

Just getting started: Marklund's Bridge Builder program marks third year

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By Dawn Lassiter-Brueske, Marklund

This spring, Marklund's Bridge Builder CDS day program is celebrating an important milestone: three years of meaningful education, growth and community!



What started as an idea to create a therapeutic learning and training program that assists adults with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities has turned into a vibrant place full of energy, connection and plenty of proud moments.

Over the past three years, 18 clients have developed new abilities, built friendships, and grown in confidence. From working on communication, social and daily life skills to enjoying group activities, creative projects, and community outings, every day has brought new opportunities to learn and have fun — at each person's own pace.

“What really makes Bridge Builder special is the people — the clients and the staff. Our clients come in trusting us to understand and support them. Our staff show up every day with patience, kindness, and a genuine commitment to supporting each

individual,” said Kate Thommes, QIDP, Bridge Builder program manager. “They celebrate the big wins and the small ones, too. We are also incredibly thankful for the families and caregivers who work alongside us — it truly takes a team.”

While specific programming tactics have evolved over the past years, the overarching goal of the Bridge Builder program is to provide a meaningful day for the clients, focusing on life skills and those necessary to pursue employment opportunities, if desired.

Curriculum is designed to foster independence, social development, vocational exploration, and creative expression — always guided by respect, patience, and person-centered planning.



Bridge Builders Community Day Services, located in Elgin's Nathan Education Center, was started by Marklund three years ago as an adult services therapeutic learning and training program. *Courtesy of Marklund*

Looking ahead, the team is excited to keep growing and improving, having a goal of serving up to 30 clients by summer of 2028.

“We're always finding new ways to expand our activities, strengthen skills, and support the pre-vocational and vocational goals and interests of the clients,” Thommes said. “Most of all, we're committed to creating a space where everyone feels safe, valued and encouraged to be themselves.”

Bridge Builder CDS is located within Marklund's Nathan Education Center, 1210 Hunter Drive in Elgin. For more information, visit marklund.org/bridge-builder-cds.