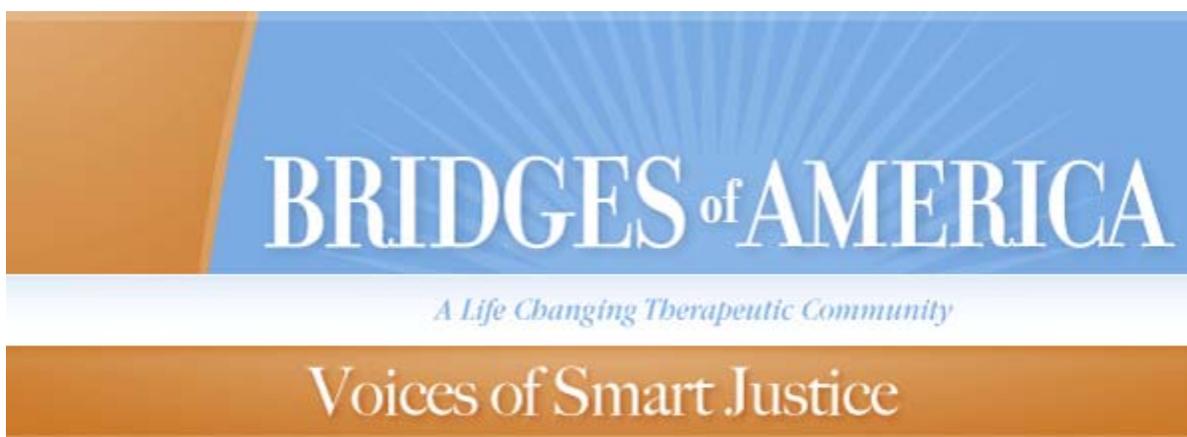


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*"Can you tell me how to get, how to get to Sesame Street?"*



Well, on Saturday, August 10, the way to Sesame Street was right through The Orlando Bridge! Our Back to School Family Day event took on a Sesame Street theme this year as we rolled out our partnership in the [Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration](#) curriculum. Games, lunch, school supplies, and family photos with Elmo were all part of the festivities enjoyed by the family members of inmates and clients of The Orlando Bridge.

As we all know, it is difficult to maintain family relationships when an incarceration is in the mix. For the inmates, by the time they are imprisoned, they have often damaged their relationships with family members. And for family members, it may be tough to make the long trips for visits, or there may be resentments that now-single mothers or dads are raising children alone. But for the youngest family members, the incarceration of a parent or another trusted and beloved family member can be a time of frustration, loneliness, and sometimes, embarrassment.

*September is National Recovery Month! Click [HERE](#) to find recovery events throughout the United States!*

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Please join us for the 2013 "Step in the Name of Love" Recovery Walk/Run

In response, [Sesame Workshop](#), the nonprofit educational organization behind [Sesame Street](#), has unveiled its newest, bilingual (English/Spanish) initiative, [Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration](#), for families with young children (ages 3-8) who have an incarcerated parent and continue to develop skills for resilience. This resource is only being distributed through targeted outlets in communities by organizations, partners and individuals who reach these families.

Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration is designed to:

- support, comfort, and reduce anxiety, sadness, and confusion that young children may experience during the incarceration of a parent
- provide at-home caregivers with strategies, tips, and age-appropriate language they can use to help communicate with their children about incarceration
- inform incarcerated parents themselves that they can parent from anywhere, and provide them with simple parenting tips highlighting the importance of communication

We are thrilled to be working with Sesame Workshop and deeply honored to be one of the locations at which [Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration](#) is being piloted. Family support and reunification is critical to the reduction of recidivism and this speaks directly to caring for the needs of the youngest victims of incarceration.

Everyone at The Orlando Bridge and Corporate office pitched in to make it a great day. The sets and decorations were designed, built and painted by the inmates. Chef Mike Schnitzer and his team prepared a delicious box lunch for everyone. Each family posed for a family picture with Elmo and all children left with a backpack filled with school supplies.

We are so grateful for the support and participation of [Westwood Church](#), which provided construction help and dozens of volunteers for the event. We also received news coverage from WESH Channel 2, WFTV Channel 9, and Central Florida News 13. One of our Orlando Bridge program participants was even featured on the [Sesame Street Workshop Blog](#).

It was truly one of the most meaningful events we've

on Saturday,  
September 14! Click  
[here](#) for more details.

had for the families of our inmates.

Sincerely,

*Lei Costantino Brown*

President and CEO



### **15th Annual International Fatherhood Conference**

Earlier this summer, Bridges of America co-hosted the [15th International Fatherhood Conference](#) in Orlando. Sylvia Bird and I had the pleasure of serving as members of the conference planning committee. This year's conference - "Taking Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Programs to the Next Level, Evidence and Outcomes" - featured workshops in 12 topic areas that examined the ways fatherhood improves families and entire communities. Local, regional, state, and federal partners demonstrated how the fatherhood-focused programs that they support have made tangible differences in peoples' lives.

To kick off the conference, Favorite Fathers of Orange County recognized seven dads that were nominated by their children through an essay contest organized through the Orange County Public School System. Gerald "Allen" Dinardo, a corporal with the Orange County Sheriff's Department and a Bridges of America volunteer, was recognized as a favorite father because of his dedication to his family and commitment to give back to his community. Dinardo also serves as a board member with the [National Alliance of Mental Illness](#) of Greater Orlando and strives to provide the best care for his children with special needs. He is an asset to his employer, to his community, and to his family as loving father and husband.

Bridges of America also was recognized as a

partner in the announcement of the new Sesame Street initiative "Little Children Big Challenges: Incarceration" for the state of Florida. This partnership with the Florida Department of Corrections was made possible thanks to Dr. Jeffrey Johnson, President and CEO of the National Partnership for Community Leadership. Bridges of America will provide multimedia resources for families with young children as they encounter tough transitions that come with a parent's incarceration. Tool kits will help kids know that they are not alone, and assist caregivers at home with ways to talk open and honestly regarding the parent that is incarcerated. These resources also will encourage incarcerated parents to stay in touch with their children in any way they can and be a positive role model.

Also at the conference, several members participated in a supersession panel that focused on working with incarcerated parents. The discussion centered on the importance of providing fathers the tools they need to promote healthy parenting practices and behaviors during incarceration and upon release. Participating on the panel were Chaplain Robert Brown of the Jacksonville Bridge; Dr. Lindsey Vigessaa, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Nova Southeastern University; Deputy Chief Cornita Riley of Orange County Corrections; Christina App, Project Manager for Sesame Street initiative "Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration;" and Bridges of America alumnus, Dianna Love. This session was designed to provide participants with information to help fathers address and build protective factors in families. Topics included nurturing and attachment, knowledge of parenting and child and youth development, parental resilience, social connectedness, places to find concrete support services for parents, and identification of barriers to successful parenting.

Later, at a roundtable discussion which included George Sheldon, from the Administration for Children and Families under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Dr. Jeffrey Johnson interviewed four Bridges of America alumni and two former Orange County Corrections inmates about the benefits of participating in parenting programs while incarcerated. The roundtable outlined the ways these programs have impacted them as fathers, and how they benefitted their families.

The conference culminated with Bridges of America receiving a Partnership Award recognizing our Nurturing Parenting Programs that support more

than 1,000 clients and inmates. Partnership Awards are given annually to an organization that models strategic and innovative partnerships in the advancement of responsible fatherhood and healthy family programs.

I am very proud of the work that is done daily at all our facilities to support families. It was an honor to represent Bridges of America in the planning of this event, and I look forward to next year!

Thank you for your support.

*Cecilia Denmark*  
*Vice President*  
*Chief Operating Officer*

[www.bridgesofamerica.com](http://www.bridgesofamerica.com)

Bridges of America is a nonprofit organization founded in 1972 with the mission of changing criminal behavior through a practical, comprehensive approach that includes intensive substance-abuse counseling, parenting classes and work-release programs. Bridges' core value is a belief that people can change.

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