

BRIDGES USA, Inc.

The mission of BRIDGES is to provide 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 11,000 youth and adults, restructuring to better align programs with mission, adoption of a challenging new strategic plan that calls for an increase to 50,000 served by 2009, successful completion of a fundraising challenge campaign, and receiving the United Way's G. Bradley Wanzer, Jr. Award for Excellence.

BRIDGES' unique approach to education is called Experiential and Adventure 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. Programs include the Bridge Builders® program, where teens increase their awareness of stereotypes, and the BRIDGES to Quality program, where middle school students learn to make positive behavior choices. 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.