

SOCIAL AND VOLUNTARY SERVICES COMMISSION FUNDING REQUEST

Legal Name of Agency: Bridges (formerly Independent Living Services for Youth)

Mailing Address: 1670 N Stubbeman Ave, Norman, OK 73069

Application completed by: Debra Krittenbrink

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Amount of Funding Request: \$7,200.00

In what year was your Agency incorporated: 1995

Are you associated with a national organization: No

Number of volunteers: 275

How many hours do volunteers donate: 2200

How much money do volunteers save the agency: \$15,950.00

Has your Agency applied for SVSC funds before: Yes

Year 2002 Amount \$2,000.00 Purpose Emergency groceries

Year 2003 Amount \$3,000.00 Purpose Emergency food cards and household supplies

Year 2004 Amount \$2,000.00 Purpose household items & small appliances for 8 apartments

Year 2005 Amount \$3,000.00 Purpose household items & small appliances for 12 apartments

Year 2006 Amount \$2,500.00 Purpose household items & small appliances for 8 apartments

Year 2007 Amount \$2,500.00 Purpose household items & small appliances

Year 2008 Amount \$3,000.00 Purpose household items & small appliances

Year 2009 Amount \$2,000.00 Purpose household items & small appliances

Year 2010 Amount \$15,000.00 Purpose Operations

Year 2011 Amount \$5,000.00 Purpose Supplies & lifeskills

Year 2012 Amount \$5,700.00 Purpose Utility assistance for students

Year 2013 Amount \$7,200.00 Purpose Utility assistance for students

Year 2014 Amount \$7,200.00 Purpose Utility assistance for students

Financial Information from the last fiscal year:

Percent of the budget which is spent on fund-raising:	<u>1%</u>
Percent of your budget spent on programs:	<u>81%</u>
Percent of your budget spent on administrative expenses:	<u>18%</u>

Percentage of Organizational funding:

Religious Organizations	<u>7%</u>
Civic Clubs	<u>1%</u>
Corporate Donors	<u>1%</u>
Endowment/Interest Income	<u>7%</u>
Fees for services/products	<u>0%</u>
Government Grants	<u>15%</u>
Government Contracts	<u>0%</u>
Individual Donors	<u>20%</u>
Private Foundations	<u>14%</u>
Special Events (based on net earnings)	<u>8%</u>
United Way	<u>20%</u>
Other	<u>7%</u>

Overall Mission of Agency

Please provide a one page narrative in 10 or 12 point type describing the mission of your agency. List the client population (income, age, geographic location – percentage of City of Norman residents) and describe all programs and services offered currently by your agency. Include any duplication of services in our area and the percentage increase or decrease projected in staff numbers over previous year.

Bridges (formerly Independent Living Services for Youth)

Mission: Empowering high school students in family crisis to achieve education without obstacles.

Bridges began 19 years ago with one social worker providing for Norman's homeless youth out of the back of her car. Today it has evolved into a robust agency dedicated to ensuring education, housing, and case-management to high-school students in Norman who through no fault of their own are forced to live alone. Bridges' staff—one full-time executive director, one full-time director of social services, a part-time administrative assistant, a part-time career coaching coordinator, and two resident advisors who receive free-rent housing in exchange for nightly apartment checks and on-call services—works to offer our students housing with sliding-scale rent based on income, access to services including food, medical care, and clothing, an incentive-based savings account, and community mentors who guide students to realize their post-graduation goals whether it be a career or higher education.

Students who come to Bridges have already left their homes because of family crisis such as death or chronic illness of a parent, parental incarceration, or an otherwise dangerous home situation. A popular saying of Bridges staff is “helping students who help themselves,” which is why to remain at Bridges students must maintain passing grades and school attendance, adhere to the Bridges handbook, and participate in mandatory life skills classes on topics ranging from cooking on a budget to self-defense.

Bridges is the only agency in the region that focuses on a triad of education, housing and case-management. It is a United Way of Norman agency with additional funds from its apartment rentals, private donations from the community, private grants such as the SVSC grant and government grants.

Client population: any student who attends any of the three Norman high schools. Approximately 60 students a year pass through Bridges. Ethnic population as of July 2014 was 44% African American, 48% Caucasian, and 7% Multi-racial and 1% American Indian.

Geographical area: Norman public school district.

Duplication of services: Bridges is a unique program in the state for three reasons: it is a community nonprofit supported largely by individuals and local grants; it is the only program in the region to offer sliding-scale housing for high school and college students; and its major focus is graduation from high school or college. Staff numbers have decreased by one in the last four years due to funding cuts, and we see no immediate possibilities for an increase. We have a fulltime executive director and social services coordinator and part-time administrative assistant and mentoring program coordinator. Our two on-site resident advisors receive no salary but get free rent.

Specific project for which funding is being requested

Please provide a one page narrative in 10 or 12 point type describing the project for which funds are requested including staff positions, salaries, equipment, office supplies and other expenses. Please address what similar services are available through other local agencies, why this program is unique, how many will benefit and why it would be appropriate for City of Norman funds to be used to support this program.

We at Bridges are asking SVSC for \$7,200 to help our students alleviate the financial burden of high utility bills on our student residents. At Bridges, our highest priority is education and ensuring that our students graduate high school. Yet to be a part of our program students must work a part-time job to be able to pay sliding-scale rent based on their income and utilities, as well as all other living expenses. During the school year this gets tough.

The highest electricity bills are at the beginning of each school semester due to extreme summer heat and winter cold. This forces students who already are struggling to pick up extra hours at work to pay their bills. We have always encouraged our students to work less during the academic year but have found the opposite to occur. Having to focus on paying off high utility bills instead of dedicating their limited time to their studies is an obstacle we at Bridges intend to help eliminate for our students.

High utilities may also make students decide to drop out of our program. While “couch surfing” or staying at various friends’ houses may be a cheaper way of living, students who choose this discounted form of housing are MUCH LESS likely to graduate high school than students who live in a stable environment like Bridges. An SVSC grant of \$7,200 would help to relieve our students’ financial burdens at a time when they desperately need to be focusing on school, and mitigate the desire to drop out of the Bridges program to pursue a cheaper style of living.

Based on our January – June 2014 OG&E bills, student utility bills are \$74.32 a month on average. To save on summer bills we implemented OG&E Smart Hours and installed their specialized thermostats, but even though we recognized an overall savings of several hundred dollars, utility bills are still a financial catastrophe for students on a limited income. The \$7,200 we are requesting from SVSC would let us pay \$50-\$100 a month (depending on the average amount spent and how hot or cold the month is) towards utility bills for eight months for each of our 18 on-site apartments. This money would be paid directly to OG&E. In 2010 SVSC was

sympathetic enough to our cause to give us \$50 per apartment for six months and generous enough to increase that amount to \$50 per apartment for eight months in 2011. SVSC continued that same level of generosity in 2012 and 2013 as well. These grants have proven extremely beneficial to the students, allowing them to worry more about the upcoming semester and grades rather than frantically scrounging for extra money.

Clients of Food and Shelter and COCAA may receive utility assistance funds from government grants. However, our students cannot access these monies because a client must have a utility cutoff notice before they can be helped. At Bridges, students risk losing their housing if their utility bills are far enough behind to be cut off. SVSC funds would help prevent homelessness by saving our students from eviction if they get too far behind in utility bills.

The funds we are requesting of SVSC would not merely benefit the students at Bridges but would profit the entire Norman community. The SVSC grant of \$7,200 saved our students an average of \$400 last year that would have otherwise been spent on utilities. By saving \$400/year on utilities students are able to spend this money on other things. This amount of money alone might not seem like an incredible boost to Norman's economy but when considering that high school graduates make on average \$16,000 *more* per year than those without a high school diploma or its equivalent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, and when also considering that students at Bridges are much more likely to graduate, this SVSC grant will indirectly increase the revenue our students are able to put back into the Norman community.

Although our students are teenagers, they are not children. They take on all of the responsibilities of a fully independent adult head of household. Providing financial help towards our students' electric bills abolishes one more obstacle in their paths to high school graduation. With the economic benefits for the city that come with more high school graduates, as well as the individual impact this grant could make on our students' lives, just fifty dollars a month could make a huge difference community-wide.

Financial Procedures

The internal financial evaluation procedure, control processes and review procedure is a three-step process. Financial reports are first verified and reviewed by Bridges's CPA, Helen Swope. Next, the finance committee, chaired by Ryan Greenlee, double-checks the reports before they are emailed to board members before our monthly board meetings. Finally, we do yearly audits, changing the auditors every few years. The most recent audits have been performed by Beller and Company.

Controls: although we have a very small staff, we try to keep monies tightly controlled, with each check being handled by at least two people. Incoming donations are opened and recorded by Administrative Assistant Jennifer Gibson. Debra Krittenbrink makes deposits, records in Quickbooks, and copies checks for the files. Any outgoing checks over \$500 require two signatures. The executive director does yearly staff performance reviews. The executive director is reviewed by the board chair with input from all board members.