

# Connections

*Connecting families facing homelessness to a better future.*

Bridgette: “I had lost all my hope, but Bridge brought it back.”

“That was a dark place for me,” Bridgette shared. It was hard for her to accept that she was truly facing homelessness and needed support.

After all, it wasn’t long ago that Bridgette had her own house and a stable job. Then, in just a few weeks, her life was turned upside down.

Bridgette and her 7-year-old son were planning on moving to Atlanta, but when those plans fell through, she needed to find a backup plan and fast. She began living with family, while she tried to plan her next steps forward. However, when the pandemic came, it became even more difficult to continue doubling up in such a close, shared space.

Without another option, Bridgette and her son moved into a hotel. She still needed time to plan her next steps, and things were changing so fast. As days in that hotel room became weeks, her savings dwindled.

The realization that she was facing homelessness

hit her hard. “I didn’t see a way out,” said Bridgette. “It was a lot of days of crying. I was really in a lonely place at that time.”

Even while facing that difficult situation, Bridgette was working hard for herself and her son. She found a new job and did all she could to make the situation as joyful as possible.

While her son was attending school over Zoom during the pandemic,

*continued on page 2*



## Fall 2023

New Growth,  
Same Commitment  
to DuPage County 3

Q&A with Sabrina  
Babers-Newman 4

Upcoming Events 4

Prospective Bridge Clients  
Can Now Apply Online 5

Bridge Communities and  
Donor-Advised Funding 5

Thank You for your Support 6

Night of Hope:  
One Community 7

Because of You 8

**“I had lost all my hope, but Bridge brought it back.”** *continued*

she made sure he had a space in their hotel room that was his own, putting him near the window and lining up his toys behind him. She didn't want him to have to explain his situation to his classmates. It was important to Bridgette that he was able to focus on learning.

Though she was facing intense despair at the time, she knew she had to hold herself together for her family, and that was what she did.

She began looking for help and came across Bridge Communities. While she was nervous throughout the intake process, it went quicker than she expected, and when she finally got accepted into the Bridge program, she was ecstatic.

**“I want to be a donor. I want to be a sponsor. I want to volunteer for Bridge... I look forward to the days where I'm able to give back to this organization.”**

“Oh my gosh!” recalled Bridgette. “When I got the call that I was accepted into Bridge, it was so overwhelming. I cried tears of joy. I was super excited.”

Better yet, the Bridge program brought her family to a place Bridgette had spent the last 20 years trying to move to. “I've always wanted to live in Naperville,” said Bridgette. “It was like the best day of my life, and I felt so honored.”

However, building a better life for your family isn't easy, and she had to work hard to reach her goals.

When she first met her mentors from Daybreak of St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church, she felt intimidated. As someone who used to have her own home and a good job, it was hard to accept help. But by the end of that first meeting, she began to see her mentors in a new light.

“I had a whole different perspective. I really, truly appreciate them taking the time to help me and my son,” said Bridgette. “My mentors were like guardian angels.”

With the support of her mentors, Bridgette immediately began working towards her goals. “Through my mentors, I was able to save tremendously,” said Bridgette. “This is the most I've ever saved at one time in my life.”

Bridgette was also able to focus on her son's education and help him reach his academic potential. He received one-on-one counseling and

tutoring to help him excel in math, and when Bridgette needed extra support, she was able to reach out to Michelle Stasi, a Children's Program Coordinator at Bridge.

“My son loved Michelle,” said Bridgette. “She is very supportive of whatever it is I need for his education.”

The Bridge program introduced Bridgette's son to new friends and new cultures. “The diversity of his friends is amazing. It's something I always wanted for him,” said Bridgette.

With the help of her mentors and Bridge's Employment & Adult Education team, Bridgette also found the motivation to go back to school. “Getting my degree is something I've been wanting to do for forever,” Bridgette said, “but it was through my mentors helping me that I was able to continue to grow in ways I didn't think possible.”

Bridgette earned her Human Resources Management Certification and is on track to complete her associate degree by spring. She has also paid off almost all her debts and substantially raised her credit score.

Today, Bridgette continues to focus on her education and reach heights she never thought possible. Through her own hard

# New Growth, Same Commitment to DuPage County



Dear friends,

Here at Bridge, we are growing in new, exciting ways that further our mission and enable us to serve more families in DuPage County.

Eighteen months ago, Bridge Communities introduced our Stability Program. This program allows us to serve even more families by providing direct case management and support services for families with more complex needs. Thus far, 13 have been welcomed which has increased the total number of new families served in 2023 by 30%. Please look for more details on this program and its outcomes in our spring 2024 newsletter.

We also introduced our Equity & Belonging initiative and shared the steps we are taking to better understand the societal disparities and inequities in which we live. If you have not yet had the chance to read our announcement, you can view it by scanning the QR code below.



We also welcome a new Program Partner, SAFE, and are excited they have rejoined the Bridge family. Thanks to new

Program Partners combined with reenergized commitments from existing Program Partners, we anticipate increasing the number of families in the Bridge Transitional Housing Program by nine in the year ahead.

Last month, we moved into our new offices at 500 Roosevelt Road in Glen Ellyn, recommitting Bridge's 35-year loyalty to Glen Ellyn. I invite you to stop by or schedule a visit to meet with us in our new location.

As we continue to evolve our housing and programs, we welcome your support of the more than 100 families Bridge will house and mentor in the coming year. Please join us at a fundraising event, volunteer with a client family, or give a financial contribution. For your lasting and generous support, I am deeply grateful.

In Service to You,

Amy Van Polen  
*Chief Executive Officer*

work and by embracing the support the Bridge program offers, Bridgette's goals are now within reach.

Even as her time in the Bridge program comes to an end, Bridgette is excited for her

family's next steps. "Bridge didn't just give me the fish. They taught me to fish," Bridgette said. "I'll leave [the Bridge program] with a sense of understanding, a sense of community, a sense of guidance and of love that Bridge has opened

up to me in a way that I never thought I would receive." "My heart is truly grateful for everybody that is a part of Bridge," says Bridgette. "Thank you." 🏡

**You can  
change  
lives!**

**By supporting Bridge Communities, you give hope to families like Bridgette's. Please make a donation today and support your neighbors facing homelessness by scanning this QR code or visiting [www.bridgecommunities.org/donate](http://www.bridgecommunities.org/donate).**



## Q&A with Sabrina Babers-Newman | Volunteer from Duly Health and Care

**Q.** How did you first hear about Bridge Communities?

**A.** Bridge Communities was made known to me through Duly Health and Care's Black/African American Community Resource Group (CRG), which I co-lead with another Duly team member. Duly supports Bridge Communities in a variety of ways throughout the year.

**Q.** What do you do as a volunteer with Bridge?

**A.** I have been fortunate to partner with Mary Slade on a couple of volunteer and donation drives that Bridge has had over the last year. My CRG has collected toiletries and hair products; we also provided around 15 volunteers to assist in the Client Appreciation event back in June 2023. We partnered with Bridge for their Client Appreciation Event in celebration of Juneteenth and our CRG's overall goal of giving back to families in the communities in which we serve.

**Q.** What inspires you to continue volunteering with Bridge?

**A.** The commitment that Bridge has to helping families in Chicagoland is so encouraging. Bridge has been, and continues to be, a great and reliable help to families in need. They are what they say they are: they help families become self-sufficient.



**Q.** What is your favorite thing about volunteering with Bridge Communities?

**A.** My favorite thing about volunteering with Bridge Communities has to be the people. Those within the Bridge staff with whom I have had the pleasure of working have all been so passionate about the mission; it's absolutely contagious! 🏡

**Thank you to Sabrina and Duly Health and Care for their commitment to helping the families of Bridge Communities.**

**We are always looking for organizations or volunteer groups to partner with. To learn how you can volunteer in a way that's most fulfilling and impactful for you, please contact Mary Slade at [volunteercoordinator@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:volunteercoordinator@bridgecommunities.org).**



**Mark your calendar for some of the wonderful events Bridge Communities has planned for 2024:**

Saturday,  
February 24



Oak Brook Hills Resort

Friday,  
May 17



Mason Sabika

Saturday,  
September 14



Downtown Glen Ellyn

Saturday,  
November 2

\*SOS 2023 will take place Nov 4.  
Learn more on page 7!



Throughout  
DuPage County



Scan the QR code to visit our website and learn more about these exciting, upcoming events.



## Prospective Bridge Clients Can Now Apply Online

Our online intake screening portal is one of the features of our newly launched website that we are particularly excited about. This portal is linked to our Apply for Services page and provides prospective clients with the option to begin their application process online.

Families have already begun using the portal, with many applying late at night, which previously would not have been an option. This screening is currently available in both English and Spanish.

If you or someone you know is interested in applying for Bridge's services, you can learn more about the application process and take the first steps by scanning this QR code to visit [www.bridgecommunities.org/access-our-services/apply-for-services](http://www.bridgecommunities.org/access-our-services/apply-for-services)



## Bridge Communities and Donor-Advised Funding

**R**ecently, Bridge Communities has seen a sharp increase in gifts from donor-advised funds (DAFs), and this comes as no surprise. A recent national study showed that grants from DAFs to qualified charities increased more than 60 percent in the past two years!

Here at Bridge, we believe strongly in DAF giving. We have seen that our friends who support Bridge through DAFs not only respond quickly and generously in the face of pressing challenges but also serve an important role in sustained giving.

DAFs have become popular in part because of their versatility, allowing Bridge supporters to give when, what, and how it's most favorable for them. Giving with a donor-advised fund can be a tax-efficient way to build a charitable legacy, dovetailing conveniently into estate planning.



Please see our website, [www.bridgecommunities.org/support-us](http://www.bridgecommunities.org/support-us), or scan the code to learn more about opening a donor-advised fund to support Bridge Communities.

### Donors Give

- Bridge donors can contribute immediately, build a philanthropic strategy, and recommend grants when ready.
- DAFs can accept a wide range of assets such as cash, stock, and real estate as contributions.



### Assets Grow

- Assets may grow over time, making more charitable dollars available to support Bridge.



### Bridge Benefits

- DAFs can be useful in the development of Bridge donors' philanthropic vision, strategy, and philosophy.



# Thank you for your support!

Our friends in the community make a world of difference to the families we have the honor to serve.

Thank you all for your generosity and compassion!



Thank you, GreenState Foundation

Many thanks to GreenState Credit Union for expanding our partnership to include a \$10,000 grant from their foundation in support of our Transitional Housing Program!



Thank you, Caton Commercial

Planting flowers to help beautify our clients' homes is just one element of a varied, multi-year commitment from Caton Commercial that includes generous funding, volunteerism, and more. Thank you!



Thank you, Old National Bank Foundation

We are so grateful to Old National Bank for their latest show of support – a \$10,000 grant from their foundation in support of our Employment Program.



Thank you, Duly Health and Care

Duly's hiring professionals have been supporting our Employment team through workshop participation. Duly's Black/African American Community Resource Group collected Resource Closet Donations. And the "Duly Gooders" showed up in force to volunteer at our client family summer picnic.



Thank you, DuPage Foundation and the Betty M. Bock & Harbaugh Family Funds

Not only has the DuPage Foundation supported our Children's Program with a \$25,000 grant from the Betty M. Bock Fund and the Harbaugh Family Fund, but they and the DuPage County Board also provided a generous grant from the DuPage Community Transformation Partnership in support of our Stability Program.



Thank you, INEOS Community Fund

A big thank you to the INEOS Community Fund for their very generous donation of \$32,000. We are so grateful for your amazing generosity!

# Night of Hope: One Community

## November 4, 2023



This year marks the 20th anniversary of Sleep Out Saturday. Since its inception, Sleep Out Saturday has raised more than \$1.5 million to support the families in our program.

**Who?** Nearly 1,000 people in DuPage County will participate in Sleep Out Saturday (SOS) this year. **How about you?**



**What?**

Create your fundraising page with the QR code below to raise awareness of homelessness and funds for Bridge Communities. Set your goal and receive our SOS Tool Kit, filled with information, ideas, and activities for all ages.



**Where?**

Participants will brave a night inside tents, boxes, and cars throughout DuPage County. Prior to the Sleep Out, a rally will be held at College of DuPage at 6:30 p.m.



**When?**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2023**

Or choose a night between October 14 and December 2.



**Why?** By becoming a Sleep Out Star, you make a real impact on the lives of families facing homelessness in DuPage County. **Change starts with you!**



**How?** **Become a Sleep Out Star!**

Scan this QR code to register for SOS.



@sleepoutsaturday [www.sleepoutsaturday.org](http://www.sleepoutsaturday.org) Questions? [margo.matthew@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:margo.matthew@bridgecommunities.org)

### Board of Directors

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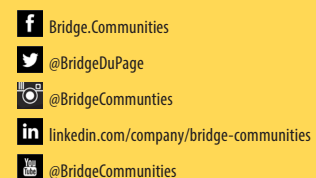
*Connections* is a publication of Bridge Communities, Inc.

The mission of Bridge Communities is to transition families facing homelessness 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, and Hope—apply to everyone involved in Bridge Communities.

500 Roosevelt Rd  
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137  
630-545-0610

[www.bridgecommunities.org](http://www.bridgecommunities.org)

We want to share all the latest and greatest news from Bridge Communities with you. Connect with us on social media:





500 Roosevelt Rd  
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137  
630-545-0610  
Fax 630-545-0640

[www.bridgcommunities.org](http://www.bridgcommunities.org)

Bridge Communities is a nonprofit organization working to transition families facing homelessness to self-sufficiency by working with partners to provide mentoring, housing, and supportive services.

**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, families of Bridge Communities recently reached these milestones:

- **Client S** earned her degree and began her career as a registered nurse.
- After graduating from the Bridge program, **Client K** closed on a home with the help of DuPage Habitat for Humanity. Client K and her boys are prepared for long-term success.
- **Client Z** applied for a personal assistant position and was hired on the spot. She'll be making \$20/hour and the position will allow her to continue going to school part-time.
- **Client J** got a job as a 911 dispatcher and earned her credentials. She texted Bridge staff to share the good news and say "There is not a day I don't thank God for putting you and the program in my life. You truly helped me grow and I couldn't have made it through the program and on my road to success without you."
- **Client Y** received a donated car. She now has reliable transportation to get to work and pick up her children, so her family can thrive.
- **Client D** joined our Stability Program a few months ago and has already paid off two of her debts.
- **Client K** completed her phlebotomy certification with financial support from Bridge. She accepted a job offer making \$19.50 an hour.



*\*Clients' names changed to initials to protect their privacy.*



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.bridgcommunities.org](http://www.bridgcommunities.org).