

# Grant Helps Students Through Key Transitions

**E**ddie Mitchell and Ryedell Davis battled long odds and difficult circumstances to become the college graduates and community role models they are today.

They saw friends from their Syracuse, N.Y., neighborhoods drop out of school. They heard of those they grew up with going to jail. They watched the burials of family members who lost their lives to crime.

Mitchell and Davis know they could have been among them. And on more than one occasion, they were tempted to give up on the education that could help deliver them from that fate.

But help was always there.



Ginny Donohue of On Point for College hopes a USA Funds grant will help students tackle college-level classes.

"I wanted to quit," says Davis, who attended Syracuse University on an academic scholarship. "I thought, 'I can't do this. I can't live here. I don't like working hard to get C's when I used to get A's.'"

"And I don't know how she found out about it, but I got a call from Ginny. She said she heard I wanted to drop out, and she told me stories about the importance of getting a college degree. She inspired me to keep going."

Ginny Donohue is the executive director of On Point for College, recipient of a \$450,000 grant through the USA Funds Key Transitions in Postsecondary Education initiative. USA Funds awarded three organizations a total of \$1.6 million through the program in 2013.

Based in Syracuse, On Point provides college access and success services to assist inner-city, first-generation students as well as adult learners. USA Funds selected On Point — and Bright Prospect, of Pomona, Calif., and College Track, of Oakland, Calif. — from 249 applicants to receive the awards.

Mitchell attended five different postsecondary schools. He faced health issues and injury as a basketball player — and as a gunshot victim — and sometimes struggled with his studies.

"On Point took me to and from college on breaks, helped me with housing deposits and books, gave me advice, and helped me keep pushing," Mitchell says.

Mitchell now is 27 and a graduate of Tompkins Cortland Community College. He runs Team A.N.G.E.L. — which stands for Avoid Negative Garbage, Enjoy Life — with his childhood friend Davis. They created the organization to assist Syracuse children who face the same challenges they overcame. Their inspiration: Donohue, who started On Point in 1999 with a work station based in the trunk of her car and funding from her own pocket.

"Ginny saw the bigger meaning," says Davis, now 28 and a graduate of Syracuse University. "And that's how we are."

On Point currently serves nearly 6,000 students in Syracuse; Utica, N.Y.; and New York City, offering a variety of support to help ensure those students enroll and succeed in college. The organization also helps its college graduates find jobs after completing school. With USA Funds' grant, On Point plans to bolster services for students who need assistance preparing for college-level classes.





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## \$1.6 Million Awarded to three college success programs.



The grant program is based on this theory of change: When supportive services are provided to students in target populations — low-income students, first-generation students, students of color, foster youth and adult learners — at key transition points, their persistence to complete college will increase.



Stephanie Allen (from left), of On Point for College, assists Marnique Rogers and Quana Caldwell, two of the nearly 6,000 students the program serves.

"If we can help students build their skills in reading, writing and math, and help them test out of remedial courses and start right out at college level," Donohue says, "we believe they will just soar."

Mitchell applauds On Point's efforts to expand its services — as well as the support from USA Funds that will help On Point in that endeavor.

"People need all different kinds of help to go to college," he says. "I had to fight to get where I am now, but On Point helped me to be successful. Students like me need a chance to have a different kind of experience in their lives." ▾