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# Getting Ahead

**PROGRAM:** First 'Getting Ahead' class graduates

**By Chris Zavadil**  
Fremont Tribune

Things are looking up for Bruce Vesper, and he hopes his son is the one who benefits from it.

Vesper was one of nine graduates from the first "Getting Ahead in a Getting-By World" program, collaboratively offered by Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, Uniquely Yours Stability Support and Care Corps Homeless Shelter.

Other graduates of the inaugural class were Scott Andersen, Kim Beecher, Mollie Christ, Haley Douglas, Randy Flagle, Lily Kinkade, Jessica Rinaker and Sasha Womeldorf.

They were honored during a ceremony on Thursday at Midland University's Kimmel Theater.

The program helps families that are struggling with poverty learn how to build stability and a better life for themselves and their children. It focuses on understanding the impact of poverty on families and the community, and encourages participants to create plans for change within their homes and community.

Curriculum includes learning about credit, lending and general financial literacy, as well as developing a deeper understanding of the causes of poverty and what can be done to bridge gaps.

Vesper, the single father of a 3-year-old son, said he looked at his future and his son's future, and then decided to commit to the class.

"A lot of it was I wanted to make a change and make a better life for myself and for my son," he said.

"One of the biggest things I found was that it shows you what direction you're going, it makes you look at where you



Chris Zavadil, Fremont Tribune

As his classmates watch, Bruce Vesper gets a hug from Nicole Hogle of Care Corps Homeless Services

Inc. on Thursday during the graduation ceremony for the Getting Ahead in a Getting-By World class.

## First students graduate from class

are going in your future and  
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how you're getting there," he said. "I can see from the classes where I am today and how I speak, and I can look at that and see the steps that I've taken to get here. Now I know that I'm on my way to make a better life for my son."

A common theme among the graduates, who each spoke briefly, was their intention to continue their involvement in the community, passing on the lessons learned in the class.

"One of the assets that we have found in this class," Vesper said, "was the fact that the resources in Fremont are there, they're just not coming to the people who need them, so we're going to take the next step forward and get the resources closer to the people that can use them throughout the community."

Michelle Padilla, family life educator at Lutheran Family Services, said the class helps participants investigate why people end up in the cycle of poverty, and how it affects themselves and their community.

"They do a lot of research and understanding of why that is happening with themselves, with their families, with their friends and in their community," Padilla said.

"Little by little, they start to understand and connect why different things are happening and how that's affecting poverty in the community or in their household, and each person saw it very differently," Padilla said. "At the end, their conclusion was that there's a lot of resources that are available in the community, and there's a lot of people needing resources, but we're trying to understand that disconnect between the two."

Research results were shared with the Fremont Family Coalition, as well as legislators and the mayor of Fremont.

The program is new to Fremont, but has been taking place in Iowa for several years, and similar efforts are being made in Columbus.

"Michelle and I attended the training three years ago and again two years ago, and then we had a training here locally," said Christy Fiala, Lutheran Family Services regional director. "Each time we attended the training, we had the hope and goal of bringing it to the community. We finally got all of the right pieces together and were able to do so."

A grant from the Fremont Area Community Foundation purchased books for the class. The collaborating sponsors covered the rest of the

expenses. There is no cost to the participants.

Classes were held on Thursday mornings at Lutheran Family Services.

"It is a large commitment," Padilla said. "It was 23 or 24 weeks, two hours weekly."

The next session will begin in November. People interested in participating can contact Lutheran Family Services, Uniquely Yours or Care Corps.

"The issues are important because there is a lot of work done in Fremont to help those in poverty, but we have to spend our efforts and time helping people get out of poverty," Fiala said.

"This work is done in order to move families out of poverty. That's ever so important in order to break the cycle, improve the community, and improve lives of everyone, because when more people are contributing to the society around us, we all benefit from it."

"The education part was the first part," Padilla said, "and I want to encourage the community to embrace and support the graduates as they move forward and work on their future plans. The work's not done yet, we're just getting started, and it takes the whole community to really come together and help people pull out of the cycle of poverty."



Chris Zavadil, Fremont Tribune

Lutheran Family Services executive director Christy Fiala talks about the Getting Ahead in a Getting-By World during graduation ceremonies Thursday at Midland University's Kimmel Theater.