



# Connections

*Connecting homeless families to a better future.*

Josie: “Thank you for seeing something in me”

For years, devoted mom Josie lived a calm, stable life with her partner and their young daughter in the western suburbs. She also maintained a part-time job and enjoyed the security they could provide their daughter, and her steady work-life balance.

But, less than three short years ago, her life was turned upside down.

“I found out that [my now-ex] was not keeping his promises and responsibilities,” she remembers. “First and foremost, he was not paying rent on time, and then he paid nothing at all for six months straight. That eventually got us to the eviction process. And a couple of weeks before leaving him, I found out that he had been gambling our money and savings away. That was very hurtful.”

Josie and her daughter were grateful to move in with family temporarily, but they knew it wasn't a long-term solution. “My sister and brother-in-law helped me in trying to

find an apartment, but with just working part time, I didn't have enough income,” says Josie. “I had nowhere to go. I stayed with my sister and her family for a while, but it wasn't home.”

Josie confided in a coworker about her situation, and the coworker referred her to Bridge Communities. And thanks to supporters like you, Josie could embark on the next chapter of her life.

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## “Thank you for seeing something in me” *continued*

“When I first found out that Bridge chose me to go through the program, I couldn’t speak or think,” says Josie. “I thought it was just a dream. Nothing like this ever happens to me... I never get chosen. I was numb, but with excitement and full of happiness inside.”

These mixed emotions continued as she faced her first challenge in the program: meeting her mentors. “I was scared meeting all of them,” Josie admits. “I thought, ‘what are they thinking of me?’ And I had to give my trust over to people I didn’t know.”

Early on, it was difficult for Josie to share her feelings and goals with her mentors from St. Elizabeth Seton—Marilyn, Elizabeth, and Judi. But as time passed, trust built all around. “I had to open up, and to be honest about how I was feeling. I had to tell myself to trust, because what would I have to lose? I slowly started to get to know each of them, and it got easier for me. And I love that I have different age group of mentors. It gave me a good sense of strong women in

different generations.”

Her mentors surrounded Josie and her daughter with love and support as they acclimated to their new life. Josie dove into the programs offered by Bridge, including relationship classes, parenting workshops, nutrition classes and the Reality Kitchen one-to-one cooking classes. Her daughter grew stronger through Bridge’s Rainbows peer support group for kids, and enjoyed YMCA camps as well.

Before long, Josie was ready to face her next challenge: transitioning to a full-time career. The first step was taking Bridge’s job readiness workshop.

“I hadn’t interviewed in 10 years, so I was as scared as could be,” Josie remembers. “That class was a good refresher and helped me become more confident. Plus, Dorothy [Douglas, Bridge Employment Counselor] helped me with my resume, and what to say or not to say when interviewing, too.”

That confidence and training paid off—at the height of the pandemic, Josie still obtained a great full-time

position with benefits at a new company, working in accounts receivable. She’ll celebrate her one-year anniversary there this

**“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.”**

summer. “My long-term goal is to learn as much as I can in my current position at work and move up in the company,” Josie proudly says.

Says Molly Howieson, Josie’s case manager, “Josie has done an excellent job on paying off her debts and saving for the future. All her hard work is paying off now wonderfully, and she now has the opportunity for homeownership.”

Indeed she does—through all her diligent work and careful saving, Josie has now increased her credit score and saved enough to purchase a home. Josie is currently shopping for a townhouse, and hopes to move in by the start of the summer.

Josie sees the last few years as not only a period of challenge, but also of growth. And she has some words of wisdom for new families entering the Bridge program. “To the new families – yes, it can be scary at first,” she says. “You don’t know what to expect, and it seems like a long journey, but at the end you will see that

### **You can make an impact!**

**You can make an impact for a family like Josie’s when you volunteer as a mentor with Bridge Communities. Our next virtual mentor training class is on May 15—contact [suzanne.thibeault@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:suzanne.thibeault@bridgecommunities.org) for details!**

# Mission Driven and Data Informed



Dear Friends,  
As we recently passed the one-year mark of the pandemic, we at Bridge Communities have certainly seen a lot of change. The challenges of COVID-19

have forced all of us to adapt in ways we never imagined.

And while many things have changed at Bridge, two things have always remained the same: our commitment to the families we serve; and our resolve to help them thrive. We've pivoted to virtual services, helped clients adapt to the fluctuating workforce, provided mental health support, created work- and school-friendly environments within home units, and so much more.

None of this would have been possible without your support. Your generosity has made all the difference and ensured a safe home for 110 families experiencing homelessness in 2020. All of us at Bridge are grateful for you and your compassion for the families we serve.

With the increase in vaccination rates across the state signaling a light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, we are now looking toward the future, and setting plans to continue to create and embrace the new normal.

And with that, we have already begun our strategic planning process, setting our organization-wide goals to take us through the next three years and beyond. Mission Driven and Data Informed: that is our mantra leading into strategic planning, as we use and embrace the findings and data we've collected over the past several years.

In addition to a review of Bridge's mission, vision, values, and impact, we will be conducting a series of engagement and feedback sessions. And, we're renewing our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, on a foundation of social justice that Bridge has always led for the families we serve. This review process will focus on our impact and outcomes, while providing flexibility to best serve our client families in an ever-changing world.

We'll share the results of our strategic planning process with you this fall. Thank you for your passion and your commitment toward our mission, and for your continued support of the courageous families we serve.

Sincerely,

Karen S. Wells  
CEO, Bridge Communities

it was all worth it. Keep up with your budget, meetings, and your goals, and just push yourself. You have great team behind you that will be there for you, no matter what.”

While Josie has always been strong and capable, she is grateful to herself for putting in the work in and reaching a great path forward. And she's grateful to her team for their support and

encouragement along the way.

“For the supporters, volunteers and donors of Bridge, I appreciate you,” she says. “You all have a big heart to make sure that others don't fall behind.

To my mentors, thank you all for being there and keeping me in line, seeing the positive things. To Bridge staff Michelle, Dorothy and Megan, I want to thank you as well for supporting

me and my daughter. And to my case manager Molly, thank you for seeing something in me that I couldn't see, and knowing that I can make it.”

Through Josie's determination and resilience, she's found a bright future for her family. Please join us in congratulating her as she moves from Bridge Communities to homeownership! 🏡

Dear friends,

Your support has been crucial to the success and safety of 110 Bridge families during the most challenging year on record, and we are grateful for you. During this time, we learned not only how resilient our families are; we also learned how flexible our staff and volunteers are, how generous our community is, and how dedicated our mentors and program partners are. Make no mistake, your collective commitment to Bridge families' wellbeing has changed—and in some cases, saved—hundreds of lives.



We are now looking forward to a welcome transition out of the pandemic era, and creating our plans to best support our clients, staff and volunteers during this time. This includes:

- COVID-19 vaccine education for Bridge's clients, volunteers and staff
- Upgraded HEPA filtration in Bridge buildings, increased sanitation, and strict adherence to CDC guidelines as we safely re-engage our in-person services
- Connecting with community partners to safely offer camps, activities, classes and more for Bridge families
- Preparing Bridge families for a return to in-person school and the physical workplace
- Continued Bimonthly COVID-19 newsletter updates to our volunteers and clientele

Please feel free to reach out to me at [will.moeller@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:will.moeller@bridgecommunities.org), and I would welcome the opportunity to share more with you. Thank you for journeying alongside Bridge as we all work toward a healthy, bright future!

Sincerely,  
Will Moeller, LCSW  
Director of Programs  
Bridge Communities



**GetInvolved!**



**Would you like to make an impact for families experiencing homelessness?**

Bridge now has a comprehensive Get Involved Guide to show you all the ways you can help! From drives and fundraisers to events and volunteering, there's a perfect opportunity for you, your community group or your family.

Please visit [bridgecommunities.org/Support-us/Get-Involved-Guide.html](https://bridgecommunities.org/Support-us/Get-Involved-Guide.html) to get your digital copy.

# Thank you for your support!

Friends in the community like you make all the difference—thank you for being a friend to Bridge families!



Thank you, Wheaton Montessori

Thank you to the kids at Wheaton Montessori School, for creating and donating taggie blankets for Bridge families!

Three cheers for the Bosacki family! Because their school wasn't holding an in-person valentine exchange this year, the family's 4 kids created Valentine's Day packages for all the kids in the Bridge program. Thank you for making their holiday sweeter!



Thank you, Bosacki family



Thank you, Top Ladies of Distinction

A big thank-you to the Top Ladies of Distinction for holding a personal care product drive for Bridge families this winter! We are grateful for your support and helping our families meet their budgets.

A special shout-out today to small but mighty volunteer Natalie Worniak! Natalie is a superstar fundraiser for Bridge and has held quarter drives, bake sales and even started a GoFundMe page, all in honor of Bridge families.



Thank you, Natalie Worniak

## One Heart, One Bridge

As a supporter of Bridge Communities, you change lives. You make a difference for 100+ families experiencing homelessness each year. And you are loved.

On February 11, we held a virtual appreciation event to show you just how much you mean to all of us at Bridge! The video is linked on our homepage, [www.bridgecommunities.org](http://www.bridgecommunities.org) under "News and Events"—check it out today!

## Q&A with Sergio Solomon | Volunteer Tutor

### Q. When did you first get involved with Bridge Communities?

A. Around 2015. It was a time in my life that I wanted to get back into tutoring and helping out in my community. There was a solicitation from Bridge asking for tutors. I applied and met with Jill Garbaliuskas.

### Q. What do you do as a tutor?

A. I started tutoring to advise students on their study habits and provide extra homework help. However, the tutoring has morphed into becoming a positive male role model with a little bit of cheerleading. My goals are to completely engage with students, customize learning through their individual interests and emphasize the importance of reading with a strong vocabulary.

### Q. What's your favorite Bridge memory?

A. My favorite memory is showing my students the world's smallest cell phone



(Jelly Pro by Unihertz). It's a really tiny smartphone. They can't believe my phone is so small but still plays videos and sends texts like a normal smartphone. I use my tiny phone as an icebreaker.

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

A. The best thing about volunteering as a tutor is spending time with fantastic kids. They help me feel young by keeping me in the loop with the latest trends. 📱

**Kids need your help more than ever! To learn about tutoring for Bridge Communities, please contact [mary.slade@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:mary.slade@bridgecommunities.org).**

## Join the **Circle of Hope**

When you join the Circle of Hope, you give Bridge families the hope and the reliable support they need most to rebuild their lives. Your monthly or quarterly gifts to Bridge Communities ensure consistency and stability to help them thrive.

The Dempster Family joined the Circle of Hope in 2020. Says Kate Dempster, "I first learned about Bridge Communities from my mom, Laurie Janik, who has volunteered in the past. During Christmas break, we had a family discussion about ways to help other families and children. I showed my kids a few different options for how they could do that, and they chose to give to Bridge Communities. I then explained the various types of donations and they picked a recurring housing donation 'to keep kids warm and safe.' After we set up the donation, my mom told the kids stories of children she had met through her work with Bridge Communities."

Thank you, Dempster Family, for your generous support of Bridge families!



▶▶▶ **Would you like to learn more about joining our Circle of Hope? Contact Susan Hacker at 630-403-5096 or [susan.hacker@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:susan.hacker@bridgecommunities.org).**

# Celebrating Women...Transforming Lives

## Virtual Luncheon Celebration

Friday, April 23, 2021 at 12:30 PM

\$60/Ticket

We are excited to welcome our guests virtually to Celebrating Women, Transforming Lives! Tickets to this year's elevated virtual event will feature gourmet lunch options from My Chef, and will include options for solo celebrations or small group packages. And, as in every year, proceeds for the event will benefit the families served by Bridge Communities.

This year's event will be emceed by ABC7's Judy Hsu, and will honor Theodia Gillespie, CEO of the Quad City Urban League with the Transforming Lives Award, as well as Bridge graduate Sio Sotelo with the Life Transformed Award.

A special thank you to our Matching Grant Donor, DuPage Medical Group Charitable Fund, for matching the first \$15,000 in donations in honor of this event. We are grateful for your support!



To purchase your ticket or donate in honor of Celebrating Women, Transforming Lives, please visit [bridgecommunities.org](http://bridgecommunities.org).

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*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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630-545-0610  
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[www.bridgecommunities.org](http://www.bridgecommunities.org)

We want to share all the latest and greatest news from Bridge Communities with you. Keep in touch with us by connecting with us on our social networks:





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[www.bridgecommunities.org](http://www.bridgecommunities.org)

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

Because of you and your support, Bridge families reached the following achievements:

- **Latasha, Gayle, Sio and Hosanna** each purchased a house
- **Kris** earned her MBA
- **Cassie** obtained a job paying \$17/hour with benefits
- **Stacy** was accepted into nursing school
- **Maria** raised her credit score by 250 points
- **Saeeda** started her first full-time job and moved into her own apartment
- **Diana** paid off all her debt
- **Ashley** raised her credit score to 740
- **Jasmine** started a new job with benefits
- **Dawn's son Ryan** graduated from college
- **Hayley** graduated from college and started prerequisite classes for her masters degree
- **Theresa** earned a promotion at work
- **Jackie** paid off all her debt
- **Michele** completed her associates degree and started a new career
- **Lissa** was promoted to a supervisory role at her job
- **Marketta** started nursing school
- **Tiffany** raised her credit score by over 100 points



Saeeda and her mentors from Our Lady of Mt. Carmel celebrate her graduation from Bridge into her new apartment!

Your support has never been more crucial. It is only because of you that Bridge can provide safe homes to DuPage County families experiencing homelessness, and help them on the road to self-sufficiency and permanent housing. Please make a gift in honor of Bridge families at [www.bridgecommunities.org](http://www.bridgecommunities.org).