

VISIONS AND PATHWAYS

Spring 2022 Newsletter

Somerset County approves \$1.16 million grant for planning, design of Bridge House residence

What happens to young adults who are homeless but have aged out of the state's limits for providing housing? They could be back on the streets.

But now, with a new \$1.16 million grant from the federal government's American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), Visions and Pathways will be able to offer these young adults the opportunity to one day live in 10 studio apartments that will be built off North Bridge Street in Bridgewater.

This is a major step toward completion of the Bridge House apartment project that Visions and Pathways first envisioned a decade

ago. When built, Bridge House will provide safe residences for young adults who have aged out of foster care, with Visions and Pathways providing the support services residents will need.

The life-changing \$1.16 million grant comes from Somerset County's ARPA allocation, part of a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill signed by President Biden in 2021 to provide funding for local economic recovery.

Bridge House will rise on land between Third and Fourth Street in Bridgewater that was acquired many years ago. At that time, architectural



ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS shows what the proposed new residence between Third and Fourth Avenues in Bridgewater will look like.

Spark! Gala is back on for Oct. 27



ACTION AT THE SILENT AUCTION is always one of the highlights of the Visions and Pathways' Spark! Gala, set this year for Thursday, Oct. 27 at the Bridgewater Marriott after an absence of several years due to the pandemic. This photo is from the organization's last gala in 2019. Exciting auction items for 2022 include stays at hotels, luxury goods, wines, and retail gift certificates.

After Covid caused the event to be canceled for the past two years, Visions and Pathways' exciting Spark! Gala is back on Thursday evening, Oct. 27.

The organization couldn't be more thrilled. The Bridgewater Marriott, long the scene of the gala, is once again home to the lively event. Even its longtime theme, "A Hopeful Future for Youth," is back.

There will be dining, dancing, and an exciting silent auction that will feature art, wine, stays at luxury hotels, handbags, and gift certificates at local stores.

Chair is Juanita Painson of the V & P Advisory Council. Tickets are \$160 per person and can be ordered through Visions and Pathways' development associate, Adriana Gonzalez, agonzalez@visionsandpathways.org.

plans were drawn up, but a lack of funding sidelined the project. Now, after Visions and Pathways successfully made a presentation to the Somerset County Department of Community Development in the fall, and the grant was approved by the Somerset Board of County Commissioners, Bridge House is about to become a reality.

With the money, Visions and Pathways is hiring an engineer, architect, and builder as well as beginning a search for grants to build the \$4.2 million project. Monarch Housing Associates of Cranford has been retained as a consultant to find construction grants.

Visions and Pathways hopes to break ground in 2023 for occupancy in 2024.

Largesse toward Visions and Pathways comes from different corners

When Visions and Pathways has a pressing need, caring donors seem to step up miraculously.

For instance, earlier this year the old pipes at Brahma House finally gave out, and it was clear remediation had to be immediate. Costs were estimated at higher than \$10,000, and Visions and Pathways didn't have that kind of expenditure in the budget.

The staff started reaching out, and right away the call for help was answered by a longtime donor to Visions and Pathways, Panzarella Contracting of South Plainfield, New Jersey.

Joseph and Nicole Panzarella of Whitehouse Station help run this family-owned business started in 1952, and they have been active supporters of Visions and Pathways for years, Panzarella does major excavation, drainage, and utility installations and contributed the labor for the entire pipe replacement project.

"We are deeply grateful to the Panzarella family for its generosity," said David Walker, executive director and CEO of Visions and Pathways. "This is but one example of the caring community we have, people and companies and groups who never say no when it comes to creating a better life for the youth of Visions and Pathways."

A major corporate donor to Visions and Pathways programs is the First Energy Foundation. This year it gave Visions and Pathways a \$10,000 grant to create housing opportunities and therapeutic services for LBGQT youth, which includes counseling and life skills training.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) at area companies are especially active when it comes to donating products to the youth living in Visions and Pathways' residences. In September, employee groups from Johnson & Johnson and Novartis donated backpacks and school supplies.

Later in the year an employee group from Insmid in Bridgewater contributed warm blankets, teddy bears, and hygiene products.

Kitchen appliances in the Visions and Pathways' residence get a lot of use and occasionally wear out. The African-American ERG at Johnson & Johnson donated a refrigerator at Brahma



WHEN VISIONS AND PATHWAYS calls, donors with big hearts step forward with special contributions, both financial and in-kind.

House.

And when several dishwashers had to be replaced in the various residences, stepping up to donate were Walkers & Associates, a Princeton financial company, and a group from Flemington Pickleball.

When it comes to individual donors, Jeffrey Meisner of Hillsborough is one of Visions and Pathways most significant. Meisner and his family not only endow scholarships for college-bound youth, but this year Visions and Pathways has Meisner to thank for donating two dining room sets, two living room sets, and sweatshirts for residents. He even sponsored two food trucks at an organization-wide celebration.

Also among the most caring donors are Bonnie and Robert Hodge of Randolph, New Jersey. The couple donated \$10,000 for Visions and Pathways to use in its outreach and prevention activities. Bonnie Hodge is a member of the Visions and Pathways' Advisory Council.

Sometimes donors prefer to go unsung. There's a new door and entrance at Brahma House paid for by a donor. And dozens of donors quietly give at Christmastime when residents fill out Holiday Wish Lists, and joy abounds when these wish lists are fulfilled.

"Visions and Pathways is so lucky to have the support of loyal donors," said Walker, "especially these past few years during the pandemic when people were isolating and not really thinking about the needs of non-profits"

5K Run/Walk postponed Until Saturday, July 30

Because rain from the day before flooded out Duke Island Park in Bridgewater, New Jersey, Visions and Pathways' annual 5K Run and Walk had to be postponed from April 9 to Saturday, July 30 at 9 a.m.

The event is marking its 25th year. Visions and Pathways officials were disappointed over the postponement, but they are thrilled that the Somerset County Park Commission is able to reschedule the Run and Walk.

Runners and walkers will come out to celebrate a quarter-century of athleticism, fun, great food, and the opportunity to support an organization that makes a difference in the lives of youth. Many athletes for the day will participate virtually, as they have done for the past two years during the Covid pandemic.

Organizers this year decided that pandemic levels were low enough to stage an in-person event at Duke Island Park, where the event started 25 years ago. They wanted to keep the virtual component, too, because of its popularity. In fact, Visions and Pathways attracted so many new virtual supporters during Covid that organizers declared that a hybrid event is here to stay.

Last year's virtual event raised \$30,333 for Visions and Pathways, a new record high.

A big thanks goes to the Run/Walk Committee and its hard-working co-chairs, Veona Martin and Fran Smith.

Sponsors include Benadon Consulting, Robert A. Bonavito, CPSA, Brown and Brown Insurance, Dave's Suburban Disposal Service, Egan Wealth Advisors, Nisivoccia LLP, New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance, Paycom, and Zeus.

Community partners are: Affinity FCU, Mailbox Business Center, ShopRite, Amwell Pharmacy, and the UPS Store.

Emily Benadon becomes new V & P Board president *Stephanie Durant's term ends after fruitful two years*

A commitment to helping Visions and Pathways help kids is why Emily Benadon of Hillsborough is taking the reins of the Board of Trustees this year.

She replaces Stephanie Durant, whose successful term of two years has just ended and who will remain active in Visions and Pathways as a volunteer. Durant recently became a Girl Scout leader in Somerville for disadvantaged students.

In moving up from a position on the Board of Trustees to its presidency, Benadon said she recognizes Visions and Pathways' strong leadership and strong governance team, including her fellow Board and Advisory Council members. "All inspire me," she stated, "along with the breadth and depth of our programming, our diverse leadership and staff, and the volunteers who support us."

Benadon brings a wealth of business experience to the board as well as many years spent in school, youth athletics, and volunteer activities. She runs a marketing strategy and implementation consulting business after spending 23 years with Johnson & Johnson in varying, progressing roles including biological manufacturing, sales, market research, and marketing, both global and in the United States.

Joining the board three years ago, Benadon has been active from the very start in increasing engagement through networking and expansion of social media platforms. She has led the Marketing and Fund Development team, which includes strengthening its organizational approach, adding more community awareness programs such as the Coins for Kids collection boxes hosted by local businesses, initiating promotional tactics including a new volunteer brochure, give-away pens and call-to-action cards, and hosting V&P tables at local events.

She has helped bring in new Board and Advisory Council members with different expertise and backgrounds and has been instrumental in getting supporters to order their Amazon products to benefit Visions and Pathways through the Amazon Smile project.

"Along with Board Vice-President Laurie Pellegrino, I have worked to strengthen our internal approaches, including creating aligned goals and respective communications trackers, fund development trackers, and one-pagers and creative briefs," Benadon said.

Initial involvement

Benadon heard about Visions and Pathways for the first time from a parent of one of her daughter's high school field hockey teammates. The parent was serving



Emily Benadon, new Board of Trustees president

on the Visions and Pathways Board and had a hunch Benadon would be able to contribute her significant expertise and energy to the organization. "He recommended me to the Executive Director/CEO David Walker as a prospective board member," she noted.

Timing couldn't have been better for this busy mom and marketing executive. "I realized my children were about to graduate from local schools, and I would have time," she said. "Also, V&P's impact with homeless and at-risk kids ages 13-24 was significant and meaningful to me."

Benadon is the youngest of five children and her middle sister is mentally handicapped. In the 37 years her sister has been living in group homes, Benadon felt her care has been wonderful, and she has received support from a fantastic staff. "Group homes are an effective model for providing care and helping kids thrive," stated Benadon.

Stepping up to the board presidency was a decision Benadon made carefully. "Throughout my tenure on the Board I realized how special Visions & Pathways is," said Benadon. "It truly makes a difference, an impact for homeless and at-risk kids. Unfortunately homelessness is local."

Additionally, she was excited to collaborate with the Visions and Pathways' leadership team. "I have always been impressed by David Walker's leadership and his team, including but not limited to Zoila Gonzalez, Jennifer Amaya, Katie Huber, Fred Irving, Steven Neblett, Indumati Patel, and Adriana Gonzalez," noted Benadon. "It's the most diverse leadership and staff team that I have ever seen."

"I also knew I could count on the strategic input and collaboration of Board Vice

President Laurie Pellegrino, who is at the 'top of her game,' and other board members and volunteers such as David Blue, Kate Meade, David Buckman, Bonnie Hodge, Lauren Swern, Jill Scott, Lisa Warren, and many others.

"Also, I knew I could count on the vision of prior board members, such as a previous board member, Joy Mathiowdis, who died recently. Joy truly inspired me and other board members and had a clear vision of our path forward."

Now, Benadon is beginning to formulate some of her goals for Visions and Pathways going forward. "These include increasing awareness and engagement in the areas surrounding our programs, including but not limited to Somerset County and eastward toward Newark," she said. "This will enable Visions and Pathways to help more at-risk and homeless kids."

Benadon also wants to support removing the digital divide for Visions and Pathways' kids by building a best-in-class technology center with area partners and aims to continue to create and provide affordable housing for youth who age out of government programs at 18. "The latter is one of the top unmet needs in New Jersey, and kids do not deserve to be homeless," Benadon pointed out.

Giving Thanks concert goes back to live event June 18 in Madison, NJ

"Giving Thanks," a live concert and interfaith multicultural celebration of music and dance, one of Visions and Pathways' most popular fundraising events, is set for Saturday, June 18 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Drew University Concert Hall in Madison, New Jersey.

This is the first "live" Giving Thanks concert since Covid forced the popular musical event into being virtual for the past few years.

Last year's event raised \$7,655 for Visions and Pathways. Many of the performers who were a part of Giving Thanks in the past will be with us for the live concert, including groups from Temple Shalom in Bridgewater, Temple Emanuel in Westfield, the Evangel Chapel Worship Team from Bridgewater, Calvary Baptist Church in Morristown, St. Francis Episcopal Church in Dunellen, and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Somerville.

Individual performers in the past have included Christina Morgan-Diaz, Renee Connell, Buddy Williams, Barbara Dever, Jocelyn Hunt, Brian Padilla, Nwaoji Joseph, Elizabeth Alfaro, and Selena Ramirez.



WELL KNOWN SPEAKERS (photo left) at the Young Adults and Cannabis information session in April at Raritan Valley Community College included Dr. Jahan Marcu, chief science officer and co-founder of the International Research Center on Cannabis and Mental Health. Visions and Pathways' youth attended the session and were a part of several panel discussions during the evening. In photo (right), Vineland attorney Michael Hoffman explains the legal risks of recreational marijuana to Visions and Pathways youth. Visions and Pathways was a co-sponsor of the event.

Recreational marijuana now legal; youth need education so Visions and Pathways co-sponsors session on laws, health risks

With the state of New Jersey opening the sales of recreational marijuana, youth from Visions and Pathways need to be very clear on the laws governing use of recreational marijuana and marijuana's health benefits and risks.

A group of them spent an evening April 6 at Raritan Valley Community College learning about not only about state laws governing the use of recreational marijuana but about how usage affects the body and even possible careers in the marijuana industry.

"Educating our youth on this topic with the most up-to-date information is important to Visions and Pathways," said

Jennifer Amaya, director of outreach and prevention at Visions and Pathways, which was one of the sponsors of the Young Adults & Cannabis information session held at the college in Branchburg, New Jersey.

Co-sponsors were NJ Cannabis Certified & Valley Wellness and the Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board.

The sessions provided actionable insight into the current and future of the cannabis industry, the laws connected to it, the legal dangers for the under-21 set, the health benefits and risks of cannabis, and career opportunities in this emerging regulated industry.

"Now more than ever, having access to reliable education about cannabis is important for our community," said Sarah Trent, an attorney and founder of Valley Wellness and NJ Cannabis Certified.

Trent spoke at the workshop along with Teresa Simon, founder of Physicians Research Center in Toms River, New Jersey, Dr. Jahan Marcu, Ph.D., chief science officer and co-founder of the International Center on Cannabis and Mental Health, Vineland attorney Michael Hoffman, who deals with

marijuana laws, policies, and regulatory interpretation, Paul Grzella, director of the Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board, and others.



HEALTH RISKS of marijuana were explained to Visions and Pathways teenagers who attended the Young Adults and Cannabis information session in April at Raritan Valley Community College.

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- Add us on Amazon Smile

Know more about us . . .

Visions and Pathways provides abused, neglected, homeless, and runaway youth with housing, a stable environment, and supportive services that guide them in becoming self-sufficient.

The agency's programs for vulnerable youth include: Brahma House residential crisis intervention program; Passages, My Place and Whitney House residential transitional-living programs; Prosperity independent-living skills education program; Street Smart street outreach program; Transitional Learning Center for in-house education instruction; Bridge House and Village House, supportive-housing for aged-out youth, an Arts and Recreation Program, and the Transitions aftercare Program.

The Loving Care Homes residence for homeless women is our most recent initiative. In addition, V & P has an affiliation agreement with Newark's International Youth Organization (IYO), IYO has served Newark's highest need youth for almost 50 years.

Since 1970, over 11,500 youth have come to seek shelter, food, clothing, and support services.

For more information, visit visionsandpathways.org or contact Executive Director David Walker, Esq. MSW at dwalker@visionsandpathways.org.

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List of donors 2022 * As of April 12, 2022

THANK YOU to the companies, foundations, and service organizations that have made generous monetary contributions to support Visions and Pathways and the homeless and runaway youth the agency serves.

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Aldersgate United Methodist Church
American Legion Ladies Auxiliary #327
Amwell Pharmacy
Anonymous
Anonymous
AT&T Pioneers New Jersey Chapter 139
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VISIONS AND PATHWAYS

IMPACT KIDS | GET INVOLVED!

"We help kids" find a **vision** and a **path** by giving safe housing, food and support services to at-risk and homeless NJ kids, ages 13+. **And we need your help!**

HOW?

Mentor Kids ● Our residents benefit from life skills, financial literacy, public speaking, cooking, conflict resolution, trades and other professional & life skills

Volunteer ● Paint a room, plant a garden, build benches, and attend events

Connect with us ●    

Operational Services ● Share your skills updating or managing our website, create or support a fundraiser, research/write grant requests, draft a brochure or write a blog. We've never found a professional skill that didn't help our kids!

Financial Support ● Financial donations, donations of a car or home, fund a scholarship or legacy /endowment, start a birthday Facebook or GoFundMe fundraiser, do a Memorial donation in lieu of sending flowers, and select Visions & Pathways on Smile.Amazon.com

Become an e-helper ● No time to volunteer and still want to help? Become an e-Helper by giving us your email address and a few times a year, we'll email you when a homeless teenager asks a special request not covered by our budget... Can I go to the prom, join the basketball team, can I get dress shoes for my job? Fulfilling these requests help youth living at Visions and Pathways get the same opportunities as their peers who live at home. E-helpers who can contribute let us know they're either sending a check or donating instantly online. There's no obligation to respond to each request, but every little bit helps. Email Adriana at agonzalez@visionsandpathways.org if you're interested in e-Helping.

You can involve your company too!

Ask us about volunteer days, mentoring, event sponsorship & "Adopt a Charity"!

Join us at Visionsandpathways.org, streetSMARToutreach.org or at our Bridgewater and Morristown locations

SUCCESS STORIES

Arthur

Arthur experienced years of family conflict and trauma while living at home. Due to severe emotional and behavioral challenges, he was admitted to a residential treatment center. After completing two years at the residential treatment center, Arthur transitioned to V&P Supervised Transitional Living Placement in June 2021.

Determined to complete his education, Arthur enrolled at Bridgewater-Raritan High School last September and was able to get started with his senior year. Additionally, within weeks of his admission to V&P, Arthur worked with our staff to secure a part-time position at the Bridgewater Commons Mall. He's currently gaining valuable work experience and began saving his earnings for the future.

Arthur has expressed to staff on numerous occasions that once he graduates from high school this June, his dream/goal is to attend a four-year university with the hope of attending medical school and ultimately becoming a pediatrician.

Throughout his placement at V&P, Arthur has been able to strengthen/develop appropriate communication and time management skills. Also, Arthur consistently takes advantage of the many resources available to our youth at V&P, such as financial literacy workshops; mentoring; networking; and learning to drive. He follows the advice and recommendations of his V&P support team, which helps to keep him motivated and on track to achieve his set goals and become self-sufficient. We hope to see Arthur succeed, share his compelling story, and inspire others in the future.



Danielle

Prior to coming to Visions and Pathways, Danielle attended outpatient therapy but always stopped participating

(continued on next page)

When There is Nowhere Else To Turn . . . We Give Homeless Youth A Home and Hopeful Future

Yes! I/We want to help youth at Visions and Pathways

Name _____
 Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____
 Email _____

My/Our gift is in honor of or in memory of:

Please send a notification (without amount) to:

Name _____
 Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____

Your tax-deductible donation provides operation funds for food, clothing, shelter, crisis intervention, counseling, basic education and independent-living skill education.

You can put your money to work immediately by making a secure gift online at www.visionsandpathways.org, or use one of the payments to follow.

SP22



Here's my heartfelt gift of : \$20. \$25. \$50.
 \$75. \$100. \$250. other _____

Check enclosed, payable to Visions and Pathways
 One-time or Monthly gift charged to my credit card
 VISA* MASTERCARD* AMEX*

Amount \$ _____ Exp. Date _____

Card No. _____

Signature _____

Employer's Matching Gift form enclosed.

** A gift of \$250 or more entitles you to a brick in our Walk of Wishes, a garden walkway at Visions and Pathways, as a permanent symbol of your generous support.*

What name or message would you like on your brick?
 Up to 3 lines with a total of 15 letters and spaces on each line

SUCCESS STORIES

(continued from previous page)

or attending because she did not find the sessions helpful. Since coming to Visions and Pathways and enrolling in therapy, Danielle reported she is comfortable, eager to participate in therapy sessions, and is utilizing the skills she is learning to help her cope with certain challenges.

Additionally, Danielle stated she is involved in her monthly medication appointments, understands the reason and importance of her medication, and has started to set reminders in her phone to maintain her medication schedule. Danielle is being responsible and proactive with her health care, in anticipation of living independently later this year.

KM

KM is a LGBTQ youth who began residing in Loving Care Homes (LCH) residential program beginning in September 2020. KM came from a single parent household run by her mother. Upon first entry into the program, KM did not have employment. She began working with her case manager

to strengthen her resume and identify the skills that will make her a great team member. KM successfully landed a full-time job working at AutoZone, at which she is doing an excellent job.

During her stay at LCH, KM remained resilient and focused on her goals. She manifested the skills that she learned in the program by purchasing a vehicle she drives

to and from work.

KM also recently transitioned to independent living, which was her primary goal upon entering the program. She is doing well with her independent living and is looking forward to her future. KM has demonstrated her willingness to grow and to become successful in all future endeavors. We are very proud of her!

You can make an impact: a gift in will or trust

Interested in helping homeless teens, both now and in the years ahead? A simple, flexible and versatile way to ensure Visions and Pathways can continue our work for years to come is a gift in your will or living trust. Your gift also entitles your estate to an unlimited federal estate tax charitable deduction.

Some of the legacy investments you can make also include:

* **Retirement Plans** – Designate Visions and Pathways to receive part or all of what remains of your retirement plan after your death. Such transfers can be a tax-efficient way of making a gift. For example, heirs may receive as little as 30 percent of a retirement plan from a large

estate after estate and income tax, while Visions and Pathways would receive 100 percent of it.

* **Insurance policies** – Designate Visions and Pathways Home Endowment Fund to receive all or part of a life insurance policy. Ask your insurance company for a beneficiary designation form.

We also welcome donations of stock and other securities. To learn more, please contact Visions and Pathways Director of Finance Indumati Patel at 908-526-6605 or ipatel@visionsandpathways.org.

If you include Visions and Pathways in your plans, please use our legal name and Federal Tax ID.

Here is the Spring 2022 issue of your Visions and Pathways newsletter.

Thank you for investing in the future of our youth!

Jewelry making class: beads, clay, and metal stamping

One Saturday a month a dedicated volunteer, Sarah Melton, comes to Brahma House to bring out creativity among the youth.

Melton, who lives in Raritan, New Jersey, has special skill in jewelry making, and she has been inspiring Visions and Pathways youth for the past year to work with beads, clay, and even learn to metal stamp.

Visions and Pathways Director of Jennifer Amaya said Saturdays are special at Brahma House when Melton brings her supplies and her expertise. "Sarah came through as a volunteer and had a special interest, so we asked her if she would be willing to do the class for us," noted Amaya.

It has become one of the most enjoyable activities at Brahma House. Between eight and 10 youth attend her classes, making jewelry like necklaces, bracelets and pins for themselves, their friends, and their families.



VISIONS AND PATHWAYS' YOUTH show off a beaded necklace made in once-a-month jewelry making classes at Brahma House run by volunteer Sarah Melton.



BRACELET OF FACETED BEADS is another example of the jewelry Visions and Pathways' youth are designing at their Saturday jewelry-making workshops.