



Gisela Bushey

City of San Jose

San Jose, California

When I learned about an Encore Fellowship in government, I took it, as I was curious to learn about this sector. I spent over 20 years managing non-profits, as Executive Director of Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, and directing corporate foundations and community relations for Palm, Handspring, and SanDisk.

As Director of Community Engagement and Development in the Office of the Mayor, I focused on matching mentors with underrepresented, disadvantaged high school and community college youth. Mentoring is critical for these youth... they often don't have role models to navigate education and career building environments.

Two programs target this population within the City of San Jose: San Jose Works, which offers summer internships to high schoolers and San Jose College Promise, which provides eligible students up to two years of free tuition at community colleges. I thought, "Why aren't we using those programs as a bridging opportunity to provide them with mentors and service opportunities in their communities?"

Working across city departments, partnering with youth-serving community organizations and meeting with the Chancellor of San Jose/Evergreen Community College District, I designed Critical Bridge, matching the youth in the programs with mentors to be the consistent adult presence in their lives as

they navigate their first job and college environments. We piloted the program with San Jose College Promise scholars and two community colleges, who came on board quickly due to the recognized benefits of mentors in helping students achieve their employment and academic goals.

As the youth move from San Jose Works, starting in 8th grade, they have mentors to help them think about different employment opportunities, and stay with them as they move to community college as a College Promise Scholar. Critical Bridge is expected to be fully launched in March 2018 with a goal to match 250 youth with mentors by the end of the first year, and to pair 1,000 youth with mentors by the end of the third year.

I borrowed from my experience with volunteers in other nonprofits to determine what we needed to build a corps of volunteers committed to this idea. To be successful, we had to craft the program so people understood the value they could bring to the life of a young person and help them see the transformative difference they could make in the lives of these young men and women.

I used many of the skills and connections I already had, and the advocacy and support of colleagues from Encore, as well as throughout the Mayor's office, to help spread the program's message and ensure its continuity. Its success will depend on these ongoing partnerships.

I was in a new environment but supported throughout by folks who were dedicated and committed to creating a "level access playing field" for our youth throughout the city. The project was a winner of the 2017 Encore Prize, for its ability to be scaled and replicated in cities and communities nationwide.

I will be returning to the nonprofit sector as the Executive Director of Loaves and Fishes, providing hot nutritious prepared meals that are delivered and served to disadvantaged individuals with a special concern for families, children, seniors and the homeless.