



Presented by
Perma-Seal Basement Systems, Inc.



2026 Toolkit

Lights Out for Homelessness





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Why Join Sleep Out Saturday?

Sleep Out Saturday makes a meaningful impact. You will help raise awareness about families experiencing homelessness in DuPage County—and raise money to support families in crisis. **You'll help families served by Bridge Communities--thank you!**

Bridge Communities was started in 1988. This year marks our 38th year serving the DuPage County community Bridge is a grass-roots not-for-profit based in Glen Ellyn. We serve families experiencing homelessness in DuPage County by providing transitional housing and supportive program services, including case management, a trained mentor team, child and adult tutoring, employment counseling and more. During the two years each family is in Bridge Communities, they develop the skills they need to be self-sufficient and sustain permanent housing.

You can safely support Bridge Communities this year while in your chosen location, whether it be in your own home, in your backyard, or with your chosen group or community.

Families and individuals can have a meaningful Sleep Out Saturday experience, right at home.



Quick Facts About Sleep Out Saturday:

Who: Over 75 Sleep Out Saturday Participant Groups made up of individuals, families, church, business and community groups commit to participate—we expect more than 750 participants!

What: Sleep Out Saturday is sponsored by Bridge Communities. Participants sleep outside safely in tents, boxes, or cars and raise donations for doing so. They are also invited to share in our virtual presentation the night of their sleep out. You may also request a Bridge Communities speaker to attend your Sleep Out & share their story!

When: Saturday, November 7, 2026 for the DuPage Countywide Sleep Out Saturday. Or, you can pick your own SOS date between October 24 and November 21, 2026. We will be hosting a rally at College of DuPage on Saturday, November 7th at 6:30pm and would love if everyone joined us!

Where: You can safely sleep out at your home in your backyard, driveway or in your car. Sleep in tents, boxes or doubled up inside with no bed of your own, as many families experience when they live with family and friends.

How: Contact us and we'll send you all the resources you need to make this event a success for your group. We have yard signs, banners, t-shirts, promotional videos, activity ideas and more!

For more information: Contact Margo Matthew at (630) 403-5091 or margo.matthew@bridgecommunities.org. You can also visit us at www.sleepoutsaturday.org

Quick Facts About Family Homelessness

- The major causes of family homelessness are lack of affordable housing, income instability, job loss, health problems, or a family death. Generational poverty, underemployment, lack of marketable job skills, divorce, domestic violence, and high debt are also large contributors to family homelessness.
- In the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin area, food prices have gone up by 2.3% since July 2024. Additionally, shelter costs increased 4.6% since 2024, on top of the previous 6.6% increase from 2023
- 81% of families entering Bridge last year were working either full or part-time, yet still homeless or facing imminent risk of homelessness.
- The majority of children served by Bridge in 2025 were under 12 years old.
- 6.6% of families in DuPage County live below the established poverty line. The most common group to live in poverty are females of childbearing age.
- In 2025, 2,746 children in DuPage County were identified as homeless by schools.
- More than 35 million people in the US live in poverty. That nearly 10.6% of the US population.
- In DuPage County, a single adult supporting two children would need to earn over \$70,000 per year to afford the most basic needs, relevant taxes, and permanent sustainable housing without being housing-cost burdened. However, the median income for incoming clients in 2025 was less than \$39,000 annually, with median debt of \$24,000 and only \$190 in savings. (Cost burdened is defined by HUD as spending more than 30% of your income on housing.)

- A typical mom in our program would need to earn \$35.20 per hour to earn a livable wage and not be cost-burdened in DuPage County.
- The average income for our families at entry into the Bridge Communities Transitional Housing Program is \$17.75/hour.
- Nearly half of all renters in DuPage (44 percent) spend over 30 percent of their income on rent.
- The majority of families facing homelessness are not in shelters or living in cars or on the streets. They are “doubled up,” or staying temporarily in the homes of family and friends. About 2/3 of Bridge families are doubled up before entering our program.
- So, while we help our client families make significant strides towards a better future, as a community, we all can do more to help families achieve more affordable housing, career development and living wages.

By participating in and fundraising for Sleep Out Saturday, you are providing impactful support for the families served by Bridge Communities. Thank you for making a difference in and helping to transform their lives!





Bridge Communities' Impact in 2025

Connecting Families Facing Homelessness to a Brighter Future

The mission of Bridge Communities is to partner with families and their children, providing stable housing and transformational support so they are empowered to overcome homelessness and thrive for generations to come.

Bridge Communities offers a holistic approach to breaking the cycle of homelessness for the families we serve. We provide employment assistance, financial resources, children's services, educational resources, and more.

Bridge Communities has helped 1,000+ families go from homelessness to self-sufficiency and permanent housing.

A Snapshot of 2025 Families:

- 111** families were served (**308** adults and children)
- 47** new families entered the program
 - 100% were low to extremely low income
 - 81% were employed
 - 93% had female heads of household
- 25** families graduated the program

In 2025...

- 29** clients secured new jobs
- 55** clients engaged in employment or education counseling
- 8** adult clients pursued degrees or certifications
- 20** youth received personal tutoring, totaling 283 hours
- 35** youth received mental health support
- 341** Children's Program home visits were made

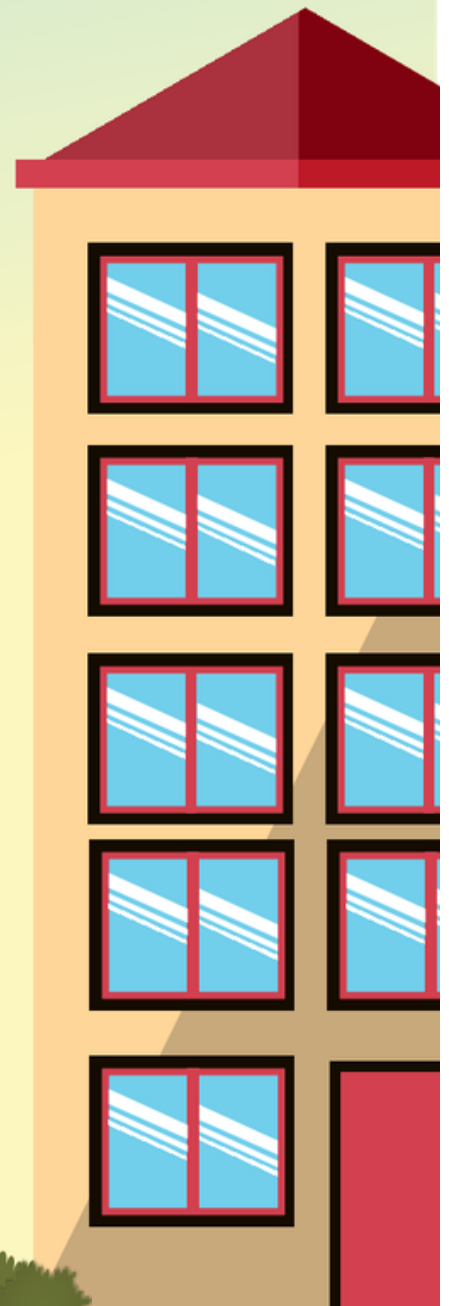


Achievements of 2025 Graduates:

- 91%** secured permanent housing
- 84%** were stable to thriving in employment
- 100%** were satisfied with their quality of life
- 100%** agreed their ability to communicate with and advocate for their children improved



Median Monthly Income grew from \$3,250 to \$4,020
Median Savings increased from \$120 to \$8,620
Median Debt decreased from \$23,090 to \$5,950



Sample Schedule for SOS

Sleep Out Saturday

4:00 PM	Set Up Sleeping Area
5:30 PM	Dinner (soup & sandwich)
6:30 - 8:00 PM	Attend SOS Rally at College of DuPage & Hear a Bridge Client Speaker
8:30 PM	Snack, Games, Movie or TV Series & Discussion
10:00 PM	Budget Activity
11:00 PM	Sleep Out

Sunday Morning

7:00 AM	Breakfast & Reflection
8:30 AM	Sleep Out Testimonials-Sharing Experiences



Cold Weather Sleep Out Tips

Dressing

- Layer with loose-fitting clothing, and start with thermal underwear.
- Always wear a hat that covers the ears and neck.
- Use wind-breaking outerwear.
- Keep feet dry.
- Wear roomy boots with thick socks.
- Mittens usually keep fingers warmer than gloves.



Sleeping

- Sleep wearing a hat.
- Insulate yourself from the ground.
- A ground pad may not be enough. Use cardboard, newspaper, or wool blankets in addition to the ground pad.
- Wear dry socks (1 or 2 pair) to bed to keep feet warm.
- If you go to bed cold, it is hard to warm up. Do some physical activity to warm up before climbing into your sleeping bag.
- Sleep with loose fitting clothing like a sweatsuit or thermal underwear.
- Sometimes a chemical hand-warmer packet tossed into the bottom of the sleeping bag helps!

Eating

- Choose foods that are easy to prepare and easy to clean up. The less time you have with your gloves off, the better you will feel.
- Choose foods that will store well in the cold. Liquids may freeze and burst glass containers. Eggs and tomatoes don't do well when frozen.
- Snacking is good to keep your energy level up. High calorie foods will replenish the energy that you will use to create body heat.

Indoor Sleep Out Tips

Are you concerned about inclement weather, or the ability for the participants in your family or group to spend a night outside? You can have a meaningful Sleep Out Saturday right inside your home. Here are some great ways to do it:

- Give up your own bed and sleep on the floor or couch.
- Do one or more of the activities and watch one of the movie suggestions.
- Share a meal together and discuss how your family can get more involved in ending family homelessness in your community.
- Journal your thoughts and share with Bridge Communities afterward.

Here's how to set up an indoor Sleep Out Saturday experience:

- Sleep in your basement or living room on the floor or couch, or set up mattresses, sleeping bags or cots on the floor.
- Keep a prominent light on all night (many shelters will include this for safety)
- Keep a TV/radio on for light noise.
- Set an early alarm.
- Set up a schedule for your group members to use one bathroom in the morning.
- Have breakfast together, and share your reflections on the night.



Top Sleep Out Activities

Make the most of your Sleep Out by taking part in these activities!

Activity: What Would You Take?

Age Level: All

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Pens and paper, backpacks

Introduction:

- Discuss why people become housing insecure.
- Discuss reasons people might need to vacate their home or apartment.

Activity: Present the following problem to the group:

- You and your family must vacate your home.
- You have only 10 minutes to choose what to take with you.
- What you choose must fit into your backpack.

Start timing and have participants write down what they would choose. After 10 minutes elapse, process as a group:

- What did you choose to take? Why?
- What did you leave behind? Why?
- How did it feel to make your choices?
- How will you do without the things you left behind?
- Where will you get the things you need but no longer have?

Discuss more facts about homelessness with group, and discuss ways to help those experiencing homelessness in your community.

Activity: My Home

Age Level: All

Time: 15 minutes

Instructions: Answer the following questions within your group:

- I like my home because:
- My favorite room is:
- My favorite things in my home are:
- When I think of the word “home” these are the things I think of:
- When I was told I had 10 minutes before I had to leave my home, I felt:

Activity: Who Do You Trust?

Age Level: 10 and up

Materials: Blindfolds

Instructions: Divide the group into pairs. One partner is the leader and the other the follower. The follower puts on the blindfold. The leader then takes the follower on a “journey.” The group leader reminds participants to notice what they are feeling during their “journey.” Have participants switch roles and walk the “journey” again.

Discussion: Ask the questions below.

- How did it feel to not know where you were going as a follower?
- What was it like having to do what the leader wanted?
- Did you trust the person who was leading you? Why or why not?
- How was it different being the follower versus the leader?
- Which did you prefer? Leader or follower? Why?
- Who had the most power and control?
- Was there any way to equalize the roles?
- Who had more responsibility?
- Was the leader helpful or controlling?
- Who are the people in your life that you rely on the most?
- Do you like being dependent or independent?
- If you were homeless, would you be more like a leader or a follower?
- Who would you have to depend on if you were homeless?
- What could we do to ease the burden felt by persons facing homelessness?

Budgeting Activity: Calculate It!

Age Level: 8 and up

Time: 15-30 minutes

Materials: Pens and paper, calculator

Introduction: Could you afford an apartment in DuPage County? Divide your group into two teams to work through the scenarios and find out! Start both teams with the assumption that an apartment costs \$1,714/month, the average rent per month for a 2-bedroom apartment in the Chicago-Joliet-Naperville HUD Metro FMR Area. Then answer the questions below.

Team 1:

- The starting wage for a job at McDonald's is about \$14 per hour. How much will you earn if you work a 40-hour week?
- How much will you earn in a month?
- How much will you have left over after you pay rent? (This needs to cover your taxes, food, clothing, childcare costs, medical bills, gasoline, car payment, etc.)
- If you do not have enough money left over to pay your bills, what will you do?

Team 2:

- Suppose you have a job paying \$25/hour. How much will you earn if you work a 40-hour week?
- How much will you earn in a month?
- How much will you have left over after you pay rent? (This needs to cover your food, clothing, childcare costs, medical bills, gasoline, car payment, etc.)
- If you do not have enough money left over to pay your bills, what will you do?

More great activities are available in our "What's It Like to be Housing Insecure?" Curriculum. Click here for more!

Recommended Media

Deepen your Sleep Out Saturday experience by reading the following books or watching these listed movies with your family or group:

Books:

- Maid by Stephanie Land
- Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting
- Our Wish by Ralph Da Costa Nunez
- A Shelter in Our Car by Monica Gunning
- Lives Turned Upside Down by Jim Hubbard

Movies & Series:

- Maid (Netflix)
- The Pursuit of Happyness (Amazon and Hulu)
- All Together Now (Netflix)
- The Public (Amazon)
- Beyond the Blackboard (Hallmark Movies)



10 Steps to Fundraising

Online Fundraising is Easy: Visit www.sleepoutsaturday.org and create your own personal page. Set your fundraising goal and earn our SOS fundraising badges that will be added to your personal fundraising page for bragging rights! Also, add a personal photo, and send out to your contact list. Share on your social media site. Promote your financial goal in your solicitations. If your supporters know you are reaching for a stretch goal, they are more likely to help you with a stretch gift. The earlier you begin, the greater impact you can make!

Set your goal to \$1,000 and see what various amounts will provide:

- \$1,000 provides a family with one month of housing
- \$500 provides summer camp scholarships for children
- \$250 provides teens and tweens with enrichment activities and opportunities

Face-to-Face Conversations Seal the Deal. Asking people in person is a fast and effective way to collect donations. Create a list of everyone you know personally. Think big. You will be surprised who will give, but first you have to ask!

Letter Writing Works, Too. In today's fast-paced world, a personalized and stamped letter can work magic. Not everyone has email, so you may have some great potential donors who need to receive your letter in order to know what you are doing and support you.

Follow up, Follow up. People are always busy and many may need a friendly reminder. Set dates for you to remind everyone how the fundraising is going and how close you are getting to your goal, also remind them that it's not too late to contribute. This takes only a few minutes and is easy to do using social media.



Grab Peoples' Attention. Do not be shy about telling friends and strangers about what you are doing. Promote your efforts for the cause by wearing your Sleep Out Saturday button. Not only will you appear more "official" but you will also bring more attention to promoting the upcoming sleep out and what the community can do to help the homeless.

Work it at work. Take the pledge form to your workplace and/or invite your parents or spouse to share it at their place of employment. Include a small written paragraph about your participation in Sleep Out Saturday this year and attach it to the pledge envelope for donations.

Door to Door. Inform your neighborhood about your participation in Sleep Out and bring your pledge envelope. Consider opportunities like asking for donations for Sleep Out instead of candy on Trick or Treat night.

Think Big, Get Big Results. Don't undersell your cause and your efforts. Any size donation helps someone, but if you ask for too small of an amount, people will limit their giving. Try saying "I am trying to raise \$1,000 to provide one month of housing for a family experiencing homelessness" or "I'm sleeping out until I raise___. Can you donate ___ to help me achieve my goal?"

Always Be Thankful. Send a follow-up letter/email when you receive a donation. On-line donors will also receive an automatic acknowledgement from Bridge Communities, and a personal letter following Sleep Out Saturday.

Share your Success. Send a follow-up email/letter to everyone you asked – even if they did not contribute. Post it on Facebook. Add a picture of yourself with your yard sign, tent or box. Include how much you were able to raise and how it contributed to the pooled contributions from all our groups. Everyone will appreciate a follow-up and it will help increase your contributions for next year.

Fundraising Badges for your SOS Page



When you register for Sleep Out Saturday, you will earn the Tent Badge!



When you receive your first Sleep Out Saturday donation, you will earn the Star Badge!



When you raise \$100 in total donations, you will earn the Moon Badge!



When you invite your family, friends and social network to be a Sleep Out Saturday participant and they REGISTER, you will earn the Family Badge!



When you raise \$250 in total donations, you will earn the Mitten Badge!



When you raise \$500 in total donations, you will earn the Heart Badge!



When you raise \$1,000 in total donations, you will earn the Sunrise Badge!

Share your badges on social media with your network!

SOS Promotional Messages

Wondering what to say when you spread the word?
Get started with our sample text below!

Bulletin/Newsletter Announcement

“(Your group’s name) will host Sleep Out Saturday 2026: Lights Out for Homelessness on (your date) at (your location), to raise awareness and support for homeless families in our community. Join us as a 'sleeper' or make a donation as we sleep in tents, cars and cardboard boxes to raise awareness and funding for families experiencing homelessness. For more information about the event, visit www.sleepoutsaturday.org and contact (your contact name and number).”

Social Media Post/Email

"On Sleep Out Saturday, hundreds of teens, children and adults will spend one night outside sleeping in tents, boxes, or cars to raise awareness about family homelessness and funds for Bridge Communities Housing Program. And I will be one of them! With your help, Bridge Communities will house and provide program services to more than 100 families annually in DuPage County. Will you please support me in Sleep Out Saturday, 2025: One Night Outside to Transform Lives and make a donation? You can give at (insert your SOS fundraising page link here). Thank you for joining in the SOS movement to provide homes and hope for families experiencing homelessness in DuPage County! "

Final Info

We're so thankful to have you join us at Sleep Out Saturday this year! We have just a few final reminders for you:

- Don't forget to set up your personal fundraising page on www.sleepoutsaturday.org!
- For details on more activities to take part in on Sleep Out Saturday, click here for our Homelessness Curriculum.
- Please be sure to come to our rally at COD on Saturday, November 7, at 6:30pm! If you choose your own Sleep Out Saturday date, please share the photos with us afterward.

For any questions, please contact Margo Matthew at 630-403-5091 or margo.matthew@bridgecommunities.org

