



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 18, 2021

Contact: Lindsey Butler (lbutler@bridgesusa.org)

BRIDGES RECEIVES \$139K YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH GRANT

*Awarded by The Assisi Foundation of Memphis to support
multi-level, collaborative programming*

MEMPHIS, TN—On January 28, [The Assisi Foundation of Memphis](#) announced BRIDGES will receive \$139,500 to help fund an ambitious response to the youth mental health crisis in Memphis. The Assisi Foundation grant will allow BRIDGES to expand its youth-centered, social-emotional wellness programming and extend a successful therapeutic services pilot with [The Anaya Partnership](#). Outside of the grant-based programming, BRIDGES will continue collaborating with a community coalition to decrease stigma and increase access for youth seeking mental health services.

A [July 2020 report](#) issued by the Tennessee Department of Education’s Child Wellbeing Task Force states that even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, TN youth were already experiencing unprecedented mental health challenges. Locally, a [2019 Shelby County Community Health Needs Assessment](#) created by the Shelby County Health Department, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, Regional One Health, Baptist Memorial Health Care and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital noted similar findings, citing lack of community mental health resources as one of the top issues affecting residents in Greater Memphis. At BRIDGES, students’ increasing reports of widespread anxiety, stress and depression among themselves and their peers was a major catalyst for the organization exploring youth-led solutions to urgent mental health needs.

At the programmatic level, BRIDGES is leveraging the Bridge Builders model to create healing spaces for youth, train program participants in self-care modalities and provide youth organizers a platform to advocate for community policy change. In September 2020, BRIDGES and youth organizers from the Bridge Builders CHANGE program joined forces with several other Memphis-area organizations across the youth services, mental health and healthcare sectors to shape successful methods of addressing the disconnected mental healthcare system. Now known as the Community Coalition for Youth Mental Health, this group of more than 30 partners meets regularly to identify and develop community resources and no-wrong-doors access points for youth and families in crisis.

“When our student leaders began asking how they could improve mental health outcomes for themselves and their peers, we thought it was time to start a larger conversation,” said Dana Wilson, BRIDGES President & CEO and one of the founders of the Community Coalition for Youth Mental Health. “Bringing together so many different organizations, each with its own unique insight into serving youth and families, has been an eye-opening experience. We’ve learned a lot from one another, especially when sharing and developing resources to help the larger community. We believe working together will break down silos and open access to mental health support for more youth and families than ever before.”

Alongside its work with the Coalition, BRIDGES received funding through the [TN Community CARES](#) program to engage mental health support services with The Anaya Partnership, a Youth Villages program created to assist schools and community organizations by providing counseling services to their youth and families. Through this partnership, Bridge Builders were offered short-term support interventions with Anaya professionals in fall 2020, which included individual and family-inclusive counseling sessions. Participating students reported unanimously beneficial experiences, citing the Anaya sessions as instrumental in helping them cope with mental health challenges. Encouraged by the positive outcomes and already seeking ways to broaden the scope of impact, BRIDGES applied for a capacity-building grant through The Assisi Foundation to grow its work within the community, as well as its own programs.

“The families we’ve worked with have been extremely grateful for the counseling and support received through Youth Villages’ Anaya Partnership,” said Susan Deason, project manager for the Anaya Partnership. “Some parents told me that they have been wanting help for their children for a while but didn’t know where to begin or how to access services. The extra support has had a positive impact on the Bridge Builders we have served, and we are excited for the opportunity to expand this partnership.”

COVID-19 has exacerbated the many existing inequities in mental healthcare access, but through the generous funding from The Assisi Foundation, BRIDGES and its dedicated community partners and youth organizers hope to fill in some of the gaps. The ultimate goal is to remove barriers and connect Memphis-area youth and families to the mental health resources and services they need as quickly and easily as possible.

###

[BRIDGES](#) unites and inspires diverse young people to become confident and courageous leaders committed to community transformation. Visit bridgesusa.org to learn more, or contact [Lindsey Butler](#).

