



Connections

Connecting homeless families to a better future.

Theresa: “Bridge gave me a new beginning”

Family and loyalty mean everything to Theresa. When she was growing up, her uncle helped raise her and saw her through difficult times. When Theresa’s son Johnny was little, her uncle was their rock and provided childcare for him as well.

So, when her uncle was diagnosed with terminal cancer, Theresa quit her job to care for him full-time, taking him to all his doctor appointments and treatments, and providing comfort and care for the last year of his life.

But, once he passed away, Theresa found herself in a new predicament. She’d exhausted all her savings and plunged into debt. She couldn’t find a permanent job that paid enough to keep a roof over her head. And before long, she and Johnny lost their home and were crashing with friends. And then they started bouncing from hotel to hotel.

“I couldn’t get a full-time job because employers would look at my address and ask why I was staying in a hotel, and end the interview,” Theresa remembers. “And it was hard on my son. He had so much potential but so much stress from living hotel to hotel, and he couldn’t excel in

school. I knew I had to make a change to get our life back.”

And because of the loyalty of supporters like you, Theresa could begin to make that change in Bridge Communities.

Theresa says she’ll never forget the day she was accepted into the program. “When

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Molly [Howieson, Senior Case Manager] called me up and told me I was accepted, I cried! I knew someone was watching over us,” she said. “Molly told me where to meet them at the new apartment, and my mentors from Good Shepherd [Lutheran Church, Naperville] had set up everything inside for me already. It was so touching, I couldn’t believe it. I had been stuck in a rut, but when I was accepted into Bridge, I knew I would get my life back and my

son would have the stability he needed.”

Theresa soon found that changing her old habits was easier said than done, though. “My first six months in the program were tough for me,” she admits. “I’d still take my son out to McDonald’s, and my mentors were not happy about me spending that money. After that, my budget was only \$75 a week—for gas, groceries and laundry.” Soon, she and Johnny learned to cook budget-friendly meals through the help of Manager of Nutrition Services Megan DeAngelis, and began to use the mobile food pantry services as well. “I wanted to show I was trustworthy and could stick to my budget if I put my mind to it. And when I did, their budget program worked dramatically for me.”

Once she started to see her bills shrink and her savings grow, Theresa’s mindset began to transform, and she set her eyes on a future goal: homeownership. And for that, she knew she needed a secure career. She’d entered the Bridge program working temp jobs

“You don’t know what to expect, and it seems like a long journey, but at the end you will see that it was all worth it.”

at \$12/hour, and soon found a permanent job paying slightly more. But, when the pandemic hit in March of 2020, her employer laid off the entire staff.

“When I lost my job, I was panicked about telling my mentors,” Theresa says. “But they were so understanding because a lot of people lost their jobs due to COVID. I kept looking for a job and worked closely with Dorothy [Douglas, Employment Counselor]. And I put all my unemployment and stimulus funds into savings because I knew what my goal was.”

Theresa also attended Bridge’s Job Readiness workshop series, and became more comfortable during the interview process. And before long, she secured a customer service position with a mortgage company, earning the highest salary she’d ever had, plus benefits. She recently celebrated her one-year anniversary on the job.

And, she has paid off all of her debts as well. “One of my mentors is like a walking calculator,” she says with a smile. “He helped me figure out how to first pay off my car. Then, I knocked down all my other bills, one at a time.



You can make an impact!

When you support Bridge Communities, you give a new beginning for families like Theresa’s.

Please make a donation in honor of the 100+ families served this year on www.bridgecommunities.org.

The New Normal and Beyond



Dear friends,
As I pause and reflect on both the challenges and triumphs we have successfully navigated through over the past year, I am filled with gratitude in abundance for the supporters

of Bridge Communities. I am thankful to all of you for journeying alongside the families and staff of Bridge Communities as we move into the new normal and beyond.

Over the past several months, we have diligently worked to develop our strategic plan for the next three years, taking us into the future. Your thoughtful and knowledgeable participation has helped shape our strategy, and we are pleased to present you with a plan that is both mission-driven and data informed. Since our beginnings over 30 years ago, Bridge Communities has had at the center of its mission the goal of creating equitable opportunities and outcomes for all of the families we serve. How we serve families through our mission is the essence of social justice and is at the heart of what Bridge Communities has always done—one family at a time. Our strategic plan builds on our strong foundation

and evolves to meet the changing and in some cases more challenging needs of families facing homelessness in these times. We are excited to begin executing our plan, maximizing the opportunity of serving more families even better in the future. You can access the entire strategic plan via the QR code below, or by visiting www.bridgecommunities.org.

I am excited about the possibilities of how to better serve our mission and evolve our program to help families move from homelessness to hope and stability, with a goal of self-sufficiency. And I am committed to keep you engaged and informed every step of the way.

Thank you for your commitment to empowering the courageous families of Bridge Communities as they work toward a better, brighter future.

Sincerely,

Karen S. Wells
CEO, Bridge Communities



As I saw my debt going away, I knew I would never get into that situation again. It is an amazing thing not to live paycheck to paycheck anymore.”

In addition to eliminating her debt, Theresa opened a savings account and an emergency fund—both of which she contributes to religiously. By the time she'd been in the Bridge program for two years, she was ready to accomplish her final goal. In June, she closed on her very own condo in Wheaton.

She loves working from home, and has been promoted twice at work this year. Johnny's in his sophomore year, now earns all As and Bs, and started honors classes this fall. Their family now has the security they'd dreamed of for so long.

“My mentors remind me that I worked hard for this, but I'm still shocked I did it all on my own,” she says. “And all the advice I got from my mentors and support from Bridge got me there. Bridge gave me a new beginning.”

To the new families in Bridge Communities, Theresa offers these words of wisdom: “Don't get discouraged if your mentors seem hard on you, because they just want the best for you and for you to reach your goals at the end of the program. They care about you and want you to be successful. Don't give up, participate, use everything Bridge has to offer—and it will be amazing what you can accomplish.” 🏡

Thriving Through the Challenges

Over the past 18 months, your loyalty, generosity and support has empowered the families served by Bridge Communities, as they've not only been surviving the challenges of the pandemic—they've been thriving.

As we've collectively made steps toward normalcy, your support has ensured the following for the 100+ families served by our program this year:

- Vaccine education, PSAs, access to clinics, incentives and more to ensure the families, volunteers and staff of Bridge Communities can become vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Upgraded HEPA filtration in Bridge buildings, increased sanitation, and strict adherence to CDC guidelines as we safely re-engage our in-person services.
- Safe, socially-distanced and outdoor programs and camps.
- Continued online workshops for our job readiness program and parenting classes.
- A safe reopening of our Bridge Communities Boutique, providing free professional clothing to working moms in our program.



Thank you for supporting Bridge Communities as we work emerge from the pandemic, stronger and more resilient than ever before.

TAX SMART GIFTS

Many Bridge friends are leveraging their securities, mutual funds, and IRAs to make a tremendous impact on the lives of families experiencing homelessness. Because of your wise investing, you may be able to give more to Bridge Communities while minimizing your taxes.

Appreciated Securities:

Consider using highly appreciated assets such as Stock or Mutual Funds to make your donation.

You will avoid the capital gains tax while at the same time claim the full charitable value of the assets.

IRA Charitable Rollover:

If you or your spouse are 70 ½ years old, you can make a significant gift without using cash from other sources of income. Contribute all or a portion of your required minimum distributions from your IRA directly to Bridge and reduce your taxable income.

Donor Advised Fund:

Creating your own Donor Advised Fund (DAF) is an easy way for you to make a lasting contribution. You can make a large contribution to your DAF in one year to maximize your charitable deductions and provide loyal support to Bridge Communities through subsequent years' giving.

Please contact your financial advisor about these and other tax reduction giving options.

Thank you for your support!

Our friends in the community make a world of difference for the families served by Bridge. Thank you for your generosity and compassion for the families of Bridge Communities!

We're grateful for Kate and the Girl Scouts from Westgate Elementary! They generously donated 30 Mother's Day craft kits, so kids could make their moms one-of-a-kind handmade gifts this year. Thank you!

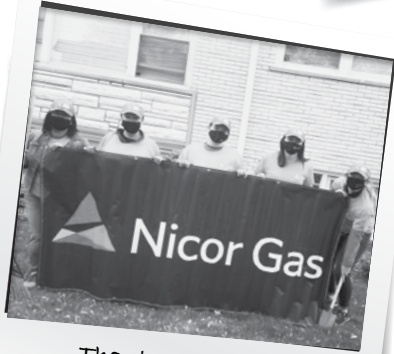


Thank you, Westgate Girl Scouts!



Thank you, Perma-Seal!

Thank you to the Perma-Seal team for donating 90 kitchen essentials bags to Bridge Communities! Each bag contained sponges, dish towels, garbage bags, aluminum foil and more—all the little things needed in a kitchen. The bags were much appreciated!



Thank you, Nicor!

We're thankful for our friends from Nicor, who spent a day sprucing up a Bridge campus, laying down mulch and beautifying the gardens! Thank you for increasing the curb appeal at the campus.



Thank you, Victory Cathedral!

Many thanks to our friends from Victory Cathedral for your generous \$1,000 donation to help support the families served by Bridge Communities!



Thank you, Carol Stream Rotary Club!

Three cheers for the Carol Stream Rotary Club, who held a personal care and cleaning supplies drive for the families served by Bridge Communities!

We are grateful for the Wheaton Lions Club! They generously awarded Bridge Communities a \$2,000 grant to help support our nutrition program. Thank you!



Thank you, Wheaton Lions!

GetInvolved!



Would your faith community, workplace, or club like to make a difference for the families served by Bridge Communities?

Check out our Get Involved! Guide for opportunities.



Q&A with with Rani McKee | Volunteer Tutor and BBQ Committee Co-Chair

Q. How did you first get involved with Bridge Communities?

A. About 15 years ago, a very dear friend asked me to help. Our kids were young, and the timing was right to get involved with something that mattered.

Q. What do you do as a volunteer?

A. Tutoring has been my favorite activity because I interact directly with kids every week and the success can be measured. COVID and e-learning were a real challenge but equally rewarding because my student at the time and I talked daily, and she was able to thrive and keep up with her class.

The Backyard BBQ is a huge undertaking. There are about 12 of us who meet regularly throughout the year to pull off this massive one-day event. My area of expertise is Piglet Playland – which is fun for the kids, a relief to the parents, and exhausting for me!

Q. What's your favorite Bridge memory?

A. When I first began tutoring N, she was not meeting her daily school reading requirement. She actually avoided reading



altogether. So, we started a “book club” and chose a series that seemed like a good fit. Flash forward to today, and we are just about to finish all 20 books in the series. Recently, I asked her if the current book in the series was her favorite, because it was particularly funny. She said, “No, the first book is my favorite.” When I asked why, she said, “Because it made me want to keep reading.”

Q. What's the best thing about volunteering with Bridge Communities?

A. Bridge Communities teaches independence. I have watched many families graduate from the program, and they are productive, smart, wonderful assets to our community. 🏡

You, too, can volunteer as a tutor with Bridge Communities! To learn about tutoring for Bridge Communities, please contact Jill at tutoring@bridgecommunities.org.



2022 Event Lineup

Mark your calendars for the fun events Bridge Communities has in store for 2022!

Wine Women & Shoes: Saturday, March 19

Oak Brook Marriott, Oak Brook

Celebrating Women, Transforming Lives

Spring Luncheon: Friday, April 22

Danada House, Wheaton

The Garage Party: Saturday, June 4

Naper Auto Works, Naperville

The Bridge Communities Classic Golf Event:

Date TBD

Naperville Country Club, Naperville

The Glen Ellyn Backyard BBQ:

Saturday, September 10

Downtown Glen Ellyn

Sleep Out Saturday: Saturday, November 5

Throughout the Chicagoland area

Follow us on social media for updates on our upcoming events! [f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [i](#) [y](#)

Sleep Out Saturday: November 6, 2021

United: One Night, One Community

Last year's Sleep Out Saturday drew the biggest amount of participants, groups and donors in nearly a decade, raising over \$100,000 to help the families of Bridge Communities. And you can make this year's event even bigger and better!

Take action for the families served by Bridge Communities and sleep out in your yard, driveway or car on **Saturday, November 6, 2021!**

You Pick the Date!

The countywide sleep out will be held on Saturday, November 6, **but you can also participate on any night convenient for you between October 15-December 4!** When you register your date on www.sleepoutsaturday.org, simply select "Other" and select the date that's best for you.

What's involved in Sleep Out Saturday?

Whether you are participating in a large group, solo, or anything in between, Bridge Communities will help you to make it an unforgettable event! We offer complete Sleep Out Saturday toolkits with activities, movies and more, to make your experience memorable and life-changing. We'll also share guides to help you fundraise and tips to help groups participating virtually feel more connected and experience the event "remotely together."

Sleep out or sleep in!

If you're wary about sleeping outside in the cold, we also offer tips on how to "sleep in" without a bed. Many Bridge families have experienced homelessness this way by staying at a shelter, or doubled up with family and friends. Our Sleep Out Saturday Toolkit provides details on how to transform your environment and create an empathy-building experience.

Register or donate to support a participant at www.sleepoutsaturday.org, and for more info, contact Margo Matthew at margo.matthew@bridgecommunities.org or 630-403-5091.



Why Sleep Out Saturday?

You can help families recovering from the traumas of homelessness when you raise funds and spend one night sleeping outside in tents, boxes and cars in honor of Bridge Communities. When you sleep out, donate or fundraise for Sleep Out Saturday, you'll support families striving toward a better future. Plus, the event is a perfect empathy-building experience for your family, business, club or faith community.

Register today at sleepoutsaturday.org!



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Karen S. Wells *Chief Executive Officer*

Connections is a publication of Bridge Communities, Inc., a program providing transitional housing for homeless families.

The mission of Bridge Communities is to transition homeless families to self-sufficiency by working with partners to provide mentoring, housing, and supportive services. Our vision is a community where all families are healthy, financially stable, and living in affordable housing. Each of our core values, Partnership, Empowerment, Integrity, Respect, Hope, apply to everyone involved in Bridge Communities – clients, mentors, program partners, volunteers, donors, board members, staff and community.

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www.bridgecommunities.org

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Bridge Communities is a non-profit organization that houses and mentors homeless families who live and work in DuPage County.

Please help us save on printing and postage.

If you receive duplicate copies of this newsletter, or no longer wish to receive it, please return your mailing label in the enclosed envelope. *Thank you!*

TIME SENSITIVE MATERIAL
PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY

Because of your help

With your generous support, the families of Bridge Communities recently reached these milestones:

- **Brandy** earned a raise to \$20/hour
- **Josie, Jess, and Jessica** purchased a home
- **Lashawna** was awarded a \$5,000 scholarship
- **Donniece** paid off all her debt
- **Kristy's son** is now a freshman at Northern Illinois University
- **Kaitlyn** raised her credit score by 200 points
- **Mariana** was promoted to a supervisor role at her job
- **Ashley** earned a 20% raise at work
- **Maria** raised her credit score to 740
- **Latashia's teen son** learned to budget as well, and saved up for his own car and insurance
- **Theresa** was approved for a home purchase
- **K and D** are now debt-free
- **Jordyn** landed a new job, doubling his salary
- Teens **Nathan and Kamal** landed great summer jobs
- **Heaven** was awarded a \$2,000 scholarship
- **Hayley** paid off her school loans
- Bridge alums **Kelly and Tony** got married in July!



Bridge alums Tony and Kelly met several years ago while in Bridge. They wed in July, blending their beautiful family of seven kids, purchased a home, and they are both thriving in their careers as well! Please join us in wishing Tony and Kelly a lifetime of love and happiness.

When you journey alongside the families of Bridge Communities, you empower families as they work toward self-sufficiency, permanent housing and a lifetime of security and success. Please make a gift in honor of Bridge Communities at www.bridgcommunities.org.