



Generosity Report | 2023





*Dear friends,*

As I reflect on Bridge Communities' 35th anniversary, I am left with a deep sense of gratitude for your generosity and commitment through the years. Since our founding in 1988, Bridge has served over 970 families, breaking the cycle of homelessness for thousands of individuals.

That remarkable feat is only possible through your generous support, and for that, I am so thankful.



Throughout the past year, Bridge Communities used jade as a symbol of this momentous anniversary. This is not only because jade is the modern symbol for a 35th anniversary, but also because it represents longevity, good fortune, wisdom, and love, which truly was the foundation Bridge was built upon.

As you will read in the story of client alumna Chris, Bridge has always taken a holistic approach to serving our families. Chris and her daughter experienced Bridge during our early days, when we had no paid staff and volunteer mentors worked with limited resources. Chris' success is a testament to the power of the volunteer mentor model, coupled with the strength and resilience of the families we are honored to serve.

With this strong foundation and the support of friends like you, Bridge's vision has thrived, always evolving to meet our community's changing needs.

In 2023, we furthered this evolution by introducing our Family Wellness Program. This Program builds upon our longstanding nutrition and gardening programs with the addition of peer support workshops, which work together to build strong physical and mental health for all families. To read the 2023 outcomes of this program, see page 9.

We have also seen success in our newly established Stability Program, which allows us to serve additional families who have more complex needs through direct case management and supportive services. Thus far, we have welcomed 15 families into the Stability Program. Six of those have graduated into our Transitional Housing Program, and three additional families found stable housing outside of Bridge services.

In this report, you will see the outcomes of Bridge's services in 2023. While I am proud of the impact Bridge Communities has had over the past 35 years, I'm most excited about our future. And, I know, with the commitment of our staff, volunteers, client families and you, our future is bright. Thank you for your dedication through the years.

With gratitude for you,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy'.

Amy Van Polen  
Chief Executive Officer, Bridge Communities

## *From Facing Homelessness to Hope*

**T**oday, Chris lives with her family in a home she owns and has a long, successful career. She has even been working her way up within the same company for over three decades now. Unless you asked her about it, you wouldn't know that nearly 35 years ago her family was experiencing homelessness.

"Things were not going well," Chris said. She and her two-year-old daughter were living in a family homelessness shelter. Chris was extremely driven and wanted to make a better life for her family. She just needed the stability and time to identify her goals and pursue them. When the shelter referred her to Bridge Communities, she found that and more.

"When I was referred to Bridge, it was the first time in a long time that I felt good about where I was going. I was setting my goals and actually accomplishing my goals," Chris said.

Chris' family entered the Bridge program in 1991, just three years after Bridge's founding. In these early days, the services offered were not as robust as they are now. However, just like a new client entering the program today, Chris was paired with a mentor, Sue Martin, and a case manager, Bridge Communities co-founder Mark Milligan.

Sue would meet with Chris weekly to talk with her about finances and how to reach her financial and professional goals,



but Sue's dedication to Chris's family went beyond even that.

"I took college courses when I was in Bridge," said Chris, "and Sue actually watched my daughter for me on Saturdays when I did them. She went above and beyond. She just loved my daughter."

Meanwhile, Mark was always there for encouragement and to ensure Chris had the resources she needed. He and Sue wanted to see Chris succeed in all aspects of life. "They drilled into me that it's also important to take time for yourself," said Chris.

Mark and Sue were the first people in a long time to ask Chris what she liked to do. When Chris shared that she loved biking, they got her a bike with a child bike seat the very next day. Bridge Communities took a holistic approach to helping Chris achieve

lifelong success, encouraging quality family time and taking care of oneself, just as we continue to do with our clients today.

"They instilled confidence in me and helped get my self-esteem back to where it should be," said Chris.

The Bridge program also changed her daughter's life. "She got to be a normal kid and got to do the things she loved," Chris said. "Without Bridge, I don't think she could've had that."

Even years after graduating the program, Chris would call Mark to run something by him, and Mark would reach out to her to check in. According to Chris, Mark was like a second dad to her.

A lot has changed since Chris graduated from Bridge. She owns her own home in Wheaton, and

her 12-year-old grandson now goes to the same school that Chris and her daughter once attended. Bridge Communities has also changed a lot since Chris was in the program. We expanded to serve over 100 families every year and offer a truly comprehensive program. However, what hasn't changed is our commitment to transforming the lives of every family we serve.

"I don't think I could have ever done it by myself. It's not just the people and the encouragement, but the resources that Bridge has at its fingertips."





## MISSION

Our mission is to transition families facing homelessness to self-sufficiency by working with partners to provide mentoring, housing, and supportive services.

## VISION

Our vision is a community where all families are healthy, financially stable, and living in affordable housing.

## VALUES

Each of our core values apply to everyone involved in Bridge Communities.

Partnership  
Empowerment  
Integrity  
Respect  
Hope

### EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Laura Jensen, Chairperson \*

Sara Stolmeier, Vice-Chairperson

Robert Mitchum, Treasurer \*\*

Bill Strons, Secretary, ad hoc

Amy Van Polen, Chief Executive Officer

\*Term ended

\*\*Term as Treasurer ended;  
he now serves as Chairperson

### OFFICERS

Loretta Abrams

Greg Crawford

Matt Dmytryszyn

Matt Doucet

Chad Fischer

Vicki Guster-Hines

Kathy Madigan

Kate Matousek

Joli Murphy

Ann Pitcher

Carl VanDril

## *Update on Bridge Communities' Equity & Belonging Journey*

**T**o ensure all families feel welcome in our program and Bridge Communities becomes a more equitable organization, we introduced our Equity & Belonging Initiative in 2022.

These efforts are being led by our Equity & Belonging Team comprised of staff, board members, mentors, and Program Partner leadership with additional guidance from an external group with race equity expertise, the Equity Institute.

Starting in early 2023, Bridge staff held a series of five trainings to focus on topics including equity, identity, bias, privilege, and microaggressions. The Bridge Board of Directors also participated in trainings on these topics throughout the past year. In 2024, we will roll out similar trainings for mentors and volunteers.

As a part of this initiative, our Equity & Belonging Team went to work to review and strengthen our core values of Partnership, Empowerment, Integrity, Respect, and Hope. Together, we updated the definitions of these values to incorporate our commitment to equity and belonging and to assign

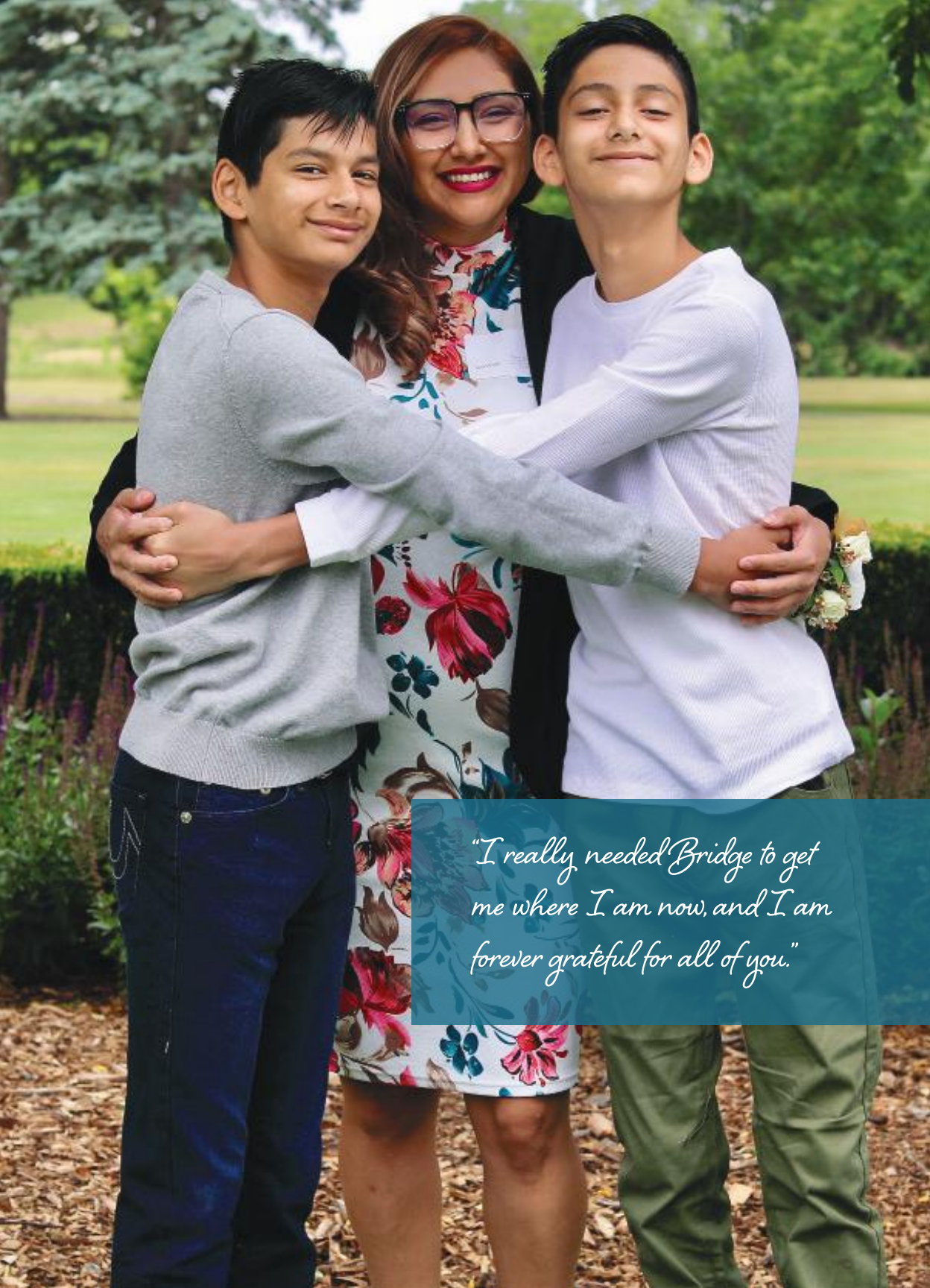
behavioral norms to demonstrate that commitment as it aligns to our values.

We tasked the Equity Institute with completing a full assessment on organizational culture, policy, and procedures, engaging with staff input on these topics. The findings of this evaluation led to an evidence report that our Equity & Belonging Team has reviewed and set priorities in the areas of human resource policies and practices, development of an equity statement, and cultural competency workshops and data monitoring.

While we are proud of the work we have done in the past year, we understand that our equity and belonging journey is far from complete. This initiative is ongoing and is becoming an established part of Bridge culture that will inform how we serve client families, plan our events, and engage with our volunteers and community.

We hope that you will join us for this learning journey and invite you to share your thoughts or questions by contacting Amy Van Polen at [amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org) or (630) 403-5090.





*"I really needed Bridge to get me where I am now, and I am forever grateful for all of you."*



# *A Snapshot of 2023 Bridge Families*

**105** families were provided housing (comprised of 111 adults and 205 children)

- **62%** of children were under the age of 12
- **86%** identified as persons of color
- **93%** female head of household

**34** new families entered the program (7 families were welcomed into our Stability Program, and 27 families were welcomed into our Transitional Housing Program)

- **100%** were low to extremely low income, with 91% employed
- Median savings of **\$79**
- **62%** were living doubled/tripled up with family and friends
- **33%** reported high risk or crisis employment status
- **33%** reported high risk childcare status
- **15%** reported food scarcity concerns

**44** families exited the program

*Review client outcomes on the centerfold*





*"Thank you. I couldn't have done any  
of this without all of their support,  
their help, their guidance."*





## *Family Wellness: A Holistic Approach to Lifelong Success*

**4** Peer Support Workshops with attendance ranging between 19-23 clients

**94%** of exiting families were satisfied with their emotional health

**36** total attendees at our nutrition workshops

**14** families participated in the GardenWorks Project program

**9** families benefited from organic farm shares from A Drop in the Dessert

**81%** of exiting families were satisfied with their nutritional health

“Not only was it fantastic that [the garden program] helped us with our budget for our large family, it taught us where the food came from and how my kids can help themselves in the future by setting up a garden.”



## *Children's Program: Connecting the Next Generation to a Brighter Future*

**236** children and youth received home visits (virtual or in-person)

**31** received personal tutoring, totaling **291** hours

**38** children received mental health support totaling **412** hours

**172** received scholarships for school and enrichment activities,  
like summer camp

**17** families were engaged in parenting support

**100%** of exiting parents agreed their parenting goals  
were supported

**94%** of exiting parents agreed their children's needs  
were supported



“The most helpful part of the program is how the mentors help you with budgeting and managing your finances and how the program incorporates the children and prioritizes children's needs.”



## *Employment & Adult Education: Creating a Path to Self-Sufficiency*

**51** clients received one-on-one employment counseling

**18** clients attended "4 Weeks to Success: Getting hired, retained, and promoted" workshops

**100%** of clients surveyed endorsed the workshop as high quality and useful for career development

**45** clients secured full-time jobs

**43** adults visited the Bridge Communities Boutique a total of 73 times

**25** clients received educational coaching or support

**17** received scholarships

**88%** of exiting clients said their employment goals were supported

**88%** of exiting clients said their education goals were supported



"The instructors [of the workshop] provided quality information. I learned a vast amount of knowledge in a short time frame. Thank you!"



*"Thank you so much for everything! I am who I am today  
because of the program that taught me to stay strong,  
be independent, and always stay positive!"*

## Achievements of 2023 Client Graduates:



**100%** agreed their ability to communicate with  
and advocate for their children improved

**100%** were confident in their budgeting skills



**94%** had money set aside for emergencies

**91%** were stable to thriving in childcare



**100%** were confident in their ability to manage their stress

## Graduates were satisfied with their Bridge apartment:



**94%** agreed that their apartment building was well maintained

**88%** said any maintenance needs they had  
were quickly and efficiently attended to

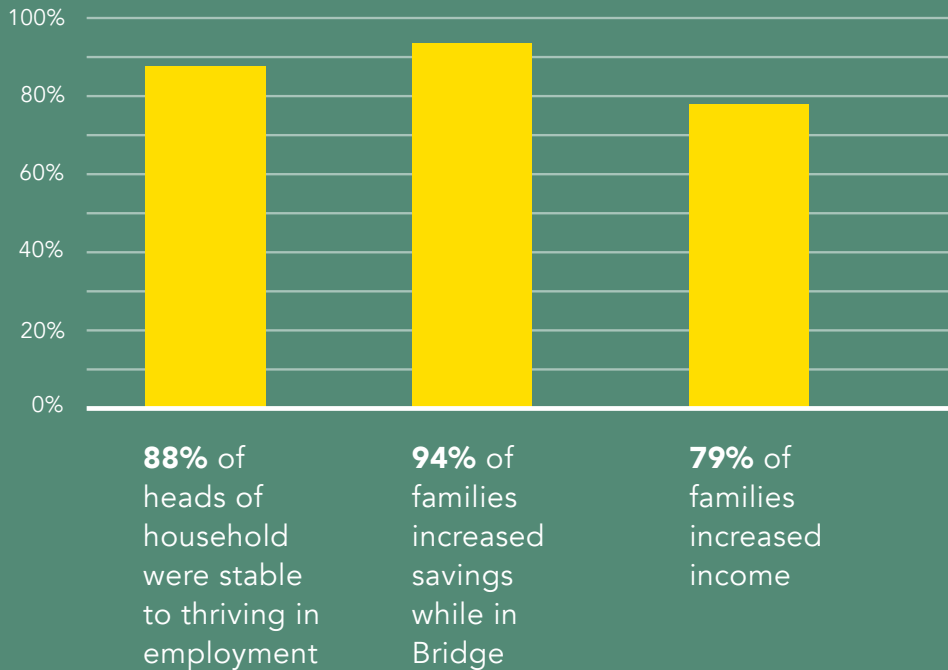


**69%** felt a sense of community within Bridge housing



## *Client Outcomes: Building Lifelong Success*

Throughout our clients' time in the Bridge Communities program, we met our goals. The statistics below reflect the progress of the clients who exited the program.



### **Graduates reported improved financial stability:**

Median Monthly Income grew from **\$2,286** to **\$3,284**

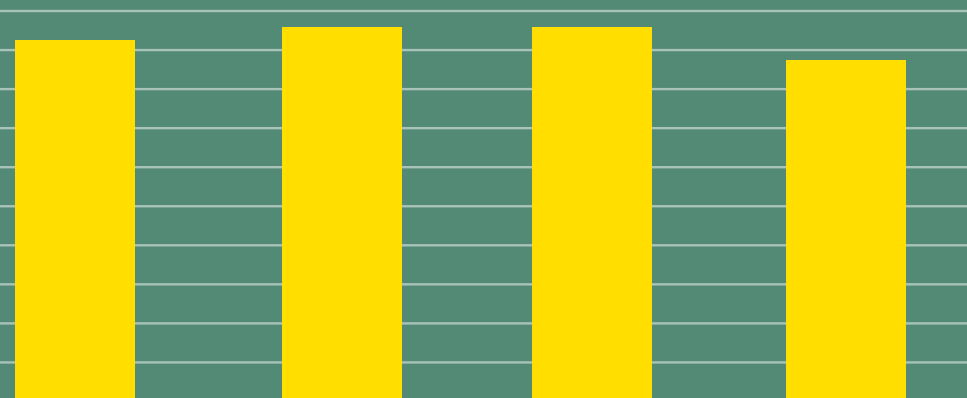
Median Savings increased from **\$0** to **\$10,916**

Median Debt decreased from **\$15,661** to **\$1,500**





monitor and measure their success to ensure it aligns with their  
ed the program in 2023. At the time of their exit:



**91%** of  
families  
decreased  
debt

**94%** of  
families  
reported  
satisfaction  
with their  
quality  
of life

**94%** of  
clients were  
confident  
they could  
achieve  
their  
employment  
goals

**88%** of  
families  
secured  
permanent  
housing





*"To Bridge's supporters I would say, you aren't wasting your money. You're putting it in the right place. You are changing lives."*

## *Building Homes & Hope in DuPage County*

Over the past 35 years, Bridge Communities has invested in the futures of over 970 families facing homelessness in DuPage County. In turn, those families have put down roots and invested in the greater DuPage community.

Of the families that Bridge has recent addresses for, 85% have remained in DuPage County. Even more live in the Chicagoland area with connections to DuPage. They are our friends, coworkers, neighbors, and classmates.

Bridge is proud to help strengthen communities and improve the quality of life of residents in DuPage County. To see where Bridge graduates have put down roots throughout the county, please view the map below.



## *Thank You to Our Program Partners*

Program Partners make a world of difference for the families we serve. Our Transitional Housing Program Partners provide volunteer mentors, financial support, and housing resources to make sure Bridge Communities' clients can thrive in the program.

Our current group of 35 Program Partners have supported a total of 665 families over the years, breaking the cycle of homelessness for nearly 2,000 individuals. Special thanks to all our Program Partners for their incredible dedication and generosity.

### **Church of the Holy Ghost**

Joined in 1999

### **Community Fellowship Church**

Joined in 2022

### **Congregation Etz Chaim**

Joined in 2021

### **Daybreak of Elmhurst - Immaculate Conception Parish**

Joined in 1991

### **Daybreak of Lisle - St. Joan of Arc Church**

Joined in 1989

### **Downers Grove First United Methodist Church**

Joined in 2001

### **DuPage AME Church**

Joined in 2007

### **Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church**

Joined in 2006

### **Families Helping Families**

Joined in 1994

### **First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn**

Joined in 1988

### **First Congregational Church of Downers Grove**

Joined in 1999

### **First Presbyterian Church of Glen Ellyn**

Joined in 1990

### **First United Methodist Church of Glen Ellyn**

Joined in 2001

### **Gloria Dei Lutheran Church**

Joined in 2003

### **Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

Joined in 2016

### **Hinsdale United Methodist Church**

Joined in 1997

### **Merrill Lynch/Bank of America**

Joined in 2018

### **Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church**

Joined in 2001

### **Our Saviour's Lutheran Church**

Joined in 2002



**Shelter Assistance Foundation  
Encouragement (SAFE)**

Joined in 2023

**Saints Peter and Paul  
Catholic Church**

Joined in 1989

**St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic  
Church**

Joined in 1995

**St. Irene Catholic Church**

Joined in 2014

**St. Isaac Jogues Catholic  
Parish**

Joined in 1994

**St. Margaret Mary  
Catholic Church**

Joined in 2016

**St. Michael Catholic Church**

Joined in 2012

**St. Peter the Apostle  
Catholic Church**

Joined in 1995

**St. Petronille Parish**

Joined in 1991

**St. Raphael Catholic Church**

Joined in 2014

**St. Scholastica Parish**

Joined in 1994

**St. Thomas the Apostle  
Catholic Church**

Joined in 1990

**St. Timothy Lutheran Church**

Joined in 2010

**Transitional Housing Ministry –  
Resurrection Catholic Church,  
St. John the Baptist Catholic  
Church, St. Matthew Church,  
St. Matthew United Church of  
Christ, Little Home Church by  
the Wayside**

Joined in 1998

**Trinity Lutheran Church**

Joined in 2019

**Victory Cathedral Worship  
Center**

Joined in 2022; Supports our  
Stability Program





*"Bridge didn't just give me the fish. They taught me to fish. My heart is truly grateful for everybody that is a part of Bridge."*



## *New Beginnings at a New Location*

**T**his past October, Bridge Communities celebrated the Ribbon Cutting of our new offices at 500 Roosevelt Road in Glen Ellyn.

This event not only celebrated Bridge's new headquarters but also our 35-year legacy in Glen Ellyn and our continuing commitment to improving the lives of families facing homelessness in DuPage County.

The celebration included Bridge Communities co-founder, Mark Milligan sharing the 35-year history of Bridge and client alumna, Chris, sharing her story as one of the first clients Bridge served. There was even a heartwarming moment when Chris reconnected with her former

mentor, Sue Martin, after more than 30 years. You can read more about Chris' story in the Bridge program on page 2.

Everyone who joined us for the Ribbon Cutting helped make the event such a wonderful celebration. We would like to once again give special thanks to Wintrust and Phoenix Builders, who have been instrumental in establishing our new offices.

If you were not able to attend our Ribbon Cutting and would like to see Bridge Communities' new headquarters, please stop by to tour our offices and learn more about Bridge.



*We would also like to recognize all of those who helped us cut the ribbon: Pam Sharar-Stoppel, Executive Vice President & Regional Market Head, Wintrust; Karen Wells, former CEO, Bridge Communities; Todd Moore, Project Manager, Phoenix Builders; Amy Van Polen, CEO, Bridge Communities; Jared Eischeid, CFO, Phoenix Builders; Mark Milligan, Co-Founder, Bridge Communities; Laura Jensen, Former Board Chairperson, Bridge Communities; and Mark Senak, Glen Ellyn Village President.*



CORNERSTONE  
SOCIETY

## *Built to Last*

**W**hen you join the Cornerstone Society, you can be confident that your planned gift will create a lasting impact on the lives of the families facing homelessness that Bridge Communities serves. You help these families break the cycle of homelessness and give them a brighter future.

Kim and Mark Dorn of Glen Ellyn updated their estate plan to include Bridge Communities. "I work in the nonprofit world, and I understand the importance and value of people committing to give planned gifts," explained Kim. "They can transform organizations and sustainability."

"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," said Kim.

Your planned gift to Bridge Communities can change the lives of families facing homelessness in DuPage County, achieve your financial goals, and leave a legacy of generosity.

To learn how you can create your legacy at Bridge Communities, call Kristin Short at 630-403-5101 or email [kristin.short@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:kristin.short@bridgecommunities.org).

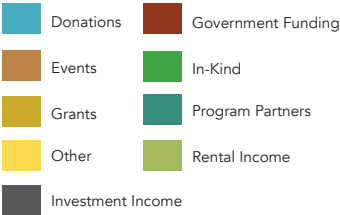
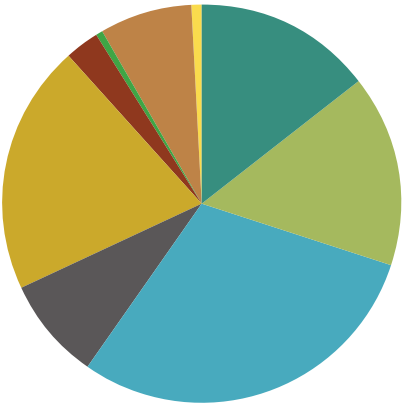




# Audited Financials: Fiscal Year 2023

## Revenue

Donations	\$1,530,597
Events, net	\$429,080
Grants	\$1,040,559
Government Funding	\$152,362
In-Kind	\$32,135
Program Partners	\$750,867
Rental Income	\$798,501
Investment Income	\$381,492
Other	\$35,158
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$5,150,751</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	<b>\$5,176,256</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Ending Net Assets</b>	<b>\$13,901,688</b>



## Expenses

Program Services	\$3,991,526
Administration	\$524,658
Fundraising	\$660,072
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,176,256</b>



# *Get Involved at Bridge Communities*

## **Tutor, Volunteer, or Organize a Donation Drive**

Contact Volunteer Coordinator, Mary Slade  
630-403-5098 or [mary.slade@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:mary.slade@bridgecommunities.org)

## **Mentor a Bridge Family**

Contact Associate Director of Program Partnerships, Marti Deuter  
630-403-5109 or [marti.deuter@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:marti.deuter@bridgecommunities.org)

## **Donate Your Car to Bridge**

Contact Senior Case Manager, Paul Matthews  
630-403-5104 or [paul.matthews@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:paul.matthews@bridgecommunities.org)

## **Sponsor a Bridge Special Event**

Contact Director of Community Engagement, Jenifer Bystry  
630-403-5095 or [jenifer.bystry@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:jenifer.bystry@bridgecommunities.org)

## **Volunteer for Bridge's Employment Program**

Contact Director of Employment and Adult Education, Jodi Fegter  
630-403-5111 or [jodi.fegter@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:jodi.fegter@bridgecommunities.org)

## **Give to Bridge Communities or Organize a Fundraiser**

Contact Director of Resource Development, Kristin Short  
630-403-5101 or [kristin.short@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:kristin.short@bridgecommunities.org)

Connect with Us on Social Media for the  
Latest Updates and More Ways to Get Involved

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