

# Crossing the BRIDGE to a Brighter Future

When you're living from paycheck to paycheck and always worried about paying bills, dealing with mounting debt, it can be hard to see a better future for yourself and your family. Our Daily Bread's Project BRIDGE Program alleviates some of that stress and provides working mothers in the Fairfax County area who are struggling the support and confidence they need to assess their financial and work situations, and develop and implement plans to move themselves to true financial self-sufficiency.

Our Daily Bread introduced Project BRIDGE in 2011. The non-profit organization has long provided emergency food and financial assistance as well as financial education and seasonal assistance to working families throughout the Fairfax County area who are in

help them remain financially stable and focused on achieving their goals. Upon meeting specified goals, each client earns a small stipend to be used toward education, certification, or another relevant expense that will help them reach the goals they have developed with the help of their mentors and ODB staff. The Project BRIDGE Manager also hosts workshops and connects clients with outside resources that will help them achieve their goals.

While receiving these supports, Project BRIDGE clients are working hard to make realistic plans to improve their finances and move into better-paying jobs, and taking all the necessary steps to make those plans a reality, while still working full time or going to school and raising their families. Several are single moms raising children on their own, or they and their spouses



Our Daily Bread's newest Project BRIDGE graduates, Reina, Liza and Sonia celebrated in November. In the photo (L-R) are: Project BRIDGE Program Manager Sally Meyer, Reina's Mentor Lucas, Reina, Liz, Financial Literacy Programs Manager Marcelle Miles, Sonia, and Sonia's Mentor Carol.

crisis. Program staff often felt that many of the families they worked with could really improve their situations if they had longer-term and more intensive support than the organization was able to provide.

The first Project BRIDGE clients were already working with a financial mentor. While ODB's volunteer financial mentors typically work with clients for six months to develop a budget and strategies for paying off debt and saving, the Program extended those mentoring services to a year, and added career goals to the mentoring work.

The organization hired a Project BRIDGE Manager, who works with the clients and mentors, and also coordinates closely with other ODB Program Managers to provide clients short-term food and financial assistance, if needed, to

are both struggling due to underemployment, debt, health issues or other barriers to self-sufficiency. Some clients are not able to fulfill all the criteria to stay in the Program and graduate, but most have succeeded or on their way to success.

As of December 2015, nine women have graduated from the Project BRIDGE Program, and nine are enrolled in the Program and working on achieving their goals. Community members can support the Program by donating funds to support client stipends, or volunteering to mentor or share skills that may benefit clients. Contact Sally Meyer at [ProjectBridge@ODBFairfax.org](mailto:ProjectBridge@ODBFairfax.org) or 703-273-8829 to learn more. Read about Project BRIDGE and see client success stories at: [www.ODBFairfax.org/ProjectBridge](http://www.ODBFairfax.org/ProjectBridge).



Our Daily Bread Project BRIDGE Program graduate Sherrie with her Mentor Ken Kozloff

### Sherrie's Story:

Sherrie graduated from the Project BRIDGE Program in May 2015. She came to the Program after attending one of ODB's free "Thrifty Thursdays" Basic Budgeting classes. At the time, Sherrie was working as an office manager. She was in debt after having taken out three payday loans without truly understanding the terms of such loans. She knew she needed help and was ready to take the responsibility of learning how to pay off these debts, and work toward becoming truly financially stable. Her financial goals were: Achieve financial stability; pay off debt; and find a better-paying job.

Sherrie worked with her volunteer Financial Mentor, Ken Kozloff, to learn how to prepare a budget and how to accept financial accountability. "I had to discipline myself mentally and emotionally. I just made up my mind that I was going to accomplish these goals." She says to future clients that ODB's staff, along with support programs that clients are enrolled in such as Food Bridge supplemental food assistance, are "truly there to help you succeed in life." She has learned that "I can do and accomplish anything with a strong support team. Support and resources are the key. I could not have done it without the great resources provided to me, and my mentor."



**A Bridge from Need to Empowerment**