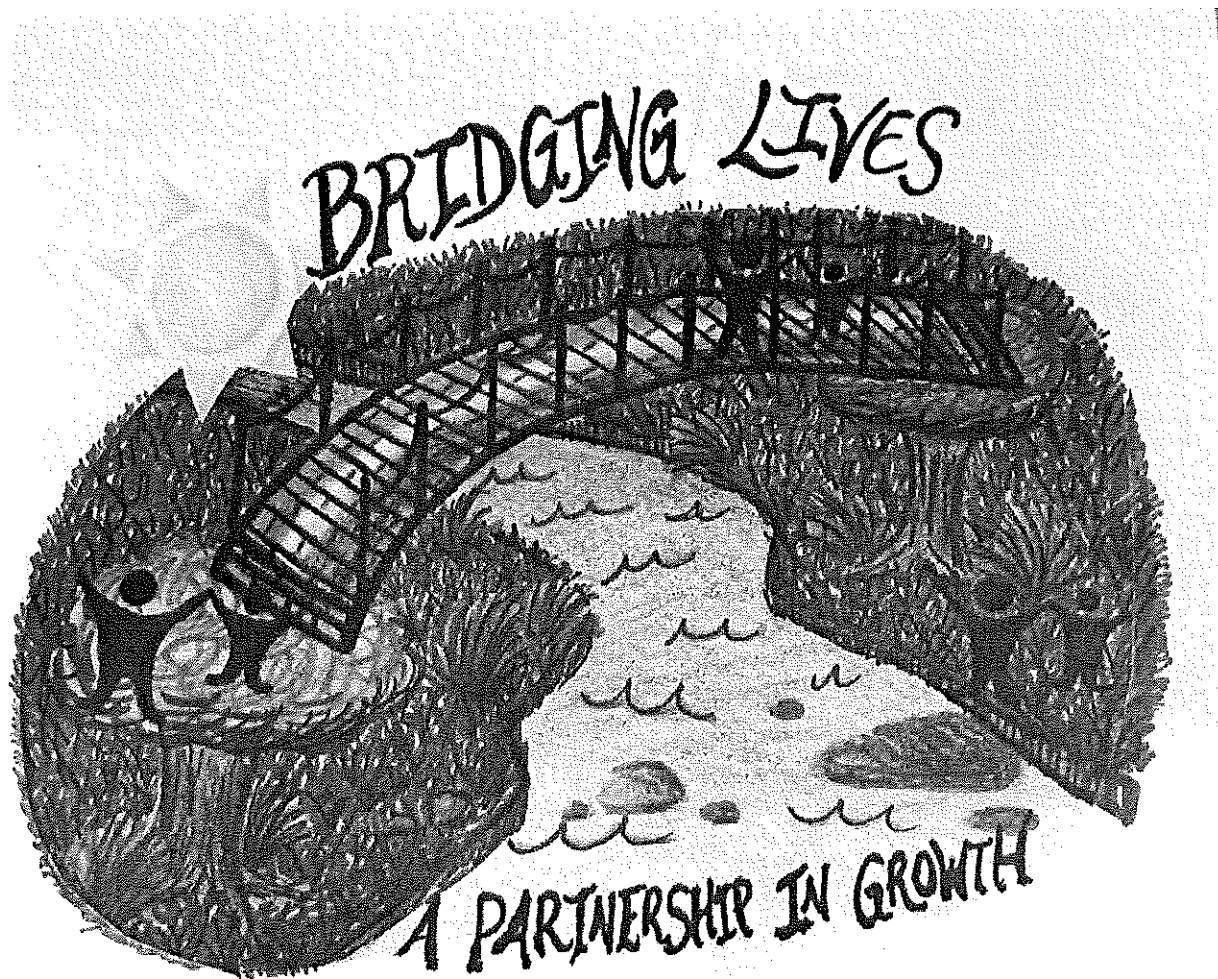


Bridging Lives

Academic year 2019~2020



~Artwork by MHS Alumni, Amanda Schillinger

In 2000, Bridging Lives came into being. Its primary objective was to help Marblehead teens grow into responsible, giving, community oriented adults by nurturing a K-5 student, providing that little bit of extra attention, imagination, and energy that a child so often needs.

What happens during this year long (and often longer) friendship is a unique result of the two personalities, but each teen is committed to meet for a minimum of an hour, weekly, with his or her little partner. The high school student might find him or herself jumping rope, reading aloud, baking brownies, identifying insects, playing ball, or any myriad of activities through which the two partners can connect. The ultimate objective for the volunteers is to give their little partner the attention, listening, and acknowledgement that can reassure and empower them. The teens receive regular support in their roles as nurturers from the Bridging Lives staff. Each teen has an 'advisor,' an adult committed to supporting him/her throughout the year. The advisor contacts her teens regularly and meets with her teens at monthly meetings. Teens are expected to attend monthly meetings where various relevant issues and topics are addressed. There are also whole group activities during the year such as the holiday party, and the end of year event. The children participating in the program can be referred by anyone, a guidance counselor, a relative, et al. Parents may want additional socialization that a mentor can offer in their child's life. Some families may be under stress and want their child to have time outside of a stressful environment. Other parent's have signed their children up simply because it seemed like a good idea. The mix is one of the joys of the program. The teens come from sports teams, friends of friends, or an announcement. What every teen walks away with is the experience of being an adult in a relationship, and often much more.

Over the course of the program, we have seen:

- Teens mature to a level of responsibility that few other opportunities could afford them.
- A great improvement in teens' problem-solving skills
- Little partners acknowledged for their unique gifts
- A marked increase in self-confidence in little partners.
- Peer bonding around common concerns and goals
- The creation of a family feeling that transcends age differences
- The fabric of our community woven with a new strength and care.

History: Bridging Lives is the creation of Marblehead resident, Dr. Jack Weltner, a family and child psychiatrist, and Judith Black, a nationally renown storyteller. They quickly found support from Judy Luise, a guidance counselor at the High School, and Paul Crosby, a director of the Marblehead Counseling Center. Since its inception, Bridging Lives has reached out to many Marblehead students who have been given an opportunity to nurture and be nurtured in a guided, structured program. Currently Pam Wanstall runs the program with the assistance of her Co-Coordinator, Liane Irons. Please contact Pam for questions, further information, or an application: bridginglives2015@gmail.com