

Bridge to Independence Pilot Program  
Broward County Family Success Administration Division

***Bridge To Independence expects to demonstrate that disadvantaged at risked-youth admitted in this Demonstration Project will achieve greater self-sufficiency and consistently experience more positive results than non-participants.***

**Bridge To Independence's Mission and Vision**

The mission of Bridge to Independence is to strengthen community partnerships to improve the social, educational, and financial success of disadvantaged youth transitioning to living independently as productive citizens.

***Providing Cutting Edge Services***

In an attempt to address the plight of a growing at-risked youth population in Broward County, the Family Success Administration Division is proposing a **Bridge To Independence (BTI)**. In collaboration with partners such as the Broward County Extension Education Division, Broward County Office of Housing and Finance, Broward County Housing Authority, Work Force One, this Pilot Project will develop and implement a state of the art curriculum that promote success youth development and provide quality life skills programs to serve the needs of disadvantaged youth in our multi-ethnic community.

**The Bridge To Independence Model:**

The BTI pilot will be based on a collaborative model to ensure coordination of existing resources and maximization of funding. Pilot Project Staff will provide the screening, intake, case management and coaching services while identified community partners will provide skills classes/experiences and housing access. Via cooperative agreements, expert community partners such as the Extension Education Division will deliver experiential life skills classes, the Broward County Housing Authority will provide housing vouchers with selected housing providers and Work Force One will provide Job Readiness Training.

Program Areas	Expected Outcomes
<b>Psychosocial</b>	Addressing social, and psychological issues
<b>Educational achievement</b>	Graduating high school & pursuing technical or higher education
<b>Employment skills</b>	Acquiring necessary skills to get and retain jobs
<b>Financial literacy</b>	Managing personal finance including paying rent
<b>Life skills</b>	Maintaining good hygiene and good nutrition

## **Eligibility:**

### Eligibility criteria

1. 17.5 years or six months from graduating
2. Referred from Childnet

### Exclusionary criteria

1. Youth enlisted ( or intending to enlist) in the military
2. Criminal background ( convicted of a violent crime, sex offender, fire starter)
3. Major mental health background ( suicide attempts, Psychotic Disorders)
4. Must not have significant drug/alcohol abuse within the past 6 months
5. Youth with children or pregnant

Program reserves the right to evaluate each youth on a case by case basis.

Number of Participants: 20 Youth

Ten students between the ages of 17.5 – 19 will be selected to participate in the first phase of the pilot based on the above eligibility criteria. An additional ten participants will be recruited for the first initial year this calendar period for a total of twenty participants. After an extensive screening process, case management, life coaching will be provided by an experienced Life Coach and Mentor. Youth will attend specialized life skills training provided by contracted Professional Development Agencies. Youth will undergo an orientation with the opportunity to meet role models who have successfully transitioned from the social services system to productive citizens. There will be opportunity for youth to attend independent living conferences and self empowerment workshops.

Staff: The initial pilot will utilize two professional level staff to implement the program. One Master's level Life Coach and one bachelors level Mentor will be employed. Staff

### **Cost: \$300,000**

Budget will cover salaries/benefits for two staff, subsidized rent, utilizes, groceries, transportation and flex funds for unanticipated youth needs.

In-kind Contributions: To be determined. Contributions will be provided by Workforce One, Broward County Extension Programs, Broward County Government, and Broward County Housing Authority.

### **Program phase schedule:**

- Phase I: Independent Life Skills Training Program (4 – 6 months)
- Phase II: Housing (12 months)
- Phase III: Follow-up and evaluation

**Screening:**

The BTI staff will participate in the multi-agency ChildNet staffing for transitional youth to identify and screen potential applicants. The results secured from the Casey Life Skills Assessment tool will be utilized to identify appropriate youth. BTI staff will then meet with the applicant to conduct an intake and additional assessments. Upon completion the selected youth will participate in an orientation with program staff to confirm the fit. A customized plan will identify the mandatory core skill classes and housing placement that will be implemented. The youth will be required to enter into a BTI agreement outlining the program requirements.

**Phase 1**

**Orientation:** Each youth will receive a comprehensive orientation to the program in which the following elements will be presented in a dynamic and engaging manner. The youth will receive a clear and defined outline of what needs to be accomplished in order to move from one phase to the next. The program is designed to build upon each preceding phase culminating in the real life application of skills and a stable living arrangement. Youth will move from the initial skill development phase to placement in a housing arrangement and the opportunity to apply skills in a real life setting. Financial and emotional support will be provided to assure the successful transition towards adulthood and independence. The youth will benefit from the program in the following manner:

- Housing information and home ownership – Provide home management skills including lease agreements and possibly rental assistance. Methods and pathways to first time home ownership will be provided. In addition, subsidies for rent, utilities, transportation and groceries will be offered.
- Personalized academic support and post-secondary education – participation in academic, and support programs to become lifelong learners, complete high school and/or complete vocational training needed to become productive working adults in a chosen field. Tertiary education support by identifying additional financial resources to supplement scholarship funding (ie. books, tools etc).
- Employability skills and job development assistance – development of knowledge, resume preparation, interview skills and work ethics that help secure and retain stable jobs, advance beyond entry-level positions and pursue self-supporting career.
- Life Skills for financial literacy – acquiring financial knowledge including developing a budget, money management, and responding to unanticipated financial crises. Encouraging savings and assets development to acquire material asset such as cars, home and savings account. Forced savings will result in receipt of additional funds upon successful completion of the program that will provide greater financial stability.

- Create Personal portfolio (birth certificate, school records, social security card, driver's license etc.)
- Access to peer support, personal life coach and mentor – ongoing 24/7 support and guidance to learn about life and work experience and establish natural support system in the community. Current and former program participants will visit and interface with current program participant to share their experience and understanding of the challenges faced by transitioning youth.

### **Independent Life Skills Training Program (4 – 6 months)**

The Life skills trainings will be provided by cooperative partners such as the Extension Education Division, Work Force One, community subject experts and the Broward Family Success Administration Division will deliver a range of customized and experiential programs designed to cover but not limited to the following topics:

- Financial management
- Consumer Education
- Housing
- Independent Living: Personal Budget Credit
- Nutrition Management
- Time Management
- Stress Management
- Personal Health
- Navigating social support systems
- Medical Services and Referrals
- Legal Services and referrals
- Problem/conflict resolution
- Assertiveness Training
- Job Readiness skills: resume preparation, interview skills.
- College Groundwork: admission applications, financial aid, tuition waivers, scholarships
- Goal setting

### **Phase II: Housing (12 months)**

Immediately prior to the completion of the core required life skills classes identified in the BTI agreement the youth will move into in a subsidized housing arrangement. Significant financial support will be provided in the form of subsidies for rent, utilities, groceries and transportation. The youth will be engaged in a forced savings program where they will be required to bank a certain percentage of their income into a savings account that will not be accessed until graduation from the program. Additionally, the youth will receive ongoing 24/7 support and guidance from their life coach and mentor to ensure successful application of the acquired life skills. The coach and mentor will

provide ongoing emotional support and link the youth to formal psychological support services (within the community) as needed. If necessary youth will be provided with counseling to help with issues that may pose as barriers to reaching and maintaining independence. At six months the youth will be assessed using the Casey Life Skills Assessment to determine the need for skill reinforcement and the need for refresher life skill training. Preparation for graduation and transition out of the program will be conducted at 9 months where a Life Plan will be completed. This plan will detail the financial, emotional, social, physical elements of their future. After 12 months the youth will complete the program however they will have access to ongoing support from the program and will be invited to serve as mentors and role models.

### **Phase III: Follow-up and evaluation**

The University of Florida has agreed to evaluate the effectiveness of this pilot program which will include follow-up with program graduates. The recommendations from the evaluation will be utilized to determine future program design and advancement.

**Conclusion - *Bridge To Independence*** is designed for the mature youth who is poised to live independently and transition successfully into adulthood. The program will assist youth to obtain training in daily living skills, employment skills and to access post-secondary training and education. The needs of youth in sponsored care transitioning into adulthood are often overlooked. At-Risked-Disadvantaged Youth represent an invisible group who exist on the fringe of society and at the lowest level of the social strata. As a society, we expect little of these young people. Therefore, they have no motivation to aim high in life and seek great achievements. We also expect little of ourselves to marshal the necessary resources to empower our at-risked youth. Yet, laying the ground work to help them achieve self-sufficiency and economic independence is indeed an achievable goal. Such undertaking is doable and affordable and promises to have immeasurable rewards for our youth and our community in the future.

***The Bridge To Independence demonstration project endeavors to create a path toward a brighter future for Broward County's At-Risked Youth population. It is often said that a great society is often judged by the way it deals with its less fortunate citizens. This is indeed a golden opportunity for us to demonstrate the generosity of our rich and diverse community by investing in our disadvantaged youth. The implementation of the Bridge To Independence Project will allow many young people to transition into adulthood with the living skills, self-confidence, and the hope for the future that all young Americans deserve.***