2017 2018
BRIDGES PROJECT
for Education

Annual Report
Taos, New Mexico
MISSION

Bridges' mission is to expand college access and improve college retention for people of all ages, with an emphasis on those of the first generation in their family to seek higher education.

Twenty years ago, Bridges Project for Education was just a glimmer of an idea shared by two local women, Pam Shepherd and Rebeca Romero Rainey. Each knew that the Taos community could benefit from greater access to higher education. Together, they envisioned a solution.

Fast forward two decades and 2700+ students, and that glimmer is a robust organization with thousands of individual success stories and a widening impact.

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Dear Friends,

A Note from Our Director

Bridges plays this role for students of all ages as they identify which educational or vocational path will help them pursue their dreams. As a first generation to college student, I can still vividly recall how overwhelmed I felt by the vast array of choices. I didn’t know where to start to begin focusing my search. Like many students and families, I was caught off guard by the emotional charge connected to such a big decision and the complexity of the process. I fumbled my way about, sought out resources where I knew to look, and fortunately ended up at a college that was a fulfilling fit for me. However, this process should be less about luck and more about informed choices.

So much has changed during the twenty years Bridges has been in existence. While Bridges has tried different strategies and flexed to respond to our community’s changing needs over time, the basic tenants that we were founded upon remain true today.

Bridges is deeply and uniquely committed to an individualized approach. We know that the reasons for pursuing postsecondary education and the path to get there are different for every person we work with. Though we offer supplementary programming that is presented in a group setting, the heart of our work remains one-on-one college counseling. Access is at the heart of our mission. It is imperative for every person to have information about various postsecondary options and the road map to get there. We do not believe that going to college or receiving vocational training is the only way to build a successful life, but we want to ensure that people make this choice actively and that it is not made for them because of insufficient information or support.

As long as Bridges exists, these two principles will be evident in our work.

We thank you for helping us celebrate our 20th anniversary and all of the many accomplishments of our students. We are all positively impacted by the ripple effect of thousands of students living their dreams out loud.

With gratitude,

- Joleen Montoya Dye
A Community Issue

College access is a community issue. Research shows that a lack of information and advising around the admissions and financial aid process creates significant barriers for students from underrepresented groups to enter college or vocational training. Students in these groups are two thirds less likely to pursue post-secondary education than their equally qualified peers. This can have far-reaching effects for the workforce in economically-challenged areas like ours—and contributes to a disparity between social groups that serves no one.

The advantages that accrue to those with a college education are profound. Workplace skills and job opportunities are obvious benefits, but income differentials, health advantages, community engagement via voting and volunteering, and self-assessed happiness are some of additional metrics used to examine the pluses of postsecondary education.

Bridges provides a continuum of college access services with the intention that each program will strengthen the others, contributing to more successful outcomes for our clients. This spectrum of programming includes:

- intensive individualized counseling
- an early engagement college readiness curriculum called College Connections
- an Alumni Support Program

Individualized Counseling is the core of our work. Person by person, meeting by meeting, Bridges works with students through the admissions and financial aid process.

But college planning and preparation can't wait until students are ready to apply. Early engagement is vital. College Connections (CC) arose from years of seeing the heartbreaking moment in which too many high school junior and senior clients discover they aren't eligible candidates for the postsecondary programs of their choice. This stressed the need to normalize a college-going culture with younger students. CC is a Bridges-designed curriculum that partners with Taos Middle and High Schools to help students develop knowledge of higher education options through progressive college literacy lessons.

Getting students admitted to college is only part of our job. We know that college retention and completion are just as vital as access in order to heal equity and social justice issues. Research shows that students who enroll in college and those who achieve a certificate or degree can be predicted by factors that include class, ethnicity and family’s experience with higher education. New Mexico schools rank 42nd and 48th in two and four-year degree completion, leaving many New Mexicans with substantial student debt but no degree. Bridges is developing an Alumni Support Program to connect with former clients at pivotal points during their college careers to provide additional support and improve their chances of matriculation.
College Connections is an early-awareness college readiness curriculum designed by Bridges. The pilot program launched in 2016-2017 and follows the class of 2021 through graduation. With the generous support of Taos Municipal Schools, Taos Middle School, and Taos High School, Bridges is shifting attitudes about college.

With the help of our external evaluator, i2i Institute, we are tracking program progress and results to ensure the curriculum increases college readiness and aids students in achieving their postsecondary goals.

This year we were welcomed by Taos High School Principal, Robert Trujillo, and Coach and Health Teacher, Art Abreu in delivering 6 content hours to all 9th graders. Over 200 students participated.

The curriculum built upon last year’s theme of self-exploration and educational pathways. Students engaged in developmental and age appropriate activities exploring the following:

**Personal Values Reflection and College Profiles:** Student’s reflected on personal values and identified types of postsecondary opportunities, demonstrating an understanding of how to discern key elements and comprehend a college profile.

**The Ideal College Experience:** Student’s clarified personal values and identified their interests, needs and preferences for an ideal post-secondary learning environment.

**Plotting/Mapping the Course:** Students explored various college admission requirements by navigating college recruiting materials and websites. Students demonstrated an understanding of how high school courses impact postsecondary choices.

**The Resume Part I:** Students identified extracurricular activities and explored elements of a resume via an activity tracker to be used throughout high school.

We’ve learned that Taos students’ excitement about college correlates with their plans to pursue education after high school. It’s our job to keep fueling this excitement.

To foster the belief that they can go to college, and to provide the tools that can help them get there.

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Bridges is excited to announce our partnership with Taos County Association of Realtors (TCAR) for the 2018-2019 Academic Year.
INDIVIDUALIZED COLLEGE COUNSELING

Bridges’ Comprehensive Counseling Model is the cornerstone of our approach to individual counseling. The focus is on the unique needs of each student. The counseling at Bridges is responsive to changing trends in college admissions. Each session helps students identify goals, chart steps, and stay on track as they craft materials to meet various deadlines.

We work with students every step of the way and strive to meet during critical way points of their process. We help our clients find and attend schools that match their circumstances, learning styles and current and future goals. The better the fit, the more likely a student is to stay the course to graduate. We assist students in filling out admissions applications, revising essay and tracking deadlines. We help clients apply for financial aid and tap federal grants, private scholarships and subsidized loans to cover tuition and expenses, while teaching them financial literacy. Our goal is to ensure access to financial aid and that students incur minimal debt to help overcome economic barriers to education.

Our external evaluator conducted interviews with former clients to learn about the most helpful elements of Bridges Project support. Students identified:

- clarity about what it takes from the students to make their dreams happen
- the value of trust and intimacy developed through a mentoring relationship
- laying out the timeline around the major steps in the college admissions process
- respect and acceptance, regardless of your personal circumstances

The Bridges Client

There’s no single image of a Bridges client and no one-size-fits-all approach to the students we serve. Middle and high school students, people working toward their GED/HSEs, pregnant or parenting youth and incarcerated students are among Bridges’ clients. We serve older, non-traditional students – those new to college or returning after a hiatus, looking for opportunities to shift careers, or transitioning from domestic roles on a regular basis.
When we think about the interesting and important roles our 2,700+ clients are playing across NM and the rest of the country, their collective impact is staggering.

Studies show that first-generation, minority and Pell-eligible college students are less likely than their peers to graduate in four years or to graduate at all. Success and completion rates are positively increased by the following:

- Enrollment within 12 months of high school graduation
- Completion of their first year
- Mentorship
- Support from home

To this end, Bridges has designed our alumni support program to provide moral and technical support through welfare check-ins during students’ first year of college or vocational program: verifying enrollment, first semester completion, support during second semester midterms and confirmation of first year completion. We will follow each alumni cohort until matriculation.

**Alumni Notes**

Here are just a few tidbits about what some of our alumni are up to:

**Santa Rael**
Ouesta High School
Class of 2011
Civil Engineer employed by Los Alamos National Labs

**Thomas Tafoya**
Taos High School
Class of 2014
Graduated in May from Duke University

**Estrella Padilla**
Currently completing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing; employed Holy Cross Hospital
INFORMATION SHARING

Read more about us here:

**We are Bridges**

https://spark.adobe.com/page/zrfkBd5MWg1ro/

**Who we Serve**

https://spark.adobe.com/page/JQyGL1VueBjAl/

Outreach

Bridges expands our reach through the following offerings:

**Learning Curve**
Monthly column in The Taos News written by our staff.

**Junior Presentations**
College admissions and financial aid process overview delivered at all area high schools.

**Community Presentations**
Population-specific college admissions and financial aid process overview delivered at community agencies.

**Social Media**
Regular posts and updates to our Bridges Project Facebook Page and bridgesproject.taos Instagram feed to provide up-to-date information about our organization, educational opportunities and scholarships for all types of students.

**Website**
Our newly restructured and frequently updated website serves as a clearinghouse for resources useful for students, parents, educators and community agencies.

Visit [www.bridgesproject.org](http://www.bridgesproject.org)
Average number of individual counseling sessions for seniors
5

Number of individual counseling sessions
351

DESTINATION COLLEGE
2017-2018

Adams State University
Arizona State University
California State - Monterey Bay
Case Western Reserve University
Central New Mexico University
Colorado College
Dona Ana Community College
Drexel University
Gonzaga University
Highlands University
Kenyon College
New Mexico Institute of Technology & Mining

New Mexico State University
Northern Arizona University
Regis University
Stanford University
University of California - Santa Cruz
University of California - Los Angeles
University of Denver
University of Victoria - British Columbia
University of New Mexico - Albuquerque
University of New Mexico - Taos

YEAR IN REVIEW
2017-2018

Hispanic 47%
Anglo 41%
African American 2%
Native American 6%
Other 2%
fast facts 1997-2018

- 2700+ clients
- 13 youngest client
- 82 oldest client
- 60% first generation
- 21% non-traditional or HSE clients
- 62% Hispanic
- 25% Anglo
- 8% Native American
- 5% Other
- 20 years
- 3000+ individual counseling sessions
- 3 counselors

https://spark.adobe.com/page/zrfkBd5MWg1ro/
I have served on the board of this non-profit for the last five years. I believe in this organization because as a public school teacher I’m reminded daily that potential is widespread, opportunities however are not. Bridges helps even the playing field and provides students of all ages in Taos county with access to opportunities to higher education through free individualized college counseling.

Ale Collignon
CONTRIBUTORS

Individual & Family

2017-2018

A heartfelt thank you to our 2017-2018 supporters.

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Quoted Cup  
Rachel Donner Ceramics  
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Revolve Design  
Rio Grande Ace Hardware  
Rivera Family Funeral Home  
Roundbarn Apothecary  
Samora Studio  
Shree Yoga  
Substance  
Sugar Bare

**Civic Organizations**

Taos Lions Club

**Honorary & Memorial Gifts**

- In honor of Sue Goldberg
- In memory of Dr. Karen Adler Storthz

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**Contributions**

- **$136,786**
- 2016-2017 total

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**Contributors**

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**2017-2018**

- Sunrise Springs Spa Resort
- Taos Aerial Gym
- Taos Cookery
- Taos Dental Group
- Taos Gravel Products
- Taos Net
- The Taos News
- Taos Landscaping
- Taos Offroad & Performance
- Tierra Wood Stoves
- Wannamaker Pottery
- Wayne Rutherford General Contractor, Inc.
- Wilder Nightingale Fine Art
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- Crittenden Palacios Legacy Fund
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