

Formerly United Methodist Human Services

THE MESSY MIDDLE

*By: Cheryl Bedick Keafer, MSW
Executive Director*

It's Official!! Bridges Cooperative Ministry (BCM) is our name!

Building on the great legacy that was originally founded as United Methodist Human Services Ministries of Johnstown in 1977, Bridges Cooperative Ministry is excited to continue the mission of "Sharing the love of Jesus Christ by alleviating suffering and injustice faced by those with spiritual, emotional, and material needs." We are building Bridges in our community that provide hope and lead people to wholeness and abundant life as a part of what it looks like for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. As our new name reflects, we have also been working to build Bridges across ministries and other help agencies in our area, as the heart of the Kingdom is about cooperation, never competition! We all have a part to play in bringing restoration and reconciliation to the community we call home.

Even when a change is for the better, it can be stressful, messy, and hard. Even good change requires adjustment and work on our part. That is where we are in the ministry of BCM. In the hard and messy time of change. In the world of painting, one artist I know calls it the messy middle. When things don't yet look like you envision, but it's getting there! We just have to be careful not to give up in the messy middle stage! There is great beauty to unveil if we do the work and see it through past this stage!

Make no mistake, we are committed to seeing it through! The stories you read in our newsletters are the reason why. They are updates on real people who are putting in some very hard work for themselves and their future story. They are finding hope and realizing they can have dreams. They have amazing talents and gifts. They bring great things to the table and often have wisdom born from hard experience. They may not look like you or me. Sometimes they look exactly like us. But they are our neighbors and a vital part of our community. Maybe in some ways they are also in the messy middle stage! We've all been there at some point in our lives. Can you see the beauty? It is there, each one of us created in the image of God, beautiful and full of potential. Let's keep building Bridges toward one another.

LAURA HORSH

FEATURED GETTING AHEAD GRADUATE

Our feature Getting Ahead graduate in this issue is Laura Horsh. Laura graduated from the Fall 2018 cohort. She has served as one of our GA class volunteer childcare workers and recently as co-facilitator for the BTS Bridges Financial Management Class.

Laura's story is unique in that she has done an amazing job in meeting some goals that she set. And although she acquired a full-time job, she has now found herself in the "Messy Middle" that Cheryl mentioned in her article (also termed as the Cliff Effect). This is exactly why the supportive assistance part of BCM Bridges to Success Program is so vital to folks who are transitioning out of poverty. Here is Laura's story.



Laura Horsh

Before taking Getting Ahead, Laura struggled considerably financially. She experienced a rough childhood, feeling tossed about from home to home with separated parents and going without. As a result, when she was a young adult, she purchased everything she wanted impulsively, but never saved any money. Initially her credit was good, so she got credit cards. But when she lost her job, her finances were ruined.

Laura graduated from Bradford Business School in December 2013 with an associate degree in accounting and office administration. She worked in childcare for three years at Learning Lamp and two years at Footsteps. She also moved out of her parent's home to become a live-in nanny.

Laura was introduced to the Getting Ahead class while providing childcare for parents who were taking the class. She heard some of the conversations and wanted to learn more, so decided to take it herself.

During her own Getting Ahead class, Laura said that she gained knowledge about places and people who can help.

Continued on page 3

BRIDGES TO SUCCESS NEWS

SUMMER CLASSES AND EVENTS

EXPLORING YOUR FAITH

(Spiritual Resources)

Come build up your Spiritual resource in this Summer Ongoing Enrichment Class. This is an 8-session class on Wednesdays 6/14/23 to 8/2/23, 9:30 am to 11:00am at the BCM offices.

Whether you're just curious about God or have a long history with God, we can all benefit from a fresh conversation about faith. We will use a video series by Andy Stanley called "Starting Point: A Conversation About Faith." Hope you can join us!

CRAFTING WITH GINGER

Join GA graduate, Ginger McCoy on Sat. June 17, 1:00 to 3:00 pm as she guides us in making a beaded angel at the BCM offices.

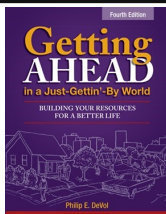
SUMMER PICNIC

Join us on Friday, July 14, 5:30—8:00 pm at Greenhouse Park for our 2nd annual picnic! We'll provide hot dogs, hamburgers and baked beans. Bring a side dish or dessert and a friend!

COMING THIS FALL

BRIDGES FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CLASS TAKING OUT YOUR EMOTIONAL TRASH

Graduates—watch your mail for postcards with more information, or check out the BCM Getting Ahead Graduates Facebook page.



APPLICATIONS ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED FOR THE FALL GA COHORT

If you know of someone who is ready for a change and who could benefit from the program, please contact Carolyn at 814-418-4336.

COHORTS START 3RD WEEK OF AUGUST!

INTRODUCING OUR NEWEST GETTING AHEAD GRADUATES!

Fall 2022 Graduates



Front from left: Ayanna Saunders, Ashlee Urban (facilitator) holding Tyson.

Back row: Brian Lingenfelter, Antoine Johnson, Matthew Bobak, Tammy Jones (missing: Ginger McCoy co-facilitator)

Spring 2023 Graduates



Front from left: Arnita Roberts, April Harrigan, Olivia DePaul, Stephanie Krumenacker (co-facilitator)

Back row: Rebecca Freeman (facilitator), Jennifer Blackner, Marlaine Bush, Mark Wentz, Irvina Fields, Brittney Klein, Carolyn Varchol (BTS Program Director)

GA GRADUATE SUCCESS STORIES

By: Carolyn Varchol, MA
BTS Program Director

As downtown Johnstown has been coming to life with new restaurants and shops, it was delightful to see some of our GA graduates as part of the excitement.

Walking into the Holiday Inn downtown several months ago, a familiar voice called my name. I turned to see that it was **Holly Vargo**, 2020 GA Graduate, smiling broadly from behind the desk!



GA Graduate Holly Vargo

Holly is extremely happy with her job as receptionist. She enjoys meeting new faces and helping to make guests' stay enjoyable. Guests have made positive comments on her friendliness and great customer service!



GA Graduates
George and Megan Heit

Just a couple blocks away is the newly opened Roots Kitchen & Juicery. Owners **George and Megan Heit**, 2017 GA Graduates, have been working hard, beginning with a lemonade stand several years ago, expanding to a food truck with catering services, and finally establishing their business downtown.

Mellanie McDowell, 2016 GA Graduate, has earned a degree in Church Management from Regent University. She currently works full-time as an auditor at Health Net Federal Services in the Pasquerilla Plaza downtown and as a part-time administrative assistant at her church.

Elsewhere, **Amanda Herdman**, 2021 GA Graduate, used her experience as a deli clerk at Koch's in the West End to advance to a new job at Conzatti's Market in Richland. Her next goal is to purchase a vehicle.

Kim Baker, 2016 GA Graduate, began working full-time at her church and is looking forward to paying off her 30-year mortgage by the end of the year. Kim has facilitated and co-facilitated several GA classes. She continues to give back to BCM by creating personalized gifts for each GA graduate.

LAURA HORSH (Continued from page 1)

She learned tips and tricks and that some work for different people. She also learned that she wasn't alone. Her initial goal was to build up an emergency fund.

After graduation, Laura moved to Harrisonville, PA to care for her grandmother and got a job at Dollar General. During this time, she acquired her driver's license. She initially accomplished her goal of building an emergency fund - at one point having saved almost \$5,000. But life situations and COVID quickly depleted that.

After two years away, Laura moved back to Johnstown. She started a budgeting system that works for her and got a job in her field as a Financial Solutions Specialist at First Commonwealth Bank in Somerset. With the help of her parents, she was able to buy a car.

At this time, Laura is experiencing the "Messy Middle." Despite earning above what is considered the living wage of \$14.85 for one adult with no children in Johnstown,* Laura struggles with increasing expenses for groceries and vehicle gas, upkeep and insurance. This, plus her payments toward her debts, is making it difficult for her to rebuild her savings account. She is no longer eligible for the monthly \$200 EBT assistance that she had previously been receiving, so she is not able to buy as much fresh fruit and healthy food as she had been accustomed to. She is also experiencing emotional stress with her current living conditions, but no longer qualifies for subsidized housing. Laura's situation is considered the "Cliff Effect" that many folks experience during the process of moving out of economic instability. Gaining income which causes a sudden loss in benefits that outweighs what they gained financially.

Laura does, however, have a plan for paying off her debt in just a little over a year. As a recent co-facilitator of our BTS Bridges Financial Management Class, she was able to pass along valuable information and knowledge that she has gained from her job at First Commonwealth.

Laura says that Bridges to Success is a great program for everyone. Knowledge is the best thing, and realizing you aren't alone in your struggles plus learning what is out there can help you as well.

*According to Dr. Amy K. Glasmeier and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. *Living Wage Calculator Methodology*, livingwage.mit.edu/pages/methodology, accessed 22 May, 2023. The Living Wage is "what one full-time worker must earn on an hourly basis to help cover the cost of their family's minimum basic needs where they live while being self-sufficient." (Basic needs are expenses like food, childcare, health care, housing, transportation.)

MORE BRIDGES TO SUCCESS NEWS

THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO BRIDGES TO SUCCESS!

- Thank you to Irene Luther and the ladies at Bethany United Methodist Church for providing delicious meals to our Spring GA Cohort! The class looked forward to home-cooked meals and homemade desserts!
- Thank you to AmeriServ Bank for sponsoring our Spring 2023 Bridges Financial Management Class! AmeriServ provided speakers to present topics such as credit bureau reports, frauds and scams, and home ownership. They also offered a savings account incentive to the three who completed the ten-week course!



From left: Justin Rohrbaugh, Krystal Webb, Rev. Sylvia J. King, AmeriServ; and Brian Lingenfelter.

BTS NEEDS YOUR HELP!

The Bridges to Success Program is in need of folks who are willing to use their skills to support programming that helps individuals and families navigate out of poverty.

CHILDCARE VOLUNTEERS

so that mothers of small children are able to attend Getting Ahead classes.



Laura Horsh,
Childcare Volunteer

COOKS

to provide home-cooked meals to our Getting Ahead cohorts. It's hard to learn on an empty stomach! Meals also give an opportunity for group fellowship.

If you are interested in helping with us in either of these ways, please call Carolyn Varchol, BTS Program Director, at 814-539-2633.

OUR NEWEST BRIDGE

A lot has been happening in Bridges to Success. In the last 12 months, From May 2022 - May 2023, BTS provided opportunities that impacted at least 230 people! As our newest Bridge develops, we can already see the benefits.

- 7 businesses attended a Workplace Stability Workshop, with approximately 35 attendees. Being able to help translate for employers what it takes to transition into stable work, we believe will be a game changer for graduates
- 25 more business and agency connections were introduced to the BTS model at JARI and Croyle-Nielsen Therapeutic Associates
- 2 GA graduates attended our first ever Job Readiness Workshop and provided us helpful feedback



Tonya Snowden, Job Readiness participant



Mark Wentz, Job Readiness participant

At the first ever Job Readiness Workshop in March, we dug into what barriers people face when it comes to the middle-class workplace and problem solved how to address those so that they can get and keep a job. In reality we hope our participants can dream of what work looks like that is fulfilling and not just making ends meet. Human Resource professionals from Martin-Baker America, Greater Johnstown School District and PA CareerLink were so helpful to our participants. Our next Job Readiness Workshop is being planned for the fall, so stay tuned!



Martin-Baker America representatives with Mark and Tonya

BRIDGES MINISTRY UPDATES

MINISTRY IMPACT FOR THE YEAR 2022

Food Pantry— An average of **3,500 people** were served

Project Shoes— **430 children** were provided with shoes

Emergency Financial Assistance—**70 families** helped

Bundles of Joy—**67 instances** of help

Emergency Food Supply—**66 instances** of help

Indirect Help (help finding resources) - **189 instances**

Eye Glass Referrals—**6 individuals**

The need for Direct Aid help increased in 2022. Overall we provided 209 instances of direct help, 189 more instances of helping people navigate getting help elsewhere (indirect help). Adjusting for household size, overall that impacted 992 individuals with Bundles of Joy, Care Program, Emergency Food Supply, Emergency Financial Assistance, and Eye Glass Referrals. We exceeded our budget in Emergency Financial Assistance in 2022.

Franklin Street Food Pantry has continued to meet needs and remains a strong help in our community, especially for the 92 seniors we serve each month with the Federal Senior program.

We added more partnerships to Project Shoes, including several Young Life Chapters and a ministry in Dubois called We Care for Kids.

Thank you to the many churches and individuals of the Greater Johnstown area who continue to give generously, enabling us to provide for the needs of so many!

*Cheryl Bedick Keafer, MSW
Executive Director*

GRANTS

Many thanks to the following for their generous grants so far this year:

- WPAUMC Mission Support
- UM Foundation
- Elizabeth A. Bradley UWF
- Lee Initiatives

HIGHMARK WALK FUNDRAISER FOR PROJECT SHOES

Bridges Cooperative Ministry is again participating in the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community on Saturday, June 10 to raise money for Project Shoes. The walk will be located at the Altoona Curve Stadium.

Project Shoes is utilized in more than 50 schools, ministries, and agencies across Cambria County and parts of Somerset, Indiana, Blair, Bedford, and Clearfield Counties.

Each year, the program enables an average of 450 students to enjoy new, well fitting shoes. That's over 4,000 students impacted in the past 9 years!



GA Graduates Rebecca Freeman and Jennifer Hantz manning the table at the 2022 Highmark Walk

This year, our goal is to raise \$5,000. If you wish to donate to our team, go to <https://www.walkforahealthycommunity.org>, click on Locations and choose Laurel Highlands. Click on Donate Now and look for Bridges Cooperative Ministry, Team Top Dog!

OUR WEBSITE AND E-MAIL ADDRESSES HAVE CHANGED!

Please note the following changes:

Our website is now **bridgescm.org**

On Facebook: **Bridges Cooperative Ministry**
Office e-mail (Stephanie) office@bridgescm.org

Cheryl's e-mail: Cheryl@bridgescm.org

Carolyn's e-mail: Carolyn@bridgescm.org

2023 BCM Board of Directors

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Member at Large

TO UNSUBSCRIBE

We would love to continue to keep you informed of BCM news, but if you would like to be removed from our newsletter mailing list you may call the office at 814-539-2633 or send an e-mail to carolyn@bridgescm.org. Thank you!

CONTACT US

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