

A BRIDGE TO LIFE

The Bridge Ministry



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*“Have you made a
decision today to
take your life back?”*

- William Washington

SYNOPSIS

From celebrated director Chris Farina comes a documentary about the power of overcoming hardship, building community, and remaining resilient. *A Bridge to Life* is a portrait of an organization that for years has been working to change and save the lives of men dealing with life-threatening addiction issues. The men receive intensive job-training skills along with psychological and spiritual mentoring to give them a chance to return to society as successful community and family members.

Interwoven throughout this film is the inspiring story of William Washington, the founder and Executive Director of the Bridge Ministry. Having suffered serious trauma as a child, this led to him becoming a homeless teenager on the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, as both a user and seller of deadly drugs. He was incarcerated more than once, and while eventually facing a long-term prison sentence, he was given a chance by a compassionate judge to enter a program that positively altered his life. Uplifted by this experience, he dedicated his own life to helping others who faced the same troubled path that he had been on. This led to his creation of the Bridge Ministry, which is a much better alternative than incarceration to deal with our country's serious crisis of drug addiction.



OVERVIEW

“A Bridge to Life”
VIEW TRAILER
HERE

Information about the film

Length: 98:16

Genre: Documentary

Language: English

Year Completed: 2023

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Sound: Stereo

Producer and Director: Chris Farina (Rosalia Films)

Editor: Bill Reifenberger (Silverthorn Films)

Director of Photography: Stu Maxey

Sound Recorder: Gabriel DeLoach (Folk Hero Films)

Contact Info

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Information about The Bridge Ministry

The Bridge Ministry works in Virginia to transform the lives of troubled men and their families by providing mentoring, vocational skills, education, counseling, and the relationships they need to bridge the gap from addiction to productive community and family life.

Founded in 1996 by William Washington, The Bridge Ministry emerged from his transformative journey during a long-term jail sentence. Overcoming addiction, he initiated community meetings within the jail and extended his home and support to troubled men and families in need. The organization has since provided a second chance for men committed to breaking free from life-controlling issues.

FAQ

A Bridge to Life – Questions for Filmmaker Chris Farina

1. How did you find out about The Bridge Ministry?

I was introduced to the Bridge Ministry by Jody Kielbasa, the head of the Virginia Film Festival. Upon connecting with William Washington and Jay James, the dynamic leaders of the organization, my curiosity led me to spend several days visiting the camp and observing their wonderful work. During this time, I saw the impact William, Jay, and the dedicated team at the Bridge Ministry had on the community. I was very moved by the Bridge Ministry's work and knew their wisdom and compassion needed to be documented for others to see. My hope is that the film not only supports the Bridge Ministry and the amazing work they do but also that their efforts inspire replication in communities across the country.

2. Why did you make this film?

The core mission of my filmmaking is to shine a light on the unsung heroes who work to positively affect and change their community. My journey with the Bridge Ministry became a profound source of inspiration. I was motivated to create a film that not only captures the essence of the Bridge Ministry but also serves as a conduit for sharing the impactful stories of those who commit themselves to community betterment. The experience of immersing myself in the camp environment allowed me to delve deep into the narratives of resilience, compassion, and positive change that define the Bridge Ministry's mission. I wanted to pass this inspiration on to others.

Through this film, I want to resonate with audiences, fostering a shared understanding of the impact dedicated individuals can have on their communities. It is hopefully proof that storytelling and cinema can be tools for social awareness and, ultimately, catalysts for positive change.

3. What were the most difficult things about making *A Bridge to Life*?

Undoubtedly, one of the greatest challenges I face in my filmmaking is raising adequate funding. It's a constant balancing act between the urgency of telling these vital stories and the practicalities of resource allocation. As someone deeply committed to the power of storytelling as a force for positive change, the financial constraints can be frustrating and limiting.

FAQ

Adding another layer of complexity to this challenge is my recent onset of ALS, a diagnosis that has heightened my concerns about creating social impact with this film. While grappling with the physical and emotional demands of ALS, the financial aspects of filmmaking take on an even greater significance. The need for accessible resources becomes not only a logistical challenge but also a deeply personal one.

As I navigate the intricate interplay of filmmaking, funding, and health challenges, my hope is that this film will shed light on the incredible work of the Bridge Ministry and serve as a reminder of the strength, determination, and resilience found within the human spirit.

4. What is unique about and what did you learn from your observation of The Bridge Ministry founded by William Washington?

I was immediately affected by the common sense of how the Bridge Ministry works to change and save the lives of men dealing with serious addiction issues. William Washington and his team provide time, compassion, and a serene setting for men to reflect and reassess how they will return to their families and community. The personal, loving connection that William Washington and his Bridge Ministry colleagues create with the men is key to their work's success. More than anything, the Bridge Ministry is a positive alternative to incarceration. I witnessed this first-hand during filmmaking, and I think it's important for others to see it.

5. What surprised you about the organization?

The sincere and loving relationships William Washington and his team create with the men residing there. This care also inspires positive collegial relationships among the residents.

6. What are your hopes for *A Bridge to Life*?

My hope is that the film shines a light on the Bridge Ministry's extremely important work as our country currently faces a serious crisis of drug addiction. I hope to generate support for the Bridge Ministry and inspire communities across the country to create life-changing programs.

BIOGRAPHY

WILLIAM WASHINGTON

William Washington, Founder and Executive Director of the Bridge Ministry since 1996, is an ordained minister and counselor with over 30 years of expertise in addiction. Additionally, he is a celebrated author of *His Grace is Sufficient, An Autobiography and People, Places, & Things: A Guide to Overcoming Addictive Behavior*, as well as a recipient of the 2022 Rotary Citizen of the Year Award and the Daily Progress's 2001 'Distinguished Dozen' award. In 2006, he received the Bridge Builders award from the City of Charlottesville and was named on the Drewary J. Brown Memorial Bridge "in honor of those people who succeeded in building bridges in our community."

BIOGRAPHY

JAY JAMES

Jay James, Assistant Director at the Bridge Ministry since 2009, is also known as the host of WINA Morning News, the Sports Director at Charlottesville Radio Group, a UVA football sideline reporter, and an Associate Producer for the Virginia Sports Network. With a BA in Religion from the University of Virginia, Jay brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the Bridge Ministry team.

BIOGRAPHY

CHRIS FARINA

Chris Farina was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, one block away from Pulaski Highway, the subject of his first independent award-winning documentary film *Route 40*. His second film, *West Main Street*, tells the stories and memories of individuals who lived and worked along this street in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he moved to attend the University of Virginia, where he still resides.

After earning an M.A. in Communications from American University, he made another award-winning film, *World Peace and Other 4th-Grade Achievements*, which had its world premiere at SXSW film festival and has garnered awards at several film festivals including the Best Film-Audience Award at the Bergen International Film Festival (Bergen, Norway) and the Youth Vision Award at the United Nations Association Film Festival. This film was broadcast on public television stations across the US through distribution by American Public Television. It has also been aired on television around the world and continues to be screened internationally.

Other events included presentations at the United Nations, the Pentagon, Aspen Institute's Ideas Festival, Google, Harvard, Georgetown, and Stanford. Farina's award-winning short film, *The Holistic Life Foundation: Breathing Love into a Community*, depicted HLF's work dedicated to improving the lives of the youth in the impoverished neighborhoods in West Baltimore. *Seats at the Table* presents a portrait of a class that connects university students with residents of a maximum-security juvenile correctional center through the collaborative study of great works of Russian literature. Farina's recently completed film, *A Bridge to Life*, is a portrait of an organization that works to change and save the lives of men with serious addiction issues.

Farina has been drawn to telling the stories of individuals whose profound contributions to their community have often gone unnoticed, thereby expanding the audience's notion of what it means to be human.

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