

THE BRIDGE PROGRAM: HELPING IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES PREPARE FOR SOCIAL WORK CAREERS

Boston University School of Social Work



Boston has long been a beacon for immigrants and refugees. Today, immigrant and refugee families make up more than a quarter of the city's population. Yet members of these communities still struggle to access vital services, including education, healthcare, and legal counsel. They urgently need skilled social workers who can speak their languages, understand their cultures, and advance their well-being.

To meet this demand—and to promote social justice, a central tenet of our mission—the **Boston University School of Social Work (SSW)** has created an innovative program to increase the number of bilingual and bicultural social workers: **Building Refugee and Immigrant Degrees for Graduate Education (BRIDGE)**. Through strong outreach to nonprofits and community organizations, BRIDGE finds aspiring social workers within the immigrant and refugee populations, recruiting those who are college educated and have a passion for social service.



In a **free, intensive nine-week program**, BRIDGE introduces its students to the expectations of graduate social work education. Those who go on to apply to SSW receive guidance on the application process, assistance in writing personal essays, and advice on securing funding for tuition. BRIDGE has more than achieved its mission since its start in 2007. Alumni who have earned their MSW degrees at SSW now serve their communities as accomplished professionals in such organizations as the Child Witness to Violence Project at Boston Medical Center, the American Red Cross, and the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families.



A STUDENT SPEAKS



“I dreamed about getting my master’s degree, but I looked at the applications and was overwhelmed. I had an undergraduate degree, and I work taking care of children at a family resource center, where a co-worker had heard about BRIDGE and told me about it. At BRIDGE, I was not just a number, I was a human being. The professors who came in to talk to us made a huge difference. They saw who we were as people, and they tried to help. BRIDGE took me through the process of applying to the MSW program. They helped me write my personal statement and apply for financial aid from BU and for private scholarships. Without support from BRIDGE, I don’t think I’d be where I am today. My career goal is to work with minorities and people of color in low-income communities.”

DEBBIE BARRIOS, WHO WILL ENTER THE MSW PROGRAM IN FALL 2018

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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WHO ARE BRIDGE STUDENTS?

Our students come from more than 35 countries across the Middle East, Asia, and Central and South America, including Morocco, Cambodia, Haiti, and Peru. Many have experienced trauma stemming from civilian or military violence. Some are the children of immigrants and refugees who came to the United States and stayed under the DACA program. Typically, BRIDGE students are raising families while working long hours in service industries such as hotels and restaurants, or as childcare providers. Although they have received college degrees in their native countries, they often lack familiarity with the American educational system and need to strengthen their command of written and spoken English to succeed in a rigorous graduate program. **Those who gain entry to SSW enrich and diversify our classes with the breadth of their life experience and global backgrounds.**

HOW DOES BRIDGE MENTOR STUDENTS?

Our team includes two full-time staffers who help BRIDGE students acclimate to the culture of American higher education and who guide them as they tackle new concepts and skills. Throughout the semester, professors from SSW visit classes and introduce BRIDGE students to key social policy and advocacy concepts and—just as important—get to know them personally. Those students who are offered a place in our MSW program take a six-week writing class for additional preparation and are matched with a mentor who is a BRIDGE alum. Students not yet ready for the graduate program receive individualized guidance to strengthen their skills, such as a referral to a community college English-language program, and are encouraged to reapply to SSW when they’re ready.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

BRIDGE is an invaluable resource for greater Boston. The success of our immigrants and refugees is synonymous with the healthy growth of our city. To continue our mission, we seek **funding for the program itself and for scholarships**. Students admitted to SSW face tuition rates that can exceed their family’s annual income. Many do not qualify for federal funding and rely on grants from BU and private scholarships from generous donors.

Thank you for considering a gift to BRIDGE.