

BRIDGES USA, Inc. 2008

BRIDGES provides experiential, hands-on learning for youth and adults to be leaders in fighting racism, poverty, and educational challenges. Since its inception in 1922, BRIDGES has served youth and adults in the Memphis community through innovative programs that empower participants to reach their potential through education, leadership, diversity and workforce development. In the early 1960s, the agency was one of the first social service providers to integrate its program and move out of the offices and into the streets through work in public housing and neighborhood groups.

Key achievements in the past year include providing services to nearly 15,000 youth and adults, restructuring to better align programs with mission and adoption of a challenging new strategic plan that calls for an increase to 30,000 served annually by fiscal year 2014. Other milestones include hosting a gala for 500+ members of the community celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Bridge Builders® program and the launch of a new program, Ordinary to Extraordinary: Learning and Leading Green. O2E is focused on developing local middle school students as leaders for sustainability, with an overall goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Memphis.

BRIDGES' unique approach to education is called Experiential Learning. This dynamic teaching method works especially well for youth because it engages them in healthy and productive risk-taking exercises, such as working a high ropes course, "trust falls," and other proactive role-playing that captures their attention. Thanks to a grant from the Church Home Youth Ministries Program, youth groups in The Diocese of West Tennessee now have the opportunity to attend training at BRIDGES focusing on developing leadership skills, personal accountability, and connectedness to the community.