

THE BRIDGE YOUTH CENTRE



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OUR BRIDGE STRATEGY

Helping Young People Become Secure, Successful, Proactive & Independent

The Bridge Youth Centre exists to create opportunities for young people. Helping them succeed as they grow.

The core elements of our programme are:

- Sessions
- Young Volunteer training
- Mentor Support
- HAF (Holiday Activity & Food)

All our staff and volunteers love working in The Bridge environment to support young people. Everything we do sits within a core curriculum, which helps to guide how we respond to the young people who attend our activities.

• Sessions

Our sessions follow a curriculum programme, which covers topics such as Alcohol, Drugs, Diversity, Sexuality and Belief.

• Young Volunteer Training

We actively promote a culture of serving within The Bridge. We teach the young volunteers how to communicate well, listen and how to run activities.

• Mentor Support

Mentor Support is provided in the community and through schools. Each member of the team is trained to offer support alongside our designated mentor specialist.

• HAF (Holiday Activity & Food)

The Bridge has a rich history of creating activity in the community. With the help of Shropshire Council, we're now able to target support to families.

PROGRAMME	DETAILS	STATISTICS
Sessions	Tuesday and Friday sessions, covering years 6 - 11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 100 individual young people.• 41 Attended on a Tuesday.• 63 Attended on a Friday.
Young volunteers training	Young people learning to serve, developing practical and youth work skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 young people gave time as young volunteers.• 6 week course completed by all young volunteers.
Mentor Support	Meeting with young people in school and in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 13 young people mentored.• 3 young people referred through Early Help.
HAF	Holiday activity and food programme funded through Shropshire Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 247 young people Impacted.• 20 new Bridge session attendees were added through HAF in the summer.

SESSIONS (TUESDAY & FRIDAY)

The Bridge is best known for its open sessions on Tuesday and Friday nights. This is when we get to know the young people the best.

The most important aspect of our session evenings is that the young people lead and guide what happens. This is true, not only in terms of games we play or food we eat, but also what the building looks like, what resources we have available, and also the things we discuss.

We have a curriculum, which we follow as the needs arise. The curriculum covers topics such as Alcohol, Drugs, Diversity, Sexuality and Belief.

In 2021, the main topics of conversation with the young people were:

- Gender
- Sexuality
- Homophobia
- Family
- Anxiety

As a direct result, we put a plan in place to talk about these things after exploring training and nominating an LGBTQ+ champion. As the Autumn rolled around again, the focus became Anxiety and issues related to Drugs and Alcohol. We were pleased to be able to bring in a creative specialist to begin some work with those who wanted to participate.

Our approach is to keep listening and to respond quickly when the time is right to move certain subjects forward, without distracting from providing a fun, safe place for young people to visit.

“Thank you for inviting us to come and see what you’re doing. We’d love to do some projects with young people together in the future!” Jono Lightfoot (Police Officer)

Despite four months of lockdowns, we have been very encouraged by the statistics in 2021

- **100 individual young people attended Bridge sessions in 2021.**
 - 41 individual young people attended Tuesday Night sessions.
 - 63 individual young people attended Friday Night sessions.
- 10 young people attended weekly **online** sessions & mentoring in **Winter Lockdown**.
- 15 young people attended **Easter Holiday** socially distanced **Picnics**.
- 11 young people went to **Glaze Studio** in July.
- 18 young people attended two **Christmas sessions**.



YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

There's a rich history of young people giving their time to help run The Bridge. Once a younger attendee sees an older young person they look up to helping out; they can't wait to do the same.

For some young people they're fulfilling the requirements of schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh award. For others they see The Bridge as a second home; either way, it's not unusual for young people to treat the building with a high level of care and attention.

In 2021 we were particularly impressed that the nine young volunteers in the programme were willing and able to come alongside young people who needed befriending.

When young people come to volunteer, they're also invited to participate in training that helps them understand positive relationship building, youth work principles, risk assessment, running activities, and even safeguarding principles to keep everyone safe and well looked after.

"Being a young volunteer at the Bridge has been a great experience. We appreciate all the staff and how they've supported us and given us opportunities to learn and grow."



"Being a young volunteer has really helped build my confidence. I find it easier to socialise and to be more independent. Since being a young volunteer I've noticed that I'm better at working in a team, and have developed leadership skills which will help me later on. It is ace to have a safe space other than home to go to. I've really enjoyed the opportunities I've had to mentor younger young people. In the future I'd like to work at The Bridge Youth Club full time."

MENTOR SUPPORT

We love helping young people find avenues for success in their lives. So this year, we've expanded our general focus on mentoring young people in sessions to include mentoring support in schools, in The Bridge and through Early Help. We're also launching a Saturday café as a base for our Mentor Specialist in the coming year.

Here are four stories of the support we offer to young people through the programme.

1

A young person in need of stability and tools to help them cope.

This young person is in long term care and has support from us in their secondary education. This year we've had a few breakthroughs which have enabled them to find more success in school. We've discussed mechanisms for taking responsibility for their time and how best to plan what equipment he needs each day in our sessions.

3

Habit forming with one young person on their way to college.

"This young person is someone we've only known for a very short time. The purpose of the sessions were to help them redirect attention to positive avenues.

We may not meet for too much longer; however, in the short time we've been speaking, they have set goals for better sleep habits, which had an immediate, transformative effect on their outlook and ability to cope."

2

A work placement to help a young person transition out of education.

This young person was introduced to us at the end of their education journey. After a half term in mentoring sessions, we offered them more opportunities including a work placement. The work placement was designed to give an experience of a real job. During the work placement, they were taught by a professional painter/ Decorator and renovated an area of The Bridge.

4

Working with a young person during family stress.

We initiated a supportive relationship with this young person to help support them through a familial breakdown. Within this relationship, they have begun to explore change and deepen their understanding of others whilst increasing their ability to reflect and deepen their emotional literacy. They've come to a better understanding of their family whilst processing their own emotions around the situation.

HAF (HOLIDAY ACTIVITY & FOOD)

"Shropshire HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) is an exciting programme of holiday activities. Children and young people who are eligible for free school meals and their families will be able to access free activities and food provision during holiday periods."

This programme has probably been the single most ambitious thing we've ever undertaken. We've tried to achieve harder things over the years, but pulling off four activity weeks in the summer holiday has been a large undertaking, and we're thrilled we did.

There have been many great moments, but one stand out moment was when we realised the real-life benefit of being available to families. It was late in the programme, and the young people talked openly about what they'd be doing if they weren't with us. One spoke about being alone every weekday; another said their family struggled financially.

The HAF programme could be described wrongly as cheap childcare, but what we've discovered is that we've helped families who are struggling and given young people from all walks of life a summer experience they'll remember for years to come.

"Being at the bridge during the summer has been a big help to me and my family. At home I have to be this calm reassuring person 24/7 which is difficult, but coming here has given me the opportunity to be myself without worrying."

"To me the Bridge is my home, its where I feel safe and I don't know what I would do or where I would be if the Bridge wasn't around to help me . I am especially pleased that the Bridge went through with the Summer Program else I would be home alone doing the washing right now and even though it does help my mum I would much rather be at the Bridge with all the leaders and my friends than at home doing the washing.

"I Initially came to The Bridge to work on my social skills and lack of confidence due to my anxiety but now my social skills are better and I'm incredibly confident when it comes to new people. I love The Bridge it's a big part of my life now!"



PARENTS REFLECT

It's important to recognise that many young people wouldn't find us without the support of parents and carers. There are many reasons why we speak to parents and carers; often, it's simply to ask how they feel about the activities and support we offer.

From time to time, parents and carers will get in touch just to let us know how things are going.

"My children discovered The Bridge as a safe place to socialise with other kids away from school and home and were very pleased when meetings continued on-line this year. This has **sustained an important link with 'normality' that has played to kids' natural ability to adapt and has given them an important escape hatch** where they can still be 'out' and in the company of older role models. The Bridge has been a vital piece of my kids' mental insulation against the effects of this strange year."

"My daughter has attended The Bridge for a few years now but it is this year that **we have really relied on the service**. Covid restrictions and the resulting many months out of school have had a huge impact on the physical and mental health of my daughter. **I see her mood lift on days that she is attending the Bridge**. She has a great relationship with the team which for me is reassuring as I know she can talk to someone there should she not wish to bring any concerns to me."

"My son gets so much from his time at The Bridge. He suffers with anxiety, and **the way the leaders listen to him, encourage him, and engage with him makes him feel 10ft tall**. He's able to be himself - to express himself and show his talents and interests - in a relaxed environment where everyone is accepted and celebrated. Besides the various activities and the opportunity to chill with friends, there are often thought provoking conversations which he enjoys continuing at home. **We are so grateful to all the team** who wrap our son up in silliness and fun and care, and help him to know he is important and valued outside his family as well as in it."

**"YOU ALL DO SUCH A
fantastic job
BRIDGNORTH
IS LUCKY TO HAVE YOU"**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As an independent charity, The Bridge Youth Centre relies exclusively upon grants, individual local supporters and local supporting business partners who join with us in our work to help young people become Secure, Successful, Proactive & Independent. We want to extend our thanks to several generous individuals, to Libra Systems, to Lowe and Fletcher, and to Torchbearers Trust for their ongoing support,

Also to Morville Womens Institute for their donation, to Edspin for their Sponsored Spin proceeds, to Shropshire Council for funding our summer HAF Programme, to the National Lottery for their grant towards the opening of a Saturday Drop-In Cafe, to the Julia and Hans Rausing Trust and the Government COVID Support Grant Scheme for their grants during the COVID difficulties.

A big 'thank you' too to Ed Brown of EdSpin for all the decorating and the amazing art work he has created for us over the past year, which has transformed our upstairs area, much to everyone's delight.

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WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF OUR WORK