



GURABO/MANATI, PUERTO RICO

BTE Success Stories

BRIDGE TO EMPLOYMENT

Launched in 1992, Bridge to Employment (BTE) is a Johnson & Johnson initiative that prepares youth for brighter futures. For more information about BTE, visit www.bridge2employment.org

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Why BTE?

The towns of Gurabo and Manatí, 60 kilometers apart on the island of Puerto Rico, share much in common despite their distance. Both were confronting high school graduation and bachelor's degree attainment rates that lagged well behind the mainland United States. Students in their high schools—Dra. Conchita Cuevas High School in Gurabo and Petra Corretjer de O'Neil High School in Manatí—lived in neighborhoods with poverty rates as high as 49 percent. Educators and parents in both communities wanted to see more young people graduate high school and enroll in higher education. And fortuitously, both communities host plants for the Johnson & Johnson local operating company Janssen.

Johnson & Johnson's BTE program aims to increase the number of students enrolling in higher education and pursuing careers in STEM²D (science, technology, engineering, math, manufacturing, and design) or health care fields. Johnson & Johnson local operating companies work with secondary and postsecondary schools and community organizations to design locally responsive BTE programs. Each program features academic enrichment, career readiness and exploration activities, and higher education preparation.

ASPIRA Inc. of Puerto Rico, a community-based organization that has served the Northeast region of the island for 45 years, joined BTE-Gurabo/Manatí as the site coordinator. BTE's objectives aligned well with the nonprofit's mission to "foster socioeconomic well-being and the enhancement of the quality of life in Puerto Rico, though education and leadership development in the individual, the family, and the community." Universidad de Puerto Rico joined as the site's higher education partner, and the Puerto Rico Department of Education Undersecretary for Academic Affairs committed to collaborate with the other BTE partners in outreach, data collection, and the BTE candidate screening process.

BTE: Opportunities to Explore

BTE-Gurabo/Manatí set out to serve students who were making average grades. Together, representatives from the two high schools, ASPIRA, and Janssen formed the BTE student selection committee, but unlike many BTE sites, the selection team also included parents from each of the schools. Parents' sustained involvement from the outset reflected BTE-Gurabo/Manatí's commitment to engaging their

SITE PROFILE

Location

Gurabo and Manatí,
Puerto Rico, USA

Grant Period

2014–2017

Sponsor

Janssen

Coordinator

ASPIRA Inc. of Puerto Rico

Community Partners

Dra. Conchita Cuevas High
School

Petra Corretjer de O'Neil
High School

Universidad de Puerto Rico

Volunteers

50

Students Directly Served

52

Completion Rate

69%

communities. BTE-Gurabo/Manatí kicked off with 50 10th-grade students, 25 from each participating high school, in the fall of 2014.

To improve students' *academic achievement*, BTE-Gurabo/Manatí offered after-school academic tutoring in math, science, and English, taught by qualified teachers. The tutoring was a hit with BTE students. "I really like the tutoring because it's a daily thing," reflected one student. "I get to [the] library, see my teachers and classmates. They help me, and I help them." BTE also helped the students prepare for upcoming high-stakes exams like the College Board exam and the island-wide META-PR.

To help students *explore careers and develop professional skills*, BTE-Gurabo/Manatí hosted yearly visits to the Janssen facilities in Gurabo and in Manatí. Students took career inventories to help narrow down their interests. Late in year 2, students from both schools visited Janssen to take part in a live videoconference in which they could observe a surgery and ask questions of the surgeon.

Students were paired with Janssen mentors on the basis of their academic and career interests; students and mentors met regularly in small group and individual sessions to discuss students' higher education and career plans. Students took inspiration and motivation from these meetings, and the Johnson & Johnson employee volunteers took away lessons themselves from meeting with BTE students. "The program was beneficial to me personally," reflected one mentor, "in creating consciousness of the problems adolescents have in their lives."

To support students' *transition to higher education*, BTE-Gurabo/Manatí hosted visits to local higher education institutions, including multiple campuses of Universidad de Puerto Rico. Later in the BTE program, the partners helped students walk through applications for higher education and financial aid.

To continue momentum over summer breaks, BTE-Gurabo/Manatí provided educational enrichment activities during summers. In 2016, for example, BTE-Gurabo/Manatí had three enrichment programs available: a practical program at Janssen; a medical clinical internship, reserved for two successful applicants; and the Techno Student Challenge, held in conjunction with the international education conference Virtual Educa Puerto Rico 2016.

"BTE has impacted me in various ways. It has helped me in my classes, in admission to the university, and in my confidence in myself and in my future."

-A BTE-Gurabo/Manatí student

"My classmates not in BTE are always asking, 'Why do you get to do all this stuff?' I'm really happy and know I was blessed to have this opportunity."

-A BTE-Gurabo/Manatí student

Impact of BTE

BTE-Gurabo/Manatí achieved many of its targets for grades and graduation rates, and it influenced students' maturity and personal growth. Unexpectedly, most of the BTE students had developed leadership skills and improved their teamwork by the time the program ended. Many were volunteering for community service hours beyond those required to graduate high school in Puerto Rico. One BTE student recalled, "I'm a good student, but I used to be more the clown of the class. Now, [because of BTE] I'm taking stuff more seriously. It has helped me a lot to grow up, to take things more seriously."

As for grades and graduation rates, students saw higher GPAs and raised their math and science grades over the course of BTE. The program helped them feel motivated for school and optimistic about their futures. Perhaps as a result, 97 percent of students who complete the BTE program graduated from high school. Among those graduates, 9 out of 10 continued into higher education. BTE students felt better prepared to make decisions about higher education and succeed on entrance exams.

BTE also influenced students' career outlooks and readiness. By the end of the program, the number of BTE students who planned to pursue health or science careers had increased by nearly 10 percent compared to the start. Almost all students felt they had developed stronger presentation skills in BTE, and two-thirds had received specific career advice from Janssen mentors.

Passing on some advice to future BTE students, one Gurabo/Manatí graduate admonished, "I would give them advice to take [BTE] seriously from the first moment. It's one of the best opportunities you can get. It will change your life."

ASPIRA would later use their experience with BTE-Gurabo/Manatí to coordinate another BTE location in nearby San Lorenzo.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

97% graduated high school

94% applied to at least one higher education institution

90% were accepted to higher education

75% of graduates went on to study science and/or health fields in higher education

67% volunteered for community service