



Bridges out of Poverty

A Southeast Iowa Initiative Results

2016-2019

78% *Graduation Rate*

64 *Graduates Are Transforming Their Life And
The Lives Of Their 79 Children*

30 *Unemployed Have Found Work And 25 Have
Better Employment*

12 *Have Gone Back To School, Started Trainings Or
Certifications, With 3 Working Towards Hiset*

13 *Have Taken Financial Literacy Classes*

27 *Improved Housing, 3 Have Purchased Homes*

150 *Community Volunteers Helping With Children,
Meals, Transportation, And Workshops*

68 *Staying Ahead Teammates*

Over **2500** *People Have Been Trained
In The Bridges Constructs*

Bridges Out of Poverty

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Located at the LOFT • 416 Jefferson Street, Burlington IA

"We Are All In This Together"



Khadijah, single mom of 7 says that she feels like she has a voice now. She wants to be active in giving back to the community and she is by volunteering in the school and Salvation Army. She is interested in becoming a phlebotomist and is awaiting an interview. We have some Bridges friends that are working with her to see she gets an interview. One of her oldest sons enrolled into a program that will help him complete his HISET and work toward a trade. Khadijah has overcome domestic violence and has had to move many times. Khadijah comments “she has never been able to set roots down, her life has been like a roller coaster, but now she can see herself and her family being able to set down some roots here. The support has been the biggest help through this.”

Heidi, a single mom employed at a hotel as cleaning staff, and has learned a lot, especially about hidden rules. She stated “the support she gets from the class and the people of bridges has been the most helpful and it is a bright spot in her life”. Heidi is working on the HISET, since we were able to help her enroll. Heidi purchased her own house and moved out of section 8 housing.



Sammie is an older student, who runs a transitional home. She said the module on language was powerful and that she had never seen it presented like that in black and white. She is in the “helping of others get on their feet” business. This workshop has helped her to be able to help others on a deeper level. She stated that she always knew Burlington community was a great community, but this has really showed how great Burlington and their people are. When she came in, she was feeling full of gloom and doom, but now hopes to make her life successful. She will be going on to the Staying Ahead piece as a leader.



We are more alike than we are different

December 11, 2018 Published by [Chanelle Nichols](#)

I would definitely not be the woman and mother I am today if Bridges Out of Poverty hadn't been introduced to me! I have grown so much as an individual by just learning new tools and having a support system of all these amazing role models. I am so grateful for this amazing Getting Ahead process and model!

If you don't know, Bridges Out of Poverty is a set of constructs and strategies that looks at poverty through the lens of economic class. Getting Ahead takes those same core constructs and allows individuals living in poverty to investigate poverty in their lives and communities and decide for themselves what changes they would like to make to stabilize.

My life before Bridges was so lonely. I was raised in generational poverty along with my brothers and sister. We were all placed into foster care at a young age because my mother and father were both drug addicts. After being sexually, physically, and mentally abused for many years, I started to act out in many ways, which only resulted in consequences for myself!



In 2010, when I was 21 years old, I believe I had my first "aha moment." I went to a party with some friends, and one of my friends never made it back home. She was shot in the head that night during an altercation. This night forever changed my life, and it helped me to see that I was living life all wrong! It was a very

traumatic day in my life, but definitely the "aha" I needed! Soon after, I found out I would be having a son. He is my EVERYTHING!

*Chanelle and her son, Reece, canoeing in Starker Lake.
Chanelle says Reece 'is 7 years old and every reason I breathe!'*

While having my own son helped me to have some drive in life, I still had nobody in my corner backing me up, nobody to go to for advice and love. This is where my life has improved the most! I never knew how important it was to have social capital, but it has definitely changed my life. When I graduated my Getting Ahead process, I had a new understanding of life. I was able to see what resources I was lacking, and I had the support I had always wanted and needed to get ahead.

Because of Building Bridges, I am now a Building Bridges associate with The Corners at West Burlington High School. I work with kids who are just like I was: misunderstood! I also now have the understanding and knowledge of the hidden rules, which makes me blend into all economic classes. My biggest struggle was my spiritual resource, but it's coming along now that I have my Staying Ahead partner and a huge network of support from amazing people! Being a part of Bridges out of Poverty has been one of the greatest blessings in my life (besides my son)! Thank you to Mona, Vern Reed, Mr. DeVol, and Mrs. Ruby for helping me learn that "we are more alike than we are different!"

Chanelle Nichols is a member of the Southeast Iowa Bridges initiative, a Getting Ahead graduate, and a Bridges Out of Poverty advocate



Ellie has been able to buy her own home! She is also working on finding better employment. Ellie Mae has been working on a full time basis for another manufacturer in town. She had been a temp at Winegard for several years and this has increased her income. Jonathan, her son, has suffered some trauma and we helped him. In addition, Bridges support walked alongside Ellie to help her advocate for her son's educational delays. Bridges has helped Ellie find volunteers to help tutor Jon in reading and he has had great success.



I don't believe in coincidences. I'm writing and giving this speech around Father's day. And I didn't have an earthly father growing up. All I had was our heavenly father. Not having a father is part of the reason I took the path I did. My mother tried. She said I love you, hugged us and even bought us toys, and I don't mean to sound ungrateful.

I love my mother, she was a full time student most my childhood. Then a full-time nurse, so she didn't have the time I so desperately needed. She had both shoes to fill and I understand...and I understand why she didn't want to put us through the daddy interview process.

She worked hard and thankfully took us to church to meet and get to know our one true father who doesn't abandon or put down. But loves with the never-ending reckless love of God.

I stopped going to church won't go into the reason why, we don't have that kind of time. I felt lost after that ...

So now the streets are raising me, mom is gone working and when she is home- she has a headache and/or is just in a foul mood. I met my dad twice and had a few phone calls then a rude cassette tape saying how he wouldn't be my escape goat!

Escape goat –

So, no mom most of the time. God's people pushed me away and now my dad. What is Love? How will I ever become a man? Is this love? Is this how a man behaves?

Then one night after beating and robbing others for years. I got knocked out by my "brothers" over my hair. It was long – I was rocking the "Kid Rock look"

OK it was a mullet, I wasn't representing the gang. They had a knife ready to cut my hair and possibly me. While I'm knocked out and a brother named Mike who was also raised in the church – stopped them? Not just for Mike, but that they showed me what we had been doing to people.

I'm thankful for that night. I decided to change my life. I'm a different person now and a few years later I met my wife and she helped change me more. Neither one of us had a good childhood growing up or support system. We tried to go to church.

We were poor and never fit in! This is what we told ourselves...so we stayed to ourselves! We are poor, and that is ok! Jesus loves the poor and he loves us all! That should give us so much joy! I didn't realize secluding us was making us so poor...poor of the spirit! I was angry at the world and this made my wife and kids so sad. My brother joined a gang and a little brother, especially little brothers who don't have a father. So I follow suit.

And these guys believe in God. They talk about him in the literature or "Lit" they gave me. But we robbed and beat people, used and abused woman. We even beat each other! During the sermon on Father's Day (Proverbs 1) a man is warning his son to not join a gang. Looking back, – its amazing to see God moving in my life. But even more amazing that now my eyes are open to see Him as he is moving and I'm chasing Him and He is chasing me. But most that movement comes in the form of other people who hear Him. Like Miss Mona-no doubt He put her in our life!

And others – like our friends we have bible studies with – The Carters, the Shins, and a pastor I call my friend – Never did I think I'd be friends with a teacher, a banker, or a pastor. Threw bridges we met the Smiths and the Arnetts who we met threw celebrate recovery! They are all new friendships hopefully we can have for a long time! Thank God for them.

When we met Momma Mona as Jo and I like to call her. We met her in Walmart parking lot – my wife was just released from a mental health facility and we were a mess and needed formula bad! The compassion in her eyes made me cry as I pulled away. One of the things I earned in bridges is social networking – it's a new concept to me. So is building bridges....I'm not used to building bridges. I'm used to burning them! It's safer especially once I became a father. There was no way I was going to let the bullies of this world in.

To the teacher, who called me a dumb thug...It has been on our hearts for a long time, crying out to God for a support system. Not just to help get jobs or money but moral support! Jobs come and go, through bridges I got a job at flint cliffs, and lost it cause I let my old friends anger and arrogance creep up and almost the next day started working at Little Caesar's at only a \$.75 pay cut! Soon I will accept the keys and shift lead position, and take a CNA course Label's – thug, poor, pizza man, shift lead, manager, factory worker, banker, teacher, pastor, CAN, nurse, social worker. At the end of every day we are His children and He is our father. So I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up. I just know I'm His and I want to help people.

Matt and Betty have transformed from from shy to actively leading and volunteering in Bridges. They have been through a rough few years with deaths of many family members, and Betty’s cancer, which brought them to a place of homelessness. Then, they lived with family in an overcrowded



environment. Bridges was able to help them find resources to find housing of their own. Matt and Betty participated in Financial Peace University. Throughout the classes, they continued to grow and get excited about what they were learning. Matt stated, “If you use this kind of thinking you can apply it to every aspect in your life and I feel like I finally have some power.” They have grown more confident in the class. Matt has a new job through one of Bridges supporters and has been a model



employee receiving three raises in a six-month period. He is working on his HISET. Matt recently graduated a certificate program at SCC for welding.

T.W. is a single mama who suffers with sickle cell anemia. This girl would be in the hospital and discharged the day of the class and she still would come to class. Mona has worked with T, on mediation a lot. Bridges helped with her son, who was having hard times at school, with bullying and how to handle it with the school. T has learned how to be an advocate and to clearly voice her concern. T completed her CAN certification. In addition, we asked to serve on the patient advocate board at the hospital.





Chris is a single Dad who had a rocky relationship with his kid's Mom. He has three young boys. When he started he was homeless - living in his car. Bridges helped him find safe housing. He now has custody of his boys. This couple has learned to co-parent in a healthy way. Chris has a stable job. Bridges helped him in mediating on the job site through the struggles he had. Bridges worked with the he kids, as they have been through a rough year with the separation and emotional drama through our PATHS program.

Jeanine is an older student trying to return to the workforce after many years. She believed her education had become irrelevant and has some disability issues. She became more confident through the workshop and has even spoke in public, which was really out of her comfort zone. Jeanine has learned a lot about herself and found great resources within herself through this class. She has enrolled in classes and is doing well in them. She shared that the Getting Ahead workshop gave her the confidence that she could pursue her education. She is building her emotional resources through counseling.



Getting ahead has been a game changer for me. Before I started the class, I was living in a site house for people with disabilities. I suffer from severe social anxiety and horrible depression. I was jobless and had a failing relationship with my kids. After attending the class and graduating; I have a fulltime job. I am renting my own place, and my relationship with my kids is thriving. Getting



ahead has not only taught me how to get out of poverty, it has lifted my self-esteem, taught me about world poverty, social stigmas and just a general knowledge of people that struggle with poverty. My support system has never been stronger. I am making new friends and new supports daily. I was always the one asking for help, but now people are coming to me for it. I cannot stress the importance and power of getting ahead. (CH)



I come from a generation of poverty but I did not realize it because love reigned over any circumstance. Whether the lights were cut off or just enough food to eat, we made due and we were so happy except when other family problems come into play. It took becoming an adult and having my own kid to understand, life does not have to be and should not be this hard. I needed to be and do differently but

suffering from anxiety and major depression kept me in just “thinking/wishing mode” instead of “doing mode”. With a lot of love and support, I got out of my head and started to follow my heart. I began to fast more, pray more, worship and praise my way to freedom, but I still needed help and that is where Bridges came into play. I knew I needed change and this was my opportunity. Well, it was a long wait but in the process I started moving slowly and life came together for me. Then I got the call. My thoughts were “Lord I’m good now; I think that spot is for someone else”. I prayed, and agreed to interview with Mona and in that conversation it was confirmed, yeah there’s something for you here beyond your imagination.

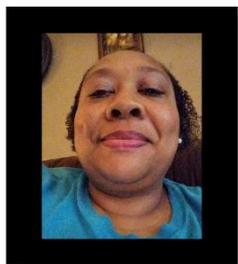
Class 6 of Getting Ahead (GA), We came into this class not expecting all we’ve received especially me. For me, GA is the greatest tool next to God & a strong support system that transforms lives. It helped me identify key ingredients to a healthier & happier life even when obstacles arise. I think most of us would agree. We laughed together, we cried, we had victories and losses, we learned together and we became a support to one another. The value of a team from many walks of life striving for the same goal (getting ahead) is priceless. Thank you to ALL those who make Bridges happen, YOU are changing lives.

One of the main ingredients you provide through Bridges to a happy & healthy life is discipline and self-control. If you can control your mind and thoughts, you can control your actions to make wiser better decisions. Discipline will make you focus on the big picture and the “do” not don’t as well as action. When you’re disciplined you’re not easily moved or swayed to go against the grain, and you look better and feel better. Your mind, body, spirit, heart and soul will thank you now and later. The second ingredient is persistence. No matter how hard life gets or your circumstances make life seem, NEVER give up! In due time you will win! Nothing worth having is easy. The process makes you appreciate the blessing. Seek a lifeline in the process.

The saying my mom uses often “go through to get to” reigns true constantly. Put in the work and the outcome will prove it’s worth it.

To whom much is given much is required right? Of course! Do the work, whatever that may look like to maintain it. And don’t forget to pass it along to your fellow sisters and brothers in a way that is permitted. That could be just planting a seed or that could riding alongside them through their journey to help usher them into who they were meant to be. Strength is a factor in any component of a healthy and happy life specifically strengthening your mind! I personally draw strength from God, my mother, my daughter, my sister/BFF and my dad. Someone very dear to my heart and soul once told me a quote by Maya Angelou “You will always move in the direction of your strongest thought”. My mantra has become “Change your perspective to be productive”. When you change your mind about who you are and who you want to become the world looks so much bigger and better. You see beauty for ashes. You see strength through pain. You see opportunity in the face of adversity. You find joy in the midst of sadness. You see hope! Stay focused & use the tools you’ve been given to become whom you were destined to be! Congratulations GA 6!!! WE MADE IT!!!

Getting Ahead Graduate Class 6



Dorothy is a single mom, she has greatly appreciated the support and the curriculum she feels the hands on approach was very helpful. We have been able to assist Dorothy with getting into other Young House programs that are helping her and her daughter deal with issues at school. Dorothy was able to move into a safer neighborhood and has really made great relationship with her staying Ahead partner!

Gia is a single mom of three with one on the way. She was living on her own when she came to us. Then, her landlord sold the house she was living in, causing her family to be homeless in the midst of a high risk pregnancy. Now homeless and unable to work – she then lost her car and her license due to a wreck. She moved into her mom’s house. During this time she was able to get into a program that helped her get her license back, and through donors we were able to help her get her car fixed so that she would have transportation. Our Staying Ahead team helped her with transportation, provided their vehicle for her to use at her driving test, and even gave her a baby shower. We were able to help her in many ways with support during all these barriers.



portrait of poverty

September 20, 2017 Published by [aha! Process](#)

“Hey, we matter too!” Charisse King reminds readers in her poem “My Life in Poverty.” She wrote the poem during a Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin’-By World module titled “What Life Is Like Now.” During this module, Getting Ahead investigators examine the impact of poverty on themselves and their communities.

Charisse’s poem describes the reality of poverty in chilling detail. However, same as in Getting Ahead, there is a “light at the end of the tunnel”: The examination of the current reality forms the foundation for a brighter future story.

Poverty has no color, religion, gender or preference where you live. It keeps its foot in your life and makes you have little to give.

Poverty is not concerned about your color or if you have a father or a mother. Poverty is not concerned about your education, or how many degrees you have. It places you in positions you could not imagine. Struggling time after time, or for some trying to lead you down a path of crime.

Poverty has no concern for what state of mind you are in. It robs you of your pride, your dignity and who you are within,

Poverty can stagnate your plans and your goals.
Which fill your plans in life with holes.

Poverty can divide your family, by destroying marriages, uproot your home and make you wonder why this is happening to me.

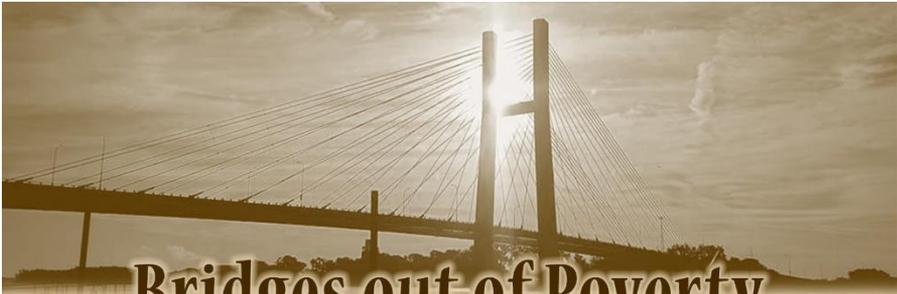
Poverty can make you doubt your faith in humanity, in your family, in your churches and community, definitely in your Government: while they fatten their pockets and bank accounts, while you suffer. Hey, we matter too! Our children have needs and wants just as yours do:

Poverty has been a constant in my life, the struggle to survive, to enhance my plight to come up and out of the ashes... But, poverty you have no place at my table, no power over my determination or passions. Poverty you can no longer live rent free, no longer welcome to enable, my thoughts of despair, hopelessness, and debris, Not seeing a light at the end of a tunnel. Hoping and praying it's not a gorilla with a flashlight deceiving me. But of motivation to end the struggle.

Yes, poverty your time is up, because I must continue to move forward in spite of it. Because I know, my help ultimately comes from my father up above.



Community Impact
Bridges Out of Poverty
Award 2016



Bridges out of Poverty

Fundraising and Volunteers

Pylon Sponsor • \$10,000

Pylons support the bridge. Without pylons, the bridge does not exist. Pylons are not flashy, but solid and unwavering. A Pylon Sponsor supports the compensation of the Bridges Coordinator and intern. Annually, 4 pylon sponsors are needed.

Pavement Sponsor • \$6,000

Fund a class of Bridges. This is where the rubber meets the road. Lives are changed. A class meets for 18 weeks with 12 individuals. \$6,000 pays for workbooks, participant stipend, childcare volunteer stipend, and supplies. Annually, 2.5 Pavement Sponsors are needed.

Beam Sponsor • \$2,000

Beams connect the pylon and pavements. Beams fund the emergency needs of Bridges participants and graduates. Funding would cover work boots, utility payments, food support, and more. This funding helps overcome obstacles to cover the basic needs

Meal Sponsor

Supply a meal for Bridges on a Tuesday night at 5:30 pm. While each class is different, an average could be 30 people. Your team decides the menu, serves, and cleans up.

Teammate Volunteer

This individual walks alongside a Bridges graduate to help strength the 11 resources. Meet at least monthly at the Staying Ahead meeting (first Tuesday of the month 5:30-7:00 pm). Every relationship is different as every graduate is unique.

Childcare Volunteer

Work with small groups of children with specialized curriculum. Tuesdays 5:30-7:00 pm.

