

Stephon Dingle Ceremony Speech

Bridges Volunteers Ceremony @ St. Paul's School

May 26, 2011

Good Evening volunteers, parents, and students. I want to welcome you to this awards ceremony that celebrates and recognizes the tireless hours and efforts of you the volunteers. Now when many think of volunteering, it's usually just to fulfill a required amount of hours to get into the next academic year for high school, or even to graduate. I am aware that is very true, but it was your extraordinary personalities and mentorship that made the experience at the Bridges program special for all students involved.

My name is Stephon Dingle, and I am currently a first generation college student at St. Mary's College of MD. I am President of the Class of 2012, and I am also on the baseball team. I am also the first male graduate of the Bridges program class of 2004. I was in a class with approximately 12 girls, so my say in decision-making among the group never went to far. So in order to keep my sanity, it was people such as you, the volunteers, or counselors who made my experience one I never forgot.

As volunteers of the program, I don't think you understand the excitement that we the students experience when coming to Bridges. It all starts when we are in our respective schools during the spring and you can just sense summer is near - at that point we know if we are in the program or not. I say that because before Bridges, I was here when it was called St. Paul's Summer Enrichment program as a rising 4th grader at

Coldstream Park elementary school. And during those times, students only received an opportunity to come for one summer.

Well it was that time of the year again and I remember ever so clearly my principal calling over the intercom to my teacher asking her to submit one boy and one girl she felt was worthy of attending the summer program. So she wrote the two names on the paper and folded it in half, and sent me off all people to take the name to the main office. On my way to the office I decided to take a peak at these names, and to my dismay, my name was not included. Instead it was two girls. I politely turned around and killed some time before returning to the class with the list and told one of the best lies that probably changed my life for the better. I said to my teacher, "Mrs. Spells, the office said you must select one boy and one girl, not two girls." So as Mrs. Spells looked at me very quizzically she crossed out one of the names on the list and graciously wrote my name. Again as I mentioned, this turned out to be one of the best fibs I ever told. Now in no way am I condoning lying, but this one was a great exception.

I say this because the former director was Mr. Nigel Sequiera, whom some of you may be familiar with. He came up with this great idea to transform the summer enrichment program into The Bridges program where students returned every summer until they entered high school. This for me was a blessing in disguise, as the journey, adventures, and opportunities I would encounter would be made into memories I would never forget. All the field trips, long days in the classroom, and the fun battles in the gym playing one of our favorites games knockout and later dodge ball. None of these experiences would be half of what it was without the counselors and volunteers such as you. My counselors had such a strong impact on my life and enjoyment I experienced here at

Bridges. They ultimately made my everyday getaway from the city so enjoyable. Those long rides on the yellow bus up I-83 waiting for the first moment to see St. Paul's sitting at the top of the hill, to then arrive and see my counselors whom I saw as my family, waiting for me to get off the bus and get yet another day started. I remember most if not all of my counselors, Rick, David, Colin Eagan, Alexandria, Jonathan Kurgansky, and some of my most favorite people, Spencer Pollock and Hunter Deeley. These people made me what I am and aspire to be as they certainly were like my family and kept me on track by simply just being there and helping to guide me along the way.

After graduating as the first male of the Bridges program I immediately became a counselor, I remained a counselor for about two years before moving on to other opportunities. And to be able to experience both sides of that realm in being here at Bridges was possibly one of the best things I've done so far in my pursuit of success in academia, community service, and mentorship. So I applaud all of you for the time you have put in to make a difference in these students lives in ways I now hope you can begin to imagine after hearing my experience. My only hope is that you don't just stop here with Bridges, but continue to be mentors as you go into the next ranks of your lives may it be college or whatever else you divulge into. Giving back is something that drives me and I hope after your experience with the Bridges students it will drive you as well. Wouldn't you like your students that you helped, to grow up and remember your name and their experience with you as a great one and a motivator to their success? Well me too. On behalf of my fellow Bridges students, from the class 2004 up until the present, we just want to say thank you. God Bless, and thank you for your time.