



Connections

Connecting homeless families to a better future.

Nancy: “When someone listens, it means the world.”

Nancy and her two kids, Sonja and Jaxon, were quick to smile when we greeted each other on the late summer evening when we met to take her family’s picture for this issue of Connections.

They were also quick to laugh. In between smiling for the camera and talking about the oncoming school year, the family was cracking jokes and making faces behind our photographer’s back trying to get each other crack up while their picture was being taken.

Nancy talked with me about how her family has their own sense of humor that keeps each other laughing and how her kids are both ready to take on this school year. In the setting sun of that summer evening, it was clear that they are a happy, loving family with a bright future.

However, that bright future didn’t always seem so certain.

Just a few years back, Nancy and her kids were homeless. Nancy had taken on a significant amount of marital debt from her ex-husband. It ruined her credit score and made finding an apartment nearly impossible.

Nancy and her kids were forced to bounce between places to live, doubling up in beds and sleeping in basements. Eventually, they wound up living in an extended stay hotel with just barely enough money to pay rent each month.

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“When someone listens, it means the world.” *continued*

After years of working so hard to find a home for her family, Nancy felt despair. However, she pushed those feelings down so she could focus on working, getting a paycheck, and taking care of her kids. According to Nancy, at that time she was doing all she could “to find a positive thing to hold onto, just to find that reason to get up the next day.”

School was her kids’ only constant, so she did whatever she could to make sure they wouldn’t have to move schools. It was actually in her daughter’s school that Nancy first learned about Bridge Communities from a guidance counselor there. She had never heard of Bridge before, so naturally she was apprehensive to take that first step.

“People in my position tend to get scammed a lot,” Nancy said. “You’re hoping someone will help you and they take advantage of that.” Nancy had even been scammed before by someone claiming they could help.

However, it was becoming harder to save up the money to pay for her family’s stay in

the hotel, so with the guidance counselor’s encouragement, she called Bridge. And because of the loyalty of supporters like you, her application process was expedited, and Nancy was quickly accepted into the program.

Although Nancy was still trepidatious about putting her trust in Bridge, she immediately felt relief. She didn’t have to worry about where they were going to stay or how she was going to keep her kids fed. After years of moving around and uncertainty, “for two years, [their new home] was going to be constant,” Nancy said, “and that was a really good feeling.”

Nancy slowly came to trust that her mentors, Tony and Dayna from Mary Queen of Heaven Church in Elmhurst, wanted the best for her. However, setting goals and expectations with them and having to be open about her finances were big adjustments.

She knows that she and her mentors came from different backgrounds. However, Nancy truly appreciated how they took the time to get to know her.

“For anyone that goes through

“Bridge has made my life so much better,” Nancy said, “and to know that I was able to do this on my own means the world.”

the kind of trauma we did before starting the program, when someone listens, it means the world,” Nancy said.

While with Bridge, Nancy learned about meal planning, nutrition, budgeting, and tips for how to search for employment. Bridge even made sure Nancy’s kids could stay in their school district so they didn’t have to worry about being the new kids in school and could focus on their education and even make friends.

Working through the program, living within her means came naturally to Nancy, but she was kept busy raising her kids, working with Bridge to find new employment, and trying to meet the expectations of the program. It was all a lot of work, but she didn’t want to let her mentors down. And truly, she didn’t.

During her time with Bridge Communities, Nancy was able to find a better paying job, and by the time she finished the program, Nancy had paid off all her debt and was able to put money into her savings. Bridge even got her a reliable vehicle, big enough for her whole family, so she could go to work, drive her kids to school and even pick them up

You can make an impact!



**Make an
IMPACT**

When you support Bridge Communities, you give stability to families like Nancy’s. Please make a donation in honor of the 100+ families that will be served this year with this QR code or at www.bridgecommunities.org.

New Challenges Met with New Hope



Dear friends,
As I look back at the past year, I am reminded of all the changes we navigated through, changes that brought both new challenges and new hope.

As the cost of housing reached all-time highs, a recent survey showed that 62% of American renters are unsure they will be able to pay for housing next year. Meanwhile, the prices of food and other day-to-day necessities continue to soar. These costs add up, making the path forward for many financially insecure families all the more uncertain.

Considering this, it comes as no surprise that demand for Bridge's services is increasing. Thanks to the support of our partners, donors, and volunteers, we have been able to rise to the challenge and continue to increase the number of families we serve. Because of your commitment to our mission, hundreds of families throughout DuPage County will continue to receive support from Bridge to make their courageous journey from uncertainty to self-sufficiency.

Now more than ever, a holistic approach to supporting the families we serve is required to create a positive, long-lasting change for financial, physical, and mental wellbeing. To meet the changing needs of families facing homelessness, we continue to expand our services by offering new

programs including piloting the Stability Program. This new program enables Bridge to serve more families by providing direct case management and supportive services for families with more complex needs, thus giving families the opportunity to stabilize in their first year at Bridge before transitioning to a program partner and mentors.

We are also evolving our strategy to ensure we continue to be there for our clients even after they graduate from our program. This includes providing educational opportunities focused on long-term career growth, developing more widespread peer support groups, and helping connect them with post-program affordable housing options. In addition, we have added additional supportive services for families focused on job preparedness, education, nutrition, and community building.

However, we cannot do this alone. We count on our community program partnerships, mentors, donors, volunteers, and amazing staff to fuel our collective passion to serve families. Thank you all for joining us on this journey.

Sincerely,

Karen S. Wells
CEO, Bridge Communities



Read Our
Strategic Plan

from their extracurriculars at the end of the day.

"It's ridiculous how good it feels to say, 'I can cover my needs,'" Nancy said. "I can take care of me and not be worried about becoming homeless."

Nancy is now looking forward to buying a new home with a down payment already saved up. The security Nancy and her family feel after no longer having to worry about once again

becoming homeless has allowed them to put down roots in the Wheaton community.

When asked what advice she would give to someone just starting the Bridge program, Nancy said, "There are so many wonderful people at Bridge that will give you the resources to grow. Use those resources and really allow yourself to grow."

She went on to say, "Don't underestimate the hard work, but

don't be afraid and don't give up."

Nancy is now enjoying all the little things in life, like movie nights with her kids and going to their school events. She's even helping her daughter, Sonja, look for colleges as she begins her senior year.

"Bridge has made my life so much better," Nancy said, "and to know that I was able to do this on my own means the world." 🏡

The Costs of Our Continued Investment in the Community

Did you know Bridge Communities owns all the apartment buildings our clients live in? This distinguishes Bridge from many other housing organizations and is a significant asset to our mission. Owning the properties allows us to better control costs and ensures that the housing we provide meets our quality standards.

This also means that, as our buildings age, we are responsible for their long-term capital needs. To assess our maintenance and investment needs, we engaged in a comprehensive evaluation of the 24 apartment buildings, resulting in a 12-year plan of required capital expenditures. These expenses include everything from exterior (roof, windows, etc.) to interior (bathrooms, floors, etc.) to mechanical (boilers, air-conditioners, etc.) needs. The plan identified nearly \$400,000 in investments needed each year for the next 12 years, which Bridge is committed to fulfill.

We started these renovations with our flagship apartment building in Glendale Heights. Thanks to funding from the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters and Congressman Sean

Casten, this building has undergone a complete renovation. Built in 1996, the building had not received any major renovations; so, as you can imagine, residents welcomed their newly refurbished homes.

Over the next 12 years, we are committed to investing significantly in all our properties, exhibiting our long-term dedication to serving families in need in DuPage County. As we work to complete these renovations, keep an eye out for emails or posts on social media about these improvements. To learn more about our 12-year capital expenditure plan or to tour our Glendale Heights building, please contact Amy at amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org or 630-403-5090.



How to Be Smart with Your Dollars

You, like many of our Bridge friends, may be seeking ways to reduce your taxable income while supporting organizations that matter the most to you.

Sue and Rick Harold are longtime friends of Bridge. This year they began to think about how to further optimize their charitable giving. After talking with their financial advisor, they decided to use qualified charitable distributions (QCDs) from their IRA for its significant tax benefits. The QCD helps satisfy their distribution requirement, lowers taxable adjusted gross income, and can be used without the need to itemize. They see it as a win-win – for them and for their continuing support of Bridge Communities.

A QCD or IRA rollover is a simple way you too can give directly to Bridge. If you or your spouse are at least 72 years old, you are required to take distributions from your IRA. You can contribute all or

a portion of your required annual distribution from your IRA and reduce your taxable income.

If you or your spouse are 70 ½ years old, you can choose to make gifts from your traditional IRA accounts now. A gift from your IRA can help preserve your assets while helping Bridge families.

How to make your IRA Qualified Distribution:

- QCDs must be processed by December 31, 2022, so if you are interested in making a smart donation and reducing your tax burden, make your gift today!
- Contact your IRA administrator and instruct them to transfer funds directly to Bridge Communities. Our EIN is 36-3705951
- Help us credit your gift by having your IRA administrator include your full name and mailing address with the gift.

Thank you for your support!

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

Three cheers to Edwards-Elmhurst Health (EEH) who generously donated \$292,500 to support our transitional housing program. Thank you!



Thank you, Edwards-Elmhurst Health



Thank you, Becker Logistics

The Healy family assembled and donated dozens of office supply kits for our clients, the latest of several unique donations the family has generously gifted Bridge. Thank you!



Thank you, Healy family

We are thankful to Perma-Seal for donating camp kits for the children of Bridge so they could have all the gear they needed for summer camp. The kids loved the kits!



Thank you, Perma-Seal

We are so grateful to Becker Logistics for donating \$29,000 and counting through their unique giving program where they donate \$1 to Bridge for every truckload they broker.

Cheers to these first-time donors!

VNA Foundation - Many thanks to the VNA Foundation for generously donating \$25,000 to support the mental health needs of our Bridge clients.

F3 Naperville - We're thankful to our friends at the F3 Naperville Foundation for their generous donation of \$6,000.

Cathay Bank - A big thank-you to Cathay Bank for their donation of \$5,000 benefiting Bridge programs.

American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation - We're grateful to American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation for generously donating \$5,000.

Byline Bank - Byline Bank generously donated \$2,500 to support our employment program. Thank you!

GetInvolved!



What an opportunity!

Do you have or know a business that markets to social media-savvy women who are CEO moms and business professionals, key influencers, decision makers, and community-minded connectors?

Bridge has amazing sponsorship opportunities for our **Wine Women & Shoes** event, which is on March 11, 2023. Packages deliver unique and highly valuable market exposure, while aligning brands with a top-rated charity and highly anticipated event.

Please contact jenifer.bystry@bridgecommunities.org to learn more.

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 Debbie Collins | Volunteer

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

A. About 20 years ago, I got involved with Bridge as a mentor through St. Scholastica Parish in Woodridge. It was an incredible experience, and I will always treasure the time I spent with the Bridge families. After a few years with Bridge, family obligations made it necessary for me to step away from my volunteer responsibilities. I also had the opportunity to work with Bob Wahlgren and Mark Milligan, the founders of Bridge Communities, and hear the amazing story of how they started this organization. Years later, when I was ready to start volunteering again, I knew Bridge was the organization I wanted to be part of.

Q. What do you do as a volunteer?

A. When I returned to Bridge eight years ago, I volunteered in the Westmont Learning Resource Center where we provided monthly family-friendly activities, including arts and crafts, game nights and food prep. We even had representatives from the public library visit to talk about reading programs. These activities were well received and always fun to be part of. Currently, I volunteer at the supply closet where families can pick up needed household items once a month. Working the supply closet is a great chance to talk one on one with Bridge clients and hear about their experiences in the program.



I also volunteered at holiday parties for the Bridge families, the Wine Women & Shoes event, and various events where childcare was needed. I've even helped stuff

envelopes for an event mailing.

Q. What's your favorite Bridge memory?

A. One of my favorite memories was at the Holiday Party at the Children's Museum in Naperville. I was in the area where children had the chance to shop for gifts for their family members. I was so impressed with how much thought went into choosing just the right gift for each person on their list.

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

A. I have always enjoyed being part of Bridge Communities, no matter what activity I was part of. The work Bridge does is so impressive, and I feel lucky to have been witness to the many changes that have occurred as it has grown over the years. The thing I like best about being a Bridge Communities volunteer is the direct contact with the clients. Getting to know the parents and children in the program is truly a gift. 🏠

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



2023 Event Lineup Mark your calendar for the fun events Bridge Communities has planned!

Wine Women & Shoes: Saturday, March 11
Oak Brook Marriott, Oak Brook

Celebrating Women, Transforming Lives
Friday, June 16
Danada House, Wheaton

The Bridge Communities Classic Golf Classic: Late August, Location TBD

The Glen Ellyn Backyard BBQ: Saturday, November 4
Downtown Glen Ellyn

Sleep Out Saturday: Saturday, November 4
Throughout the Chicagoland area

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

Sleep Out Saturday: November 5, 2022

Spend a Night, Change a Life

Join us as we spend a night outside in tents, sleeping bags, and cars in honor of the families served by Bridge Communities! This fall, participate in an immersive experience on Sleep Out Saturday with your family, group, company, or as an individual. Sleep Out for an empathy building night and help provide homes and hope to the 100+ families served this year by Bridge Communities.



presented by **BECKER** LOGISTICS

You Pick the Date!

Our countywide Sleep Out will be Saturday, November 5, but you can pick your own date from October 28-December 3! When you register your date on www.sleepoutsaturday.org, simply select "Other" and select the date that's best for you.

Join Us for our Kick-Off Rally!

We will have a Kick-Off Rally on November 5 from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. in partnership with the College of DuPage at their Lakeside Pavilion. There will be soup and bread served, music, SOS t-shirts available for all registered Sleep Out Stars, and even a \$250 Cash Raffle for all present!

If you cannot attend the Kick-Off Rally, you can share in our Virtual Presentation on the night of your Sleep Out. The Presentation will be sent to all registered SOS Stars.

How can you get started?

Register at www.sleepoutsaturday.org to become a Sleep Out Star or Group and set up your personalized SOS fundraising page. We encourage everyone in a family or group to register and set fundraising goals, create their own page to earn their personal fundraising badges and share with their friends and family.

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.



Register

Sleep Out Your Way!

You can sleep outside safely in your own backyard, in your car in your driveway, or at your church or place of business. You can even hold a meaningful SOS inside your home. Wherever you choose to participate, you will be helping us raise \$125,000 to support families experiencing homelessness!

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:

- **Jazmine** delivered a beautiful and healthy baby girl
- **Kaylen, Kyle, Shreya & Abigail** all received college scholarships for post-secondary education
- **Donice** has a new job as a human resources generalist earning \$64,000
- **Victoria** graduated from a job readiness training program with Nicor Gas in partnership with Quad County Urban League
- **Myia** has earned her CNA certification. She is now enrolled in nursing school with the goal to graduate by December 2023
- **Simeon** earned a pay raise to \$21 per hour. He earned just \$14 per hour when he and his family started the Program
- **Shaneese** got a new job earning \$22 per hour and raised her credit score to 700+
- **Diana** has begun classes in the Ultrasound tech program at College of DuPage. She has also saved nearly \$50,000 in just 18 months
- **Ashley** received a promotion from \$23 to \$26 per hour at a job she loves
- **Rasheeda** started cosmetology courses with the goal to graduate in December
- **Maria** graduated with a new job earning \$22 per hour and a new home in partnership with Habitat for Humanity



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.bridgecommunities.org.