spotlight
BRIDGES PROJECT FOR EDUCATION

meet sue goldberg
Freedom to dream

After 16 years—and thousands of college counseling sessions—at Bridges, Sue Goldberg is ready for a change. Ten of those years she spent at the helm, co-directing Bridges with Joleen Montoya Dye. Hard as it is to tear herself away from an organization she calls “a living, breathing being,” Sue is looking forward to a retirement that includes more reading, gardening, and cloud patrol. Dreaming, you might say.

“The crux of Bridges work is personal and intimate and relationship based,” Sue says. “It’s the opportunity to work with people towards their goals…. We’re focusing on their aspirations, and there’s something really beautiful about that. We look at big ideas and big goals and big hopes and dreams, and break them down into little steps. Those steps can be used in whatever you do.”

Certainly practical matters come into play, Sue knows. Financial concerns, family responsibilities, and a range of other elements weigh in as Bridges helps students figure out a good fit for their futures. “But the focal point is, where do I next want to be in my life?”

Sue says, “The hope is that everyone will … be able to choose a path that feels really right and really genuine and really true.”

Her advice for students? “You want to dream big, and you want to be practical. And that’s a funny dance. It’s about keeping lots of doors open.”

Ultimately, Sue says, “what matters is a person’s sense of wholeness and well-being and happiness.” We wish her all that, and more, in this new adventure.
SUE SAYS:

"it's not just about college, because there are so many ways to live a life. We don't believe that going to college is better than not going to college. We're not promoting a one-size-fits-all agenda. It's about exploring ideas and options and just knowing that you can do anything you want to do."

With deep roots in the community, Bridges helps students navigate not just the procedural challenges of applying to college, but the emotional aspects of the experience as well.
"Each path is unique"

Sue opens up about what makes Bridges tick

**What Bridges does:** "The original mission is alive and well. This is what we do: we help one person at a time through this process. And there is no recipe because each person is different. Sure, there are common steps, obviously; but each person’s path is unique."

**Why Bridges has lasted:** "Bridges is a family... a very, very intimate organization. People get involved because it strikes a chord; and in many cases, they remain very closely connected to the organization. I think it’s just because we’re truly community based, and don’t promote any particular agenda or a path for people. We’ve had the incredible honor of working with people across the board in Taos—and in the area, not just in Taos."

**What changes Sue has seen:** "We see a ripple effect through families where by we work with a senior in high school and her mom says, ‘I’d like to try going back to college. You know, I tried it first semester after I graduated from high school; and I think I’m ready to give it [another] shot.’ As more family members access higher education, the comfort level rises, because it’s no longer foreign. It’s no longer, you know, something that other people do, but I don’t do."

**Why Bridges is still needed:** "We used to joke about how we would be tapped out eventually, that there would be no purpose for Bridges anymore. But I don’t think so, because the process is always changing. And it’s always new for those who have never embarked on it before.... Also because our world is changing so fast, the workforce is changing and the skills people need are changing. All this is happening before our eyes. And high school counselors and high school teachers and parents are doing as much as they can, but I feel that there’s always a need for a little extra help... This is a big time of life. And I think the more hands on deck, the smoother it can be."
Being part of the Bridges family for 16 years, Sue says, "has instilled me with great hope for the future."

"Bridges is such a people oriented organization—and it does have a life of its own," Sue says. "It does have a heart and soul. I don’t know if you can say that about too many institutions or organizations, but it really does. And, for me, the relationships with people of all ages have been the greatest joy."

"People ask me, “Well, how do you feel about leaving Bridges?’ I’m really excited about what’s happening at Bridges! We’ve put so many years of thought and work into the direction we’re headed in right now. I mean, it’s a dream come true."

Challenges to increasing access to higher education for all continue to mount, though. "It’s not right that the cost of [college] is an obstacle," Sue says. "It’s not fair. And to me that’s the greatest concern... What I see is how accessibility is being impacted. It’s a big enough leap for people to consider higher education, if they’re the first in their families. That’s tremendous. But to do so and have to be worried about paying back debt? That’s an obstacle that just shouldn’t have to be part of it."

It all comes back to the fairness issue, Sue says. "I see Bridges as, in a small way, being able to level the playing field for people who are in the first generation and their families. They are concerned about how they’re going to finance their education, and they are concerned about what their education will lead to. We always keep in mind family structure and responsibilities, and the desire people have to want to be close."

College Connections is an exciting new pilot project at Bridges. "Reaching out to Taos students in the 8th grade, first—and then in each subsequent year—Bridges provides age-appropriate programming to help young people imagine their way forward. The hope is that ‘their imaginations are expanding; they’re entertaining ideas that perhaps they never considered for themselves.’"

Follow your dream, for as you dream you will become. For a generation of Taos students, Sue’s legacy at Bridges has been to help them braid big dreams with practical considerations, and to map out the steps to help them achieve the future they want.