Darlene Smith first heard about SJC Bridges Out of Poverty from her diabetic instructor. They were discussing avenues to change her life around, and he told her about Bridges. Two years later, Darlene is now a graduate of the Financial Management Class, certified with Talk With Your Baby, a regular participant at Health and Wellness meetings and the AKA Leadership Program.

“Bridges out of Poverty took me to another level, where I got out of from poverty on my own. It helped me get out of the world I was living in, and I found out I didn’t have to be…how do I put it… I didn’t have to be poor. I was stuck in a world that I can’t even explain to you. I woke up. And I finally graduated. I couldn’t believe it. I completed something in my life. I couldn’t believe it. I was standing there in front of everybody, and I graduated.

I learned how to be a part of something, part of the community. I’ve been in this house since 1997, and it’s 2014 now. You know it’s like I never really took part of living in the neighborhood; I was always complaining. I abused the system. I felt poor. You know it was like…I can’t explain it to you. I can’t even put it into words…how important it is to have taken this opportunity. ”

Biggest takeaway? “Everything. I took away from everything, and it seems like I still have a lot more to learn. Because, how can I put it…I was like the child who is just not done growing up, and I still have a lot to learn. But I learned a lot in a short period of time. It was life-changing. It’s like I could stand on top of a mountain and tell everybody about it. And it all started with my diabetic instructor. Just one person.

I believe in the higher power called God. When opportunities come, you have to take them. You have gotta get out of your comfort zone. You can’t stay in that comfort zone, or you’ll miss out on a lot.”

Halfway through the interview, she simply stated, “I’m just happy. I’m sitting here happy.” The interview brought back happy memories thinking of all the friends and progress she has made through Bridges Out of Poverty. In her own words: “Bonnie taught me how to find a solution Amber believed in me. Her friendship means a lot to me.”

Darlene’s next steps are to continue being involved with Bridges Out of Poverty and bringing other women into the program, because as she says, “I know it really has a lot to offer.” But she can’t force anybody: “you just have to go and see for yourself, and then after that you’re on your own.”

On her free time, she continues going to different classes and being involved with the community. Right now, she’s sponsoring a lady who’s currently in a program for rehab.

Last words of advice: “**Keep going**. Keep going. Don’t stop. Don’t stop. Keep going, don’t stop. I feel like I’m on a journey, and this is a true story. I’m on this journey, and if I stop…nuh uh, I can’t stop. Gotta keep going. Because God has something planned for me. Gotta keep on going. We’re only promised today, we aren’t guaranteed today, and the past is gone. I take every bit of the day and keep going.”