



# BRIDGES TO INDEPENDENCE

## VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Bridges to Independence  
3103 9<sup>th</sup> Road North  
Arlington, VA 22201  
Phone 703.525.7177  
[www.bridges2.org](http://www.bridges2.org)

## WELCOME

Dear Volunteer,

**Welcome to Bridges to Independence!** You are joining a small but mighty staff who guide children, youth, families, and individuals out of homelessness and toward independence. Our motto is simple: learn, lead, work, and thrive. With the help of our committed volunteers, we can help families overcome homelessness and strive for a better future.

This handbook was prepared to give you some essential information about the policies and expectations of Bridges to Independence. No handbook can answer all the questions you might have about our programs and services. Please do not hesitate to ask questions of our staff.

Thank you for your willingness to volunteer your time and talents to help others. Volunteering at Bridges to Independence can be a very rewarding experience that has an invaluable impact on those we serve. I wish you much success in your volunteerism at Bridges and thank you for helping us fulfill our mission.

Sincerely,



**Samuel L. Kelly, Jr., MSW**  
Executive Director  
Bridges to Independence

## ABOUT BRIDGES TO INDEPENDENCE

### *Contact Information*

Address: 3103 9<sup>th</sup> Road, North  
Arlington, VA 22201

Phone: 703-525-7177

Website: [www.bridges2.org](http://www.bridges2.org)

### *Social Media*



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Bridges2Indep



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### *History and Mission*

Bridges to Independence leads individuals and families out of homelessness and into stable, independent futures.

A private, nonprofit organization, Bridges to Independence (Bridges) has been serving people experiencing homelessness since 1985 when we were founded as the Arlington-Alexandria Coalition for the Homeless. We started with a 20-bed shelter on Fairfax Drive in Arlington before moving to our present location in 1989. Over the years we have expanded and strengthened our programs and built an extensive network of community partners, including public and private service providers, landlords, and local businesses.

### *Geographic Area Served*

Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, Virginia

### *Programs and Services*

Through a dedicated and committed team of management, staff and volunteers, Bridges helps over 500 men, women, youth and children each year:

- Those experiencing homelessness
- Those in need of affordable housing
- Those in need of supportive services

Our core programs and services consist of the following:

**1. Emergency Shelter.** Emergency shelter is a temporary and last resort option for those with little or no resources. Participants come to Bridges to Independence's Sullivan House emergency shelter after experiencing a major housing crisis. Sullivan House is the largest emergency shelter for families experiencing homelessness in Arlington County. The shelter, with ten one- and two-bedroom apartments, can accommodate up to 14 families at a time. The median length of stay is 3 months.

**2. Rapid Re-housing.** Along with emergency shelter, Bridges to Independence provides rapid re-housing to individuals and families in Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. Homelessness

should be rare, brief, and non-reoccurring. The goal is to move individuals and families into safe, affordable, and permanent housing as quickly as possible. Concurrently, Bridges provides a range of services to ensure participants are able to maintain housing upon program completion, including housing identification, connection to mainstream resources, financial assistance, and community-based case management. Through our close partnerships with landlords in the community, families are able to secure and maintain a lease in their own names, which assists them in establishing a foundation for good credit.

**3. Employment Services.** Our Bridge to Work program promotes the self-sufficiency of our clients through employment and increased wages. The program provides group training and one-on-one mentorship, and brings together the skills, knowledge, and community networks that will help clients become and remain independent. Bridge to Work blends the “basics” (resume and cover letter writing, interviewing, etc.) with soft skills development (teamwork, workplace communication, conflict resolution, etc.). At the same time, the program further enhances Bridges’ continuum of aid and support for those we serve by reducing major barriers to employment (such as transportation and child care) and helping participants find, secure, and retain stable employment.

**4. Youth Development.** Youth who are currently at-risk for or experiencing homelessness are often exposed to risk factors, including trauma, poor physical/mental health, stress, developmental delays, and missed educational opportunities. Our youth development program aids these youth in improving their academic skills, self-esteem, job readiness, health and well-being. Our goal is to give youth the confidence, skills, and tools needed to pursue and complete post-secondary education or vocational training, providing them with a pathway to economic security.

**5. Financial Literacy.** Many of our participants are unemployed or underemployed, carry large amounts of debt and have poor credit. Bridges works with our families to raise their financial consciousness and make healthy financial decisions. We partner with Wells Fargo to host workshops for our shelter guests and the Virginia Cooperative Extension to offer intensive financial planning and management training to our Rapid Re-housing participants.

As homelessness is often episodic, we work closely with former program participants to ensure they are able to remain securely housed and do not fall into homelessness again.

## VOLUNTEER CLASSIFICATIONS

Volunteers are the backbone of Bridges. The involvement of talented and committed volunteers greatly extends the range, quality and variety of our programs and services. Bridges defines a “volunteer” as an individual who freely offers to assist Bridges in the accomplishment of its mission without being paid.

Volunteers are classified as follows:

**Direct Service Volunteers** refers to those who participate in Bridges' volunteer activities and have direct contact with clients. All Direct Services Volunteers must consent to a background investigation which includes National Sex Offender Registry screening and a criminal background check.

- *Examples:* Tutoring, child care, assisting clients with job applications, volunteering with the youth program, working at the front desk, and training with Bridges Runs.

**Indirect Service Volunteers** refer to those who participate in Bridges' volunteer activities but DO NOT have one-on-one direct contact with clients.

- *Examples:* Assisting with office/administrative tasks, running errands, and delivering furniture.

**Special Event Volunteers** includes those individuals who participate in special one-time or annual events, such as fundraisers, on behalf of Bridges.

- *Examples:* Working at the annual kickball tournament, Black and Gold Bash, job fair or other events, or representing Bridges at community fairs/events.

**Service Group Volunteers** include those individuals who participate as a part of a larger group (company, church, school, sorority/fraternity, etc.) in a specific project benefiting Bridges.

- *Examples:* Participating in a group workday at the shelter (gardening, painting, etc.), field trip, or off-site event organized by an outside group, organization, or company.

## VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

All Bridges' volunteers are required to sign a Volunteer Agreement, which includes a *Code of Conduct* and *Release of Liability*. Volunteers under the age of 18 must sign the form in conjunction with their parent/legal guardian.

### ***Code of Conduct***

While I am serving as a Bridges' volunteer, I affirm that I will:

1. Represent and seek to serve the best interests of the organization.
2. Treat all individuals with dignity, respect, and worth.
3. Be a positive role model for children, youth, and adults.
4. Be present, respectful, patient, and courteous.
5. Avoid profane or abusive language and disruptive behavior that is dangerous to self or others.

6. Refrain from humiliating or frightening discipline techniques.
7. Abstain from photographing or recording any Bridges clients unless authorized by a staff member. And refrain from posting any images to personal social media accounts.
8. Respect and not disclose any confidential information.
9. Refrain from using, possessing, or being under the influence of mind altering chemicals (such as alcohol, narcotics or prescription medication) on Bridges' premises.
10. Use reasonable efforts to avoid being alone with a Bridges' client who is a minor unless I am in plain sight of others.
11. Refrain from leaving a child unsupervised.
12. Refrain from any form of physical, verbal or sexual abuse.
13. Dress appropriately for the volunteer activity.
14. Report any kind of suspected neglect or abuse to a Bridges' staff member.
15. Refrain from preaching to anyone or pressuring anyone to accept my political, cultural, or religious beliefs.
16. Seek Bridges' staff consent and coordinate with Bridges' staff prior to conducting any fundraiser or in-kind drive on behalf of the organization.
17. Refrain from volunteering if I have a physical or psychological condition that may adversely affect clients' health, including significant fever or contagious conditions.

### ***Volunteer Release of Liability***

I acknowledge that I am entering into this release of liability knowingly and voluntarily. I assume all responsibility and risk associated with being a volunteer for Bridges. I fully acknowledge and recognize that risks may be involved, including but not limited to illness, paralysis, death, damages, economic or emotional loss, that I may suffer as a direct or indirect result of my participation, including travel to and from the volunteer site.

In consideration of being permitted to participate as a volunteer in Bridges' activities, I fully accept and assume all such risks and all responsibility for losses, costs, or damages incurred by me that may be caused by my own actions or inaction or the actions or inaction of others participating. I represent that I am physically able to undertake any and all activities. If, at any time, I believe conditions to be unsafe, I will immediately discontinue my participation.

I further agree to release Bridges, its employees, agents, officers, directors and affiliates, and the host facility, and hold harmless and indemnify them from all claims and liability as a result of my voluntary participation, to the extent that those claims and liability are caused by my own negligence or willful misconduct, or are caused by the negligence or willful misconduct of others

participating, to the fullest extent allowable by law and excluding only damages caused by the negligence or willful misconduct of Bridges. I further agree that Bridges assumes no responsibility for the welfare of my property or belongings in this activity.

## VOLUNTEER POLICIES

### ***Age Requirements***

Bridges is committed to developing youth involvement so that young people may better serve their community and become the leaders of tomorrow. We warmly welcome volunteers of all ages. However, youth volunteers under the age of 18 must have the written consent of a parent or guardian prior to volunteering. **Unaccompanied volunteers must be 14 years or older.** The volunteer work assigned to a minor should be performed in a non-hazardous environment and should comply with all appropriate requirements of child labor laws.

### ***Commitment to Diversity***

Bridges is committed to diversity and inclusiveness. Volunteers are accepted without regard to gender, disability, age, race or other condition. Volunteers are accepted based upon their skills, abilities and suitability to perform volunteer responsibilities.

### ***Background Checks***

Bridges strives to maintain a safe and productive volunteer environment with honest, trustworthy, qualified, and reliable volunteers who do not present a risk of harm to others. Bridges may perform, or may request that third parties perform, background checks at any time in the application or volunteer oversight. All background checks will be performed in accordance with applicable federal and/or state laws.

Background checks may include criminal history, sex offender registry review, and DMV record review. In conducting background checks, Bridges may use consumer-reporting agencies to gather and report information to Bridges in the form of consumer or investigative consumer reports. All background check results will be maintained in a confidential file.

If asked, potential and current volunteers are expected to consent to conduct a background check and respond with truthful and complete information to inquiries made by Bridges or third party investigators during the process.

### ***Clients and Client Relatives as Volunteers***

Current or former clients may be accepted as volunteers, where such service does not constitute an obstruction to or conflict with provision of services to themselves or other clients. Clients cannot be placed as Direct Service Volunteers. Relatives of clients may also serve as volunteers, but cannot be placed as a Direct Service Volunteer in programs where members of their family are receiving services.

### ***Volunteer Orientation***

Under normal operations, Bridges' volunteer intake process is as follows:

The potential volunteer...

- Completes a volunteer application
- Signs a release for a background check if necessary
- Completes volunteer orientation
- Reviews and signs an acknowledgement form

Attendance at Bridges' volunteer orientation is required before **working directly with clients at Bridges**. Volunteer orientations are held once a month. Please visit Bridges' website for upcoming days and times.

### ***Tracking of Volunteer Hours***

We ask that volunteers please track their hours online in their Volgistics profile. You can do so by following these easy steps:

1. Login into Volgistics
2. In your home screen on the left hand side, click 'Post Your Hours'
3. Record your hours appropriately

### ***Unable to Volunteer***

If you are unable to make a scheduled volunteer shift, please contact a Bridges staff member as soon as possible. We appreciate at least 24 hours' notice.

### ***Volunteer Feedback***

Volunteers are encouraged to have informal, open and honest discussions with Bridges staff about their experience as volunteer.

### ***Photo Release***

As a Bridges' volunteer, you give your permission to be photographed while participating in volunteer activities and understand that these photographs may be used in any media, including social media, promotional materials, newsletters, etc. If you do not want your photo to be used by Bridges, please notify us and we will honor your request.

## **SAFETY & SECURITY POLICIES**

Some of the best safety improvement ideas come from volunteers. If you have ideas, concerns or suggestions for improved safety and security, please bring them to a staff member's attention. Please report any condition that you believe poses a safety, health or security risk in the volunteer environment. Bridges will investigate such reports thoroughly and take appropriate corrective action. If you do not follow safety guidelines or cause hazardous or dangerous situations, you may be asked to leave your volunteer assignment.



### ***Injuries and Personal Safety While Volunteering***

You are expected to follow safety guidelines and to exercise caution in all volunteer activities. However, even under the best circumstances, an accident may occur. If you are injured, even slightly, you are expected to immediately stop the activity that caused the injury and seek first aid or medical attention if necessary. You should inform appropriate staff about the incident and complete an incident report form. You should not resume the activity until treatment has been provided and/or you have been given the approval to continue the activity. If you are unable to complete a volunteer assignment because of an illness or injury, please inform a Bridges' staff member as soon as possible.

### ***Universal Precautions***

Some Bridges' staff members are trained in CPR/First Aid/AED. In the event that first aid is necessary, please do not try and render medical assistance. While we understand that some of you by nature will want to assist someone in need, we ask, however, that you observe universal precautions and avoid contact with any bodily fluids. Bridges' staff members have been trained to handle emergency situations.

### ***Arrest and Criminal Conviction of a Volunteer***

If you have been convicted of any of the following, you are disqualified from Bridges' volunteer opportunities: abuse, assault/battery, rape, any crime of a sexual nature, homicide or manslaughter, attempted murder, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, felony drug crimes, animal cruelty, theft and robbery, forgery/fraud, kidnapping, arson, weapons violations, or any crime (misdemeanor or felony) involving children as an accomplice or victim.

### ***Security of Personal Belongings***

Bridges assumes no liability for your personal property. We encourage you to lock valuable personal belongings in your vehicle during your volunteer service. Bridges is not responsible for your personal items that are lost, stolen or damaged.

### ***Use of Supplies and Equipment***

Bridges' supplies and equipment, including copy machines and postage meters, are for Bridges' business use only. Equipment and supplies purchased by, or donated to, the organization belong to Bridges.

### ***Handling Money***

Whenever possible, two or more individuals (volunteers/staff) should be present when handling money, fees and donations to ensure that funds or donations are adequately accounted for.

### ***Harassment Free Environment***

Bridges is committed to an environment free from unlawful harassment in which everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Unlawful harassment is defined as harassment based on any characteristic protected by applicable federal, state or local law including race, religion, color, sex, national origin, age, veteran or disability status, which is sufficiently severe or pervasive. Examples of conduct prohibited by this policy include, but are not limited to:

1. Verbal or physical conduct that harasses an individual on the basis of a category protected by applicable federal, state or local law and that is sufficiently severe or pervasive as to create an intimidating, threatening, offensive or hostile environment.
2. Sexual displays or publications, or other verbal or physical conduct, where an individual is told either explicitly or implicitly that he or she must submit to the conduct to remain involved. Examples of prohibited verbal or physical conduct include: unwelcome sexual advances; stalking, dating violence, date rape, or sexual assault; persisting with romantic advances despite the rejection of the advances; requests for sexual favors, whether or not accompanied by promises or threats with regard to the employment or volunteer relationship; sexual jokes and innuendo; verbal abuse of a sexual nature; comments about an individual's body, sexual prowess, sexual activity, or sexual attractiveness; leering, whistling, or touching; insulting or obscene comments, sounds, or gestures; displays of sexually suggestive objects, cartoons or pictures.
3. Words, actions or visual matter that demean or show hostility toward an individual or group because of any characteristic protected by applicable federal, state or local laws.

Please report any concerns regarding unlawful harassment to a Bridges' staff member.

#### ***Violence Free Environment***

Bridges promotes a safe environment and does not tolerate any type of threatening or violent behavior. Please report any potentially dangerous situations or unauthorized individuals on Bridges' premises to a Bridges staff member as soon as possible.

#### ***Non-Solicitation***

Please do not distribute literature or printed materials of any kind, sell merchandise, solicit financial contributions, or solicit for any other cause while volunteering with Bridges without prior consent from a Bridges' staff member.

#### ***Drugs and Alcohol***

Bridges' facilities are free from drugs and alcohol.

#### ***Smoking***

Bridges' facilities are smoke-free. Smoking inside all Bridges' facilities, including vehicles that are owned or leased by Bridges, is prohibited. Smoking is permitted in exterior designated smoking areas only. Smokers have a special obligation to keep outside smoking areas free of litter and to dispose of all smoking materials in proper receptacles.