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More than luck

The St. Joseph County Bridges out of Poverty initiative operates on the certain knowledge that it takes more than a second chance or a piece of luck to break the grip of poverty. It takes skills, knowledge and a plan.

The Pokagon Fund seems to understand the role of luck just as well. Its pledge of \$240,000 to Bridges Out of Poverty, to be paid over two years, will change the lives of many people. It will teach them the skills they need to move ahead in life, under their own power.

Bridges out of Poverty is the cohesive effort of many charities and agencies. They unite to provide the framework needed to lift people from poverty to self-sustainability.

This initiative has aided hundreds of St. Joseph County residents to prepare for employment, develop financial literacy and build supportive social networks - all essential ingredients for self-sufficiency. More than 250 people have graduated from Bridges' Getting Ahead classes.

Besides teaching impoverished people to make it on their own, Bridges teaches those who help the needy to understand the components and pitfalls of poverty. That understanding can aid, for example, a guidance counselor at Ivy Tech Community College to better appreciate the choices a struggling student might make.

This very generous donation comes from revenue of the Four Winds Casino Resort, located near New Buffalo and operated by the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi Indians. The Pokagons set aside 1 percent of electronic gambling revenue and have given more than \$5,800,000 in grants in the New Buffalo area. St. Joseph County in Indiana might seem a bit far afield, but it qualifies as an area where there is a tribal land consolidation site.

As many thousands can attest, a few hours at a casino can be a fun diversion. It's a form of entertainment - a break from the routine for those who can afford it.

But one thing gambling *isn't*? It isn't the answer to needy people's financial problems. As Bridges Out of Poverty reaches more people because of the Pokagons' gift, that is one of the lessons to be imparted. And it is one reason this gift is especially well-placed.