

February 2017

New York State Legislature Higher Education Budget Hearing

Testimony from Executive Director Samuel Rowser, On Point for College

Thank you very much for your interest and investment in On Point for College, your leadership is appreciated. I'm Sam Rowser, the Executive Director of On Point. Ginny Donohue, the Founder of On Point for College, started out as a volunteer helping young people from a homeless shelter get into college for eight years. In 1999, it stole her heart and she left her corporate job and started On Point for College. Shortly after, I joined On Point as her first employee. It's been 17 years and we've now placed 6,800 people in more than 200 colleges and universities. Our biggest bump in size came in 2012 when HESC gave us funding. It was College Access Challenge Grant federal funding that moved through HESC, and because we were a single source provider and we became a HESC partner we were able to double in size in Syracuse, open an office in Utica, and partner in New York City with Goddard Riverside Community Center in Manhattan and New Settlement Apartments in the Bronx to give them both funding and guidance on how to do a retention program.

I just want to explain how we're different. There are a lot of college access programs in the state. We work with people 17-29. We receive a lot of referrals from the high schools, but we don't work in the high schools, we only work in community centers. We work in 27 community centers, Boys and Girls clubs, settlement houses, refugee centers, libraries, municipal housing. 60% of the students we meet are not in high school. Most are high school graduates and or got an education somewhere else so they don't have a guidance counselor available to them anywhere else. 30% of them have no parent in their life, and so they're very, very vulnerable but despite all of these obstacles that they're facing, 70% of them—and most of them are community college students—return for their sophomore year, which is clearly 10% above the average community college student, despite all the obstacles they're facing.

I just want to tell you a couple of things that we do that most programs don't. We have an orientation that teaches them the ropes before they go to college because most of them have been the first person in their family to go. We give them some college supplies. We provide transportation in New York State all the way through college, with a bus ticket or through transportation by 150 mentors—including ex (Syracuse) Mayor Tom Young—we drove 190,000 miles last year to take inner-city youth to and from college. At the beginning of every semester, we go to 78 different college and we sit across from them in the cafeteria and we make sure they've gotten their books and their food and we introduce them to the campus angel, a volunteer that helps them on campus. We partner with a dentist who does pro bono root canals, we provide winter coats, and eyeglasses, and we've had so many students that were homeless I went to my alma mater Le Moyne College, that allows them for the last 15 years—not just students from Le Moyne, and even students from New York City—to live there for free for the summer if they

have nowhere else to live. We do job placement, we help people with certificate programs, and (Syracuse) Police Chief Frank Fowler has said that there is no organization in the city of Syracuse that has decreased the violence like On Point for College.

I want you to know that we've been good stewards of the money that was given to us through HESC. We brought more than a million dollars from national foundations. We're instrumental in teaming up with three community colleges and SUNY Oswego to bring \$2.8 million in the First in the World grant. We're the only community-based organization in the country that got funding for that. Since we got funding from HESC we've placed over 4,000 students in college. We enrolled them in college, which brought over \$17 million in tuition to SUNY and CUNY—remember most of these students weren't in high school so they couldn't have gotten there any other way—and \$22 million worth of PELL. Over their lifetime, if they get an associate's degree it'll bring \$1.5 billion of taxable income, or with a bachelor's \$2.1 billion. The funding for this grant ended in August of 2016 and are so very grateful for the \$400,000 allocated by the State of New York through the Assembly in the current budget year. We are asking for your support to help us replace the \$1.2 million dollars for Syracuse, Utica and New York City so that we can continue on to do this fine work. Because we were not fully funded in 2016, we were forced to cut important services to our students including college supplies, clothing, and math-science grants. We also know that we do know how to replicate. We're reaching people that no one else is reaching and we're open, given additional funding, to be able to share this with other locations. I thank you.