

IT JUST FELT REALLY IMPORTANT:

An Oral History of Bridge to Employment

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Building Partnerships.
Transforming Communities.
Empowering Youth.



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**“YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THE
KEY TO SAVING THE WORLD.”**



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PREFACE

Thirty years ago, with a new millennium on the horizon and an intriguing approach to social responsibility sweeping corporate boardrooms, Johnson & Johnson laid the foundation for a cross-sector, healthcare-focused youth development initiative that would become one of its signature programs. In 1991, long-committed to enacting the Johnson & Johnson Credo by investing in communities and employees, the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) arm took a new strategic direction. Instead of making one-time or short-term donations to community-based organizations, Johnson & Johnson would design and operate its own social impact programs with an eye to company culture and priorities and, equally important, to the needs and dynamics of the communities in which they operated.

Johnson & Johnson started close to home, establishing the first **Bridge to Employment** (BTE) program in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1992. The program grew to communities across the United States that hosted Johnson & Johnson operating companies, and paired those companies with local secondary schools, postsecondary institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Within a few years, the company had brought on a global NGO partner to manage and support the ever-expanding initiative and honed the BTE model to its three essential strategies:

- Academic Enrichment
- Career Readiness and Exploration
- Higher Education Exploration and Preparation

The adaptability of the BTE model was tested and proven over the following decade, as the program expanded internationally to Cork, Ireland in 2005 and later to sites across Africa, Europe, Latin America and Asia Pacific. At every BTE site, Johnson & Johnson and the partners commit to supporting their students' growth and elevating their communities. In every year, Johnson & Johnson brings sites together to build alliances and train partners. Over time and with increasing attention to systematic data, BTE has demonstrated lasting impact on young peoples' lives.

In the pages that follow, 30 BTE partners and alumni share their oral histories of doors opened, opportunities taken, and bridges built over the past 30 years. This is their BTE story.

**“NEW BRUNSWICK WAS
KNOWN AS THE
HEALTHCARE CITY.”**

PART 1: BTE BEGINS

Johnson & Johnson unveiled the first BTE program in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1992. Born out of an emerging policy focus on linking school to work, a nascent consensus around strategic programming in CSR circles, and Johnson & Johnson's enduring commitment to its Credo, BTE launched a new era for the company and its community.

Michael Bzdak, J&J Office of Corporate Contributions and BTE Global Leader (1992-present):

If you look at the literature on CSR, at this point in time, companies were transitioning from supporting the United Way and doing the good citizenship thing into developing their own programs. So it was good timing on my part that I got involved in corporate social responsibility at the time I did, because it's an exciting time when it was starting to become a profession. I think the climate was right. You know, there was an enabling environment.

So I jumped in, and had a lot of learning to do, and most of that learning took place in our New Brunswick, New Jersey headquarters. Just trying to understand how schools work, how business-school partnerships work.

Conrad Person, J&J Office of Corporate Contributions (1992-2016): I first heard about BTE naturally from working in the [CSR] department. I was literally down the hall from Michael Bzdak, and we were, at that time, a small enough department that there was very little that any of us were doing that the others didn't have some knowledge of. My initial impression of it was that it had the beauty of what I call the ripple effect. The typical young person has exposure to very few professionals in their life. For someone of my age, especially a person of color, there were very few people who were professionals that we had any kind of contact with, and they would typically be clergy, and healthcare and educators. And so, if you ask the typical kid in my generation what they wanted to be when they grew up, they would say one of those things. They had no idea of the wide range of possible careers within the world of healthcare. With BTE, that meant that their sense of what was possible within that world was much bigger.

Amanda McMahon, BTE Manager and later Director, FHI 360 (1996-present): BTE was also in response to, at that time, the movement for school to work, which many companies were signing on board for. From the White House, there was a push to get young people more engaged and understanding about the world of work. At that time there was very little hands-on learning, almost no applied learning. There were all these new roles and positions coming out that young people had never heard of back in the early '90s.



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Jeff Vega, then-President, New Brunswick Tomorrow, BTE New Brunswick, NJ (1996-1999, 2003-2007): I thought it was really great, because it really was an effort to try to understand what the labor demands were and matching that up with how we expose kids to different fields, particularly the health field. I thought it was a terrific concept, and very visionary for a company like Johnson & Johnson to take it on. You know, they didn't have to do this.

BTE started in and maintains a unique relationship with Johnson & Johnson's hometown of New Brunswick, New Jersey. Over the years, BTE has helped Johnson & Johnson become ever closer and more integrated with the New Brunswick community.

Jeff Vega: New Brunswick was known as the healthcare city. That was its nickname because of all the hospitals and pharmaceutical and research institutes, the cancer institute, all of the science and tech presence in the area. Really, there was a desire to prepare kids for that.

Professor Kamal Khan, Rutgers University and BTE New Brunswick, NJ (1992-present): We started in New Brunswick approximately 30 years ago. How we got involved with Bridge to Employment is, we invited Michael Bzdak and his wife to see the high school, see the students. And from that point, Michael believed in the success that we had, and that we have presently. Other districts outside of New Brunswick wanted to do the same thing; they all wanted to get involved.

Dr. Natasha Ramsey, Alumna, BTE New Brunswick, NJ (2004-2007): I think the thing I remember the most is going into Johnson & Johnson. I'm from New Brunswick, I grew up in New Brunswick. Johnson & Johnson was just like, this castle over there that you just never venture to. There's all this beautiful grass around the world headquarters that you just never touched. With BTE, we just walked right in. Whenever we would go there, we would feel like we are royalty, you know?

In New Brunswick and beyond, the BTE model promotes college and career awareness and readiness. As the program progressed and expanded, Johnson & Johnson and its NGO partners refined and defined program elements. Over time, BTE coalesced around a focus on the healthcare field and a set of core metrics that would allow Johnson & Johnson to track impact through a comprehensive evaluation.

Yezenia Ramos, J&J Office of Corporate Contributions and Global BTE Leader (2015-present): There were several reasons for BTE coming about. One, we're really helping out the next generation and one of the things within BTE that we were looking at was really trying to drive that interest in healthcare careers. You know, we have a shortage of doctors and nurses, community health workers around the world. And so we thought that by inspiring this

generation into getting them interested in healthcare careers we could potentially help close that gap globally.

Michael Bzdak: Early on it was a very loosely structured program...At that point there was no focus on careers or healthcare. That's why it evolved over time, taking it from something soft...then the beginning of seeing what could be possible. We looked at what was going on with other programs, with the German apprenticeship model, and I decided that we needed to start honing in on definitions. It went from informal to very formal over the course of the last few decades.

I had some great mentors early on, including some partners at what was then called the National Alliance of Business. I'm so grateful that I met Amanda McMahon during that tenure, she was part of the National Alliance of Business and then when we went out looking for another partner and issued an RFP, an organization called Academy for Educational Development, which then became FHI 360. I think part of the reason that BTE has continued to evolve successfully is the presence of Amanda and the continuity that she brought from the NGO side.

Lisa Johnson, BTE Director and later Department Director, FHI 360 (2007-present): When I first started, there were multiple ways that you could be BTE. So there was a one-year program, there was a three-year program, there was a two-year program. There were 600 kids [in one program] and 20 in another. The role changed by standardizing processes, then developing training over time for new sites and new staff coming on board.

Julie Solomon, BTE Evaluator, California and Latin America sites (2007-present): In the first years I worked as an evaluator, as I recall, we had a very similar role to the role that we have now—which is to work with the site to collect and analyze data that would help the site to learn and improve the program from one year to the next and understand the outcomes of the program. The data collection instruments and protocols were not as systematized as they are now, so I think there was a lot more variation across the sites previously with respect to the specific measures that we were collecting and also the kinds of analysis we were performing and in addition, what the reports looked like. So there's been, over time, greater standardization.

**“WE’RE ALL ONE BIG,
LOVING GROUP WHEN YOU
PUT US ALL TOGETHER.”**

PART 2:

BTE BECOMES A GLOBAL FAMILY

From its beginnings in the tight-knit New Brunswick community, BTE has expanded to embrace new continents, countries and cultures. BTE brings together partners and colleagues within sites, exposing young people and those who mentor them to fresh experiences, opportunities and networks. Across sites, BTE forges bonds among students and professionals with vastly different backgrounds but a common purpose: their commitment to the BTE family.

Johnson & Johnson convenes BTE partners in the fall of each year to share lessons, struggles and advice. Since its inception in the 1990s, when a handful of Johnson & Johnson representatives gathered in the Johnson & Johnson boardroom in New Brunswick, the annual Alliance Building and Training Session (ABTS) has flourished into an international event and a family reunion of sorts.

Jeff Vega: I believe the Alliance Building Session was held at world headquarters when I was there. And it's probably not as refined as it is today for sure, but it was an opportunity to connect with other sites and understand who is doing what. And from what I recall, there were not that many sites when we got started but it was still a good opportunity to connect.

Michael Bzdak: I think [the first ABTS] was in New Brunswick. We probably had maybe a handful of sites at the time. And you know, we thought it was a big deal to have a couple of sites and when we think about what ABTS is now, it just doesn't compare.

Lisa Johnson: My first ABTS was my second week on the job [in 2007], so it was a whole community of people that I didn't know. There were a group of a couple of young people from Silicon Valley that did a panel. I'd say there were 50 or 60 people there, and it was abuzz, everybody was excited about it.

Tiffany Nesbey, Site Coordinator and Youth Specialist, BTE New Brunswick, NJ and FHI 360 (2013-present): It's really nice to be in a room full of equally passionate people who are committed to young people. The BTE family...I always kind of think of Michael Bzdak as the father of BTE, and I think of Amanda [McMahon] as the mom.

In the 2000s and beyond, BTE burgeoned into an international community, bringing together far-flung colleagues across North America and then Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia Pacific.

Lisa Johnson: When I started in 2007, it was the first year the program was going international outside of Ireland. We were starting off in Scotland and Colombia... From a Johnson & Johnson giving perspective, going international was about being more equitable around the world. I think that was some of the motivating factor, and also testing to make sure that the model could work, that it could go from the U.S. abroad.

Cliona O'Geran, J&J Champion, BTE Cork and BTE Limerick, Ireland (2005-present): We were the first country outside the US almost 16 years ago to be piloted. I initially got involved as a mentor and then went on to go onto the leadership committee myself...As a partnership it's a kind of an aberration, not just with the three schools, but it was also Junior Achievement, businesses in the community and also the three colleges in Cork. It was the first time that they collaborated with each other, with other colleges. You know, it was new to everybody... Some of these students would never have heard about continuing on to third level education, and they never really would have talked to people about what careers were open to them.

Matt Mitianiec, Alumnus, BTE Cork, Ireland (2005-2008): I joined actually just after immigrating from Poland, because I'm originally Polish. And to be honest, at the time I couldn't even speak English very well, so I wasn't even aware of what I was getting myself into... I didn't even know what the program was all about at that point and the significance it would have to my life and my future.

Laura Nel, J&J Champion and Executive Sponsor, BTE Johannesburg, BTE Cape Town, BTE East London and BTE Tswelopele, South Africa (2011-present): Michael [Bzdak] introduced me to Bridge to Employment, and he kind of suggested, 'Would we have any interest in starting a Bridge to Employment program in South Africa?' Of course, I jumped at the opportunity, because...the aims and objectives of Bridge to Employment were such a good fit with really trying to support our community... [At that point], it hadn't had that much exposure on the continent of Africa because it had been very much U.S. based. I think there were some sites obviously across Europe, but we hadn't heard too much about it on the African continent. And so it was kind of a pretty big thing to bring it to the African continent.

Paola Soledad Martinez Chiñas, J&J Champion, BTE México City, México (2015-2018): It was back in 2016, I believe, when I was starting with boosting the employee engagement plans for Johnson & Johnson México. I was looking for a program that will bring our colleagues together with the possibilities to see the changes in the communities. People in general in México were more used to programs that delivered goods, and I really wanted to inspire minds and to connect with their personal stories... That's why I reached out to the employee engagement team, especially to Michael Bzdak, to learn more about the Bridge to Employment program and I got amazed. Because what I find very interesting about the program is how it connects

us, and it also gives a possibility to have the same structure across all countries and have this connection with FHI 360 and the evaluators.

Ido Shwartz, Site Coordinator, BTE Yokneam, Israel (2017-2020): When I heard of BTE, I thought, oh wow. This is across the world, that's amazing...Then I thought, how do we do the adaptation to the Israeli culture?

As BTE grew, so did ABTS, adding more people, more sites and more networking over the years. In 2013, Johnson & Johnson hosted ABTS outside of the United States for the first time in Leiden, Netherlands. Starting in the late 2000s, BTE introduced Student Ambassadors, a critical innovation that has become the standout of each year's ABTS. Student Ambassadors to ABTS compete to represent their respective sites and, once there, collaborate on action learning projects that showcase what BTE students can do.

Peg Forrestel, J&J Champion, BTE Trenton, NJ, (1999-2020): To me, the Student Ambassadors are the highlight of every year of the conference. Because you just see the amazing work, how they collaborate together, how strong they are as a team but also individually. And how much they've grown, just over that three- or four-day period of ABTS.

Paola Soledad Martinez Chiñas: My first ABTS was London. Then I went to, I believe it was then Washington, then New Jersey, and Lisbon. It looks like the Olympics! I definitely love when we can see the impact of our work in the students. So for example, I remember very much how impactful the closing presentation from the kids in London was. I remember that very well because it was my first time with BTE.

Aliyah Saleem, Alumna, BTE Bound Brook, NJ (2017-2020): I attended the ABTS session in 2018 in Lisbon, Portugal and I will forever and ever be grateful for that experience. It taught me so many new things. Working with diverse students really made the project, and I just love working with others who may not have the same culture as me. I also enjoyed being able to explore the beautiful country. I often still reflect, look at photos, reminisce, and I tell so many people how amazing this program was and what it allowed me to do, how I've grown not only educationally but professionally as well.

Lucy Phillips, J&J Champion, BTE Sydney, Australia (2013-2016): I loved the students' presentation on the last day of ABTS. I think you'd struggle to find a dry eye in the house, it was like you're a proud mother. And just to see the confidence and to see the friendships that the students developed was amazing. You know, they only know each other for four days and they're all best friends at the end of it. And they speak different languages! They've got such different experiences, but there's a level of commonality that means that they all connect really nicely with each other.

**“IT’S ABOUT HAVING THE
ABILITY TO KNOW I’VE GOT
THROUGH TOUGH STORMS
BEFORE, AND I’LL GET
THROUGH TOUGH STORMS
AGAIN IN THE FUTURE.”**

PART 3: BTE PERSISTS

Over the course of 30 years, BTE has weathered winds of change in policy, technology, and physical environments. BTE partners and sites have faced catastrophes large and small, from hurricanes to political upheaval, and through it all, BTE keeps the focus where it belongs: on young people and their needs.

Michael Bzdak: I think, you know, we all pay attention to the performance of students on the national rankings and international ranking. So it seems like education hasn't made a lot of progress, and probably needs even more business support. So it gives us renewed confidence in that we're doing the right thing, and maybe we should be doing more of it. I think the statistics around youth unemployment around the world are also huge, so that gives us incentive to do more of this as well.

Julie Solomon: I was in a hotel in Cali, Colombia. I had found out the week before there was going to be a national strike. Fortunately, I was able to collect the data that I wanted to collect, but I was not really able to do very much else because there was a curfew and anyone on the street would be put in jail immediately. I was not able to leave the country on my intended flight.

And the Panama site, for example, I think had seven principals or more of the school during the program, which could have presented a huge challenge, but the site made sure to have a relationship with the Ministry of Education from the start. There was one change because of an election, but they had a good relationship with both.

Jamie Twomey, Alumnus, BTE Cork, Ireland (2005-2008): As someone who grew up during the global recession, which hit Ireland extremely hard for a couple years...Having seen how things can turn so quick, I was like, I feel like education is the only way to protect yourself against that. If that could happen again, at least if I have an education which would give me a qualification and skills. There's something to fall back on, hopefully.

Paola Soledad Martinez Chiñas: When we wanted to start our program, we had an earthquake in México City. So it was terrible, because we had our launch date, and then we had the earthquake and then we had to move it because we didn't know how the school will be and how it would be affected. And I had an emergency response for four other parts of the country. So it was difficult to adjust to that, but it was a very short period of time that we readjusted and then we continued. It was funny for us, we said "OK, we started with an earthquake and then we're finishing with the pandemic." But adversities come across, and we have to keep up.

Luis Parker, Alumnus, BTE Norristown, NJ (2017-2020): I do want to acknowledge that it's not as easy as I'm making it sound, some days was a hardship. I worked at a movie theater as well, and I wouldn't get off of work until literally 12:00 AM... I would go home and do homework until like 2:00 AM. The next day, I go to school...Time management is the overall message there.

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic confronted BTE with a challenge of unprecedented scope and scale. BTE partners rallied, taking advantage of new technology, to continue serving students in a newly-remote learning environment.

Laura Nel: At the East London site, they don't have access to Wi-Fi and Internet and anything like that, so it's been a real challenge to continue with the virtual learning, and in fact as a school they couldn't. So what you're finding is that the students are probably getting about six days classroom time a term, if that, because of social distancing.

Lisa Johnson: With the pandemic, obviously we had to do everything virtual. And we now have e-modules that we never even thought of before. We hired instructional designers too. We thought about how you can bring a sense of intimacy, of face-to-face, a sense of family to remote engagement.

Tiffany Nesbey: We've all had to learn how to navigate virtual spaces, become flexible in our learning environment, take advantage of opportunities despite something as huge as a global pandemic. I think COVID has helped to shed light on how important human interactions are. We just need human contact. We need to see each other. We want to connect with one another. We see the value in it, and I think COVID helped to shed light on that.

BTE pulls together to serve students, no matter what.

Lucy Phillips: We had a student last year who didn't have a computer during COVID, so during homeschooling wouldn't have been able to do anything. We were able to get her a computer so she could finish Year 11 and Year 12.

Lisa Johnson: After the hurricane, you know how long Puerto Rico lost their power for, it was crazy. But our site coordinators were out walking up hills and making sure everyone was alright and had water.

**“HE TOLD ME I MADE HIM
BELIEVE IN HIMSELF MORE.
I DIDN'T THINK I HAD SUCH
AN IMPACT, YOU KNOW?”**

PART 4:

BTE BUILDS ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS

Partnerships are a cornerstone of the BTE model, and the strong relationships that develop during the program have changed lives. Bonds between mentors and students have empowered young people, giving them the confidence to believe in themselves. These mentor-student relationships often continue well after the program ends—into college, through graduation and beyond. Mentors reach out to check in with BTE graduates and send encouraging words, while BTE alumni seek advice or send updates of their accomplishments.

Conrad Person: A lot of us Johnson & Johnson folks, me included, functioned as mentors. And we tried to be available to young people and to just have routine non-structured contact to be another caring adult within their circle. So that when they had an issue and they just wanted to vent or they wanted to get some ideas, whatever their goal was, that simply was your job to be there and to be that person who answered the phone. And had time for lunch etc. And that was a big eye opener as well. The ripple effect for the managers who functioned as mentors was that it opened our eyes to what the realities were for young people.

In our department and in the company generally, I saw [mentors] had relationships with some of these students that persisted over the course of their high school career, over the course of their college career, over the course of their postgraduate career.

Cliona O’Geran: I was quite a few years younger 16 years ago...We were doing the training for the first rollout of the mentors, and when I first met my students, I was wondering what would I do? Obviously, it was kind of daunting your first time meeting your student and [wondering] what influence I would have. But I am still friendly with my mentee...He got engaged last month and he was bringing tears to my eyes, so to me it's a lovely story... When he told me that I had such an impact in his life that it made him believe in himself more and try harder. I didn't think I had such an impact, you know?

Jamie Twomey: I had kind of that light bulb moment where I was like, “I'm ready.” Going to university...I knew I had the ability to do it. That was all facilitated by mentors. I feel like every moment that benefited me there was organized, and put in place, and made possible by the work of the volunteer.

[BTE] helps form relationships with your classmates within this class, and relationships with other schools, and obviously then again, you form relationships with the mentors and the volunteers and the BTE program. So I feel like you have almost like a trifecta of different kinds of relationships going on that are all very important.

Matt Mitianiec: I just think all those little bits, people actually being involved in it and genuinely caring about you and trying to help you and trying to improve your situation, I think that's just the most important thing. The guys that are running this program, that's their main focus, and they really want to improve the lives of kids in different countries.

Carrie Malone, Site Coordinator, BTE Livingston County, NY (2007-2010): Some of our mentors and some of our kids made some really strong connections that have stayed...mentors were invited to graduation parties, weddings, baby showers, all of those types of things.

It was a really fabulous experience getting to know the kids and just seeing them grow. And you know, to become more mature and to really kind of decide what they wanted to do with their life and then make it happen...I have some of my BTE kids, I'm still in contact all the time. And to see where they've gone and what they've done is really amazing.

Laura Warner, J&J Champion, BTE Solano County, CA (2007-2010): We definitely became a family. I have one student that I still keep in touch with who always called me his BTE mom, you know, and sometimes they'll call me and say, "Hey Mom, let's go get lunch."

Laura Nel: Some very strong relationships and friendships, I think, blossomed out of those mentoring occasions. I had a young guy, and he just would never read. He hated reading and I said, 'But you have to read because that's how you broaden your vocabulary and your view of the world.' I said, 'What about *The Hunger Games*?' Because at the time that was very topical, and so I bought him a copy of *The Hunger Games*, and I had a copy, and that would be the thing that we spoke about when we connected. But it was the way that we had something in common. Because, you know, I wasn't even a young professional. I was a mature professional. I was a different race group than him and spoke a different language to him. We didn't have anything in common other than we both could read and so we used that as our bond to kind of get to know each other and learn more about each other.

Marilyn Teutle Cuautle, Alumna, BTE New Brunswick, NJ (2014-2017): My mentor and I, we kept in contact because I wanted to build that relationship. I think that support during the transition, and then just college in general, there's a lot of transition happening. It was very valuable to have career support and it's nice to have that group of people where you're all kind of heading towards the same goal, which is your graduation.

Luis Parker: My favorite coach, his name was Michael, but I called him The Mighty. Michael was a big dude. To this day, I see him as family at this point. I even have his number, so we text each other here and there... He definitely shoots a message saying, 'I hope everything is good and keep up the good work.'

Jez Sherman, J&J Champion, Auckland, New Zealand (2016-2019): It was a sustained kind of give over a period of several years. And that was a bit problematic for some people because they couldn't find the time to commit, but for others it was great, and I think pretty much

everybody who stuck with it and went through the whole program would say that they got a lot of value out of it themselves. It taught them more about themselves as well, but it taught them that there's a lot of people out there that they can actually help. We've got a lot of people within our organization who have a lot of ability and a lot of skill even if they don't recognize and think they've got anything to give.

BTE partners have also developed strong bonds over the years, working across organizations towards a common goal. Within sites, colleagues sustain working collaborations and personal friendships. Across sites, professionals share ideas, learn from each other and enjoy companionship. ABTS sparks many of these cross-site relationships, and they continue to grow through technology and social media.

Amanda McMahon: We always say BTE is like a family, but it really is like a family. Like I feel like I could reach out to South Africa, or if I'm going to be in Singapore, I could reach out, or we have a new grant coming to the Philippines and if our partner is still there, we could reach out to them. Things like that. You know, your professional network has grown beyond where you ever thought it would be.

Conrad Person: [BTE, through ABTS] gave them a close relationship with someone who they would never know otherwise.

Laura Nel: I think also just meeting all my colleagues from around the world...it was so lovely to connect with people from all over the J&J world and to meet the implementing partners and the school representatives. Just such a such a mixed sort of melting pot of cultures.

Ido Shwartz: Schools and corporates don't speak the same language. They need a translator, maybe, and that's the coordinator role...We live in both. My job was to help both sides communicate properly to make the volunteering impactful.

**“YOU’VE GOT THE DROPS
OF WATER THEMSELVES,
BUT THEY KEEP CREATING
RIPPLES AND WAVES. AND
THAT’S HOW I VIEW BTE.”**

PART 5:**BTE LEAVES A LEGACY**

The BTE legacy is deep and wide, improving the lives of people and communities across the globe and over the span of three decades. The primary legacy of BTE is in the students themselves—the impressive and inspiring ways they grow and apply what they’ve learned as they enter higher education and the workforce.

Laura Nel: Some of the students really improve their self-esteem...you saw people stand taller, and speak louder, and speak clearer as their confidence grew. And that was something that struck me at the graduation ceremony in fact, I was very emotional watching these children because I remembered seeing them coming in and how they were either indifferent or embarrassed or shy. And then how they showed up in the graduation...everybody standing taller with big smiles. It was truly impactful.

One [legacy] would be opening up opportunities for students that they might never have had or might never have been aware that they could take advantage of. It's not that we gave them the opportunity. I think all we did was open the curtains so that they could see what opportunities there were, and we guided them towards how best to get those opportunities.

Laura Warner: We really are advancing lives; we really are advancing on a large global scale. But there's one program one that focuses on the individual person, and that's what I really love about BTE. That was the impact for me. When I think about the individuals we touched, and then you multiply all the BTE sites, all the students that go through it. And it becomes that ripple effect, right? You've got the drops of water, but they keep creating ripples and waves, and that's how I view BTE. To be one of those drops, and our program to be one of those ripples, it becomes the wave of change. It's the best experience I've done in my career. I am grateful all the time.

Jamie Twomey: Seeing the benefit of programs like BTE, that kind of exposure, it's a generational effect. It filters down, you know...you're kind of breaking that mentality of 'because I'm from this area I can't do X,Y and Z.' That gets passed down to your kids. That gets passed on to their kids and it just becomes a wider community kind of feeling. It just again becomes much brighter, more I suppose, optimistic.

Kamal Khan: And that's what Bridge to Employment did, it showed students how to strengthen themselves, think and reach for the sky. The legacy is that BTE has shown results. And consistent results. Every year. And I do believe that without BTE, many of these students would have quit high school or stopped after they graduated from high school.

Tiffany Nesbey: I was very proud as I worked with all of the New Brunswick high school programs. Every single year we had students who didn't have the confidence to apply to reach

or even target schools, but every year we had students who were accepted to their reach schools. Every year we had students who were accepted to Ivy League colleges. And you got to watch the growth of the students who doubted themselves or felt that college wasn't necessarily a fit for them. And that, to me, is the bigger piece of BTE... the students seeing the value in themselves and their potential.

Julie Solomon: First and foremost, I think the legacy of BTE lies with the students who have been participants in BTE and who go on to take the new knowledge, skills, motivations, attitudes, behaviors, and use those as they move ahead. Apply those learnings to their futures and to be able to do things like set goals and work towards the goals and be persistent and not give up and strive to achieve. I think that's a very important legacy of BTE.

Sam Cox, Alumnus, BTE Rochester, NY (2007-2010): In retrospect, you realize how big of an impact it had on your career. If I think back, having BTE on my resume really helped me get into business school, which helped me to be able to get my first jobs...I've just realized the value that it provided me while I was young, in high school, to be able to prepare me to be a professional today.

Marta Djalleta, Alumna, BTE Wissahickon, NJ (2012-2015): We had a shadowing day for the participants in my BTE program and then also with the employees at Janssen. I got to shadow someone that was doing corporate philanthropy at the Janssen office. So that was really cool for me to learn more about, and I actually ended up doing corporate philanthropy as a job after college. And I do a little bit of corporate philanthropy in my job now. That [shadowing experience] kind of opened my eyes to that possible job.

Melvin Kioka, Alumnus, BTE Nairobi, Kenya (2013-2016): I think I learned how to be more self-aware. I learned how to make friends... I met university students who gave me more insight, so without BTE I don't think I would even be in the school that I was.

Shaun McAllister, Alumnus, BTE High Wycombe, UK (2014-2017): BTE definitely helped me pick a course for college, and they definitely kind of pushed me towards work in the pharma industry. When you are coming to the end of school, but you literally have no idea what you want to do... My mentor, she was saying, 'Oh, I did this in college,' and she talked about all the bits she was doing at work, and I was like, it's all very interesting. I started to be really interested, and then started focusing on biology and stuff in school, and here I am. The program did kind of direct me into an area that I am very happy with now. I never would have considered working in a lab for a pharmaceutical company as a career after college.

Marilyn Teutle Cuautle: The program teaches you a lot of things that maybe aren't emphasized in school, or at least for my school. Overall it's about advocating for yourself and how to do that. I feel like that applies to every part of life really, and the program really developed that for me. My sense of self.

Aliyah Saleem: [As a sophomore at Rutgers] right now, it doesn't feel like I'm holding back because there's so many people who are rooting for me, so many people who are here to help. It doesn't feel like I'm going through this journey alone...I've been unafraid because I'm immersed in this village who just wants to help you so much... I would have chosen this path over and over again because I gained so much.

J&J volunteers and other BTE partners also remarked about the powerful impact the program had on their lives personally and professionally.

Lucy Phillips: [Students] feel like they've got someone in their corner, and they genuinely believe they can do anything and that for me, is just the greatest gift you can give to any young person. I feel like I'm actually making a difference, and it's a part of my life that really brings joy to it. You know, I love seeing young people succeed and be exposed to a world which sometimes isn't very nice to them and to show them that there are good people out there and there is a future for them. You know, like, I come home from BTE events, just smiling and so happy because it makes me really thankful. It makes me really grateful to work for J&J, but it also makes me realize how lucky I am in life. Which you know you don't always get reminded of. So yeah, it's impacted me a lot.

Mary Lou Stuart, J&J Champion, BTE Milpitas, CA (2001-2005): You know, after retiring and looking back over my 22-year career with J&J, I have to say that BTE was one of the most impactful things that I was able to do in my role. How many people have the opportunity in their career to actually touch the lives of so many students? And to give them the opportunity to experience what they might want to do as a career and to actually work in that job in a corporation before going on to college?

Jez Sherman: BTE also taught me about interacting with a wider variety of people, because when you're running the program, you know, one aspect you're talking with NGOs. The other aspect you're dealing with the kids at the school, then you're dealing with the management at the school, and you're dealing with external parties. Then you're dealing with BTE staff. So that gives you a broader strategic outlook on everything, which can help you with your work as well.

But I think it probably also gave a sense of worth and fulfillment to the people who were involved in helping me run the program, because a lot of them committed quite a bit of time to it. And I think they have come out the back end feeling that it was a worthwhile time, and it was something that should have been done, and was done. And we managed to get it done well.

Lisa Johnson: J&J has created an employee engagement program where people can feel proud, where employees can build their own professional development skills, their leadership skills, supervisory skills. We've had people tell us that they have built their public speaking and

presentation skills from going through BTE. So, I think the legacy for them of giving back and living their credo is giving back to the communities in which they live and work. This exemplifies that and it can point them to a product or a model, and more importantly, to success. They've changed people's lives directly by their mentorship or their career coaching.

Michelle DuPreez, J&J Champion, BTE East London, South Africa (2018-2020): [BTE] taught me a lot about definitely leadership skills, planning, organizing, communicating, every area. And I felt like my strength and confidence grew. And for the community, BTE opened my eyes to see so many different things.

BTE will also be remembered as an important and noteworthy Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program and a bedrock for the future Johnson & Johnson workforce.

Conrad Person: I would say it's about enlightened self-interest. BTE is very much a project that will and probably does serve Johnson & Johnson's ends. In the highest sense, it's not about us trying to have outsize influence on people, but it's about us having a deep, deep relationship with a relatively small number of students, the trajectory of whose lives was almost certainly changed as a result of the arrangement. So to me that leads to health care providers for the next half century.

Michael Bzdak: Hopefully BTE becomes part of the history of J&J, especially in the last 30 years. It will be mentioned alongside the vaccine and other happenings that are significant to the company, as one of the longest sustained corporate social responsibility activities by any company.

Amanda McMahon: I think the legacy of J&J is that BTE is one of their longest standing corporate social responsibility philanthropic programs ever. I think that it is one of their only programs where they have such robust data on young people, and youth and program accomplishments. I think the signature employee engagement component is also really important, whereas most other programs don't have that requirement. I think integrating employee engagement is part of what makes this program work.

Jeff Vega: Being catalytic and helping to introduce resources that spurred on other resources to help children... That'll be [BTE's] legacy—that was a game changer.

**“HOW CAN WE REACH
MORE STUDENTS? HOW
CAN WE HAVE A GREATER
IMPACT?”**

PART 6:

BTE LOOKS AHEAD

After reflecting on the past 30 years of BTE, alumni and partners offered ideas for the program's future. The key theme was expansion. Many expressed hopes of expanding BTE's reach to support students in more cities and more countries, possibly with assistance from additional funders.

Michael Bzdak: We should be collaborating even though it is a program with our name on it. You know, nothing we do is proprietary, we could easily partner with different industries to have career paths for students. And reach a lot more students. I think we could partner with government and other foundations.

Peg Forrestel: I'd like to see BTE at every operating company site around the world, I mean like that's the big vision. And my hope is you know the operating companies see that value and that impact and look to invest in it, from a sustainability standpoint and obviously engaging our partners and doing the same, so that we can bring it to new sites around the world.

Mary Lou Stuart: I would love to see BTE continue on a global path to create more programs for understanding between the students and more opportunity for networking.

Laura Warner: I'd say just more of it. I think there's many communities that need BTE, so the more we can do it the better, I think it's one of our most impactful community programs.

Laura Nel: I would like to see more organizations come on board, because obviously J&J can't fund everything always, so I would love to see BTE start a broader community of funders. I would love to see the concept that is BTE grow...Because the cost is the only limiting factor. It would be great if there was a way to scale it through collaboration.

Yezenia Ramos: My question to myself and to those on the team, is how can we reach more students? How can we have a greater impact? So when we do go into a community, we're not just working with 35 to 50 students, but we're really hitting a home run by touching the majority of the students.

We've also thought about, you know, can we take this model and hand it to another company and say, 'hey, partner with us and do it in the communities that we can't reach.' J&J is not in every part of the world, and so how can we take this great model that we feel that we've built and really expand it and get others to join in with us on this?

Amanda McMahon: What does it mean to empower and guide youth? As we move into the next decade, we may need to think more clearly about what [students] have to offer and how can we build their skills in a way that they are empowered to do the teaching? If that makes sense, rather than us teaching. More guiding, more inspiring, that kind of shift.

Julie Solomon: But I would like to see additional focus on how to sustain at least elements of the program, if not the whole program. Of course New Brunswick is an exception, but in most sites there's one cohort of students that has the opportunity to go through this program.

One specific way of expanding BTE's reach is through technology. Harnessing lessons learned through virtual meetings during the pandemic could lead to stronger connections across sites and among alumni.

Amanda McMahon: I think we've done a good job so far of adjusting to this new sort of virtual world. But even if everything goes back to being in person, this virtual component is still not [going away]. It's never going to be what it used to be. So, moving forward, we're using it as an opportunity to think about, how can we better connect, globally, students with volunteers?

Carrie Malone: I would really like to be able to see BTE use technology to open it up to even more students in more unique and rural settings, because I think that sometimes that gets overlooked. But with all of the technology that we have to connect our Johnson & Johnson sites with our school districts, we don't necessarily have to limit ourselves anymore with that, so we would definitely love to see that.

Laura Warner: I'd love to see more connection between alumni.

Lisa Johnson: We could do some cultural exchanges remotely like learning about other parts of the world so that it brings more to a community, in that young people see themselves as part of something bigger and larger.

Another key element of BTE expansion is a focus on diversity. BTE can play an important part in increasing minority representation in STEM education and careers.

Michael Bzdak: I think in the United States, I'm hopeful, that we can do more to help students of color achieve, whether it's entering J&J or other companies or other careers. I just think it's a perfect model because we are already targeting underserved high schools in the United States.

Conrad Person: I do believe that BTE ought to seek to have appropriate representation in universities that have historically served the African American community. Now that could be

HCBUs, but it could also be some of the urban colleges. The city colleges and things like that. I think I'd love to see BTE link to some of the fairly broad announcements the company has made around its diversity.

Peg Forrestel: As we focus on health and equity within our organization, and you see the disparities in terms of representation in the health care profession by minorities, it's really not reflective of minority representation in the population. And we need to change that, and we need to change that for a lot of reasons, not least of which is to ensure there's culturally competent care.

Jamie Twomey: A lot of people moving from secondary school to university struggle finding disability supports. And kind of being able to cope with the university life and trying to, I suppose, mitigate the effects of having certain disabilities and stuff, so I feel like just maybe some more [focus] on that.

Inspired by their BTE mentors, alumni looked forward to giving back to their communities in time.

Marta Djallela: I think I didn't really realize how incredible of an opportunity it was at the time I'm so fortunate... Not every high school student had the opportunity to participate in a program like BTE. So I just feel so lucky that we had the opportunity to engage with a company like Johnson & Johnson, that has so many resources and is willing to devote a lot of those resources to us... It's cool to see that a program that I got so much value in is being replicated to give more high school kids the opportunity to engage with it.

Melvin Kioka: If there was an opportunity for a reunion, I would be down for it!

Aliyah Saleem: I think there could be more of giving back to the program, or maybe having student mentors. Maybe with the alumni going back in to work with the current participants, having the alumni share their experiences and the participants as well. So it would be kind of like a learning experience for both counterparts.

Shaun McAllister: My mentor is telling me she does want me to go back into the next cycle – I think it's in two or three years – as a mentor, which I'd be completely up for because I've gotten so much from this, I'd have to give some back first.

**“I JUST HOPE IT GOES ON
FOREVER, UNTIL THEY HELP
EVERYBODY.”**



Building Partnerships.
Transforming Communities.
Empowering Youth.



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| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
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Empowering Youth.



ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE

FHI 360 staff members and representatives of the BTE Youth Leadership Council interviewed 30 BTE alumni and partners, spanning 30 years and more than a dozen sites, to collect participants' personal oral histories of their time with BTE. Some of the interview respondents granted permission to share the full transcript of their oral history interviews. Visit the [Bridge to Employment website](#) to access full interview transcripts from participants in the oral history.

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