A few years ago, Debbie Lively was a stay-at-home mom, married for 16 years. Then, a difficult divorce rocked her world. She lost her home, and with no income to provide for her kids, had to move her family in with her sister. “I had just gone through the divorce and my finances were in shambles, so we lived with her in her Bolingbrook home as a temporary situation,” she recalls. “After about a year, I started to look around to find what resources would be available to us.”

A neighbor of her sister’s told her about Bridge Communities, and Debbie decided to call and inquire. Within 48 hours, Debbie came to the office for an interview. A month later, Bridge offered Debbie and her family a Glen Ellyn apartment in the Transitional Housing program.

“It was a godsend for my kids and me,” she says. “I had just found a job a week before as a reporter for a newspaper, and we were off to a new start. We were very grateful to have a place to live while we were getting back on our feet. Bridge felt like a landing pad—a safe place.”

Once she entered Bridge, Debbie was connected to mentors from the First Presbyterian Church of Glen Ellyn: Linda Tyree, Dave Ludwig and Barb Perry. “Initially, the biggest challenge was revealing so much of my personal life to my mentors,” she says. “But, once they became my friends, it didn’t bother me as much.”

Debbie’s kids transitioned well to their new life, and both benefited from Bridge’s tutoring services. “The tutoring helped with my kids, especially my youngest; he had some math challenges, and that helped. Education continued on page 4
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.

Shop the Scarf Market

This holiday season, String Theory Yarn Company in downtown Glen Ellyn is asking knitters from across the Chicago area to create beautiful, hand-knit scarves, which are donated to the project and displayed in-store. And, **100% of all sales of the scarves are donated to Bridge Communities**, directly benefiting the families in our transitional housing.

Says owner Janet Avila, “The variety is incredible. There is a little bling for the holidays, good guy scarves for the man in your life, and cozy cowls for the coldest days of winter.”

The Scarf Market starts on Friday, November 28 at Glen Ellyn’s Holiday Walk, and runs through Wednesday, December 24. **Interested in shopping or donating a scarf?** String Theory is located at 477 N. Main St in downtown Glen Ellyn, and owner Janet Avila can be reached at 630-469-6085.

**www.stringtheoryyarncompany.com**

We’re feeling social. Are you?

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:

- facebook.com/bridge.communities
- @BridgeDuPage
- linkedin.com/groups/bridge-communities
- bridgecommunities.wordpress.com
- youtube.com/user/bridgecommunities
- smile.amazon.com/ch/36-3705951

We’d love to hear your thoughts on Bridge, too! **Keep the conversation going** by replying to any of our posts or e-mailing Bridge’s Communications Manager, Lisa Doyle, at lisa.doyle@bridgecommunities.org.
The call to action at Bridge’s founding was “children should not be homeless in DuPage County.” As our co-founders worked as volunteers at a homeless shelter, it was seeing the children there that inspired them to carve out a special place in the small group of agencies serving the homeless population. And thus the Bridge Communities we know today was born, with the rental of a single apartment to house a homeless family with a two-year-old child.

None of the best success stories ever told about Bridge were without significant mention of Bridge’s impact on the children of the families we served, many just as heroic as their parents. They worked within the family structure to make it happen for themselves, and their families became stronger for it. To see for yourself the best of what children have been able to accomplish, you can look at any number of the videos on our website, or newsletter stories, and hear the testimony of Justyn, of Jordyn, of Mauro, of Kris, of Joanna, and on and on.

The past 26 years of tireless effort and support of donors, program partners, mentors and staff have positioned Bridge well to improve and expand its work with the children. Our tutoring and other Learning Resource Center activities for kids have been hallmarks of the Bridge program for many years. In the months to come, look for more programs focused on children: early childhood development, counseling, nutrition, and mentoring for children preparing for college.

As of today, Bridge has 151 children among the families we serve, some two thirds of them under the age of 9. That’s a lot of lives. That’s a lot of opportunity. That’s a lot of promise for their futures. It’s thanks to you—the supporters of Bridge Communities—that these children have a better tomorrow.

John R. Hayner, Chief Executive Officer

Heart and Sole

Part of Bridge’s mission is helping restore our families’ confidence and dignity after going through the traumas of homelessness, and that’s why we’ve partnered with the Gotta Have Sole Foundation.

The organization was started in 2010 by teenager Nicholas Lowinger, who was inspired after learning that many children in a local homeless shelter didn’t have shoes that fit properly, or had to miss school frequently because they only had one pair of shoes to share among their siblings. He started to collect gently used shoes to donate, then new shoes. His dream became a foundation, and they now have given free, new shoes to more than 10,000 homeless children across America.

More than 90 Bridge Communities’ children received shoes from Gotta Have Sole in time for the new school year. The Bridge Builders volunteer group measured the feet of the children for shoe sizing at events throughout the summer, and the kids also received new pairs of socks from a collection drive conducted by Baird & Warner’s Glen Ellyn office as well.

We’re grateful to these volunteers and donors for helping Bridge families take a “step” in a better direction!
Debbie Lively: I’m More at Peace  continued from page 1

has always been important to us, and my kids have done well academically.”

Just as important to Debbie’s family is the stability that Bridge provided to her family. “Bridge helped with consistency and lack of disruption in their education,” she says. “I don’t know if that would have happened without Bridge. We were able to take a breather and focus, and they still have the same friends that they had four years ago. A lot of kids have to move around a lot—I’ve seen that, and my kids have not experienced that since we started at Bridge.”

Her mentors also saw a lot of potential in Debbie, and supported her dream of higher education. While in the Bridge program, Debbie enrolled in a master’s program in English at University of Illinois-Chicago. Because she was going to school part-time and working as well, her tenure at Bridge was longer than usual—four years rather than two—and her mentors agree the extra time was important. “We saw that a Habitat for Humanity home was coming up as a future possibility, and we wanted everything to work out for her,” says Dave Ludwig. “We were all in agreement that we should extend Debbie’s stay in the program, and we had no problem doing that through the church.”

And, earlier this year, Debbie’s dream of homeownership came true: She and her kids moved into their own Habitat for Humanity townhome in south Glen Ellyn. Her children, now 11 and 14, were able to stay in the same school district as well, and are both excelling in school. Debbie teaches 8th grade language arts at an enrichment program for inner-city students through UIC, and will graduate in the spring with her master’s degree. Her goal is to teach English classes at the college level.

Debbie still maintains great friendships with all of her mentors, even referring to them as her “Glen Ellyn family.” “My relationships didn’t end with me coming out of the program—I still talk to them regularly,” she says. “I am taking a sewing class with Dave’s wife, and Barb and I do yoga together. They really became friends of mine, and of my kids. They’re just genuinely good people.”

She credits Bridge with helping to ease her life during a stressful time, and is thankful she had the opportunity. “When I first came to Bridge, I was so stressed. I was trying to figure out how to take care of my kids and put a roof over our heads,” says Debbie. “If you’re stressed, that carries over to your kids, and so on and so on. My mindset is different now, and I’m more at peace.”

HJWC Chooses Bridge Communities as Philanthropy

This past spring, Bridge Communities was selected as the philanthropy supported by the Hinsdale Junior Woman’s Club (HJWC) for the next two years. “We are honored and humbled to have been chosen as the HJWC’s charity of choice,” says Resource Development Director Amy Van Polen. “We’re thrilled to have such a fantastic group of caring women partner with us and enrich the lives of Bridge families.”

Bridge underwent a rigorous, yearlong application process, in which Bridge was first named a semifinalist from a pool of more than 50 charities. Next, Bridge was deemed as a finalist among two other organizations, and presented at a general meeting to all club members. “These women really care about these organizations that they’re going to spend time with and support,” says HJWC President Anna Fiascone. “Our philanthropies are not necessarily organizations for women and children, but they tend to be; those are often the organizations that tug at our heartstrings.”

Through the partnership, the HJWC will volunteer for several different Bridge events and programs for families over the upcoming two years. “For us, Bridge is a new, fresh charity and it gets people excited for the new volunteer ideas and activities that we’re going to do throughout the year,” says Fiascone. “Plus, the Bridge leaders have been so great. The passion they have for Bridge and for joining up with us make us excited to team up with Bridge, too!”
For the 2013/14 school year, there were 1,633 children in DuPage County schools identified as homeless — a 26% jump from the previous school year.

That’s 1,633 children too many.

It’s time to do something.

Join us for Sleep Out Saturday 2014.

On November 1, 2014, nearly 2,000 DuPage County residents will spend a frosty night inside tents, boxes and cars to raise awareness and money for Bridge Communities’ Transitional Housing Program. The all-night event will be held in 25+ DuPage County communities—JOIN US!

Groups, families and individuals can register to participate on www.sleepoutsaturday.org as either Groups or Sleep Out Stars:

• **Groups:** Children or teens from a community organization, faith-based group, or Scout troop, plus the group leaders, who will direct educational activities, encourage participants to raise funds, and supervise the Sleep Out site.

• **Sleep Out Stars:** Families or individuals who are participating independently; Stars commit to raising awareness and funds to support Bridge Communities and are encouraged to participate in special Sleep Out activities.

A high-energy rally at 6:30 PM will launch the event outside the Bridge Communities main office in Glen Ellyn, where participants will enjoy an inspiring concert and stories from Bridge families. Bus transportation from Sleep Out Saturday group sites to the Rally will be provided. Bridge also provides resources, games and activities for the event, so that participants can have a better understanding of suburban homelessness and how they are making a difference.

Last year, Sleep Out Saturday participants raised more than $130,000 to help homeless families in DuPage County. The funds raised through Sleep Out Saturday directly benefit Bridge Communities’ Transitional Housing Program, which provides homeless families in DuPage County with shelter, case management, employment search and assistance, education and tutoring, counseling, and car donations.

Registration for the November 1 event is now open. It’s time to do something. Please participate and help provide DuPage homeless families with affordable housing, access basic needs, mentoring support and so much more. We thank YOU for making a difference in their lives!

Register today by visiting www.sleepoutsaturday.org!
Pathways Partnership

A unique partnership between Bridge Communities and a donor is bringing homes and hope to one client family in a new way. John Wightkin, a finance professional and real estate investor, rents his investment unit townhouse to Bridge Communities for the residence of a family in the Pathways program. This program allows for Bridge graduates to pay less than fair market rent on a home for a period of up to 2 years before moving on; as such, their rent is much lower than most locations in DuPage County, allowing the Bridge families to continue to build their savings.

“I wanted to get involved with an organization that helped with housing for people who were truly in need,” says Wightkin. “I thought it would be more meaningful to provide my rental property for people who really needed it.”

As a result, a family comprising a mom and her teenage daughter moved into the 2-bedroom, 1 ½ bath townhouse in Naperville this summer. It features two stories, an open floor plan, a fireplace, patio and in-unit laundry. What’s more, the townhouse is in the same school district as their previous Bridge unit, so the daughter can continue to attend the same high school.

“This partnership allows the best of all worlds,” says Wightkin. We agree!

Do you have an investment unit that you would like to rent to Bridge Communities? Call Amy Van Polen at 630-545-0610 ext. 12 to discuss the opportunity.

Success Stories

- **Teneshia**, who obtained an interior design internship, and has already interviewed for jobs upon her graduation
- **Desiree**, who works at a bank and was just promoted to a loan operations specialist
- **Devin**, who was promoted from part-time to full-time with benefits and coordinates an after-school program
- **Inez**, who got a full-time CNA position and is making $13.25/hour
- **Margaret**, who is making $16/hour as a dispatcher
- **Adriana**, who obtained a full-time job at a daycare
- **Diderot**, who received a $1,000 grant from DuPage County to continue in nursing school toward his LPN degree
- **Keyia**, who received a customer service excellence award at her housing specialist position
- **Tonae**, who accepted a full-time LPN position at $22/hour
- **Latosha**, who received a 4.0 GPA last semester in her nursing studies
- **Vynie**, who was rated #1 in her section at her customer care job
- **Maureen**, who obtained a job at a grocery store after taking Bridge’s Nutrition Workshop *(see page 8 for the story!)*
- **Lisa**, who was hired as an occupational therapy assistant for a school district, making $26/hour
- **Kelly**, who was hired as a customer care representative at $18/hour with full benefits
- **Vicky**, who eliminated $10,000 in debt in one year, and has now put $11,000 into savings
Summer Wrap-Up

The summer of 2014 was a summer to remember for Bridge Communities’ families. Thanks to our generous donors and volunteers, they got to experience activities galore:

**Ice Cream Socials:** To kick off the summer, Bridge Communities families enjoyed the ice cream socials and barbecues held at our Westmont, Glendale Heights and Naperville Learning Resource Centers (LRCs). There were scavenger hunts, bags tournaments, and of course plenty of food and prizes. Volunteers from the LRCs and the Bridge Builders group helped make these successful events.

**Camps:** Many Bridge kids got to attend one or more camps this summer. There were 15 kids who went to a weeklong sleep-away camp at Covenant Harbor, based in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, thanks to the camp providing $6,500 in scholarships; the Spring Hill day camp in Elmhurst provided more than $1,000 worth of scholarships for 7 kids to attend for a week; and the B.R. Ryall YMCA in Glen Ellyn provided $6,700 in day camp scholarships for Bridge kids to attend all summer long.

**Summer BBQ:** The Naperville Evangelical Covenant Church hosted a summer barbecue and backpack giveaway for Bridge families in July—great times were had by all!

**Back to School Nights:** Capping off the summer celebrations, Bridge held a party at each LRC to launch the families back to the school year, and provided school supplies, backpacks and gift cards, and announced upcoming LRC fall programming for Bridge families.

In addition to the larger scale events, Bridge donors helped provide fantastic summers for the kids on an individual basis, as we were able to help families pay for classes in swimming and karate, as well as basketball and football camps. We were also able to help pay for memberships to the DuPage Children’s Museum, keeping the kids’ minds active and giving them an edge for the upcoming school year. *Thank you for enriching the lives of Bridge Communities families!*
Food for Thought

Throughout a family’s time with Bridge, we’re teaching a number of life skills; now, nutrition has been added to the list. In recent years, Bridge has held healthy eating workshops at least twice a year at Knox Presbyterian Church, led by volunteer Suzanne Thibeault and Bridge’s Community Outreach Coordinator Vicky Joseph.

“For the 6- to 12-year-olds, it’s a great time to introduce the concept of healthy eating to kids—they all have a lot of energy and want to be healthy,” says Vicky Joseph, Community Outreach Manager. “The moms are always asking for help on how to feed their families nutritious meals with little time. This class gives them a way to plan ahead.”

The classes are made available by sponsorships from J.R. Albert, Families Helping Families, PhilCon and Whole Foods. More than 40 parents and children attend each session and benefit from the recipe demonstrations, tips and tastings. For the July class, Bridge families learned how to make cauli-rice and zucchini noodles, or “zoodles.” Registered dietician Toni Havala also spoke to the class about weight management and helped attendees set personal goals.

Teens attend the classes with their parents, while kids aged 6-12 go to their own “Let’s Move!” class, teaching about healthy food and exercise. Childcare is even provided onsite for kids 5 and under.

Our clients love the classes—after the most recent workshop in July, one attendee wrote us to say, “I just wanted to thank you for what you did for me and my family! I left there with such a renewed spirit in making changes for our overall health. Thank you for what you do!”

Bridge’s healthy eating workshops have long-lasting effects as well. One client, Maureen, attended the workshop in April, and used her newfound knowledge while interviewing for a job at a grocery store. She was immediately hired to work in the produce department, and her daughter was hired for a summer job in the bakery, too!