Kerry felt comfortable dating her best friend, Tim*. She could not foresee that the relationship would turn ugly, and dangerous. For 12 years, Kerry endured a relationship fraught with verbal and physical abuse from a man she’d loved – a man she trusted as a father figure to her first son, Zachary*, and with whom she dreamed of building a family and a home.

“I don’t know what went wrong,” Kerry shared. “There was a lot of yelling, fighting, verbal and physical abuse.” By the time Kerry became pregnant with her second son, Jacob*, “things were really rough … and escalated to a breaking point.”

Kerry recalled the night of her 30th birthday, when she and Tim had planned to go out for a celebratory dinner. Instead, when they met in front of Kerry’s parents’ home, Tim exploded at her, creating “a huge, horrible scene,” all because she touched his truck.

“That was the last time he choked me.” It was the last in a long list of injuries inflicted by Tim, a list that included a dislocated shoulder, being choked twice and getting struck with a wine bottle.

Kerry called the police, who instructed the couple to stay away from each other. Kerry knew she needed to find a safe home for herself and her two little boys but didn’t know where to go. Kerry and her boys bounced back and forth from her parents’ house back to Tim’s, feeling unwelcome at one and unsafe at the other.

“I did not leave him. I was caught up in the domestic violence cycle,” Kerry explained. “I stayed because I didn’t know where to go. I couldn’t live on my own and support two kids.” Making only $13,000 a year as a teaching assistant, Kerry knew her options were limited.

When Zachary was five and Jacob only a baby, she was awakened by a knock at the door of Tim’s house and was stunned to find a police officer standing there. “Tim had filed a court order to have me evicted from his home, where the kids and I were living. Everything was in his name.”

*Some names have been changed. continued on page 4
Board of Directors
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Yvonne Naese  Director of Operations

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

Bridge Communities is a non-profit 501c3 organization, with offices in Glen Ellyn, whose mission is to: 1) inspire and affect change by advocating for homeless families, 2) provide services and opportunities that connect families to a better future, 3) collaborate with faith-based partners, community groups and businesses to leverage resources and create long-term solutions, and 4) lead by example through our innovative programs and grassroots involvement.

Our Vision: To create communities where families in need have safe and affordable housing.

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www.bridgecommunities.org
http://bridgecommunities.wordpress.com

Fond Farewells and Friendly New Faces

Bridge Communities was sad to say goodbye to longtime staff member Marge Bartlett in January. Marge joined the staff of Bridge in 1999, initially doing intake from home. She moved into a case manager role and then into her role she held until retirement, Special Projects Coordinator. Marge expertly coordinated Bridge’s semi-annual Mentor Training Program, produced a variety of reports and manuals, and lent her keen eye for design to the decorating of Bridge’s offices. We will miss Marge and wish her and her husband Gary all the best!

John Hayner joined the staff of Bridge in November 2011 as Chief Executive Officer. Most recently, John held the position of COO of Perspectives Charter Schools in Chicago. In this newly created role, John is responsible for the overall decision-making at Bridge, operations, and strategic planning. He and his wife, Rosellen, have four grown children and live in Glen Ellyn. You can welcome John at john.hayner@bridgecommunities.org or (630) 545-0610 ext. 28.

Susan Pearson joined the Bridge staff in January as Program Evaluation Specialist. Susan is responsible for administering client exit and follow up surveys as well as Mentor and Program Partner surveys. She also coordinates Bridge’s semi-annual Mentor Training and oversees client and mentor records. Prior to joining Bridge, Susan worked as Program Director for Satisfaction Survey at Life Services Network of Illinois. She lives in Roselle with her husband Randy and their son Jeremy. You can welcome Susan at susan.pearson@bridgecommunities.org or (630) 545-0610 ext. 21.

Jennifer Didier has retired from the Board of Directors to more fully devote her time to her business, Directions Training. Jennifer was a hard-working, loyal board member, and we will miss her contributions to Bridge Communities.
The mere mention of its name – Run Like A Mother – brings smiles to everyone’s faces. No one is smiling bigger and brighter than Bridge Communities, the grateful beneficiary of this year’s race, which takes place on Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 13 in downtown Hinsdale.

“Run Like A Mother sought out Bridge Communities to partner with for many reasons, first of which is that we share a common mission – to transform lives,” explains Maggie Barney, Director of Operations for Run Like A Mother. “The truly life-changing transformation Bridge offers its families paves the road to embracing and learning about the benefits of living a healthy, well-balanced life. Run Like A Mother has seen first-hand the positive effects starting a running program have. Our inspiration & motivation comes from the mental and physical transformation that often takes place in first-time athletes.”

Run Like A Mother is a women’s-only race geared toward women who have never run a race before, all the way up to experienced competitors. Special training groups were formed to give participants training, support and encouragement in preparing for Run Like A Mother.

Event coordinators have also provided three “scholarships” for Bridge client moms to participate in the race free of charge.

“I’m so excited about this!” exclaims Bridge mom Sarah about the opportunity to race in Run Like A Mother. “Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to do this. It really means a lot to me.”

Maggie adds, “We hope to share the message of Bridge Communities to DuPage County and in turn, introduce our love of running to the Bridge community. Our hope is that together we can make a positive and lasting impact on those who rely and benefit so much from the services Bridge provides.”

Women can register for Run Like A Mother’s 5k race for $35 at www.runlikeamotherrace.com. A kids’ one mile run is also available for a registration fee of $15. A portion of all revenues benefits Bridge Communities. Additionally, donations to Bridge Communities can be made along with the registration fee payment.

Bridge Communities is extremely grateful for the generous support of Run Like A Mother!

There’s a good chance you’ve already received your Bridge family scrapbook, also known as our 2011 Annual Report. In it, you’ll see happy faces from the past year of Bridge Communities’ successes and celebrations that you made possible, including Sleep Out Saturday, the Glen Ellyn Backyard BBQ Cook-Off, the Naperville Learning Resource Center rehabilitation, and of course, the beautiful smiles of Bridge families!

In addition, the annual report features illustrations of our client families’ accomplishments. The story about one courageous client, Georgette, is not to be missed. You’ll also find a list of our incredibly generous donors – people like you who make it possible for Bridge Communities to help homeless families in our community transition from homelessness to self-sufficiency, financial stability and permanent housing.

Special thanks to Bridge graduate Georgette for courageously sharing her inspirational story!

If you would like an annual report, we’d be happy to mail you a copy; just contact Heather Wachter at heather.wachter@bridgecommunities.org or (630) 545-0610 ext. 30. You can also find it in PDF format on the homepage of our website, www.bridgecommunities.org.

Thank you for all you do to bring the pages of our Bridge family history to life!
In shock, Kerry drove Jacob to daycare and Zachary to his first day of school, where her car broke down in the parking lot. In what she described as “absolute crisis mode,” Kerry called a friend, who drove her back to the daycare center.

“I didn’t know what to do. [Tim] had said that he was going to take my kids from me. I just needed to go get Jacob and then figure things out.” With her baby in her arms, Kerry began walking. She didn’t even make it out of the parking lot when one of the daycare teachers stopped her.

“She gave me the keys to her minivan [and a slip of paper] and said, “Here’s the number to Bridge; you need to call them.” She was a Bridge client as well.”

That phone call marked a new beginning for Kerry. After three rounds of interviews, Kerry was accepted by Program Partner St. Elizabeth Seton of Naperville and moved into an apartment in her hometown of Woodridge, her support network nearby. She was grateful not only for the home but also to keep Zachary in his home school, ending the chaos he’d endured throughout his young life.

Bridge’s Transitional Housing Program wasn’t easy for Kerry. She struggled to let her mentors into her personal life. “It was hard,” Kerry recalled. “We had good days and bad days, but they were very supportive and understanding.”

Kerry learned budgeting and debt management, which were critical since she’d never been involved in household finances. “Tim wouldn’t let me see the bills. He said I didn’t have a right to be involved in finances,” Kerry said. By the time she entered Bridge, she was $30,000 in debt, living on credit cards and struggling with car payments and medical bills. “My mentors really got me to learn how to budget and look at the reality of my situation. They gave me a lot of encouragement.”

That encouragement ignited a spark in Kerry. “One of my mentors was very open and had been through similar bad situations. She got me to believe in myself. To have it recognized by others was very encouraging and empowering to me.”

During one of their initial meetings, her mentors asked Kerry about her ultimate goal, and she replied “homeownership.” Focused on providing a safe, stable home for her kids, she worked extremely hard to eliminate her debt and manage her finances. She also advanced her career, finding a new job and then earning a promotion within six months. With new confidence, she graduated from Bridge’s Transitional Housing Program in less than the two years it takes most families.

This April, Kerry, Zachary and Jacob moved into their new home. With her dream realized, Kerry has a new goal: to pay it forward.

“I just completed mentor training for Bridge,” Kerry happily shared. “I fully believe in paying it forward. I wouldn’t be here today if a stranger who was going through the Program did not reach out to me. I wouldn’t be getting my house, living a healthy lifestyle and in a healthy relationship if somebody had not come forward and said, “Hey, you need to call Bridge.” My mentors gave up their time for me, when they could have been with their families. I believe in paying it forward to be able to be there for others. I am able to look people in the eye and say, “I get it. I’ve been there. I understand.”

“Every single Bridge client is a diamond in the charcoal waiting to be unearthed. Every one of the Program Partners has the ability to make an extreme, long-lasting effect by believing in them, standing by them, hounding them on their budget – it’s little things that cause these great, big, huge ripples in clients’ lives.

“It’s sad knowing DuPage is one of the richest counties and so many families are losing their homes because they can’t make ends meet, regardless of the situation. If people don’t step up and do something, it’s not going to change. Bridge is one way I know I can step up. The Program is life changing on a scope that is unimaginable.”

...With her baby in her arms, Kerry began walking. She didn’t even make it out of the parking lot when one of the daycare teachers stopped her . . . “Here’s the number to Bridge; you need to call them.”
At a meeting last month with a dozen or more of our Program Partners, I introduced myself as the “luckiest man on the planet,” and it was heartfelt. To be back home working in Glen Ellyn and DuPage County… where my wife Rosellen and I have lived and raised our four children over the past 30 years… to have gotten reacquainted with Bridge Communities in the most serendipitously imaginable way…and to realize in five short months that Bridge is all that I imagined, and considerably more. . . and to have been warmly welcomed to this great family by Bridge staff and board, mentors, donors, and clients…to be a part of such a noble cause. Well, you see that I do not exaggerate in my claim.

What have I witnessed? The close of a wildly successful 2011, in which…
…over 1,500 people’s lives were touched in some way in helping them to find solutions to homelessness,
…two more apartment buildings were purchased to provide housing for many homeless families for years to come,
…several new Program Partners joined the Bridge family, sending a record number of highly-motivated new mentors to Mentor Training,
…over 50 clients were directly served in finding employment or improving their incomes,
…29 clients enrolled in college or vocational training,
…and it goes on.

I’ve heard the most inspiring stories from our clients and mentors about…
…a family who fled civil war in Africa,
…the child of a Bridge graduate who was just completing an MBA,
…a client who had just received a $3/hour pay increase after only six months on the job,
…and it goes on.

All of you have been a part of the ongoing Bridge narrative, through contributions of your time, your talent, and your treasures. You know that Bridge is continuing to grow, to help alleviate the gap between the prevailing wage and living wage required to live in the mainstream in DuPage County, and to help solve the severe shortage of affordable housing alternatives here. I confess that all too often in my past employment – both in the non-profit and for-profit sectors – I have worked in breakneck growth situations. It’s still a great thing to be involved in a growing, evolving organization, but our growth, while perhaps breath-taking, will be anything but breakneck. Please know that, as our extended Bridge family, your participation is both needed and valued in this next phase of our development.

Finally, to those who came long before me – Mark, Bob, Joyce, long-time staff members, and to all donors and Program Partners and mentors who were Bridge founders in their own right, and who have been with us since the early days of Bridge – I am so pleased and proud to be “Employee #18” and to count myself among you. And to those who have more recently answered the call – new staff, Program Partners, mentors, donors – welcome to the Bridge family and thank you for your commitment. Thank you all for having the courage to say YES when others said NO, to take chances, to believe, to inspire and trust others, to overcome, to solve.

I strive to be an accessible person. Please contact me at (630) 965-2193 or john.hayner@bridgecommunities.org with any comments, question, or ideas.

John R. Hayner, Chief Executive Officer

We Celebrate Our Clients’ Accomplishments That Transform Their Lives!

Pamela passed her Citizenship Test and is now a US citizen.
Carlene started a new job and got a significant raise.
Lindy is leaving the Bridge Program and will renting a 3-bedroom townhome.
Kara is graduating from Benedictine University and already has a job offer.
Two clients earned $3/hr raises, bringing one to $13/hr and another to $15/hr.
Andrew completed her phlebotomy tech program.
Tonja completed cosmetology school.
Erica completed training to be a Licensed Practical Nurse.
Laverne started a new job that offered him a 33% salary increase over his previous job.
LaToya finished high school early.
Alicia passed her CNA test.

Employment Updates:
6 clients were employed in September in the following positions: two Pharmacy Techs, Office Assistant, Warehouse, Teller, and Store Set-up. Salary ranges $8.50-13.00/hr.
2 clients were employed in October as a Care Giver and a Driver. Salary ranges $9-10/hr.

1 client was employed in November in Customer Service at mortgage company at $14.00/hr.
4 clients were employed in December as Digital Print Operator, Care Giver, Limo Driver, and Corporate Travel Agent. Salary ranges $10-15/hr.
1 client was employed in January as a Project Manager for $21.33/hr.
2 people were employed in February as a Certified Nursing Assistant at $10/hr and a Project Coordinator for $27.00/hr.
The Cornerstone Society is a distinctive group of donors committed to ensuring Bridge’s future through planned giving in a bequest, living trust, life insurance, charitable gift annuity or other planned giving arrangement. By joining the Cornerstone Society, you will:

• 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

Alicia and John Rasnic of Glen Ellyn are Cornerstone Society members and longtime supporters of Bridge Communities. “We became aware of Bridge through a former Bridge Board member who is a personal friend,” explained Alicia. “I had retired and was looking for something to do. I was invited to lunch by board members and staff to discuss possible opportunities within Bridge...through [volunteering], I saw all of the good Bob and Mark envisioned Bridge Communities would become when they started 25 years ago.

“Volunteering for Bridge, working on various committees and interacting with the staff has given me a new sense of worth and a great opportunity to make a difference in the lives of deserving people who need help. Including Bridge in our estate plan seemed the natural thing to do.”

Please consider joining Bridge Communities’ Cornerstone Society by making a gift in perpetuity. Your attorney can assist you in exploring your options. For more information on preparing your will, please visit www.bridgecommunities.org/How-you-can-help/Create-Your-Legacy.html.

If you include Bridge Communities in your estate plan, please let us know so we can thank and recognize you as a Cornerstone Society member. 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.

Bridge co-founder Bob Wahlgren and his wife Kay are hosting a brunch on May 19 for those in and considering the Cornerstone Society. If you are interested in attending, please contact Amy Van Polen at amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org or (630) 545-0610 ext. 12. You can also contact Amy if you would like to explore planned giving through Bridge Communities’ Cornerstone Society but are unable to attend the Wahlgrens’ brunch.

When eight year old Liam planned his 9th birthday party, he decided to do something different: not accept presents. It’s quite a surprising decision, given the usual birthday tradition of receiving lots of cool stuff!

“I can’t take getting all these presents, because that would be overwhelming. I wanted to help homeless people,” Liam explained. “I know they don’t have a lot of money.” Liam and his mom Jan searched the internet for agencies, and they found Bridge. When Liam watched a Bridge video and learned that the average age of a homeless person in DuPage County is eight years old, he made his decision.

“I couldn’t believe it,” Liam said. “That was my age. I couldn’t imagine being homeless. I just wanted to help other kids like me.” They learned about Bridge’s Birthday Party Program that helps kids just like Liam to throw parties that benefit Bridge while educating guests on the plight of homeless families in a fun, interactive way.

At his party, Liam stood and told his 25 guests about the families in Bridge Communities’ Transitional Housing Program, giving each friend a goodie bag containing a Bridge pen, lifesavers, and a winter hat embroidered with Bridge’s logo and thanking them for celebrating with him so generously. Liam’s friends donated $500 in retail gift cards for Bridge families to purchase food, clothing, and daily essentials.

“My friend Marco, said, “Wow! That’s a really good thing to do. I can’t believe you’re doing such a big thing like this!”

Liam’s friends were so moved by what they learned that they decided to wear their Bridge hats on the next school day to spread the word about Bridge. As classmates and teachers inquired, “My friends were able to explain about Bridge to their teachers and friends because of what they learned at my party,” Liam proudly explained. “They wore the hats all winter – they loved them!” The hats were a daily reminder that those kids made a difference in homeless kids’ lives in their own community.

The party’s over, but Liam’s passion for Bridge has just begun. When he donated the gift cards to the Bridge office, he inquired about volunteering at Bridge’s family events.

“I want to keep helping Bridge,” he stated simply but firmly.

Bridge Communities is deeply grateful to Liam for helping teach his friends about the needs of homeless kids in his community and for his remarkable generosity. Hats off to you, Liam!

Hats off to you, Liam!
You are invited to the home of Jeff Huppertz and Roanne Maisel for a summer evening of fine food, live entertainment and the company of good friends.

This garden is only open for the Glen Ellyn Garden Party and will not be featured as part of the Glen Ellyn Garden Walk.

Purchase tickets for $100, which includes a ticket to the Glen Ellyn Garden Walk, at www.bridgecommunities.org or by calling (630) 545-0610 ext. 19.
Glen Ellyn revelers enjoyed a break from the winter blahs at The Garage Party, the annual beat-the-blues bash hosted by the Bridge Builders. More than 300 people gathered on February 4th at Gearhead European Auto Repair for an evening packed with food, drinks, friendship and live music, benefiting Bridge Communities’ Auto Donation Program. This year’s event raised $19,000 to provide client families with safe, reliable transportation.

New this year was the evening’s highlight, “Singing with the Band” silent auction. Lucky winner Scott Vogg of Glen Ellyn earned the spot, and his singing and guitar playing brought the house down! The party goers wanted an encore, so they pitched in to buy him another spot, and Scott performed a rousing encore with live band Local Favorite. “Singing with the Band” raised a total of $1,500 and is a guaranteed highlight of next year’s Garage Party.

Another new addition to The Garage Party this year was the fresh, eye-catching logo, designed by Glen Ellyn’s own Greg Bane. The custom logo was designed to capture the edgy, urban vibe of The Garage Party.

This year marked the 5th anniversary of The Garage Party, a perennial favorite conceived by the Bridge Builders, a dedicated band of volunteers solely committed to raising funds and providing special programs for Bridge Communities families. Bridge is extremely grateful for the Bridge Builders’ dedication, creativity and generosity.

Bridge Communities thanks the following Garage Party sponsors:

Tap House Grill  Enterprise Car Rental of Glen Ellyn
Gearhead European Auto Repair  Euclid Beverage
North Side Sports Bar & Grill  Glen Ellyn Bank & Trust
Cab’s Wine Bar Bistro  Dairy Queen of Glen Ellyn
DuPage Medical Group  Carrie Morris of Baird & Warner
Bane Ink  M & M Sports
Infiniti of Lisle  Barone’s of Glen Ellyn

Next year, The Garage Party will take place January 26, 2013, bringing back fan favorites and introducing even more new ways to beat the winter blues. See you at The Garage Party!