

ourBridge For Kids

by Suzanne Taylor



A bridge is a connection of one side to another, of one person to another. We've all crossed one during our lifetime. If the news is any indication, we as a people need to be making more bridges.

One group that has been involved with crossing and creating bridges is the organization known as ourBridge for Kids. They are located at the entrance to the Aldersgate community. This group of dedicated people provide the children of immigrants from 5 schools in East Charlotte an after-school program. As Sil Ganzó has said, "The relationships that we built in trust for years are still here. We are not an afterschool program where if your kids are not here, we're not here. We are going to be here anytime, all the time. Pandemic or no pandemic and they know that." You may or may not have seen bits about their work on the news over the last weeks. They are in short, a committed community that is rooted and driven by community and the values of love, education, respect and diversity.

They have a staff of 3 full time and 22 part time employees, as well as volunteers. The culture they invoke is to be responsive and adaptive to the needs of the families and neighbors in the immigrant community. For example, within 48 hours of the announcement of the pandemic they had listened to the community feedback and made a plan to make it happen. They worked with the CMS and Migrant Assistance Project and other groups deliver food to children and their families. They began on March 17th by delivering 40 breakfasts, and 40 lunches. They successfully transitioned to mobile support services and at the time I write this had delivered nearly 9,000 breakfasts, lunches dinners, and care packages a week to hundreds of families on the east side. They have delivered 700 meal assistance packages to members of the community weekly; along with 50 bags of groceries each week and dozens of boxes with specially chosen STEAM activities. (Science, technology, engineering, art, and math)

Along with sustenance, the ourBridge group has continued to provide daily contact with their students and students' families. They have recognized the importance to giving children the opportunity to create, play, read and discover all while having to stay home. Our Bridge has provided their families with boxes full of brand-new art, science, math, and literacy supplies to keep their minds active and engaged. They have checked in virtually every day to give the children a safe place to share concerns, provide reassurance, and answer questions on schoolwork. They have done games and virtual field trips while checking in. The parents are also included in this bridge. On its board, Our Bridge for Kids has a licensed family therapist and a licensed professional counselor and will soon be launching mental and emotional wellness support groups for the Our Bridge parents.

Our Bridge receives valuable information to distribute to the community. The only problem is the information is only printed in English and Spanish. On the Eastside there are families from Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East and other areas of the world. At Our Bridge alone there are 12 different languages spoken. Here is a bridge waiting to be built...translation.

One of the mottos used at ourBridge is: *Don't talk about it. Just be about it.* I think they are about it.

Visit their website to learn more: <https://www.joinourbridge.org/>