



We don't reject.  
We don't punish.  
We don't judge.

We mend  
young lives.

# The Bridge Family Center

Serving West Hartford and  
the region since 1969

Every family. Every child. Every time.

# safety net.

That's **one way** to describe **The Bridge**.

Ask a family who's come to us for counseling, **desperate for one small ray of hope**.

Or someone we've brought along **from homeless teen to self-sufficient young adult**.

Or parents **worried about drug use** after school, which we now see in our communities **as early as the elementary grades**.

## problem 1)

**GREAT SCHOOLS NEED ACTIVE PARENTS** For lots of youngsters, the deciding factor in school success comes down to one thing: Are their parents involved?

If so, children are far more likely to shine in the classroom, studies show.

West Hartford has well-regarded public schools. But we need to pay attention to parent involvement if we want to keep them successful.

There are challenges. Things have changed. Single-parent households are common (one in five). In two-parent households, most times both work. Many grandparents are now primary caregivers.

And the town's demographics are shifting dramatically. Among the kids in one of our schools, there are now 25 different languages spoken at home.

## our solution)

**FAMILY CENTERS INSIDE SCHOOLS** The Bridge has a way to guarantee parent involvement in our schools.

We start at birth with home visits to new parents. And we just keep going, into early childhood education, kindergarten, right up through the elementary school years.

Our best tool? We call it a Family Resource Center. It's a community of parents within a school.

At the Center, parents learn how to give their children the best possible start. Parents can find remedial programs, play groups, peer support and expert counseling. They can learn how to use children's books for "Raising Readers." They can even take a course in community leadership.

We have one award-winning Family Resource Center, est. 1991, inside Charter Oak Academy.

But one Center in one school doesn't solve all West Hartford's fifth-grade-and-younger problems. We have a presence in four other schools we'd love to expand – with your help.



## problem 2)

**TEEN HOMELESSNESS** Teens with no safe place to sleep? It happens far more often than you'd suspect.

Sometimes parents get fed up with drug abuse, a bad attitude, school screw-ups, run-ins with the police. "We've had it. Get out."

And sometimes there simply are no parents around. The majority of our homeless kids come from abusive, chaotic, intolerable homes.

So, who does tuck in a homeless kid at night? Well, there's the pedophile, the drug dealer, the pimp. Or, if the teen gets lucky, The Bridge.

## our solution)

**SHELTER AND A REAL SECOND CHANCE** West Hartford, like other suburban Connecticut towns, reveals surprising contrasts.

Downtown a thriving dog bakery boasts the best, all-natural ingredients for pets.

While up the street is our thriving homeless teen shelter (opened in 1978) where desperate kids get a real second chance and a lot of help: counsel, kindness, safety, and rules.

This year, The Bridge will shelter scores of homeless teens, the majority of them girls. These aren't "somebody else's kids," by the way. They come from our local communities. We already have five shelters for adolescents: in West Hartford, Manchester, Southington, Wolcott and Harwinton – and more on the way.



## problem 3)

**YOUNG LIVES INTERRUPTED** Meet 16-year-old angry Joe. He's buried deep inside a hostile shell.

Meet Mike. His home life's a mess, so he's majoring in three things in high school: marijuana, booze, and sex.

Meet Maria. She's a college hopeful. But she can't live with her mother; it's too dangerous, with all the strange men around.

Meet young George. The other boys tease him so much he'd rather be dead.

Meet Emma, a driven eighth-grader. She's having a nervous breakdown and keeping it quiet so her parents won't suspect.

We changed the names.

But they're all real, a sampling of the many young, troubled kids we see who live in our neighborhoods and need your help.

## our solution)

**LIVES RESTARTED IN A NEW DIRECTION** Mike? The Bridge gave him a stable environment. Maria? She loves college. George is coping. Emma's got relief.

And angry Joe? He came out of his shell, graduated from high school and joined the Marines. "...we all watched Joe transform from a boy to a man before our very eyes. The amount of confidence he gained and the grace with which he carried himself were amazing to watch. He was a great example to his peers." He's a proud dad now.

Miracle? No. Effective, real-life programs that bring stability, counseling, life skills training, and non-judgmental assistance to children and families. One of our mottos: Hope first, ask questions later.



## problem 4)

### **DRUGS, DRINKING, TOO MUCH IDLE TIME**

Some would argue that towns like West Hartford can't have a real drug problem. But our police and school officials know the truth. Drugs are prevalent, inexpensive, and easy to obtain everywhere.

And they're moving younger. Recent studies show that by sixth grade, one in 13 children has smoked marijuana. In the seventh grade that figure jumps to one in five.

Instant messaging, Internet access, cell phones, all aid the rapid spread of drug experimentation among school kids.

## our solution)

**TEEN CENTERS AND POSITIVE PROGRAMS** Thousands of times a year, community kids drop in to our safe, supervised, substance-free after school teen center. These are kids who would likely be on the streets otherwise, away from adult supervision, making life interesting for themselves and others. Instead, The Bridge provides positive options, games, sports, snacks, and counsel, under watchful, caring adult eyes.

**The Bridge: Every family.  
Every child. Every time.**

## What is The Bridge in a nutshell?

A place where teens who are at risk of ruining their lives find the help they need to get back on track.

A place where parents get help when there's trouble at home – with crisis intervention, counseling and referrals.

A place where kids in crisis can find real hope.

A place where kids exposed to many negative influences such as drugs find positive options.

The Bridge has worked with children and families in West Hartford and other regional communities since 1969. In 2009, The Bridge will celebrate 40 years of helping, thanks to our donors.



**Child and family counseling**

**Intervention in times of crisis**

**Prevention programs**

**Supervised after-school alternatives for teens**

**Personal development programs for parents, children, and youth**

**Shelter for homeless youth**

**Assistance with the transition from youth to adulthood**

Every family.  
Every child. Every time.



The Bridge has a growing number of shelters,  
transitional homes and counseling offices in  
West Hartford and other regional communities.



Tel: 860.521.8035 • Fax: 860.521.8036  
1022 Farmington Avenue  
West Hartford, CT 06107-2105  
[www.bridgefamilycenter.org](http://www.bridgefamilycenter.org)