In 2007, the Archway Partnership was established in Washington County. From this collaboration came a series of ongoing listening sessions throughout the community to develop a list of priorities.

Topping the list was the need for increased access to health care professionals such as Registered Nurses (RNs) and physicians.

The Archway Partnership was asked to facilitate a series of meetings with officials from the Washington County Regional Medical Center (WCRMC), representatives from Sandersville Technical College, potential healthcare employers and community leaders to assess the level of interest in a health care professional to RN Bridge program.

Survey results indicated that the Bridge program would be a great asset to the community and was strongly supported. Following the positive response from the community, the partners moved forward with planning and implementation.

To address the need for increased healthcare access, WCRMC and Sandersville Technical College created a partnership to establish an EMT/LPN to RN Bridge program at the college. Officials at Sandersville Technical College agreed to upgrade their technology equipment to better serve the needs of this program. Additional meetings were held with Darton College, with officials agreeing to establish a Bridge program branch at the nearby campus.

The total estimated cost for creating this nurse recruitment program at the two colleges was $180,000, with most of the funds generated dedicated to faculty salaries. Funding for the creation and ongoing implementation of the program is provided by the University System of Georgia.

In October 2009, the Sandersville Healthcare Professional to RN Bridge program officially began, with the first class cohort of 25 students enrolled. This inaugural class of Bridge students is on track to graduate in 2010. Approximately 90 professionals have expressed interest in the Bridge program.

Advancing Community Priorities: The Archway Partnership has identified several key community advancement priorities in Washington County, with health care and economic development being two such issues. The Sandersville Healthcare Professional to RN Bridge program established in the Washington County community works to address both of those priorities, by fueling the local work force, as well as creating easier access to health care.