is all they have ever known. In situational poverty, the poverty is a more recent situation of the family.
5. **Having a future story is important** for those trying to **transition out of poverty.**
6. **This work is based on patterns – all patterns have exceptions.**
7. In order to move from poverty to middle class, you may have to **give up certain relationships** in order to focus on achievement.
8. As Jodi Pfarr described, individuals moving from one class to another often feel like they are **living in two worlds without really fitting in to either one.**
9. **You can't blame people for being in poverty.** There are many factors contributing to their situation.
10. **Don't make excuses for nor scold people in poverty.**

#### **Group 1 Discussion:**

**“People in poverty may need to make some changes, but no more than anyone else working toward sustainable communities.” What are some of the changes you may need to consider to work effectively with people in poverty?**

#### **Group 2 Discussion:**

**What are the poverty levels in your town? What are the average costs for rent, utilities, food etc. compared to wages available.**

## ***Bridges Out of Poverty Video 4***

### ***Hidden Rules***

Video four presents the concepts of unspoken rules within each class and how they impact understanding and behavior.

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Main Points of the Presentation:

1. **Unspoken rules and habits** of a group come directly from **the environment you live in**, in which you were raised.
2. Food: poverty is concerned with **quantity**, middle class is concerned with **quality**, wealth is concerned with **presentation**.
3. Driving force: for poverty is **relationships** (the more you have the better chance of survivorship), for middle class is **achievement** (working lunch, working vacation and working retirements), for wealth is **connections**.
4. **Poor: name on their shirt; middle: name on door or desk; wealthy: name on a building**
5. **If you want to have a relationship with someone, you must understand their perspective.** If you grew up in middle class and that has shaped your hidden rules, you must also be aware of the different hidden rules of those who have grown up in poverty in order to build a relationship. Being aware of your own rules and the different rules of a person in poverty can help reduce being judgmental, and help to resolve conflicts and build relationships of mutual respect.
6. **Time: poverty** is concerned with **now**, middle class is concerned **with future**, wealth is **traditions and history**.
7. **Destiny:** for poverty is **fate** (not planning future), for middle class is **choices and consequences** (difficult time living in and for a moment), for wealth **“noblesse oblige”** (giving back).
8. **Power:** for poverty is strength or **ability to fight**, for middle class is **information and institutions**, for wealth **is expertise and connections**.
9. If someone wants **to successfully navigate the environments of work and school, they must understand middle class hidden rules and formal language structure used there** – making it about choice – **the more rules we know the more gains you make**.

**Group 1 Discussion:**

**Can you identify hidden rules not mentioned in the video, for example: love, education, world view, clothing, and personality?**

**Group 2 Discussion:**

**In what ways and to what degree have you been judgmental about those who have come to you? What have you encountered in those in poverty that upsets you? In other words, what do they do that bugs you?**



## ***Bridges Out of Poverty Video 5***

### ***Family Structures***

Video Five looks at different life styles and family structures among those in poverty. This segment will delve into areas of moral sensitivity. ***(NOTE – this video has not been included in today's workshop)***

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Main Points of the Presentation:

1. It is easy to cross the line of being judgmental when encountering alternative family structures.
2. In order to keep proper perspective, we must see **family structures as different – not dysfunctional.**
3. Middle Class: blended family (Marry-Divorce-Marry) – Man: provider (patriarch); Woman: care giver/provider
4. Poverty: Marry (maybe)-move on (no Divorce)- Live together – Man: protector, lover, fighter; Woman: rescuer, single parent provider (matriarch)
5. “Arched eyebrow” is a sign of judgment.
6. There was a significant discussion of Jane’s family structure.
7. The question in **poverty is not “where you live” but “where are you staying?”**
8. **Stability is not often characteristic of the family in poverty.** This refers to both the environment and the coming and going of people.
9. **Be aware of your own mental models about families.**
10. The penance/forgiveness cycle is about maintaining relationships – not changing behaviors.

**Group1 Discussion:**

**In what ways will this understanding change how you will work with those you encounter?**

**Group 2 Discussion:**

**What family situations/environments do you encounter that strain your moral values and convictions and how do you deal with them?**

## ***Bridges Out of Poverty Video 6***

### ***Language and Story***

The sixth video presents the topic of language and an analysis of how language differs with each economic group.

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Main Points of the Presentation:

1. **Relationships of mutual respect begin with language.**
2. There are **five language registers**: Frozen (prayer); Intimate (language of love); Formal (institutional, organizational, middle class); Consultative (formal conversation); Casual (between friends, poverty).
3. More neuropathways with greater vocabulary.
4. Survival (driving force in poverty) truly means staying alive.
5. Those in **poverty** use the **casual register** (400-800 words plus body language).
6. **Middle class and wealth: linear response** - get to the point; **Poverty: circular response** – talking around the situation – long story
7. People using the **formal register** (middle class, wealth and organizations) **will always dominate those using the casual register.**
8. The results of a six year study were presented, showing how formative the first three years are in the development of language in each economic class.
9. **We need to devote more time to relationships.**
10. The formal register is linear and sequential; the casual register is circular-random.

**Group1 Discussion:**

**From what was discussed here, do you feel you have a better understanding of those you are trying to help? If yes, why? If no, why not?**

**Group 2 Discussion:**

**Language issues: what problems do you encounter when trying to communicate with those who come to you for assistance?**

## ***Bridges Out of Poverty Video 7 Resources***

The seventh video presents the different types of resources we all have available to us.

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Main Points of the Presentation:

1. The Bridges' definition of **poverty is “the extent to which an individual, institution, or community does without resources.”**
2. “Getting Ahead” **investigators do a self-assessment of their personal resources and decide which to build.** They make a SMART goal action plan using their strongest resources and support from the community to begin working towards a more stable life.
3. Resources:
  - a. **Financial Resources:** for now and for the future
  - b. **Emotional Resources:** how do you deal with what you encounter
  - c. **Mental Resources:** how educated are you
  - d. **Spiritual Resources:** anything bigger that gives direction to your life
  - e. **Physical Resources:** are you physically able to deal with all that comes your way
  - f. **Support Systems:** social capital: bonding (investigators) vs bridging (mentoring)
  - g. **Hidden Rules:** understanding how things work
  - h. **Relationships/Role Models:** those you can rely on
  - i. **Social Capital:** Bonding or Bridging capital
  - j. **Trust / Integrity:** Not only in the individual but towards agencies and systems
  - k. **Motivation / Persistence:** The ability to follow-up on plans diligently
4. The example of Cascade Engineering was presented
5. Recognize those we serve as problem solvers

**Group 1 Discussion:**

**How might traditional approaches to “bringing” resources (charity) “enable” people to remain in poverty? What must be considered if we are help empower individuals in poverty to “build” resources?**

**Group 2 Discussion:**

**Cascade Engineering – why did it work? Do you have any companies in your area like them? Do you have community resources that could make something like this happen?**

# ***‘Getting Ahead in a Just Getting-By World’ Program Overview***

Getting Ahead is geared toward people in generational and long term situational poverty. It is a 16-20 session **facilitated** program for small groups (8-14 each) of individuals wanting to get out of poverty.

Participants are ‘vetted’ by HTA committee members. The participants must agree to engage fully in the program and accept outside help in the form of mentors. At all points in this process it is the participant who accepts the program makes the choices necessary to transition out of poverty.

In Getting Ahead participants, called “Investigators”;

- explore and analyze their life now
- learn about the hidden rules of economic class
- assess their personal resources and those of the community in which they live
- make their own arguments for change
- build their own future stories, not someone else’s
- make their own choices
- enjoy the power that comes from solving problems and controlling their own life
- make concrete plans to build resources and transition to economic stability
- become skillful at using the hidden rules of economic class to build resources and navigate systems
- prepare themselves to take a seat at the decision making tables in their community

The seminar series consists of ten modules. They include;

- My Life Now
- Theory of Change
- Rich/Poor Gap and Research on Causes of Poverty
- Hidden Rules of Economic Class
- The Importance of Language
- Eleven Resources
- Self- Assessment of Resources
- Community Assessment of Resources
- Building Resources
- Personal and Community Plans for Transition