The Salter Family: “Bridge allowed us to see that there is hope”

For years, the Salter family had been living the American dream. George was working as a corporate executive, Nina was home with their daughters, Simone and Daisha, and they were living comfortably in their own home.

Then, in 2012, everything changed. George was laid off from his job. Soon after, he was diagnosed with lung cancer—and didn’t find out that the diagnosis was wrong until already in debt from treatment. Nina and Simone then both had to undergo necessary surgeries, leading to more medical bills, and Nina lost her job after having to extend her medical leave.

Between the loss of income, the medical bills and no job prospects, it was a domino effect, and in less than a year, the family lost their home. They moved into a friend’s basement apartment until George found part-time work, then moved into a house. But, they soon found themselves five months behind on their rent, thousands of dollars in debt and facing eviction.

“We were drowning,” Nina remembers. “When our foundation fell, it was tough. We couldn’t make the right decisions on what to cut back on.” The Salters were about to become homeless once again.

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The Salter Family continued

George visited Bridge Communities when researching DuPage County nonprofit organizations, and decided to apply. They were soon accepted into Bridge’s transitional housing program.

“There were some trying times at first,” says Nina. “We had to adjust to doing things differently and change to a way of life that would allow us to get out of debt, learn to budget and live within our means.”

George adds, “What grabbed me most was the accountability. We’d never had weekly accountability and people watching our progress who wanted to help. If we weren’t meeting weekly, I can see how the program could be something totally different, or we could have fallen off the radar. This really put us all on the same page.”

Their mentors from Glen Ellyn Bible Church—Karen, Merri Jo and Joe—are lovingly referred to by the Salters as “The Shark Tank.” The mentors not only taught the family how to better manage their money and create a savings plan for the future, but they became like family to them as well. “Our mentors really cared about us and still do to this day,” says Nina. “We’ve built friendships that will last a lifetime.”

“And it’s crucial that we become our own ‘Shark Tank,’” adds George. “We’re making those habits that allow us to continue on the right track and provide stability for our family.”

Now that they’ve completed the Bridge program this summer, the family is definitely on the right track. George has now been at his job for more than two years, working with high-risk males at a nonprofit organization based in Chicago, and after completing Bridge’s job readiness classes, Nina found her dream job at a doctor’s office only seven minutes away from home, allowing her to be closer to their children.

The Salters have also become closer as a family throughout their time in Bridge, and experienced a lot of personal growth, too. “Every day was a struggle for me as a husband, father and provider,” George remembers. “Daily, I was telling myself what a failure I was. What Bridge taught was that it’s not only about the money, but about how I use my time. I’ve learned how to focus more on my job and my family.”

Being in her late teens throughout her time in Bridge, their older daughter, Simone, had felt isolated and upset during their time of homelessness. “It was challenging in the beginning to see my family struggle and it was hard not knowing what ultimately would happen to us,” she says. “When I switched schools, I didn’t open up to anyone at first, but by my senior year, I realized I was holding onto pain that I had to let go of. I had to let God work in my life. I am no longer ashamed of homelessness because it made me who I am today and it’s made me a better person. I don’t think I’d be as successful if I hadn’t gone through it.”

Throughout all the tribulations, some of Simone’s many achievements include excelling in school, participating in student council and cheerleading, and volunteering actively through her church and at a food pantry. She was accepted at Elmhurst College and, knowing her family wouldn’t have all the resources needed, she took it upon herself to apply for more than $40,000 worth of scholarships and grants, all of which

“This summer, Bridge staff and volunteers celebrated Simone’s acceptance into college with the Salter family, and awarded her a $3,000 scholarship.

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It was my great joy and privilege recently to attend the dedication ceremony for a Habitat for Humanity home. Soon to move into this home was one of Bridge’s very own families, who years ago had made their way from West Africa in search of a better life. Having navigated the many steps of legal immigration, this family then faced the challenges of cultural assimilation, learning a new language, and finding employment. Through the help of their mentors and Bridge supporters like you, they succeeded brilliantly.

This year, Bridge is proud to have served twenty families from thirteen nations of origin. These families enrich the experience of our staff and volunteers. They inspire us with stories of overcoming the most desperate circumstances to find a better life in this country. They provide us great lessons in resourcefulness, frugality, determination, and persistence. When we might expect them to be bitter about their past, they instead demonstrate great gentleness of soul and spirituality. And in serving these families, the very best of our Bridge volunteer giving spirit is demonstrated day after day — the spirit of compassion, humility, and love of humanity.

It has been said that Bridge Communities program is simply the experience of thousands of friends like you — donors, volunteers and staff — providing the opportunity for many hundreds of families to change their life trajectories. Immigrant and refugee families will continue to add to the richness of the Bridge story. On their behalf, we extend you the warmest of thanks.

John R. Hayner, Chief Executive Officer

When you join the Cornerstone Society, you can be assured that your estate planning agreement will ensure a lasting impact at Bridge Communities and save homeless families in the years to come.

Kim and Mark Dorn of Glen Ellyn recently updated their estate gifts to include Bridge Communities. “I work in the nonprofit world and I understand the importance and value of people committing to give planned gifts and how they can transform organizations and offer sustainability,” explains Kim. “We like the philosophy of Bridge and that it ‘teaches people how to fish.’ We love the great stories that come out of the good work done at Bridge, and we know the organization is built in a way that’s sustainable.”

Your planned gift to Bridge Communities can change the lives of homeless families in DuPage County, achieve your financial goals, and leave a lasting legacy of generosity. To learn how you can create your legacy at Bridge Communities, please call Amy Van Polen at 630-545-0610 x12 or e-mail amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org.
Meet Cheryl Miceli
Mentor, Stepping Stones • Circle of Hope Member and Donor

“I work as a teacher in Cicero, and every day on my way to and from work, I see homeless people asking for money at stop signs. Every day at work, I am with children who don’t have the luxury of a bed of their own. There might not be a bed at all – they might sleep on the couch, an inflatable mattress, or a pile of blankets on the floor. They might sleep with a 6-month-old infant at their side, or a 55-year-old grandmother. For these people, life is hard, and comfort is a luxury.

“When I examine my own life, I realize I have been extremely blessed with many gifts, and many of these gifts were given to me without me working for them at all: parents and relatives with jobs, a warm, comfortable house in a safe neighborhood, family members who watched out for me and helped me to get what I needed, and good schools where the teachers expected me to go on to college. I have had to work, but I have never had to struggle to survive.

“There but for the grace of God…” I would think when I saw a struggling mother with her children. But just thinking about homeless people never changed anything. And then I learned about Bridge Communities and their program partner, Stepping Stones. They had a plan to help homeless families transition to being families with a home. They worked with struggling mothers to help them learn how to provide for their children and their selves. And I knew I wanted to stop looking at the problem and start to be a part of the solution.

“I took mentor training from Bridge Communities and I became a mentor for Stepping Stones. I have had the opportunity to help a young woman in her journey from being homeless to actively seeking for a house of her own, a house which she can afford now because of the assistance received from Bridge Communities, Stepping Stones, and her own hard work and determination.

“I learned about Bridge Community’s Circle of Hope. By donating a fixed amount each month – an amount which I know I can afford – I can help Bridge with their mission of helping homeless families find the peace, security, and comfort a home brings.

“Now I don’t have to sit back and placidly say, ‘There but for the grace of God…” as I look at the problem of homelessness. Now I can say that with the grace of God, I am working towards a solution for the homeless. I may only be making a slight difference, but every journey starts with one step. Being a mentor and contributing to the Circle of Hope was my first step. What will yours be?”

Circle of Hope
A Perfect Match

Join Circle of Hope and your recurring gift will provide homes and hope to homeless families! To donate, return the enclosed form or contact Susan Hacker at susan.hacker@bridgecommunities.org or call 630-545-0610 x 23. Visit www.bridgecommunities.org to learn more.
Sleep Out Saturday 2015: This Is The Day

November 7, 2015

Spend a frosty night inside tents, boxes and cars to raise awareness about family homelessness and critical money for Bridge Communities’ Transitional Housing Program. This all-night event will be held in 25+ DuPage County communities and shared by 2,000 members of the community—will you join us? Visit www.sleepoutsaturday.org today!

Q. Why should I participate in Sleep Out Saturday?
A. When you participate in Sleep Out Saturday, you’re raising awareness about homeless families and the lack of affordable housing in DuPage County. You’re also helping to bring 120 families in from the cold as they move toward a better future.

Q. November 7? Sounds cold. Why don’t you do this in the summer?
A. It will be cold! Just ask any of the 750 Bridge families who have experienced homelessness in the past. We hold this event in November to promote empathy and understanding for homeless families.

Q. What can I expect that evening?
A. The night kicks off at 6:00 p.m. with a high-energy concert and rally outside the Bridge Communities office in Glen Ellyn, where you’ll enjoy live music, inspirational videos and meeting Bridge families (we’ll bus you there and back!). We’ll also offer plenty of resources, games and activities for the event, so that you’ll understand how you’re helping break the cycle of homelessness.

Q. How do I sign up?
A. Check out the guidelines below and register today on www.sleepoutsaturday.org:

- **Groups:** Adults, 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.

**Give to Sleep Out Saturday**

Last year, Sleep Out Saturday participants raised well over $110,000 to help homeless families in DuPage County. This funding provides homeless families in DuPage County with shelter, case management, employment search and assistance, education and tutoring, counseling, and car donations. Donate to Sleep Out Saturday and you’ll connect homeless families to a better future!

**Platinum Sponsors**

- Sikich
- 95.9 The River

**Gold Sponsors**

- Glen Ellyn Bank & Trust
- Wheaton Bank & Trust
- Naperville Bank & Trust
- Bank of America
- BMO Harris Bank
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**Silver Sponsors**

- First Midwest Bank

**Bronze Sponsors**

- Oxford Bank & Trust
- Nicor
- Providence Bank
- Marcus & Millichap
It’s been a busy real estate year for Bridge Communities: thanks to a generous private donor, we’ve just added three more apartment buildings to our portfolio, bringing our total to 22 across DuPage County. “The addition of these buildings translates to Bridge’s increased capacity for housing homeless families in the community,” says Amy Van Polen, Resource Development Director. “Because of your generosity and support, we now have 126 units within the Bridge program.”

Bridge is still on track to fulfill its capital campaign goals, as these dedicated monies will fund the growth of Bridge programs, further building acquisition and the endowment. “We’re currently exploring building opportunities in DuPage, and are confident that we will add further units by the end of 2017,” says John Hayner, CEO. “We’ll continue to share with our supporters our progress, and on behalf of all the Bridge families on the path to a better future, we thank you.”

Our newest Learning Resource Center, located in a recently purchased building in Glen Ellyn, is now open to clients!

Why I Support Bridge

“The Ronald L. McDaniel Foundation was organized in 1995 to assist primarily children, but also others in need, as well as to provide educational support. I realized Bridge would be one way to accomplish this objective.

“A number of years ago, I ran across a cartoon showing a glove on the sidewalk and someone offering money. The caption was, ‘I am looking for a hand up, not a hand out.’ That captures what Bridge does and is all about.

“Bridge Communities represents an end result I want to accomplish: helping people become self-sufficient. Bridge’s plan to add more transitional housing was a way to accomplish one of the objectives of the Ronald L. McDaniel Foundation. Bridge Communities represents a great way to assist others in an undesirable situation and looking for a hand up instead of a hand out.”

— Ron McDaniel, Supporter of Bridge Communities

The Salter Family continued

were awarded to her. She was just $3,000 shy of covering her freshman year’s tuition, and Bridge saw her great potential and decided to increase her scholarship to cover the difference.

“The Salters are an amazing family. Through the hard work and tough sacrifices of learning new spending patterns, they were able to successfully complete the Bridge Transitional Housing Program,” says their case manager, Paul Matthews. “However, through this challenging process, they displayed a remarkable level of dedication and humility that carried them through. The Salters are certainly an inspiration to families that are striving to become independent.”

Nina concludes, “Bridge allowed us to see that there is hope. I wish there was a Bridge Communities in every county in every state, because it’s so needed. Learning how to change our way of thinking and way of life, and how to become stewards, will stay with us forever. Bridge built our family and made us who we are today.”

More Buildings, More Families
GardenWorks Partners with Bridge

For the second year, The GardenWorks Project, an organization that teaches organic gardening to low-income families, has partnered with Bridge Communities. “Teaching people to grow their own food can take the strain off their monthly food budget and allow people to grow things they can’t always afford to purchase at a store,” says Tina Koral, executive director of The GardenWorks Project. “Organic food is often out of reach, so for families in that situation, we help them learn these gardening skills.”

Volunteer gardeners helped Bridge families in Glendale Heights, Naperville and Glen Ellyn this spring by teaching them how to plant their crops. In some locations, community garden plots were built, while other locations had planter boxes for each balcony. The volunteers were available by phone and e-mail to answer questions, and visited throughout the summer to check in on the gardens’ progress. The end result was organic broccoli, tomatoes, parsley, basil, sweet peppers and kale.

“T’d never gardened before, and my girls and I were excited to get into it,” says Bridge client Kathy. “A lot of it’s a waiting game, but it’s worth it. It’s really fun and interesting to learn how to do it, and it’s awesome to go to your own garden and see your own tomatoes and peppers growing big and wild. It’s a good feeling.”

Thanks, The GardenWorks Project—we love seeing the fruits (and veggies) of these labors!
Bridge families were able to accomplish these amazing goals this past summer:

- **Ann Marie** obtained a new job in external relations
- **Lillian** found a new, full-time administrative position with benefits
- **Ayda** earned 3 As and 1 B last semester in college
- **Beatrice** earned her GED
- **Diana** had a summer internship in dietetics at a hospital
- **Thomas** earned a full scholarship and is now studying in a welding program
- **Vivian** finished her associates degree, and has been preapproved to purchase a home
- **Jasmine** graduated from nursing school and is completing her clinicals to become an RN
- **April** earned her bachelor’s degree in communications
- **Allie** was promoted at her job and earned a $15,000 raise
- **Lisa** closed on a house with a finished basement and a big backyard
- **Marketta** has paid off all her debt and now has $2,000 in savings
- **Tony’s** hours at work went to full-time, and he has received a $1/hour raise
- **Jaleen** graduated from college with her bachelor’s in elementary education and began working as a kindergarten teacher this fall
- **Liz** accepted a new account analyst job with a $4/hour raise
- **Jeanine, Baramunde and Yolanda** have been approved for new homes through Habitat for Humanity
- **Bethany** purchased a two-bedroom condo
- **Tammy** got a new nursing job and is now earning $60,000/year