

# *What is Hands Across the Bridge*

In first walking into a planning committee meeting of Hands Across the Bridge in 2004, I had no idea what I was getting into. A good friend had asked for me to help. With what, I had no idea. He originally asked if I wanted some free food. This tactic seems to work well with many of us starving students. I remember walking into a highly fervent and active crowd as I was taken aside from this spectacle. On my part, there was no comprehension of anything that was transpiring. Yet, I was drawn in by the energy. There was something going on here—some significant and larger than I could begin to understand. They graced me with an opportunity to volunteer with safety.



My first experience of the Hands Across the Bridge event helped to absolve any uncertainties I may have had towards our supportive community and our leaders. Reaffirmation was very important at this stage of my life as I had so often experienced discrimination. Something inside has always attempted to see beyond my pessimism to the truth of human nature.

Throughout my transaction with society and in hiding behind my educational endeavors, I seldom revealed my past in fear of judgment. Even beyond any feeling of shame, I believed responses would always present discrimination. I adopted the concept of anonymity to its fullest extent. There I was in witness of many of my friends on the front line, in full self disclosure. I was in admiration of such certainty and selflessness. At the time, I did not understand the significance of such willingness and the continued impact it would have on others lives or my own.

What I was able to connect with was a sense of unity with this massive crowd. This inspiration drove me back to Hands Across the Bridge in the years to come. The inspiration was more than

holding hands on the bridge. It was the involvement of the recovering community coming together as one, and our elected officials and other advocates—those who took time out of their lives to support recovery.

I now come to realize the significance of being an advocate of recovery and how self disclosure would strengthen that advocacy. When we had discovered that Hands Across the Bridge was in peril do to a lack of funds, we decided to gather volunteers and resources to make this happen regardless. We had been inspired by this event and had a willingness to go to any lengths. As we reached out to the community for help, we would soon discover how truly supportive our community is. So often people expressed sincerity in supporting our cause. They may realize that all are effected by addiction and therefore recovery. However, I would like to believe that it is in their true nature to be companionate to their neighbors.

Most every endeavor left me with a feeling of gratitude and connectedness as those walls of indifference crumbled and fears of judgment abated. I come to realize that most of what I experience as judgment was an attitude of indifference reflected back at myself. My confidence provided a presentation that would further inspire others. Then, I would watch others express themselves in confidence and develop a sense of passion for our cause.

I am now aware of the essence of my admiration towards those for whom I first experience at Hands Across the Bridge in 2004. To stand on the front line and fight against the stigma of addiction requires one to know their true self. One must have a true sense of identity—one that does not waver in the face of discrimination.

And as the support of our community truly gives me hope, I can experience a new sense of unity. Whether it is holding hands on the bridge, community support, or those much needed recovering programs and elected officials, these demonstrations give hope to our community. They give me hope. They bring about faith in humanity by demonstrating its truth. The true nature of humanity—through unity—is our strongest aspiration. It is this unity that brings about strength, requires integrity, and saves lives.

With all the inspirational words I can muster, I still fall short to express the experience of “what is Hands Across the Bridge.”