Transforming lives. Transforming communities.

On Point for College
On Point for College guides young men and women along the often daunting road through college, including the application process, with mentoring, one-on-one counseling, transportation, clothing grants, workforce transition, and on-campus visits to all NY state colleges every semester – places where dreams can falter under adversity. Students benefit from continuous support, including on-campus visits throughout college. Most importantly, On Point provides the opportunity for students to stand on their own dreams, and move forward with the strength to make a secure investment in the future.

The numbers, including more than 5,000 students who have gone on to 216 colleges and universities to date, speak loudly to On Point’s success. The personal achievements of the students who are On Point – and the mentors and volunteers who are with them along the way – are a voice louder by far.

On Point for College Inc.’s Mission:
We break down barriers that prevent young, underserved individuals from achieving education and career success.

Ginny Donohue
Founder, On Point for College

From austere beginnings come remarkable results.
In 1999, Ginny Donohue left a corporate career to found On Point for College, devoting her time and energy to the educational success of inner-city youth. For the first few years, she led the charge from the trunk of her car, which served as office space. As the program reached more students, it attracted the attention of donors and volunteers, who quickly caught on to the spirit – and importance – of Ginny’s work.

She had found, as one student put it, a way to share her “college access know-how.”

Ginny knew that the biggest obstacles beg some of the simplest solutions. She built On Point on the basics, because that’s where many would-be students fall away. Intimidated by the application process, skeptical about being able to afford college, and lacking basic transportation to get them to the dormitory door, many students are hindered by a fog of logistics that, to them, is a wall impossible to scale.

These students found in On Point for College what they needed to achieve success in education.
Mawut Guarak

At the age of 10, forced to join the South Sudanese revolutionary movement, Mawut was holding a gun instead of school books. “That, I thought, was the end of my studies.”

One of the Lost Boys of Sudan, he fled to a refugee camp in Kenya, and eventually relocated to Syracuse, where a new beginning was waiting.

Through On Point for College, Mawut renewed his dream of education, earning a master’s degree in public administration from Binghamton University.

“...I can use to express my gratitude. Thank you for making On Point for College a bridge that connects the less fortunate world to the real one.”

Mawut Guarak
Masters of Public Administration
SUNY Binghamton
Starting over was becoming a habit for Marcus. Forced to drop out of high school to take care of his ailing mother and younger sisters, he earned his GED but lived a dangerous life on Syracuse’s streets. Thoughts of a better life pulled at him, and Marcus enrolled in community college. Still, his education took a back seat. “I lost a lot of focus.” On Point for College helped him get it back.

Marcus earned a bachelor’s degree in legal studies from University at Buffalo and a master’s of Health Administration from Cornell University.

“On Point for College nurtures the potential and talent in individuals that would otherwise be wasted.”

Marcus Smith
Masters, Health Administration
Cornell University
Delvina Uka

Leaving war-torn Kosovo for a new life in Syracuse, Delvina faced language barriers and a new culture, yet was hungry for college. On Point for College eased the struggle.

"In the beginning, you feel lost. It was, ‘Am I doing this right?’ They always have their phones on.”

Four years into a five-year civil engineering program at RIT, Delvina feared for the future she desperately wanted for herself and her family. She had no money for books.

On Point put her in touch with the first of two cooperative jobs.

Now, Delvina is ready – eager, even – for the next challenge.

And then? “Change the world.”

More than 9,000 students have gone on to 200+ colleges and universities to date.

More than 95% of these students are the first person in their family to attend college.

30% do not have an active parent; some are homeless, from foster care, or are refugees.
Lawrence Denson

What he learned in the classroom at Notre Dame University accounts for only a fraction of Lawrence’s success. While On Point for College opened his mind to the opportunity of higher education, he found a steady, guiding hand in On Point mentor, Sam Lanzafame, who shared his experiences and knowledge of the business world, and passion for his own alma mater, Notre Dame. The two forged a relationship that shaped not only Lawrence’s college experience, but his path for the future.

Lawrence learned to seize every opportunity, landing a coveted job with Goldman Sachs in New York City.
Candice Gregory

On her own since 15, Candice found On Point for College through a chance encounter at the Southwest Community Center.

“They really encouraged me. I had the academic strength, but I needed the personal strength and know-how to get by.”

The anchor in Candice’s On Point family was her mentor, Mary Ann Laidlaw. Mary Ann saw Candice’s challenges and strengths and visited Candice at college every month for the first two years.

Inspired to help people, Candice earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology at Buffalo State University, graduating with honors. She has a job she loves, counseling people affected by mental illness.

The positive impact on the community is what On Point is all about.

With the help of volunteers and mentors, On Point staff provides students with the tools they need to succeed.

86% of each dollar received goes directly to student services.

“My degree is my first possession in life and no one can take that away from me.”

Chol-Awan Majak
Lost boy of Sudan
Masters, Political Science
SUNY at Albany
Messen Agbossoumonde
At 15 years old, Messan knew the value of hard work, and the power of hope. A refugee from Togo who relocated to Syracuse, he worked 30 hours per week while in high school to help support his family.

Through the Northside CYO, Messan learned of On Point for College, and his new goal – attending college – seemed within reach. When a $35 exam fee nearly put Messan out of the game, he refused to give up.

“I told them how much I’m willing to learn.”
On Point came through with help; the result was a $35,000 scholarship. Recruited to play soccer at St. Lawrence University, he was given four years to complete his bachelor’s degree. He did it in three.

Goal!

More than 70% of On Point students return for their second year of college.
Isaac Rothwell
Being a good student in high school didn’t make the road to college easy for Isaac. For starters, his chosen career path – music production – wasn’t exactly laden with scholarship opportunities. Through On Point for College, Isaac found his way, then lost it when a tangle with the law waylaid his plans. Incarcerated for two years, he helped other inmates study for their GEDs. On the day of his release, Isaac paid a visit to On Point. He hadn’t given up on his college dream, and On Point didn’t give up on him. Instead they showed him how to get back on track.

“I don’t think I would have finished school without that.”

Isaac earned a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from SUNY Oswego, and dreams of opening a music studio. Meanwhile, he is paying forward the support he received from On Point, by running an after-school music program for kids.

“The support and mentorship I received from On Point was like having a truly caring parent and expert college administrator all in one.”

Isaac Rothwell
Bachelors, Music
SUNY Oswego

On Point for College has successfully replicated in Utica, NY and replicated our College Success program model Downstate by partnering with the Goddard-Riverside Community Center and New Settlement Apartments.

Yvonne Cedeno
Facing challenges, and seeking a better life, Yvonne came to On Point for College accompanied by her pastor. There, Yvonne found the support she needed to pursue college, and the confidence to secure a hopeful future.

“I knew that I wanted more. On Point made me realize I could do it. They were support when I needed support.”

Yvonne earned an associate’s degree at Herkimer Community College, then transferred to Crouse Hospital’s registered nursing program and earned her nursing degree.
Sam Rowser
Executive Director, On Point for College
Sam has dedicated his career to guiding urban youth in their quest to attain a college education. A tireless advocate, Sam makes himself accessible 24/7 to both students and parents, dismantling barriers as a counselor, mentor, and liaison. He knows first-hand the struggles and triumphs of urban youth reaching for higher education; he too was a first-generation college student. Since 2001, Sam has been part of On Point for College, helping hundreds of students enroll in and succeed at college.

Sam was awarded the National College Access Network’s Dr. David B. Swedlow Memorial College Access Staff Member Award of Excellence in 2011; the Interfaith Works Coalition “Racial Justice Award” in 2008; and the Onondaga County Department of Aging and Youth “Professional Youth Worker of the Year Award” in 2007.

On Point in the Community
Part of On Point for College’s success is its innovative approach to reaching students. On Point for College goes directly to the students at community centers including Barnabas House, Catholic Charities centers, Boys & Girls Clubs, the Center for Community Alternatives, GED sites, Southwest Community Center, and Syracuse Housing Authority.
You can change lives degree by degree.

Make a significant difference in your community. Become involved with On Point for College with a donation of time, money, or other services. On Point’s community of volunteers – more than 160 strong – are critical to the program’s mission. Their gifts to On Point are as diverse as each individual student. Some log hundreds of miles, driving to college visits. Some tutor, collect college supplies or telephone students. Others give their time as mentors, providing invaluable guidance in career and life issues.

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On Point for College Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) organization.
With your help, we can change lives degree by degree!

On Point’s Proud Mentors include (left to right) front row: Cydness Johnson, Nicole Neri, George Nazzaro, Meg Catanzarita, Al Turner, Rachel Doyle, Ginny Donohue, Joe Lewis, Frances Kip Smith, Phyllis Georger; middle row: Bruce Haney, Carole Bildstein, Boyd Rimel, Sue Hamilton, LaSonya Griggs, Mary Ann Laidlaw, Nancy Runyans, Carolyn Doughty, Linda Lowengard, David Bean; back row: Leola Rodgers, Peter Huntington, Melinda Johnson, Mary Huntington, Chung-Chi Cha, Marty Levine.