



25 YEARS OF BUILDING BRIDGES

Fall 2021

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bridgestoabrighterfuture.org



25 years of impact



Dear Bridges Community,

We live in such a beautiful and vibrant community, attracting visitors from all across the globe. Who wouldn't love to spend time here? Yet for all the growth and development, we still see some of the same inequities our founder saw 25 years ago. Breaking the cycle of poverty and achieving economic mobility have been issues that have challenged our community for years. Luckily, there are people and programs that are actively working to change the story, and Bridges is a shining star among them.

When I'm asked what makes Bridges so successful, the first word that comes to mind is *people*. It's the *people* of Bridges that make this program strong. Our staff, faculty, community partners and families understand that empowering students is about more than programming. To empower students to dream big and to work their way out of the cycle of poverty, they need to know they are not alone.

The idea of the "Bridges family" is real, and it's effective. We start with love and trust, and we build from there.

This family feel dates back to the culture set by our first two directors of Bridges, Judith Chandler-Huse and Sarah Fletcher, along with the focus on a student's potential rather than deficits. And we can thank Judith for our tagline: Go forth and do great things!

The same need identified 25 years ago still exists today. In fact, Bridges' mission is even more critical today as we better understand how education is the key to economic mobility. Borrowing from the United Way of Greenville County's impact statement, we know this: "Education is a powerful antipoverty tool — and the most consistent driver of sustained upward mobility."

The following pages lay out our history and how we have evolved to strengthen the program as a "powerful antipoverty tool" through research and practice. You will read how the programs and resources we provide have grown from a summer-only program to a full-year, comprehensive program for students and their families, all the way through college graduation. You will read about our model of success and all the people who work together to meet the needs of our community. And, you will see how we plan to continue to evolve in the coming years to empower even more Greenville County youth.

I'm so honored to be a part of the Bridges family, and I am excited to see what the next 25 years bring!

With gratitude,
Carrie Silver, PhD
Bridges Director

Our History	2
Our Model for Success	3
Our Curriculum	4
Our People	5
Our 25th Summer	6
Our Partners	7
Our Future	8

our history: envisioning a way to support youth build a brighter future**1996**

Ms. Mamie Jolley Bruce meets with Furman University President David Shi, Dr. Susan Shi, and Benny Walker to use her gift to create Bridges to a Brighter Future.

1997

The first class, the Alpha Class, is selected and Bridges hosts its first summer session.

2006

Saturday College is created to make Bridges a year-round program, supported by funding from the Jolley Foundation.

2010

Crossing the Bridges is created to further support students in college. Soon after, Bridges is recognized by the Education Policy Institute as a "Blueprint for Success" college access program.

2020

Bridges receives funding from the United Way of Greenville County for the first time, recognizing our approach of viewing education through the lens of economic mobility.

2021

The 25th class of Bridges, the Alpha2 Class, is welcomed. Bridges is recognized as a WhatWorksSC best practice educational program by the Riley Institute.



In 1997, Greenville native Mamie Jolley Bruce had a vision to create a program to help underserved students. In the summer of 1997, 21 students from Greenville High, Carolina High, and Southside High attended the first Bridges four-week summer academic enrichment program. Since this first "Alpha" class, Bridges has expanded to a year-round program and has served more than 500 students.

In 2000, Bridges expanded to include all 14 Greenville County high schools and four charter schools in its residential summer program.

In 2006, Bridges added a Saturday College component, providing year-round tutoring and academic support for its students.

In 2010, Bridges introduced the Crossing the Bridge component, offering one-on-one support for students as they enter college to ensure a smooth transition and retention.

Much has changed in the past 25 years. As Greenville continues to grow, so does the number of students facing poverty and personal challenges that stand in their way of academic success. Designed to help students gain confidence and discover their strengths, Bridges continues to enable its students to overcome their adverse conditions in order to excel in school and stay on the path to college, career, and financial stability, thus breaking the cycle of poverty for future generations.

"Bridges continues to strengthen the supports it provides students to ensure their post-secondary success. Mom would be so proud to see the many accomplishments of Bridges students and the impact the program has had on their lives and the Greenville community."

- Jolley Bruce Christman,
Ms. Bruce's daughter

our model for success

Bridges combines research with experience to create a year-round program that addresses the academic, social and personal development needs of students. The three main components of Bridges for our high school students include Bridges Foundations, Saturday College, and Crossing the Bridge. Other programming offered throughout a student's year enhance the lessons taught in these main components.

Spring and Fall Break Trips

Students can spend school breaks touring colleges in regions outside Greenville and South Carolina, expanding their college efficacy.

College Tours

During a student's high school years, they will tour an average of 30 college campuses with Bridges.

Family and Alumni Events

Families and alumni are seen as valuable partners and are included in our work.

Community Service

Group volunteer projects expose students to important issues in our community.

Crossing the Bridge

Crossing the Bridge continues our work past a student's high school graduation, including a one-week intensive college orientation program. Students also receive on-going, active support while at college.

Saturday College

Students return to campus one Saturday a month for Saturday College, where they receive tutoring, mentoring, and leadership development. Standard elements of the day include life-skills workshops, speakers, college planning, lunch, and activities customized to broaden students' perspectives.

Bridges Foundations

The summer program, Bridges Foundations, is still the center of our overall program. Students live on Furman's campus for four weeks, engaging in a packed schedule of academics, team-building, self-discovery, creative arts, athletics, and fun. This is often when students begin to discover their strengths and challenge themselves to step outside of their comfort zones.

our curriculum

One common thread that runs through all of our programs is College Planning. This curriculum addresses where a student should be in the college planning process based on grade level. And it builds upon itself, so that by the time students graduate high school, they have a strong understanding of who they are, where they want to go in life, and how to get there.

We measure success in our curriculum through several metrics, including the following:

- Families participate in the college application process
- Each student completes the FAFSA in the fall of senior year
- 100% graduate high school.
- 92% enter college or military directly after high school, compared to 54% nationally of a the same population.
- 87% persist to second year of college, compared to 79% nationally of the same population.
- 96% graduate college on time, compared to 39% nationally of the same population.

Student Spotlight: Chattlin Dillon Valdosta State, Class of 2022



"Bridges impacted me in high school in so many ways. I learned so much about myself and what the true meaning of family was. Bridges always showed me love and support through tough times! Everything about the program helped me prepare for my freshman year of college."

development of a Bridges scholar

Sophomore Year:

The first year is for building relationships and trust. Scholars also learn about emotional intelligence and gaining the communication and research skills necessary to begin a college search.

Junior Year:

The second year is for self-exploration and discovering the unique gifts each scholar possesses and how those gifts might lead to decisions regarding college and career. Scholars begin in-depth conversations about their college path.

Senior Year:

The third year is for finding the internal motivation and community network to ensure high school graduation and acceptance to a best-fit college. Scholars are guided through the entire process of the college application,

College:

We stay with our scholars through their college journey, beginning with structured programming following high school graduation to keep them on track to enter school in the fall. We then support them through their academic and personal needs as they work their way to graduation.

our people**STUDENTS**

Our students come from all across Greenville County and bring an array of backgrounds and experiences that add to the rich culture of Bridges. Ninth-grade students are nominated by a teacher or counselor who has seen first-hand an inner drive for success.

To be eligible for nomination, students must come from a high-poverty home (the average household family income for our students is \$29,000), hold a 3.0 GPA, have a clean discipline record, and have a unique situation that serves as a barrier to educational success.

Bridges staff then meet each candidate to get to know the person behind the application. This is an important step in creating a diverse, equitable, supportive class. Our community prepares students for how to live an authentic life in a diverse world.

STAFF

Our three-person staff brings professional experiences from the classroom, student affairs, housing and student services. In addition to a director, we employ an assistant director of high school success and an assistant director of college success.

We also employ six certified teachers to join us each summer to teach core classes of math, science and humanities. Local experts join us to teach creative electives and fitness classes to expose students to new experiences and emphasize health. And college students live on campus as summer counselors and mentors.

**Student Spotlight:
Guillermo Ojeda,
Greenville High, Class of 2022**


"Bridges is a second home to me! It's somewhere that I know I have people that will always care and look out for me. It is the place that helped me develop and grow as a person and helped me become who I am today. They saw something special in me."

ADVISORS

Our Advisory Council includes members of the Greenville County School District (including the county-wide director of counseling and a local high school counselor), members of the Furman University community (including the chief of staff in the office of the university president and three members of the university Board of Trustees), an admissions officer at a local university, and other business and community professionals. We also include the voices of Bridges alumni, current Bridges students, and Bridges parents on our Advisory Council.

our 25th summer



Summer 2021 was an exciting time for multiple reasons, most specifically because Bridges was virtual for the previous year. And it was our 25th summer! Here are just some of the highlights.

CLASSES

Math: Students constructed mathematical models out of newsprint, tape, and popsicle sticks to test proportional relationships and trigonometry.

Science: Students investigated the causes and impacts of water pollution and methods to conserve clean water.

Humanities: Students gained an understanding for how reading makes the world a better place by building empathy and helping us discover our authentic selves.

Electives: Students chose options including art, social justice, magic, video production, and yoga

CONNECTIONS

- Community partners facilitated workshops that helped students connect where they are in life now to where they want to go.
- Virtual events throughout the summer kept students and families engaged.
- Bridges alumni came back to campus to share their experiences with students.
- Students enjoyed time to "just be a kid" with movie nights, field day events, karaoke, arts and crafts, and free time.
- Our end-of-summer event at the Greenville Zoo brought together more than 300 students, family members, and alumni together for an evening of fun.

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

Students preparing to head to college for the first time had their own week-long program, including workshops on these topics:

- being a first-gen student
- the transition to college
- time management
- mental health
- healthy relationships
- financial health
- campus involvement
- academic skills

**Student Spotlight:
Kara Diaz
USC Honors College,
Class of 2025**



"Bridges gave me a place to become who I've always wanted to be. It's like I was in a box and Bridges was the key to unleashing the success I held inside. I would not be who I am today if it was not for Bridges."

our partners



We couldn't do what we do without our partners. So many people give their time and treasure to Bridges: donors, speakers, foundations, corporations, college buddies, and volunteers.

CURRENT PARTNERS

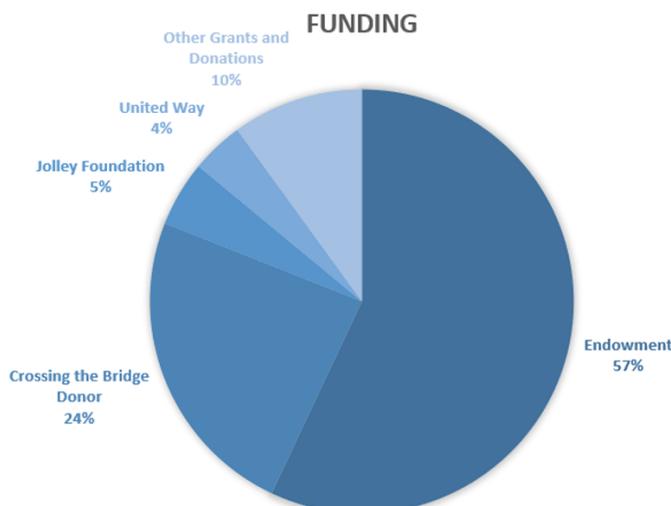
- BMW
- CFFCU
- City of Greenville
- Cliffs Residents Outreach
- Fluor Foundation
- Furman University
- Greenville County Schools
- Hal Warlick Scholarship
- Hendrick Honda of Easley
- Hubbell, Inc
- Jacobs Engineering
- Jolley Foundation
- Lockheed Martin
- Sanders Foundation
- Community Foundation of Greenville
- Greenville Humane Society
- Greenville County Parks and Recreation
- Habitat Restore
- Hal Warlick Scholarship Committee
- Hispanic Alliance
- Live Well Greenville
- Prisma Bradshaw Institute
- Safe Harbor
- SACAC
- SCICU
- Triune Mercy Center
- United Way of Greenville
- Urban League of the Upstate
- Warehouse Theatre
- Youth in Government

Partner Spotlight: Cliffs Residents Outreach

So much of what impacts our students comes outside of our structured curriculum. Cliffs Residents Outreach (CRO) is an organization dedicated to supporting local youth; and because of their support, we are able to enhance the programming we provide beyond campus.

One way they support our students is with school tools. They provide funding for sturdy backpacks with lifelong warranties for our newest students, and school supplies each fall for all students. They support our fall and spring break college tour trips, during which we take students on multi-day trips to explore colleges outside of our region, thus opening their eyes to new opportunities. CRO also supports our culture of being family-focused, supporting our family back-to-school bash and providing boxed meals for our families over the holidays.

Their members build connections with our students, showing they truly care about our students and their futures.



our future

We have come a long way in 25 years! After intentional analysis, including thorough review of our curriculum with educational professionals and an extensive series of focus groups with our constituents, we have a clear understanding of the strengths of Bridges and how to set a path toward even greater success. Our constituents identified the greatest strengths of Bridges as our ability to:

- Focus on the whole student
- Foster relationships that provide students with caring adults
- Provide year-round programming and support for students and families
- Use data and experience to inform our college planning curriculum
- Create experiences that open students' minds to new possibilities
- Honor the diversity we each bring to the Bridges family
- Empower students to take control of their futures

This analysis has reinforced our vision and mission, and shaped four overarching objectives for the next five years at Bridges. The four objectives, which are listed below, will drive all that we do and ensure that we continue to empower students whose potential outdistances their circumstances.



Vision: All youth in Greenville County will have access to higher education and the resources needed to create foundations for a meaningful life.

Mission: To empower students whose potential outdistances their circumstances to break the cycle of poverty through higher education.

Provide students with the knowledge, resources, and confidence to show resilience in the face of adversity, succeed in high school, and graduate with an individualized post-secondary plan. **1**

Prepare students to thrive in higher education and to graduate on-time with as little debt as possible. **2**

Build community engagement and promote a culture that values diversity and life-long learning to all of Greenville County. **3**

Create relationships with donors and foundations for sustained student and program support. **4**

