Bridges’ mission is to expand access to college and vocational training, primarily for first generation to college students.
This line from a Maya Angelou poem was the essence of my college experience. I imagine the same is true for many first generation to college students.

Going to college was not an option for my parents or grandparents. This was due to combination of barriers that students from underrepresented groups often face, including: lack of information and exposure to options, little support through a complex and unfamiliar process, limited financial resources and the challenge of imagining oneself as a college student when you are the first in your family to embark upon this journey.

Bridges’ mission is to expand access to college and vocational training for people of all ages, with an emphasis on students who are the first generation in their family to seek higher education. Historically, over 60% of our clients have been among the first generation in their family to attend college. We wholeheartedly believe that education is the most meaningful investment we can make to ensure a resilient community.

By 2020 most jobs will require some form of further vocational or educational training. More skilled workers lead to a better economy, stronger workforce and better wages. We know that the earning power of a degree holder is more over a lifetime and that it takes completing one year of vocational training or college to shift the economic mobility of a family which has a multi generational impact. We also know that social mobility, voter and volunteer engagement, and overall health outcomes are improved...all powerful undeniable benefits of post secondary education and reasons for Bridges to exist. But most importantly to me this work is about

My hope is that our students know that while they are charting the course for countless others, they are being held by those who have come before them. Their experiences must be reflected at these institutions, and in all decision making realms of our society. I am continually heartened by the varied and powerful ways our students are shaping their lives, building families, leading communities. Their influence goes broad and deep. One of our donors recently said, “Having a dream is vital. Knowing how to get there is essential.” We couldn’t agree more. We are ready to help.
Why Bridges?

Bridges was founded in 1997 by Rebeca Romero Rainey and Pam Shepherd in response to the low number of college graduates and the lack of existing supports to help people access postsecondary education in Taos County. Our mission is to expand access to college and vocational training, primarily for first generation to college students.

For all its rich natural, cultural, and human resources, Taos can be a challenging place to live. Education often takes a back seat for families as they struggle to satisfy basic needs. The high rate of children in poverty – 32%, versus the U.S. average of 20% –correlates with a lower level of educational attainment. A smaller tax base means the school system has less funds for staff. The average student to counselor ratio is over 400:1.

Lack of information and advising around the admissions and financial aid process can create a significant barrier for minority, low income and first generation students to enter college or vocational school. The New Mexico Kids Count Data indicates only 17% of Taos County adults posses a Bachelor’s degree. Parents may find it difficult to guide their own children toward this unfamiliar experience. While we welcome all, Bridges’ primary mission is focused on helping underrepresented students—the group with the highest need. 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 majority of Bridges’ clients are high school students. We also serve a significant number of nontraditional students—those new to college or returning after a hiatus. Youth pursuing their high school equivalency, incarcerated students, and pregnant and parenting youth are among Bridges’ clients, too. In 22 years we’ve served over 3,000 students of all ages.
Bridges Project for Education Programs

**Early Engagement**
- Begin earlier conversations with students and families about college and vocational programs
- Explore career options
- Review high school course selections to align with post-secondary education goals

**Individualized Counseling**
Some of the tasks clients might complete in individual counseling:
- Create a personalized list of colleges and/or vocational schools
- Register for college admissions tests
- Complete college and scholarship applications
- Brainstorm, revise and edit application essays
- Complete FAFSA & CSS Profile
- Review financial aid packages
- Decide on the best school to attend
- Register for orientation programs and housing

**Alumni Support**
- Help students and families navigate postsecondary education programs
- Provide assistance locating resources on campus
- Continue with scholarship search and support
- Assist current college students with FAFSA
- Provide assistance with transferring or continuing school

Bridges reaches the community in a number of ways

**Learning Curve**
Monthly column in The Taos News, written by Bridges Staff

**School Presentations**
Bridges staff presents college admissions and financial aid process overview to juniors at area high schools.

**Community Presentations**
Tailor made college admissions and financial aid process overview delivered to community partners and agencies by Bridges Staff

**Website**
A clearinghouse of useful resources for students, families, educators and community partners
**Early Engagement**
Our experience with individualized counseling emphasized the need to work with younger students. We saw the heartbreak when clients discovered their ineligibility for the schools of their choice, due to a lack of adequate preparation. We want students to make informed choices, have access to the broadest options available and build relationships with them to optimize our counseling services. See page 5 for more information on College Connections, our on-site pilot program working with the Class of 2021, starting with their 8th grade year following them through graduation.

**Individualized Counseling**
Individualized admissions and financial aid counseling is the heart of our work as it addresses the unique needs of our clients. We help students identify goals and plot a course of action. Students are supported as they complete applications, write essays and develop resumes, apply for financial aid and local, regional and national scholarships, and compare financial aid awards. The average student meets with us four times in a school year. Clients are referred by alumni, school staff and community agencies. They also learn about our services through presentations and events. Students do not need a referral to make an appointment. They often know of Bridges from immediate or extended family who have utilized our services.

**Alumni Support**
Getting students to enroll in a postsecondary program is only meaningful if they’re able to graduate. New Mexico institutions rank 42nd and 48th in two-and four-year degree completion, leaving many students with sizable debt but no degree. 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. To counteract low completion rates, Bridges’ Alumni Support Program connects with alumni during their postsecondary program to support their matriculation. Through welfare check-ins during students’ first year, we provide support and encouragement and connect them with resources available at their institution. In addition to the support for students, families are supported on the journey as well. Post secondary degree and program completion rates are positively increased by consistent support from home, enrolling within 12 months of high school graduation and successful completion of the first year. For these reasons, we verify enrollment, first semester completion, provide support during second semester midterms, and confirm program completion. Each alumni cohort is followed through to program completion.
Research shows the critical importance of an early start in preparing youth for postsecondary options. While Bridges has always included outreach to younger students, the Taos High School Class of 2021 is the first cohort to take part in College Connections (CC), a new Bridges program that supports students from eighth grade through their senior year. Because the application and financial aid processes can be similar, at Bridges we use the term "college" to easily capture all post-secondary educational options including: vocational certifications; training programs; associates and bachelors degrees. Through this program, we introduce age-appropriate information about post-secondary education (PSE), help students identify their strengths, dreams and desires, and work with them to develop a clear understanding of the steps needed to reach their goals.

Our experience counseling upper-class students has shown us the necessity of normalizing a college-going culture earlier with younger students. CC arises from the heartbreaking moment we witness year after year when juniors and seniors discover they are not eligible for the schools and programs of their choosing due to inadequate information and preparation.

Implementing CC onsite at Taos Middle School and Taos High School enables us to reach students most aligned with our mission as well as those who may not make their way to our office for individual counseling. CC is designed with the community in mind, addressing and responding to issues salient to post-secondary education and Taos. Working with students during a “class period” as opposed to a large assembly has enabled us to reach an entire grade over the course of school year, but still work with 20-30 students at a time. The smaller groups create an environment where participation and curiosity flourish. The intimacy of CC and continuity of multi-year relationship building, positions students to have the most choices when they arrive at Bridges for individual counseling during their junior and senior years.

We are grateful for the continued support from Taos Municipal Schools and partnership with Taos High School and Taos Middle School. Thank you, Dr. Lillian Torrez, CJ Grace, Alfred Cordova and the amazing teachers of Taos Middle School and High School.

The 2018-2019 program is made possible through the generous support of the following:
Bridges Project launched CC with the Class of 2021. The lessons were delivered to 8th graders in a required US History class. After an overview of Bridges and the CC program goals and objectives, students' knowledge of PSE was assessed. After completing a career-interest assessment, students identified corresponding PSE options. Students also learned about different educational experiences during visits from local alumni. The monetary benefits of PSE were identified and students explored how their desired lifestyle may or may not align with their career interests. Students were introduced to the idea of an academic plan and encouraged to meet with a counselor to ensure that their course selections over the next 4 years supported their personal goals.

The four-lesson series was delivered to the 9th grade during a required Health class at Taos High School. Building on the previous year's work, students reflected on personal values and explored how these translate into choosing a "dream" college. Through discussion, interactive group work and individual exploration, students considered how today's decisions may impact tomorrow's post-secondary options. Students identified extracurricular activities that are personally meaningful and communicate more about themselves in the pursuit of PSE opportunities.

The curriculum was delivered to 10th grade students over the course of three Advisory Periods at Taos High School. Picking up the thread from the previous year's curriculum, students reviewed PSE knowledge. Through interactive class discussions, students examined misconceptions and dispelled myths about PSE admissions and financial aid. At the completion of the lessons, students were prepared for a more individualized exploration and process in the coming year.

Bridges continues to work with external evaluator i2i to track program progress and results. We want to ensure that CC increases post-secondary readiness and aids students in the pursuit of educational goals. A static pre-survey is administered each year to identify shifts in student perceptions from year to year. The post-survey changes each year to measure students' knowledge and retention of content delivered. The flanking classes have been surveyed to analyze attitudinal and perceptual variances between our pilot cohort and those not receiving curriculum. Already in the CC cohort, we are witnessing an increased understanding of postsecondary options and knowledge of available degrees and certificates, different types of schools, and the basics of admissions requirements. More specifically, these students are understanding the link between how high school choices impact future options.

Our continued presence with students bolsters trust and increases knowledge about and excitement for pursuing PSE. Our data thus far confirms, students receiving the CC curriculum can imagine themselves in a PSE program. Furthermore, they see themselves in a postsecondary environment that complements their interests, need and preferences. By preserving this enthusiasm and providing access to information earlier, we are creating informed and empowered students with more choices.
**First Generation** students are the first in their immediate family to pursue a bachelor’s degree. In Taos County 17% of residents hold a bachelor’s degree.*

Ultimately, the term “first-generation” implies the possibility that a student may lack the critical cultural capital necessary for college success because their parents did not attend college. While first-generation students are often quite academically skilled and contribute in many ways to a campus community, navigating the tangled web of college policies, procedures, jargon, and expectations can be a challenge. This pervasive “hidden curriculum” can damage the confidence of first-generation students, lead to struggles in belonging, and result in departure.*

These issues are equally, if not more relevant in the application and financial aid process that enables First Generation students to make their way to college.

**Pell Grants** are limited to students with financial need and awarded by the Federal Student Grants Program. In Taos County 81% of students qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch.* Federal Pell Grant awards can reach up to $6,195. Amounts can change yearly.

*Annie E. Casey, NM Kids Count Data 2018

**Pell Eligible Status:** While we attempt to collect this data about each student, sometimes families prefer to submit the FAFSA on their own or complete the application with another entity. In these cases we are not always privy to a student’s Pell eligibility status at the end of the program year. We often find out a student’s status after they have started school, during the following program year. Typically, 60% of our clients are Pell eligible.

*Annie E. Casey, NM Kids Count Data 2018
In addition to financial aid and scholarships from their respective schools our 2018-2019 clients received:

(Number of our clients who received this award)
3 Bent Lodge #42 Masonic Scholarship
1 Catholic Daughters Scholarship
4 Centinel Bank of Taos Scholarship
3 Cissy Vargas Scholarship
2 Class of 1989 Memorial Scholarship
4 Elizardo “Eli” Memorial Scholarship
2 Frank Coach Vigil Scholarship
2 Fraternal Order of Eagles Scholarship Ladies Auxiliary Scholarship
2 Holy Cross Hospital Ladies Auxiliary Scholarship
1 Irene Thomas Scholarship
3 Kit Carson Electric Scholarship
3 L.U.L.A.C Council #78 Scholarship
6 LANL: Los Alamos Employees’ Scholarship Fund
1 Maria Medina Memorial Scholarship
1 Northern New Mexico Senior Men’s Golf Association
1 Our Lady of Guadalupe Padre Martinez Merit Scholarship
1 Quest Bridge Scholarship
1 Ranchos Plaza Grill Scholarship
1 Taos Community Foundation: Beatrice & Virgil Gutierrez Legacy Scholarship
2 Taos Community Foundation: Friedman Family Scholarship
2 Taos Community Foundation: Manuel & Fillie Hispanic Scholarship
1 Taos Community Foundation: First Generation Scholarship Fund
1 Taos Community Foundation: Ernie Blake Memorial Scholarship
3 Taos County Sheriff Posse Scholarship
3 Taos Diplomats Scholarship
1 Taos Federation of United States Employees Scholarship
1 Taos High Culinary Arts Scholarship
2 Taos High School Mariachi Scholarship
3 Taos Milagro Rotary Scholarship
2 Taos Optimist Club Scholarship
3 Taos Tiger Athletic Boosters Scholarship
1 Teressa Singleton Scholarship
1 The Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico Scholarship
3 Tierra Wood Stoves Scholarship
1 US Bank Merit Scholarship
3 Veterans of Foreign Wars Scholarship

Bridges
Class of 2019

Adams State University
Case Western University
Colorado College
Dona Ana Community College
Eastern New Mexico University
Grand Canyon University
Lincoln College of Technology
Montana State University
New Mexico Highlands University
New Mexico State University
Northern Arizona University
Rice University
University of Colorado, Pueblo
University of Hawaii, Manoa
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque
University of New Mexico, Taos

University of Oklahoma
University of Oregon
University of Virginia (UVA)
University of Washington, Seattle
University of Redlands
Vassar College
Western Washington University
Wichita State University

57% of 2018-2019 clients will be attending school in New Mexico
Contributions
2018-2019 Program Year | August 2018-July 2019

indivduals

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Dr. John Wilson
Laura Wynn
Doug Yeager
Erika Zetty
Barbara Zaring & Stephen Rose

Bridges Project
Total Budget
2018-2019
$173,219
Contributions
2018-2019 Program Year I August 2018-July 2019

Gifts in memory of
Edy Anderson
Eve Gordon
Ron Kalom
Hallie Leland Leighton
Jeanette Berman Salot
Bonnie Zirkel

Gifts in honor of
Julie Gray
Pamela Shepherd

Civic Organizations
Taos Lilac Festival
Taos Lions Club

Foundations
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AmazonSmile Foundation
Barbara and Barre Seid Family Foundation
Bread for the Journey
Frederick H. Leonhardt Foundation
Friends of Bridges
Harry Chapin Foundation
Isora Foundation
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Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation
Los Alamos National Security Employee Giving Program
New Mexico Children’s Foundation
Quail Roost Foundation
Reed Family Foundation
Santa Barbara Foundation
Santa Fe Community Foundation
  Liberty Ranch Infinite Possibilities Fund
  Susan & Conrad De Jong Fund
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Taos Community Foundation
  Cid’s Food Market Fund
  Crittenden Palacios Legacy Fund
  Jones Family Fund
  La Plaza Fund
  Magpie Fund
  Making it Fund
  Pleasure Mountain Fund
  Skygazer Fund
  Stagg Family Fund
  Taos Ski Valley Charitable
The Hallie Leighton Tikun Olam Fund
U.S. Bank Foundation
Wells Fargo Foundation
Wilder Green Fund

Businesses
ABI Real Estate Investments
Accesso Siriusware
Adventure Ski Shop
Jade Anaya dba Leave It to Us Taos
Aural Fitness
Barrista
Bella Mundi – John Harris Donovan
Berkshire Hathaway, Diane Enright
Bloody Maria
Brett House Catering
Centinel Bank of Taos
Cid’s Food Market
CHA– Montserrat Oyanedel Tolmo
Charlotte’s Bliss
Chevron Environmental Management Company
Claireworks Gallery
Coldwell Banker
Collignon Roofing
Common Fire
Crossroads Realty and Management
Danny Hart Design
Dimond Mortgage
Earthship Biotechnology
El Taoseño
Five Star Burgers
First New Mexico Title and Abstract Company
Friday Motors, Inc.
Danny Hart Design
Diamond Finish
Diamond Plaza
Golden Willow Counseling
Gutters Bowling Alley
i2i Institute
Kat’s Stuff – Kat Watson
KNCE
KOKO
KTAOS
Light Mountain Gallery
LMNOC Broadcasting
Los Alamos National Security
Los Pajaritos
Lucas Construction
Mary Emery, Realtor
Material Cut Designs
Mike Epperly Ceramics
Miramonte
Mogul Medical
Mudd N Flood
New Mexico Mountain Properties
New Mexico Real Estate Group
Oh My Garden
Olguin’s Sawmill and Firewood
Orlando’s New Mexican Café
Page Sullivan Real Estate
Phoenix Mechanical
Rachel Donner Ceramics
Randall Lumber and Hardware
REVOLVE Design – Siri Soule

Funding Sources

20% Individuals
21% Businesses
59% Foundations

Rivera Family Funeral Home
Round Barn Apothecary
Seconds Eco Store
Shank
Smith’s Inspiring Donations
Solutions Bookkeeping
Spirits of Beauty
Storyteller Cinemas
Strive
Substance of Taos
Sundropmakes– Heather Carlson
Sunshine Soaps by Ava and Lil
Taos Art School
Taos Charter School – Jeremy Jones
Taos County Association of Realtors
Taos Country Club
Taos Cow
Taos Flower Diva
Taos Gravel Products
Taos Gutters Bowling Alley
Taos Healing Arts
Taos Offroad and Performance
Taos Physical Therapy
Taos Properties Real Estate Investments
Taos Sage Real Estate
Taos Ski Valley
The Blake
The Cellar
The Coffee Apothecary
The Waite Company
Tierras Title
Twirl
Up Front Construction, Inc.
Vigil’s Asphalt & Gravel
Wannamaker Pottery
Window Pro
Zeke’s Auto
2018-2019

**100%** clients accepted to at least one school

**594** individual counseling sessions

**125** clients

**200+** college connections students

**2** outreach connections to class of 2018 alumni

**5** average number of sessions per client

**60%** clients from under represented groups

**21** presentations delivered to Taos area students and community partners

**$900,000** in scholarships received by clients

**65%** sessions with under represented groups

**3000** clients served since 1997

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Bring a Bag
Cid's Market
Shop at
Smith's Grocery
Donate
Give a gift
in Memoriam
Bequest or Will
Beneficiary
Corporate
Matching
Pledge a
Recurring
Monthly Gift
Bring a Bag
Cid's Market
Host an Event in
Bridge's Honor

Ways to Support Bridges
Donate
Shop at
Smith's Grocery

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L-R: Julie Gray, President; Bambi Sturbois, Vice President & Treasurer; Ale Collignon, Secretary; Romy Colonious; Lisa Cancro.

Bridges Project for Education, Staff
Joleen Montoya Dye & Anne Weil Levine

Your gifts help students of all ages in Taos County and access higher education, especially those among the first in their families to seek post-secondary education.

Bridges provides free college counseling. We are a small 501 (c)(3) nonprofit supporting big dreams. Gifts of any size are appreciated and all contributions are tax-deductible.

Other ways to give: Donate stock; Shop with smile.amazon.com; Cause Marketing.
Contact Bridges for more information and other ways to give.