



Bridges Out of Poverty
Community of Practice Summary

The aha!Process is a national antipoverty organization that helps people move toward upward mobility. The focus of its Bridges Out of Poverty model is on socioeconomic class differences, and helping people understand the importance of these factors and how they are related to their lives.

The mission of aha! Process is to directly impact the education and lives of individuals in poverty around the world. Communities are awakening to the reality that they do not offer a sustainable way of life to their children and are looking for direction. Equity and critical mass impact the changes that are taking place. If a community allows any group to be disenfranchised for any reason (religion, race, class) the entire community becomes economically poorer (Sowell, 1998). When poverty reaches a point of critical mass in a community and efforts to reverse the problem don't succeed, the people with the most resources tend to move out of the community, leaving behind enclaves of poverty. At this point the community is no longer sustainable.

What Is the Bridges Model?

Poverty is a common denominator for many sectors in society. Its impact is felt by a wide range of entities, including schools, healthcare providers, social services, food services, faith communities, police and other first responders, courts, correctional facilities, workforce development, employers and government.

The Bridges model operates on the law of attraction: If you like this approach, then take ownership of the ideas and apply them where you live and work. Your innovations can impact the lives of people in poverty, improve the outcomes of your organization, and help build a broad community initiative. When you share strategies with others, you are creating a learning community – whether it's at the water cooler where you work, within your own discipline, or in a community collaborative.

Poverty is a complex problem that demands a comprehensive approach. And therein lies the challenge. Poverty is not resolved with a single program or even set of programs, because there so many variables. Bridges is not a program. It is a set of constructs that can be applied in many settings and in many ways.

These 17 sectors have applied Bridges concepts. Poverty, a common denominator for all of them, covers the span of life:

- Prenatal care
- Early-childhood development
- K-12 education
- Postsecondary education
- Housing
- Workforce development
- Businesses/employers
- Banking/lenders
- Health and healthcare
- Faith-based entities
- Arts and entertainment
- Government safety-net services
- Nonprofits
- Addictions and mental health
- Courts and corrections
- Law enforcement and first responders
- Elder care and hospice

A national study of Getting Ahead participants conducted by Elizabeth Walher of Indiana University identifies 16 barriers. This is what the poor and working poor perceive. They are arranged according to the frequency with which they were reported:

- Bad credit
- Unemployment
- Transportation
- Affordable housing
- High debt
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Isolation
- Underemployment
- No access to computers
- Chemical dependency
- Learning problems
- Felony convictions
- Unstable working conditions
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Domestic violence

Bridges Focus Areas

While Bridges Out of Poverty has 7 Focus Areas, our implementation locally will initially focus on the **Community** and **Getting Ahead** areas.



K-12

Guiding Educators to Better Engage
Students and Parents



Community

Creating Healthy, Sustainable
Communities



Higher Education

Enhancing Outcomes for First-
Generation Students



Criminal Justice

Reducing Recidivism and Saving
Taxpayer Dollars



Healthcare

Improving Access and Costs in
Individual and Population Health



Workplace

Increasing Employee Retention and
Productivity



Getting Ahead

Helping the Under-Resourced
Achieve Stability



Community

Creating Healthy, Sustainable
Communities

Community

Implementing the Community Focus Area begins with a Bridges Community Workshop.

Bridges Out of Poverty Community Workshops are known for changing the way people think about poverty and economic class. People have “aha” moments that deepen into insights that are so powerful that there is no going back to their old way of thinking. These in turn deepen into paradigm shifts that alter every aspect of their work on poverty. Communities that use the Bridges constructs recognize that to address poverty effectively we must engage the whole community.

The workshop moves communities toward sustainability where everyone can live well. By discussing the four areas of research into the causes of poverty, the workshop deepens understanding of the costs to communities.

The goal is to build a comprehensive approach to reducing poverty.

- Develop a community- and relationship-based approach to poverty.
- Create a structure to support and maintain the initiative.
- Engage all classes, sectors, and political persuasions.

All sectors and economic classes need to be at the table and speaking the same language, and this workshop is the foundation of that ongoing work.

Our Bridges Community Workshop will be held on Wednesday, October 28th from 8:30am to 4:00pm at Heartland Community Church. The presenter will be Terie Dreussi-Smith, M.A.Ed.

Terie has been an author/consultant with aha! Process since 1997 and is experienced in bringing diverse audiences to new understandings and paradigms with practical knowledge, humor, and sincerity. Terie has years of both direct and midlevel management experience working with youth and adults in poverty. Her areas of expertise are health and wellness initiatives, K–12 education, higher education, alcohol and other drug prevention, community youth development, and community wellness.

Community of Practice

Once the Bridges Community Workshop is held, our **Bridges Community of Practice** will form. The Community of Practice brings people from all sectors and economic classes together to improve job retention rates, build resources, improve outcomes, and support those who are moving out of poverty.

The goals of creating a Community of Practice are to:

- move individuals from poverty to self-sufficiency
- reduce social costs to crime, poor health and welfare
- strengthen educational attainment and job skills
- improve on-the-job productivity
- revitalize neighborhoods and build sustainable communities where everyone can live well

The Community of Practice will host quarterly meetings and will include professionals of all levels (Executive Directors, Management and Case Managers) in each of the Bridges Community Sectors, which include:

- Community Based Organizations
- Getting Ahead Graduates
- Faith Leaders
- Housing
- Government
- Courts
- Law Enforcement
- K-12 Education
- Post-Secondary Education
- Business/Workforce
- Behavioral Healthcare
- Healthcare Organizations

We anticipate more than 50 area agencies and churches participating in the quarterly meetings. The first Community of Practice meeting will be held on Friday, November 20, 2020.

The Bridges Out of Poverty model is currently used in 35 states and 7 countries; there are currently 33 communities across the world that have established Communities of Practice.

Communities of Practice are currently being developed in additional communities across the State of Illinois. These include Gurnee, Joliet and McHenry. We will have the opportunity to meet with these communities to discuss policies that we could influence together for statewide change.

Triple Lens Approach

Individuals learn about poverty through personal experience, stories in the news, reading, and general debate—but rarely through an intention to fully understand this complex problem. Without a structure for processing the complexities of poverty, without a way to organize our thinking, our responses to poverty will continue to be ineffective.

The triple lens is a structure by which poverty can be assessed and processed thoroughly. Looking at poverty through a single lens—be it individual, organizational, or community—will not provide the depth of understanding that comes from viewing poverty through all three lenses. By using the triple lens, we develop new ideas, discover how to apply new concepts, and make necessary changes. This tool helps us do thorough work.



Our Community of Practice Vision

By attending the Bridges Community Workshop, participants will gain an understanding of the Bridges Out of Poverty concepts and constructs as they relate to an individual in poverty as well as their specific field or organization's work.

The Community of Practice then brings key participants together to discuss how these concepts can be applied within their organization, and at a higher level, the entire community. These discussions will lead to a vision that is developed collaboratively and is supported by staff at all levels.

Our Vision is to have a Champion in each of the Bridges Community Sectors who will participate in the Community of Practice, while also working to implement the Bridges concepts within their respective organization. Ideally, this individual would also become a Certified Bridges Out of Poverty Trainer and would also provide ongoing educational presentations within their organization, as well as their field of work.



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