

# Bridges to a Brighter Future about providing love

If we love until it hurts, there won't be any more hurt

By Tobì Swartz

I am often at a loss for words when a friend or neighbor asks, "What do you do at Furman University?" There is no word or sentence that accurately describes the profound experience called, "Bridges to a Brighter Future."

When I attempt to describe the program, I always begin with, "Bridges to a Brighter Future is a pre-college, academic enrichment program for Greenville County high school students whose potential outdistances their circumstances." People are always interested in the phrase, "potential outdistances their circumstances."

Lately, to change things up, I have described Bridges as a college access program. However,

the reality is that no words I creatively blend or brainstorm will ever fully describe the "experience."

One of our 75 amazing students recently stated in a speech about Bridges, "You know how sometimes you can't explain something because you just have to be there to experience it? That is exactly how I feel about Bridges." It is true. To best understand the program, you have to be there.

So I am left standing in front of interested people, searching for the words to describe something that is indescribable. Even when I engage someone enough to capture their interest in the program, they look at me with blank eyes trying to make the connection. It is hard for people to understand that for me, being the director of Bridges to a Brighter Future is not a job; it is a ministry of love.

On Feb. 1 I reached my four-year anniversary working with Bridges to a Brighter Future.

## GUEST COLUMN



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While I feel like I am still fresh, have unlimited ideas to implement, and lives to touch; I also feel as though I have walked a million miles and have given unconditionally all that I have to give. I had no idea when I started this position that I would come into the calling that God

bestowed on my life. I now understand that he has called me into a ministry of love.

A Bridges parent once asked me, "How do you do it?" I knew exactly what she meant by this question. In these five words, she was really asking how I find the energy to love, counsel, mother, inspire, mentor, motivate, instruct, educate and hold accountable 75 at-risk teenagers. When I really think about it, it even overwhelms me to think about the magnitude of this responsibility. I surprised myself when I responded without hesitation to her question, "Love." Really, it was the first thing that came to mind. "Love." I could not do this work if it were not for the overwhelming, overpowering and overcoming love that God has placed in me.

This one word, "love," has so much power. Mother Teresa said, "If we love until it hurts, there will be no more hurt, only more love." Can you imagine a world where we love rather

than tear down, hurt and abuse? A world where our teenagers do not separate themselves in cliques and put down others perceived to be lesser than. This world does exist, it is called, "Bridges to a Brighter Future." The Bridges faculty, counselors and students pour so much love into each other that it heals the hurt these students have endured from their difficult lives.

A Bridges student recently stated, "The love you get in Bridges, I can't explain it in words. The love is real. Everyone loves you; they love you for who you are, no matter what. I was hurting so bad before I came to Bridges. When I came to Bridges, they just loved on me until I couldn't hurt anymore."

So when someone asks me, "What do you do at Furman?", all I can do is smile, knowing that I will not be able to express in a sound bite the experience or the love. Maybe I should just say, "I love until it hurts."

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