

Bridging the Gap

Nonprofit lifts up San Diego's high-achieving, low-income teens

PHOTO BY BOB STEFANIKO



Michael Nance

areas, and to close the achievement gap created by financial barriers. Initially, he offered kids a \$1,000, one-year scholarship and 1:1 mentoring. Now, the nonprofit also offers tutoring, SAT and ACT prep, and college tours to participants in addition to the sponsorship element.

To say it's been successful is an understatement. Nance claims a 100 percent graduation rate for the kids who have been accepted into his program, which also boasts student enrollment at such top-tier colleges and universities as Stanford, Yale, Princeton, Brown, NYU, Emory, Berkeley, and yes, Harvard, among others.

“**H**ERE'S A QUESTION: how much does it cost for any random student we work with to go to school at Harvard per year?” asks Michael Nance,

founder of the nonprofit A Bridge for Kids. Seeing I'm stumped, he says, matter-of-factly, “It's free.” This is the kind of information that clearly gives Nance a thrill to share.

No, Harvard isn't free to everyone, but it is free, or nearly free, to the kids Nance has committed his life to helping through A Bridge for Kids. Explaining that the esteemed university is what he refers to as “need-blind,” he says it and many schools like it accept kids first, then determine any financial need second, with multi-million (or billion) dollar endowments to back up acceptance letters. This knowledge is just one of the ways A Bridge for Kids helps pave the way to a brighter future for the students it serves.

Nance created the organization four years ago to help the highest achievers in San Diego's lower income

Nance says the majority of the students he works with are living close to the poverty line at an annual family income of about \$25,000 per year. He believes that the obstacles the kids have already faced have taught them crucial life skills that children of greater privilege don't have the opportunity to learn. “I'm convinced that if we get these kids into the right fit college, vocational program, or whatever it is that they aspire to do, they're going to have a much better chance for success than their peers,” says Nance. “Right now, they have a much *lower* chance to succeed than their peers, but we're hoping to be that leveling of the playing field.”

The biggest challenge A Bridge for Kids faces is not finding qualified kids, but rather securing those \$1,000 sponsorships and, equally importantly, the mentors to guide those kids along the way, and the two don't have to go hand-in hand. About fifty percent of his annual funding is generated at the annual DreamMakers event, a fun-filled evening featuring a live auction, casino gaming, a DJ, dancing, food stations, and a hosted bar. The sixth annual DreamMakers gala will take place on October 6 at the Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine. abridgeforkids.org DEANNA MURPHY