

# Building *for the* Future

Engaging Business. Empowering Youth.



Every fall, during the months of October and November, Bridges from School to Work (Bridges) programs across the country hold celebratory events timed to coincide with Disability Employment Awareness Month. Hosted by Richard Marriott, these celebrations recognize youth with disabilities and the employers who hire them. Describing the Bridges program, which is a 25-year-old initiative of the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities, is not as easy as you might think. So that people can more easily understand it, we distill our description into something like: “Bridges helps kids with disabilities get their first jobs.” Most respond with a nod, with a smile, and with something like “Wow, that’s great!”

But this year, a recurring theme has emerged that runs counter to “We help kids with disabilities get their first jobs.” In all of our Bridges cities, the young adults we recognize receive a Youth Achievement Award from Richard Marriott, chairman of Host Hotels & Resorts and the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities. But in many cases these young people didn’t get only a *first* job through Bridges; they got a *second*, and in some cases, a *third* job through Bridges. This is because Bridges works with these kids for one year, sometimes longer, helping them climb the first few steps of a career ladder. We believe these first few steps set them on a path to independence and lifelong employment.

Take for example a young lady named Jamethia in Dallas, whose first Bridges job was as a steward at a Fairmont Hotel, where she worked for one year until the distance became unmanageable. Her second Bridges job, also a steward, this time much closer to home, came at the Dallas W Hotel. But all along Jamethia knew that she wanted stewarding to lead her on a culinary career path. So with that goal in sight, she continued to work, but she juggled her W Hotel job with culinary school, a plan that seems to be paying off. Jamethia, who has been employed continuously for more than two years, is now on her *third* Bridges job, working for the last nine months in the pastry kitchen at the 1000-room Dallas Omni Hotel. As she has progressed through each job, Jamethia needed less support and guidance. For her Omni job, she completed the application on her own while asking her Bridges mentor questions over the phone.

We at Bridges aren’t the only ones who’ve witnessed Jamethia’s transformation. Her employer has also seen her grow and develop, as evidenced by what Jamethia’s supervisor, Pastry Chef Kristina Kent, had to say about her: “I absolutely adore Jamethia! She always has a fantastic attitude and is really working hard to learn as much as she can! I am really proud of her, seeing how far she has come in the time she has been with us.”

Clearly, Bridges benefits not only young adults, but also the employers who hire them, as in the case of the Dallas Omni Hotel, which counts this ambitious young lady among its valuable employees. With more than two decades of serving over 21,000 young people, Bridges has perfected a magic formula: Committed, compassionate, quality mentors who match young people with real jobs in businesses that offer advancement opportunities. So, as we celebrate Disability Employment Awareness Month, we at Bridges reflect on the many young adults like Jamethia served each year in the cities of Dallas, Atlanta, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and metro-Washington, DC. Among these Bridges cities, Jamethia is one of many examples of the power of a job in transforming the lives of young people with disabilities.

About us:

In 1989 the Marriott family established an independent foundation—The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities (MFPD)—the centerpiece of which became Bridges From School to Work. Not a corporate foundation, MFPD is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization operating Bridges program in nine major U.S. cities.

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