



The Bridge, Inc.

Year End Report

Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2019

The Bridge is a nonprofit community based organization that provides behavioral health care services designed to strengthen and support the family and to promote the personal growth of children, adolescents, adults and seniors. Founded in 1971, we have a long term commitment to helping children and families in the Caldwell's, Irvington and beyond overcome mental health challenges that threaten to derail lives of children and adolescents, and tear families apart. Our vision is to promote balance, healing and hope.

In the last fiscal year, The Bridge served a total of over 4,000 children, teens, adults and families.

Peace Model Project

The Peace Model Project is a collaborative venture between the Caldwell-West Caldwell School District and The Bridge. It is a *comprehensive* school-based counseling program that addresses student needs through the intersection of prevention education, school-based counseling (individual and group), and appropriate referrals to providers of mental health care and social service support.

The main goals of the Peace Model Project are as follows:

- Help elementary students develop stress reduction, coping and self-regulation skills through classroom-based lessons, small groups and one-to-one counseling.
- Increase early intervention by connecting students and families who are experiencing mental health challenges with referrals to appropriate services.

Our results of the 2018-19 school year include:

- Offered small group counseling on topics such as friendship building, coping skills and emotional regulation.
- Presented grade-level, social-emotional learning curriculum called Peace First to grades K-5. Over 500 structured lessons were taught in 2018-19, serving over 1,000 CWC elementary children. PMP is leading the delivery of social-emotional learning for the district.
- Punitive disciplinary actions by principals have reduced by 67% since the inception of The Peace Model Project in 2015-16.
- Significantly reduced the need for crisis psychiatric intervention among elementary-aged students by providing in-school intervention and follow-up mental health referrals. In 2018-19, no elementary students were referred to hospital emergency rooms for mental health crises.
- Provided 453 students, and their families, with school-based counseling, referrals to outside mental health services, and follow-up care after referrals.
- Hosted three parent education workshops during the school year on topics including the impact of the digital age, social media on child development, and how to build resilience in children. All three workshops were well attended.

School-Based Youth Services/ The Imani Center

The Imani (Swahili for Faith) Center is The Bridge's comprehensive program for students at Irvington High School, located in the parking lot of the High School, and Making Achievement Possible, a program for middle school students at University Middle School, also located in Irvington, NJ.

During FY19, the Imani Center provided over 2,150 services to students in six main programs:

- 862 students participated in Irvington High School Based Programs including
 - Individual, group, and family therapy sessions through qualified therapists. Family conflict, academic issues, immigration issues, homelessness, mother daughter conflicts, anger, depression, domestic violence, and general adolescent growth issues are some of the problem areas addressed.
 - Monthly programs with the Congregational Church of Short Hills include tutorials for Creole and Spanish speaking children, translation services for the school and working with bilingual parents. The Church provides food once per month through the Oasis program, as Irvington does not have adequate food resources. This is in coordination with the Irvington School District Superintendent.
 - Wood Working Group gives students an opportunity to work with their hands. The students learned cutting skills and made a frame.
 - Academic Support/Tutoring helps students with homework and other school assignments.
 - Cooking Classes give the students an opportunity to prepare meals at home and for some, career preparation.

- My Life, My Choice Group for Girls is sponsored by NJ Prevention of Child Abuse and addresses how to avoid getting involved in human trafficking.
- The Attendance Group served 173 students who were in danger of not being promoted or graduating due to lack of attendance. This helps students stay in school and, in some cases, get a GED. This group operated four days a week from 10 am – 1 pm
- English as a Second Language summer program helped students become more proficient in reading and writing English.
- The Transition program for eighth graders who became freshmen in the fall, prepared student's adjustment to high school and to ensure readiness.
- Cinderella's Closet Trip to Long Branch for young ladies and young men provided outfits for prom and military ball.
- Life Skills Academy sponsored by the Congregational Church of Short Hills is a five-week program focused on job preparation, finances, healthy eating, and learning how to write college essays.
- 215 students participated in Making Achievement Possible program for middle school students:
 - Individual, group, and family therapy sessions through qualified therapists. Family conflict, academic issues, immigration issues, homelessness, mother daughter conflicts, anger, depression, domestic violence, and general adolescent growth issues are some of the problem areas of these students.
 - Teen Outreach Program (TOP) in partnership with Central Jersey Family Health Consortium that combines curriculum with community service learning to bolster social-emotional learning and resilience served 35 students. Topics included bullying, healthy eating habits, anger and self-esteem.
 - Tutoring services after school were provided on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays.
 - MAP Leadership Club met every other Thursday and guided 53 children on developing leadership skills in school and the community.
 - Facilitated a Uniform giveaway to 98 students in need to ensure school participation.
 - MAP Book Club helps children to read, comprehend and then discuss the books.
 - Middle School girls lunch club addressed social-emotional learning issues.
 - Four week summer enrichment program for 27 kids included six trips outside of Irvington.
 - Spelling Bee – hosted for the eight year in a row, teaches students vocabulary skills and competitiveness.
 - Translation assistance provided in French, Creole, and Spanish for 50 family-school communications.
 - Two field trips during school breaks for students and families
 - Organized fathers to greet students on the first day of school, followed by a breakfast for the fathers.

- Community Service at Hillside Community Food Bank allowed children to help in community service values and principles.
- 75 participants in Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Initiative that encourages students to focus on dreams and goals to reduce the risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.
- 17 teens who are about to age out of the foster care system participated in the Independent Living Program, learning life skills such as money management, food shopping and cooking, health education, employment resources and/or access to vocational training or college. 90% of the teens reached all of their goals for the program.
- 800 students participated in Irvington Municipal Alliance programming through the Imani Center, including
 - Drug and Alcohol use prevention programs at two Irvington elementary schools.
 - Drug Educational Presentations at various school district PTA sessions.
 - Interactive Drug education session for 300 seniors in May in Irvington High School, Mount Vernon Elementary school and Grove Street Elementary school
- Students participated in a variety of community service projects, including crocheting baby blankets, assistance in the Irvington Court System, serving as Elves in the Irvington Library Christmas Giveaway program and many more.

Programs at the Imani Center are funded through a variety of state and local grants. All programs far exceeded their mandated service numbers.

Family Preservation Services

Family Preservation Services (FPS) is an intensive, in-home crisis intervention and family education program for families whose children are at imminent risk of abuse, neglect, or out-of-home placement, and for families preparing to be reunified with their children.

The Bridge's highly trained and dedicated staff is available to each family 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for up to eight weeks. Families throughout Essex and Union Counties are provided with 5 to 20 hours of direct face-to-face services per week. The intensive skill-based intervention includes a minimum of three home visits per week where staff teaches families a variety of skills which includes parenting, stress management, coping, communication, and anger management

The goal of FPS is to keep children safe, stabilize the family, prevent out-of-home placement, improve family functioning, and link families with appropriate community resources. All services are designed to build on family strengths.

This year, Family Preservation Services assisted 133 families, including 349 children, who were referred by the Child Protection and Permanency local offices. Among those families:

- 33% achieved their case goals
- 41% significantly achieved their case goals
- In Essex County, 96% of children remained with their families in the six months following completion of the Family Preservation Services program.
- In Union County, 92% of the children remained with their families in the six months following completion of the Family Preservation Services program.

During this fiscal year, the FPS team members donated Christmas gifts from their own personal financial resources to 15 families with the most need, which included 40 children.

The Essex County FPS program was one of two programs that participated in the Usability Testing (Phase 1) for the FPS Practice Profile that was conducted by the DCF Office of Research, Evaluation & Reporting.

Outpatient Mental Health and Addiction Counseling

With outpatient offices located in both the West Caldwell and Irvington communities, The Bridge provides a stigma-free and culturally sensitive environment for children, adolescents, individuals, families and couples who are struggling to cope with life's challenges. At The Bridge everyone has an opportunity to receive the support they need to change, grow and thrive.

The issues we see range in severity, and include anxiety, depression, mood disorders, loss, school refusal, trauma, life adjustments and transitions, substance use, gender identity, family conflict, parenting challenges and couples conflict.

Our clinical staff takes a systemic approach by promoting and supporting the importance of family/caregiver involvement to best support our clients' progress in treatment. In order to meet the growing needs of the communities we serve, The Bridge has expanded our clinical staff with a focus on the expansion of clinicians who treat children and families. In the last year, The Bridge has served over 700 in our Mental Health and Substance Use Counseling Program.

Stepping Stones

The Stepping Stones Women with Children program provides substance use disorder treatment to women with children that are involved with New Jersey's Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P).

The program also accepts women of childbearing age that are not involved with DCP&P. The women are from Newark, Irvington, Maplewood, East Orange, and West Orange and sometimes from Middlesex and Ocean Counties.

The women's commonality is that they are pregnant, recently birthed or have children or caring for children and are experiencing a substance use disorder.

Through the use of didactic, individual and group sessions psycho-education is provided to increase the knowledge of the negative impact of substance use on family dynamics, the developing fetus, the brain, the inability to effectively parent, and the poor decision making, poor coping mechanisms that are part of the substance use cycle.

Seventeen mothers completed treatment. Three others as a result of completing treatment were reunified with their children, and two other mothers were able to return to work, because they were able to pass a drug test and secure employment.

Stepping Stones has benefited from several partnerships this past year.

- Little Flower children and Family services of New York and the Administration for Children Services (ACS) have referred to the Stepping Stones program. These are usually women who have moved to New Jersey, but have active ACS cases.
- Stepping Stones continues to benefit from its affiliation with the Irvington Family Development Center (IFDC). Two three week long workshops, were provided, and included incentives for attendance and certificates of completion. Irvington family Development Center (IFDC) assists with a variety of case management needs that The Bridge does not offer, such as pantry vouchers, housing lists, and emergency pregnancy testing.
- The Women with Children's program provides nutrition education through collaboration with Rutgers University Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP);
- The Nurturing Parenting curriculum developed by the Institute for Health and Recovery, is used to help address abusive and neglectful parenting in order to re-parent the parent to break ineffective transgenerational parenting styles.
- The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) and their Education to Empowerment program offers the Stepping Stones women the opportunity to become economically stable via trainings that provide chances to work for higher wages above minimum wages. NCJW also provides feminine hygiene products and self-care items that the women most often cannot afford.
- Healthy Start works with the women to provide timely prenatal care and continued services for one year after the birth of the baby. We currently have two pregnant women in group.
- The application with the Community Foodbank of New Jersey will be finalized and the clients will have access to additional food choices while attending group as well as the necessary items for the upcoming holidays to prepare family dinner. This will also provide a connection to The Period project, which provides feminine hygiene products to women that cannot afford them.
- An affiliation agreement was signed with L&A Absolute Care, LLC, which provides psychiatric evaluation, mental health counseling and medication monitoring to our clients at no cost to the agency

Overall, the Women with Children program have extended its reach into the community by linking with various community resources. These linkages did not

exist in the past and serve to bolster the mission of the program and the agency as a whole.

Adolescent Educational Substance Use Outpatient Program (AESUOP)

The Adolescent Educational Substance Use Outpatient Program (AESUOP) combats drug and alcohol abuse among students at Irvington High School and Middle School through a customized program for these schools, in coordination with the Irvington school district. The program includes drug screenings and assessments along with group and individual counseling. It is primarily funded by The HealthCare Foundation of New Jersey.

AESUOP completed its first full school year in FY19, serving 35 students. The students who engaged with the program in any way, even if eventually they were unable to complete it, learned the value of speaking with an adult professional who could help them resolve some of their problems. Their feelings were validated, and they learned that some adults will trust them and will help them develop control over the aspects of their lives that they can control, including their emotional responses to situations they face and whether or not to use substances.

- 86 students were referred for urine drug screening.
- 35 students were assessed using the Teen-Addiction Severity Index.
- 519 case management activities, including scheduling (and re-scheduling) appointments, updating records, providing information to the school and more
- 419 communications, including 86 phone calls, 162 emails and 171 letters.
- 78 individual therapy sessions for 32 students.
- 3 students referred out for a higher level of mental health care.
- 10 group therapy and drug education sessions.

For some students life is centered around daily survival and they are unable to look past the four years of high school to what might come next. Students participating in AESUOP gain the perspective that there is life after high school and receive help setting goals for what their post-high school life might look like. Then they learn tools to help them get there.

Through AESUOP, The Bridge staff respect the students as individuals, capable of making choices for themselves and work with students to address the underlying family stresses and other trauma that they encounter daily, providing language and tools that will help them focus on longer term goals and cope with the daily stresses.