Chaotic is the word that best describes Kandice’s childhood. Her parents divorced when she was five, and from then on, she felt like she was “in a tug-of-war between them.” After the divorce, Kandice, her mom and sister moved in with her grandparents, who were also caring for her two cousins. Her days were filled with uncertainty, confusion, and conflict, much of it fueled by the drugs and alcohol consumed by her mom and other family members.

But rather than succumb to the chaos that pervaded her life, Kandice was determined to rise above it. She worked hard to earn honor roll status in high school and made plans to earn a nursing degree in college. Unfortunately, her grandparents’ illnesses detoured her back home to care for them; she returned to school after their heartbreaking passing only three months apart from each other. Kandice’s return to her studies was once again detoured, this time by an unexpected pregnancy.

Again, Kandice’s determination drove her to escape chaos. Living with her sister, mom and teenage cousins in a tiny two-bedroom apartment where she slept on a futon, Kandice resolved that she needed to break the cycle for her baby.

“I felt like I was repeating the cycle my mom had created,” she recalls. “I did not want to repeat that by following in her footsteps and just giving up. That was something I just refused to do.” She researched resource options and found Bridge Communities via the People’s Resource Center.

Kandice called but didn’t hold out much hope of being accepted into Bridge’s Transitional Housing Program.

“I thought the chance of me being a part of this Program was slim to none, because it was surreal all the things that they provide. Things were very chaotic for me, so I didn’t have the hope to believe they would call me back.”

Kandice did receive a call, and after a series of interviews, she was accepted by Program Partner Immaculate Conception in Elmhurst, and her chaos finally came to an end.

“It felt like a burden had been lifted off my shoulders,” she recalls while fighting back tears. “I felt blessed. I continued on page 4

Connecting Homeless Families to a Better Future

Connections

Kandice Irvin – Sheer Determination
Welcome New Staff

Bridge Communities is excited to welcome two new staff members: Jodi Fegter and Yesenia Sanchez

Jodi Fegter recently joined the Bridge team as Employment Counselor. Jodi’s a Human Resources Professional with 20 years’ experience in numerous HR functions, including recruiting, career transition, salaried personnel, labor relations, and compensation. She originally came to Bridge as a volunteer with a desire to help individuals, and, in her own words, “that has turned into an awesome opportunity to work closely with our clients and assist them individually, as well as in group training classes!” Jodi’s an avid runner who cherishes spending time with her husband, three daughters and dog.

Yesenia Sanchez joined the Bridge staff as a Case Manager for the Pathways Program, where she works closely with 20 Pathways families. Her main responsibility is to work with clients to discern each family’s new housing destination upon exit. Prior to Bridge, Yesenia worked as a Property Manager for Community Housing Advocacy and Development. Yesenia comes with extensive property management experience and is knowledgeable with federal and local housing programs. She says that housing is her “passion!” Yesenia is also bilingual in Spanish.
Kandice Irvin’s story is emblematic of the spirit I see played out every day at Bridge – the spirit of determination. As Kandice was willing to do whatever it took to be successful in the Program, her mentors and Bridge staff were determined that she and her child succeed.

Determination is not something new to Bridge; Bridge was born with it. It is in the very DNA of Bridge. As we celebrate our 25th anniversary this year, the story of Bridge’s formation 25 years ago is worth retelling. Co-founders Mark and Bob set out to give just one family hope and a path to stability by renting one apartment. They did this against the advice of many whose opinions they sought, determined that they could navigate through the uncertainty of such an untried concept; determined to just figure it out. Their early success inspired the work of other determined people, and before long a small community came together – scrappy and courageous groups of people figuring it out every day – to help homeless families change their lives and achieve their dreams. The rest, as they say, is history, but determination is Bridge’s bedrock.

Over 25 years, DuPage County has seen the changes common to many counties across the country – changes that go hand in hand with suburbanization and the new economy. The incidence of poverty in this county now exceeds that of the city of Chicago, and the demand for Bridge’s services has grown in lockstep with it. Undaunted by these challenges, Bridge’s board and staff launched an ambitious capital campaign two years ago to rise to the challenge, inspired by a quite determined donor who simply asked, “What will it take?” We can now see the light at the end of that tunnel, a new era for Bridge in which we will serve 40% more families within just a couple of years.

You can know with great confidence that the spirit of determination will live on in the next generation of Bridge. We are determined to adapt to change, to seek out the very best advice and wisdom from all those who care about Bridge, to learn from the families we serve as they learn from us, and to continue to be inspired by their example. We are determined to strengthen our partnerships, and to find more and better ways to make our families successful. We are determined to be part of the solution for adequate affordable housing in DuPage County and beyond, and to spread the strong sense of ownership in Bridge that has made us so unique and put us on the map. We are determined to never forget what got us to this place.

I give my thanks to all of you determined friends for your important role in what we’ve become and will be.

Sincerely,

John R. Hayner, Chief Executive Officer
Support Summer Camp

Bridge kids often endure incredible stress in their young lives. Summer camp is a wonderful opportunity for them to just be kids – no worries, no homework, and no stress – just fun.

Just as important to us is giving our moms the peace of mind that their kids are safe and happy during the long summer days while mom’s at work.

By donating to Bridge’s summer camp fund, you can bring the joy of summertime into the lives of our Bridge families. Only $33 sponsors a day of camp for a child, giving Bridge kids a safe, fun environment – a place for kids to be kids. Bridge partners with community park districts and YMCA programs to give our kids a great summer experience.

Kandice Irvin – Sheer Determination

Kandice was willing to do whatever it took to be successful in the Program.”

That included opening her personal life to her mentors – strangers at the time – a leap she wasn’t fully prepared for. Her unwillingness to share her personal feelings, struggles and finances made for a rough start.

“I honestly did not think that they were going to understand me. I thought that everything in their eyes was so easy, that they had no clue about my life. I didn’t understand how people could tell you how to spend your money and live your life. They were really very strict on me, and I dreaded seeing them every week. I was ashamed of the things my mom had done. That was something I didn’t really want to share with them, because I feared that they would be judgmental.”

After several weeks, Kandice experienced a breakthrough in perspective. “It wasn’t until I started to open up to them, and when they started to open up to me, that we started to understand each other.

“Once I opened up to them, they were surprised at how much I had been through at such a young age. That’s when they started to understand why I was so closed and didn’t let anyone in. They were more embracing and accepting than I gave them credit for. I didn’t think that they would understand me or my life, but they were very understanding and very accepting.”

Together, Kandice and her mentors faced her challenges head on, whether it was finding a car to replace her own that had died, using the counseling Bridge provides to tackle personal issues, working toward promotions at work, or managing her finances as head-of-household.

Case Manager Tom Thiltgen remembers, “I watched Kandice grow in confidence and maturity. During her time at Bridge, there were several personal challenges that would have easily derailed any other client... but not Kandice; she persevered through each one of them, keeping a positive and hopeful attitude through it all. She listened to and acted upon the guidance given her by her mentors and me in helping her move ahead in the Program.”

Throughout her journey at Bridge, Kandice’s determination kept her focused on her goal of stable housing for herself and her son Kameron.

Today, Kandice is a proud mom and a client service analyst with JP Morgan Chase – a job she loves. She’s a Bridge Communities graduate currently participating in Bridge’s Pathways Program, transitioning into permanent affordable housing.

Pathways Case Manager Yesenia Sanchez speaks highly of Kandice, sharing, “Her determination has paid off. Kandice has her life together. She has a good head on her shoulders, and she really wants to be the best mother that she can for Kameron.”

Just as determined as ever, Kandice’s goals are “to become self-sufficient for me and my son. I want to be able to earn more money and move forward in my career. The feeling of completing the Program made me feel renewed. I feel a sense of completion – something that I’ve never felt before. It was a long, hard two years, but I made it. I’m really grateful for Bridge and everything that they do.”
Saturday, June 15th, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Spend a Saturday strolling through masterfully created, awe-inspiring gardens on the Glen Ellyn Garden Walk. For many area gardeners, the Glen Ellyn Garden Walk, sponsored by Bridge Communities, has become an annual rite of passage from spring into summer.

This year’s Garden Walk takes place Saturday, June 15th from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm and features six private gardens, including a garden certified as a Natural Wildlife Habitat; a garden lovingly tended without the use of pesticides or chemicals and a beautiful container garden will inspire all attendees to try year round gardening. A free trolley will circle the route, transporting guests from garden to garden, providing an easy, trouble free way to enjoy the day. Master Gardeners from University of Illinois DuPage County Extension will be available at select gardens to answer questions. There will also be presentations on container gardening and creating a wildlife habitat.

Tickets are $25 through June 13th and $30 beginning June 14th. Children’s tickets are offered to children 12 years and younger at a reduced cost of $15. Tickets can be purchased at www.bridgecommunities.org and beginning May 13th at Glen Ellyn retailers: McChesney & Miller, 460 Crescent Blvd.; BMO Harris Bank, 405 Pennsylvania Ave.; Just the Bookstore, 475 N. Main St.; Stacy’s Corners Store, 800 N. Main St.; 7-Eleven, 3S035 Park Blvd.; Keller Williams, 45 S. Park Blvd.; and Glen Ellyn Bank & Trust, 500 Roosevelt Rd., or the day of the event at all participating gardens.

Thank you to the generous homeowners that opened their gardens:

Jack and Marjie Ridge, Carol Anderson, Mary Ellen and Bruce Kummer, David and Andrea Yob, Brad and Erin Browder, Mark and Mary Bushman

Glen Ellyn Garden Party

Friday, June 14th, 6:30 – 10:00 pm

At the home of Peggy and Mark Udelhofen
771 Revere Road, Glen Ellyn

You are invited to the home of Mark and Peggy Udelhofen for a summer evening of fine food, cocktails, entertainment and the company of good friends. The terraced front walk and garden provide a grand entrance to the home, maintaining the period feel of this renovated 1926 Georgian. A beautiful Saucer Magnolia anchors the backyard, creating a canopy over the brick patio and providing a room-like feel. A stone patio with a copper fire pit provides an additional entertainment area and an alternate view of the property. A variety of hydrangea, delphinium, lilac, weigela and burning bush complements annual and perennial flowers, providing seasonal colors. Reclaimed boulders and flagstone enhance recently updated landscaping in this environmentally conscious design. New and old elements blend seamlessly together to create a relaxing and private outdoor living space. This beautiful garden is only open for the Glen Ellyn Garden Party and will not be featured as part of the Glen Ellyn Garden Walk.

Purchase Garden Party tickets for $100, which includes a ticket to the Glen Ellyn Garden Walk.
Tickets are available at www.bridgecommunities.org or by calling (630) 545-0610 ext. 19.
Leave a Legacy through Planned Giving

“I see nothing but a bright future for Bridge in its service to homeless families because they are doing such good things for families in need,” shares Ken Murphy, longtime Bridge supporter and Cornerstone Society member. “Taking people from hopelessness to independence has been one of the most rewarding experiences for me. I have shared many great experiences with Bridge over the past 21 years, and so I found it important to contribute to the future success of Bridge.”

Ken and his wife, Jeanne, have chosen to include Bridge Communities in their estate planning because they believe so strongly in Bridge’s mission and want to ensure its continued success.

Just like Ken and Jeanne, you too can make a personal statement about your passion and your values through planned giving. By creating a charitable gift through a will or estate plan, your planned gift to Bridge Communities can help you:

• Create a legacy of generosity that will last forever
• Secure the future of Bridge Communities’ Transitional Housing Program
• Be assured that families in need in DuPage County will get help for generations to come
• Realize personal fulfillment and peace of mind in your estate planning

When you designate Bridge Communities as the beneficiary of your planned gift, you are inducted into the Cornerstone Society, a distinction that honors those who have made a commitment to the future of Bridge Communities through a planned gift, such as a bequest, living trust, life insurance, charitable gift annuity or other arrangement.

There are many ways to make a lasting legacy, provide for your loved ones and receive the assurance that your personal philanthropic goals will be achieved in perpetuity. The simplest act is to leave a bequest in your will. If you choose to include Bridge Communities in your estate plan, you may wish to provide the following language to your attorney in preparation of any will:

**Form of Bequest**

“I give to Bridge Communities, Inc., located in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, the sum of $____, for its general use and purposes.”

**Form of Residuary Clause**

“I give the residue of my estate, both real and personal [or a specified fraction or percentage thereof], to Bridge Communities, Inc., located in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, for its general uses and purposes.”

If you provide for Bridge Communities through your estate plan, please let us know so we can thank and recognize you as a member of the Cornerstone Society. All gifts made through your will, trust or other type of estate plan can be established as an enduring tribute to a family member or loved one.

If you would like to explore planned giving through Bridge Communities’ Cornerstone Society, please contact Amy Van Polen today at (630) 545-0610 ext. 12 or amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org.

Jeanne and Ken Murphy on their 60th anniversary
When Carl Pellettieri decided to invest in Bridge Communities’ capital and endowment campaign, he did so because he firmly believes in sustainability. “Bridge needed to create a vision and the financial resources for its future. I want Bridge to be there for the next 25 years.”

Investing in Homes + Hope is Bridge Communities’ Capital and Endowment Campaign, designed to support the purchase of five new buildings, strengthen program services and build a $2 million endowment. As Bridge CEO John Hayner explains, Bridge will continue its growth “to serve about 140 families by 2016,” up from the 124 families currently served annually.

Pellettieri, chairman of the Investing in Homes + Hope Campaign, expounds, adding that “the need for our services continues to increase. The cost for housing is very high, and the recession has kept wages from rising to keep up. [Bridge Communities] can give our families hope for the future.”

The goal of the ambitious campaign is to raise at least $5.5 million with the intent of purchasing five new apartment buildings strategically located throughout DuPage County to meet the greatest needs of our client base. In addition to increasing Bridge’s inventory of apartments, “we will develop partnerships to offer more employment and education opportunities, which is a great challenge today, and we’ll position Bridge for future prosperity by establishing a $2 million endowment,” Pellettieri adds.

Bridge Communities officially kicked off its campaign on October 12, 2012 at a special reception at Harry Caray’s in Lombard. Guests heard from Pellettieri, along with Bridge CEO John Hayner and special guest Candace King from the DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform.

To date, Investing in Homes + Hope “has raised nearly $4.7 million,” according to Resource Development Director Amy Van Polen. But there’s still much work to be done to ensure the viability of this endeavor. Bridge needs your help in funding the final portion of the campaign in order to ensure that its goals to serve even more families can be met.

How can you be sure that your investment is being used wisely? Pellettieri had the same question, which is why he did his homework before committing to Investing in Homes + Hope. “Enhancing our endowment fund will provide sustainable income for operations. As we expand our Program, there is a corresponding increase in expenses. I am proud of the fact that over 85% of Bridge’s income goes directly to Program.”

If you would like to invest in homes + hope for homeless families in your community, please contact Amy Van Polen at (630) 545-0620 ext. 12 or amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org.

Campaign Chairman Carl Pellettieri addresses the audience at the Investing in Homes + Hope kick-off event.

Let’s Hear a Cheer for:

Raymond, who got a second interview for a transportation supervisor role
Rhonda, who was hired full-time with benefits as a customer service representative
Three clients who received scholarships from AAUW Hinsdale
Tracy, who was ordained as a minister
Aaron, who was hired full-time as a warehouse picker/packer
Ashley, who was hired by a local school district as a hearing specialist
Bridge Communities is a non-profit organization that serves homeless families who live and work in DuPage County.

Fond Farewells

Bridge bids fond farewell to two beloved staff members, Employment Director Patty Kelly and Manager of Education Services Pam Howe. In their own words...

“In 1991, I became aware of Bridge Communities, beginning my involvement as a member of St. Thomas Transitional Housing Ministry and then as a mentor. My life changed as I worked side-by-side with two other mentors and our wonderful mom and her four year old daughter. As everyone says, “I received far more than I gave.” In 2000, Bridge invited me to carry on the work that Fran Anderson began in 1998; she was instrumental in beginning the first employment program at Bridge. She saw a need, and the rest is history.

“Retiring in December 2012 was a difficult decision. The easy part was knowing that Mary Zienty and Jodi Fegter were carrying the employment baton with knowledge, skills and passion to help clients move forward in employment and career choices. I want to thank Bridge for giving me the opportunity to be part of the team to help change lives. I never felt it was a “job”; it was and is a ministry. I thank clients who gave me the opportunity to meet and work with them and to share and delight in each accomplishment they made along the way. You made my life more worthwhile – I’m deeply grateful. Thank you to mentors, Program Partners, Board members, volunteers, donors and staff who see the importance of what is being done every day with Bridge families. My best to all! Peace, Patty Kelly”

“Not many people have a job that makes you a better person. I’ve been blessed to work for an organization that did just that... made me a better person. I have had the opportunity to experience compassion, empathy, hope, love, sacrifice, forgiveness, patience, and, above all, commitment from a group of people not thought of as sages, but known as ‘homeless families.’ I have had the opportunity to be trusted enough for clients to share their stories with me. I have had the opportunity to work with people who truly care how I am doing, have had the opportunity to form new friendships with people I would have never met if not through Bridge Communities. I have had the opportunity to realize the importance of family and the support they provide. I have had the opportunity to appreciate how, as an individual or community, we really can make a difference in someone’s life. I’m so thankful to have been part of the Bridge team!” From Pam Howe