

Bridges Volunteer Alum Making a Difference in NYC



“MY EXPERIENCE WITH BRIDGES CONTINUES TO SHAPE ME AS A PERSON TO THIS DAY.” - SPENCER RIEHL

Bridges offers independent high school students 170+ volunteer opportunities per year (9,000+ service hours). Students can volunteer during all four seasons. Spencer volunteered and worked in Bridges for 7 years from 9th grade at St. Paul's School through his junior year at Denison University. He credits his professional path in large part to this experience.

What are you up to right now?

I'm a Senior Program Director for an organization called Harlem Lacrosse and Leadership (HLL) in New York City. We are a school-based intervention program that uses lacrosse to structure the lives of underserved, at-risk youth in Harlem. We provide academic support, behavioral intervention, leadership training, summer programming, and high school admissions support for our student-athletes and are planning on expanding to Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia in the near future.

How has Bridges influenced your career choice?

Bridges is where my passion for working with kids was first realized. I started out as a volunteer for the summer program after my 9th grade year at St. Paul's and eventually rose to the rank of Head Counselor towards the end of high school and into my college years. I looked forward to working at Bridges every summer and it became so apparent to me how impactful programs like Bridges are in the lives of children. In working with HLL, I was able to combine my experience with Bridges with my passion for sports.



Spencer as Head Counselor at Bridges circa Summer 2011

Why did you decide to pursue Harlem Lacrosse Leadership?

I am personally indebted to how being a part of numerous sports teams growing up positively shaped me into the person I am today. HLL uses lacrosse as a motivational 'hook' to improve academics, behavior, and to build leadership skills. I am very passionate about making sure every child in America has the opportunity to play and to be part of a team, regardless of socioeconomic barriers.

What does Bridges mean to you today?

Bridges is an inspiration to me. Although the model is a bit different, I still try to emulate and instill the spirit and work ethic that encompasses Bridges staff and students every day in my HLL program with the goal of facilitating long-term success in our students. I consider Rob Paymer a mentor and someone I can call on if I need any guidance in work and life. My experience with Bridges continues to shape me as a person to this day.



Coach Spencer running practice at HLL, 2016

What advice do you have for Bridges high schoolers?

Cultivate relationships with as many people as possible. You only have one chance to make a first impression and you never really know when connections and good relationships will help you professionally or personally down the line. Be memorable and stay connected.