

Jaziyah Forte-DuBois Middle School

BRIDGE

Hi, my name is Jaziyah Forte and I am a student at the Du Bois Middle School and my mom, Joallen Forte, is a preacher at Macedonia Baptist Church in Great Barrington — the Town where Elizabeth Freeman made history in the Berkshire County courthouse. I have attended Macedonia since I was a little baby. I have known Ms. Gwendolyn for about 4 years now, but people in my family have known and worked with her for much more. This year was my fourth year participating and being a part of BRIDGE. This summer I went to our summer Happiness Toolbox/Real Talk program as an LIT which if you didn't know stands for a youth leader in training or leader in training, and I am working my way up and learning how to be a leader. While being a part of BRIDGE I've been able to learn about many leaders and groups of color in our Berkshire history through our Berkshire Legends program run by Stephanie Wright whose family is from right here in Sheffield. One of the leaders I had the opportunity to learn about over the years was Elizabeth Freeman which alot of you might also known as mumbet. I hope you know who elizabeth freeman is by now but, if you don't I'll tell you who she is and why it is important to see this statue today. She was the first enslaved African American to file and win a freedom suit in Massachusetts. It's important for me personally to see this statue built because it shows how long my culture has been leading and claiming our freedom and how far my culture has come. To be able to see such an important woman standing in the center of Sheffield is truly inspiring. It has inspired my bravery and perseverance as a young Black woman. To me it's so important for middle schoolers and young people in general to be able to have this statue represent such a big impact she had on our history from right here in the Berkshires where I live. I hope that everyone and every student especially appreciates this monument as much as I do.

Thank you.