



The 2013 Getting Ahead Class

# Starkville Bridges

Newsletter  
November 2013

## End of the Year Update

### From SB President of Board

As the year comes to an end, Starkville Bridges eagerly anticipates the ways we can expand this coming year!

We have been busy since our last newsletter! We graduated the 2013 *Getting Ahead Class*, we met with key community members for discussions of how to improve Starkville Bridges and possible partnering with their organizations. Four volunteers attended the National Bridges Conference in Oklahoma City, where we meet with other community groups such as ours to exchange ideas!

### Welcome

Starkville Bridges warmly welcomes the new members of our Steering Committee!

**Richard Hilton**-OCH administrator/CEO

**Melissa Cheney**-OCH Social Worker

**Cynthia Travis**-OCH Human Resources Manager

**Alicia Bates**-Student

**Sandra Sistrunk**-Former Alderman and Vice Mayor

**Roderick Holmes**-Vista Volunteer

**Jennifer Gregory**-Executive Director of The Greater Starkville Partnership

### North Starkville Ministries

Representative from the various ministries serving the impoverished citizens living in North Starkville were organized and brought together by *Christian World Ministries*. Our new group meets to network, learn from, and take advantage of each other's programs. Susan Seal says "It is great to know who all is out there and what they are providing"

Please give special thanks to missionaries Susan Seal, Leanne Williams, and Lori Smith of *Christian World Ministries* for spearheading this initiative. Paul and Melissa Luckett, two of Starkville Bridges cherished charter members, are among those ministries represented in this group.

### Upcoming Meetings

**Steering Meeting:** Friday, November 8, 2013 at 10:00 a.m. at 929 Coffee Bar.

The meeting is open to **all** who are interested in learning more about Starkville Bridges. We will hear a briefing from those who attended the national conference and make plans for the 2014.

**Vicksburg Community Training:** Saturday, November 2 with Jodi Pfarr!



Pictured above: Steering Committee member, the Very Reverend Lee Winter (left), President of the Board The Reverend Lynn Phillips-Gaines (right), and the very holy dog, Early Gaines.

Photo by Dr. Robert Collins

# Getting Ahead Class of 2013 Graduation

On August 27, 2013, Bridges was honored to hold the graduation for the third "Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' by World" class! The graduation took place at the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection, with 13 graduating participants. The Getting Ahead classes are a component of the Starkville Bridges initiative, and they focus on learning the causes of poverty, the hidden rules of the middle-class, and how to build resources for individuals in low-income situations. Each week (16 weeks) the participants met for 2.5 hours to accomplish these objectives. Thank you to John Breazeale and Lynn Peterson for serving as facilitators and Sara Moyer for co-facilitation.

Rose Coffey-Graham was the speaker on behalf of the graduates. She cited a beautiful rendition of a personally written poem.

## Special Volunteer Cooks

### Beverly Hammett, Lance Clark, and Kathy Martin

This year, the meal's volunteer chair, John Harkness, had a huge surprise when he was introduced to three wonderful volunteers. These volunteers were Beverly Hammett, Kathy Martin, and Lance Clark, better known as Beverly and her "entourage." Beverly approached Bridges and asked to be placed wherever she was needed, and before long, the trio found themselves preparing and serving meals on a weekly basis! The graduates loved not only Beverly and the meals that she prepared, but also her Seeing Eye dog, Amazing Grace, or Mazie for short. Through their generosity and desire to contribute to the Starkville community, Beverly, Kathy, and Lance were of tremendous help to Starkville Bridges Out of Poverty and the *Getting Ahead* initiative!



Kathy Martin (left), Lance Clark (middle), and Beverly Hammett (right) preparing to serve the *Getting Ahead* class. Photo by Kim Harris.

## Achievements!

### Robbie Ward's feature on NBC

Robbie Ward, previously from Starkville and member of our steering committee, wrote a series of stories on Poverty. One of these stories featuring Sara Moyer, our 2012 *Getting Ahead* graduate and 2013 *Getting Ahead* facilitator, was picked up nationally by NBC! If you would like to view the article, you may go to [Starkvillebridges.com](http://Starkvillebridges.com), and look under posts to find the "NBC News-Robbie Ward Article Feature" and follow the link. We would like to thank Robbie and Sara for helping us educate the public about the uniqueness of the Bridges approach!

Pictured below: Robbie Ward, reporter for Tupelo Daily Journal



### Sara Moyer named Bridges board member

Our newest board member and 2012 *Getting Ahead* graduate, Sara Moyer, shares a little of her story...

"My name is Sara Moyer and I am a resident of Starkville, MS. I became a volunteer for Bridges Out of Poverty because of the positive influence that the *Getting Ahead* class had on my life. I have learned a lot from this program, and I believe that I should educate others about the many resources that we have in Oktibeha County.

When I was in high school, I thought I was grown and unstoppable, but I didn't know what was around the corner. At first I blamed everyone for my mistakes, and then I realized that it was me making the mistakes. I have lived a hard life, but through God I am a survivor.

People think that when you are in poverty, you are always looking for public assistance, but they must be careful not to judge, just as I have learned not to judge those in the middle class. I work very hard, and if people would take time to walk in my shoes, they would see that I do more

than sit around the house all day eating and watching TV.

I am a high school graduate, I plan to soon attend EMCC, but being there for my family is my most precious gift.

I enjoy taking care of them. My mother had six children, and my sister and I are the only 2 survivors. I believe that there is a reason that I am still here, and that is to help others who may be in the same situation that I find myself.

Through Bridges, I have come to realize that there is a better future for me and my family. This is something that I never dared to believe in before. I served as a facilitator for the *Getting Ahead* class of 2013, and remain available to do whatever I can to help Bridges. I am now serving on the board of directors, where my insights and contributions are valuable to the success of this initiative."



## Lynn's Response to the detractors of Robbie Ward's Story on Sara Moye:

"If you haven't been exposed to the *Bridges Out of Poverty* constructs, it is easy to fall into the middle class cop out and say, "Where is the story?" However, once you understand people in generational poverty typically have NO future story, the advancements Sara has made are huge! She has taught our group more than we could have ever imagined. Our initiative has only been in existence for two years, and it isn't perfect. At least we are not waiting to do something. It is hard to confront this issue head on without reverting to quips about getting a job, not having babies, and getting an education. I know, I am one of those "people who have all the answers," but, once I was exposed to the research and the Bridges material, the blinders came off of my eyes. I now understand there are "barriers" at the individual, community and institutional levels. Because I am hard core middle-class, it has taken me three years to be able to honestly see the institutional barriers and to acknowledge the simple tweaking that could take place to allow our general dollars to be spent more wisely."

## Bridges National Conference- Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

In September, five of our members signed up for the Bridges National Conference in Oklahoma City. Jennifer Gregory donated her time and effort to make all of the logistical arrangements, but could not attend due to her representation of Starkville in Jackson on the C Spire project. Congrats to both Jennifer and Taylor Smith on your success!

The four members of our group who attended were Kathleen Olivieri, John Breazeale, Roderick Holmes, and Lynn Phillips-Gaines. Everyone that attended had different "Aha experiences," which are sure to impact the Starkville Bridges initiative.

Lynn Phillips-Gaines described her experience by saying, "I learned about creative ways to bring the Bridges constructs and approach the various sectors of the community. Identifying a trainer who can be called upon to do these trainings is of paramount importance."

In the words of Roderick Holmes, "I don't think I met a person there that didn't possess hope within their individual and organizational efforts. Building Bridges is all about that very aspect; hope. I felt that in sincerely in every session. That single word is the structural key that can and will mold all levels and aspects of poverty into non-existence."

According to Kathleen Olivieri, "One common denominator that I observed was that the Bridges out of Poverty initiatives were coordinated under one agency or entity in the community. Starkville Bridges was the only successful group in attendance who consisted of all volunteers! I was very surprised by this realization!"

"Because our university is such an integral part of our community's success, Starkville Bridges must extend our reach to faculty, staff and students. Faculty and staff need educational training and time to examine processes in their offices. Students who come from under-resourced backgrounds view MSU from a totally different mindset than the middle class. Due to the changing funding structure of all IHL's in Mississippi, the needs of all students must be addressed and learning/applying the constructs of Bridges is an excellent beginning!"

"After attending the National Bridges Conference, our group realizes the Bridges initiative is so much more than providing Getting Ahead classes and mentoring," mused Lynn. It is a way to remove community and institutional barriers to financial sustainability in Starkville. This is very exciting! So, please invite anyone who has been attracted to this initiative to be in these vital upcoming conversations about our future!

A debriefing of the event will take place at the next Starkville Bridges meeting on November 8<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m. at 929 Coffee Bar for anyone who wishes to attend.

## Family Centered Programs at National Bridges Conference

Imagine our surprise! We were tickled to meet John Daniels, Kate Covich, Barbara Culberson, and Megan Artz of Building Strong Families at the National Bridges Conference. It was a good opportunity to share ideas of ways that we can connect to help our graduates and our initiatives in the future. We were especially excited to learn about the career counseling and educational opportunities through Megan Artz for our *Getting Ahead* graduates!



Pictured above: John Breazeale, Dr. Regina A. Lewis, Kathleen Olivieri, Ruby K. Payne, Lewis Robinson III, and Lynn Phillips Gaines. Rod Holmes was not available for this photo due to his popularity among fellow participants.

## Getting Familiar with those donating time and talent

### Roderick Holmes

Roderick Holmes is the new Volunteer Coordinator for the Maroon Volunteer Center, adopting the former position of Stedmond Ware. Since acquiring this new position, Rod has become very involved with Bridges, demonstrating his deep concern for those in poverty, and desire to assist in carrying out our initiative. For those not familiar with Rod, we asked him to write a narrative of his life to help everyone get to know him, as we look forward to working closely with him in the future!

"I was born in Louisville, MS. During my grade school years, I had a desire to be different, and walked the edge of trouble and curiosity to see life in a whole new direction. Nevertheless, I had parents who stayed in my life as a strong influence, and an older brother and younger sister that meant the world to me. Even though I had my threats of boarding school, my goal was to never let my sister down; she's my best friend.

After graduating high school, I enlisted into the United States Air Force for four years, in Security Forces. During that time, I was deployed to numerous training locations, many cities within the U.S., and also deployment assignments to Saudi Arabia and Iraq. After spending four years in active duty, my mindset was unstable, and I needed a change. I left the military in 2005, and lived in Baltimore, California, Ohio, Florida, Texas and Washington State. I got to know many individuals from previous years, even though some were of good and bad influence.

The work I did throughout those years was both legal and illegal to say the least. After involvement with some people and crimes that I was not proud to affiliate with, I decided to move back to the gulf coast where I started work with the Air Force reserve system.

After being on the coast for a year, I decided that Atlanta was a place where I could live, so I moved there with the



hope to pursue music, and any attempt to make more money than what I was making. I became a certified songwriter with SESAC International, where I wrote under engineer and super producer Roahn Hylton for celebrity names such as Mario and Trey Songz.

In Atlanta, I also worked with the Reserve system. Regardless, I spent my free time with some of the same people that weren't of a "quality" nature. In 2008, I was charged with a felony, and was in and out of prison with good behavior conditions with both the state of Georgia and the Air Force reserves. In 2009, I was released with a new chance to be a better man that I once was.

Once I was allowed to work and my conditions of probation/parole were negotiated, I became a bartender until the summer of 2010. Once I was authorized to leave the state, I moved back to Mississippi. In the fall of 2010, I enrolled in Mississippi State University, and kept my change of faith towards Christ that I made at a summer revival a month prior in my home church in Louisville. With a renewed faith and a second chance in life to make sure situational poverty and the consequences of failed motivation remained on a path of achievement, I set out to prove a point of success. While I attended MSU, a kept a grade point was invited to numerous honor societies such as Lambda Pi Eta, Omicron Delta Kappa, and became a Prince Hall Mason. I was employed for two years with 91.1FM WMSV as the after personality, and the producer for their syndicated sports show, Southeastern Drive Time. I graduated in the spring of 2013 Cum Laude with a degree in communication with a concentration in broadcast journalism. I now work in the Office of Student Leadership and Community Engagement and the Maroon Volunteer Center as a Volunteer Coordinator."

### Andy Lewis

We'd like to thank Andy Lewis of **Lewis Galey** for the rework of our website, and the creation of our logo. He is also responsible for our gorgeous print materials! To reach him, you may email him at [andy@lewisgaley.com](mailto:andy@lewisgaley.com).

## Ways you can contribute

Many have asked how they can participate in this initiative, so here are some of the ways that you can help:

**Publicity:** Writing press releases, taking photos of activities, and coordinating with the media to get the word out about what Starkville Bridges is doing.

**Social Media:** Anyone who likes following social media might enjoy maintaining our Facebook and Twitter pages.

**Become a certified Bridges trainer** so we have someone here in our area who can go into businesses, health care, education, and law enforcement communities to help educate our middle class first responders about the mental models of poverty. Funds are available to pay for training.

**Speaker's Bureau:** We would love to have multiple volunteers who can address civic clubs and help organizations install Bridges within their organizations.

**Event planning:** For those who love to entertain, we need an event coordinator for the Soiree, Community Training, and other events.

**Praying** for our work, that it be pleasing in the sight of God.

**Mentoring** an under-resourced individual from our community.

**Facilitating** a *Getting Ahead* class.

Km Harris, our student worker, is also a full-time student and is only here for limited hours during the week, so anyone willing to volunteer in these areas will be greatly appreciated! If interested contact us at: (662)-418-3100 or [bridgesoutofpoverty@gmail.com](mailto:bridgesoutofpoverty@gmail.com)