



Connections

Connecting families facing homelessness to a better future.

Theresa: “Bridge Communities was an amazing opportunity. They are a sincere, kind-hearted organization that will never turn their back on you.”

As Theresa prepared for her daughter to leave home for her first year of college, it was hard to believe that this once seemed nearly impossible. But it was only a few years ago that Theresa, her son, and daughter were facing homelessness.

“It was a struggle, even though I was working,” Theresa recalled.

Her family had been living with her parents, but it wasn’t a great situation for them. When it was time to leave, they wound up living in and out of hotels and friends’ houses.

Constantly bouncing around, it was hard for Theresa to build up savings or plan for her family’s next steps forward.

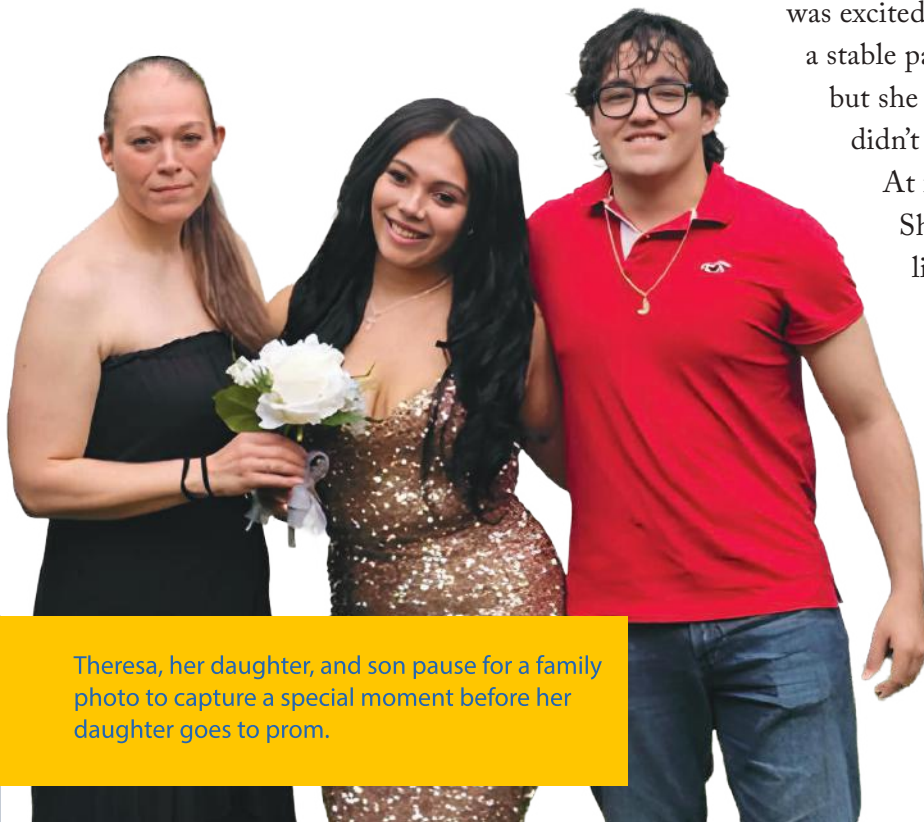
“I was scared, nervous, anxious—all of the above,” Theresa said. She tried to keep things as normal as possible for her kids. “They knew their mom would always find a way, but they did have their worries. ‘Mom, will we have enough money for this? Will we be able to eat?’”

When a friend recommended she consider Bridge Communities, she was excited for a new beginning and a stable path forward for her family, but she was nervous too and didn’t know what to expect.

At first, it was hard for her. She had to open up her life to a new team of mentors who she had just met.

“I had to build trust with my mentors,” Theresa said. “But they opened up too

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Theresa, her daughter, and son pause for a family photo to capture a special moment before her daughter goes to prom.

Fall 2026

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“Bridge Communities was an amazing opportunity.” *continued*

and helped me let my guard down. They turned out to be fabulous people, sweet and very sincere people. They wanted to help and see me do well. You have to have a good heart to do what they do.”

Over time, Theresa learned what an incredible resource they were. She felt that she could go to them with any question and be welcomed with open arms.

“If it weren’t for my mentors teaching me how to budget, I wouldn’t be where I am today. My kids and I have taken a tremendous amount of knowledge from the program.”

With her new Bridge Communities apartment home and mentor team, Theresa began to focus on her goals. She knew she wanted to work in the medical field, so she started pursuing her CNA. Theresa also began working on her budget in order to build her savings.

Hopping from house to house, Theresa didn’t have a chance to make home-cooked meals with her kids. That became a big priority of

hers as a way to save money and have more family time.

It was during that family time that Theresa felt her relationship with her kids growing stronger, and she would share what she was learning at Bridge.

“They saw that mom was learning to save and wanted to do it too.” Theresa said. “They wanted to save up for a car, and that’s exactly what they both did. They both bought their own cars.”

In the Bridge program, the family attended cooking classes, counseling, and children’s events. With Bridge’s Children’s Program, Theresa’s son toured a college campus and enjoyed the visit so much that he decided to go there when he graduated. Through her hard work, Theresa earned her CNA, took control of her budget, built savings, and was ready to graduate from the Bridge program into long-term stability.

“I left with a substantial amount of money saved and have been in this house for nearly three years. I’m looking

to build a home in the next two years,” Theresa shared.

Now, the future looks bright for this family. Theresa started her own caregiving and CNA business.

Her children both finished high school and, with the savings they built up, were ready to take on college. Her daughter is entering her freshman year, and her son is returning for his sophomore year this fall.

“I don’t think I’d be where I am today without Bridge,” Theresa said. “I’m more successful now because of the tools they gave me and the things they taught me. We laughed together. We cried together. It was just a great experience overall for me and my children.”

To those who supported her journey from homelessness to hope, Theresa shared, “Thank you so much for all the knowledge, everything you taught me. You have no idea how much you’ve changed my life for the better.” 🏡

**Hope Is in
Your Hands!**

**By supporting Bridge Communities,
you give hope to families like Theresa’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).**



Building on What You've Started



Dear friends,
Every year, I have the privilege of watching families in the Bridge Communities program move from crisis to stability, a life changing transformation that you make possible. Because

of you, parents are building careers, children are thriving in stable homes, and families are creating brighter futures. Thank you.

As we move into the final stretch of our Opening New Doors Investment Campaign, I am especially grateful to everyone who has helped us reach this exciting milestone. Every gift brings us closer to the finish line while strengthening our endowment, ensuring our mission can evolve to meet the needs of our community.

If you'd like to learn more about joining us in these final months, please reach out to Kristin Short at Kristin.Short@BridgeCommunities.org. We are deeply grateful for all who have walked this road with us.

I also want to say a special thank you to our mentors, who are truly the heart of our mission. Their guidance, consistency, and unwavering belief in our families make lasting change possible. If you'd

like to work closely and partner with families on their journey to overcome homelessness, consider becoming a mentor. Please see page 7 to learn more about the impact mentor's make and how you can get involved.

Looking ahead, our 2026-2028 Strategic Plan will guide Bridge into an exciting new chapter. Together, we are deepening support especially in regard to children and housing, evolving how mentors engage, growing our resources, and investing in our team and the voices of clients and alumni. To learn more about this work, scan the QR code to explore the full plan.

The housing, the mentoring, and the futures being built would not be possible without you. Thank you for believing in Bridge's mission and for standing with our families every step of the way. Together we are opening new doors and creating lasting change.

With deep appreciation,

Amy Van Polen, CFRE
Chief Executive Officer



Read our Strategic Plan

Create a Legacy of Life-Changing Support

National Estate Planning Awareness Week is October 19–25, a time to reflect on the future and the lasting impact we hope to make.

At Bridge Communities, we believe every family deserves a stable home, the opportunity to achieve their goals, and a brighter future. A legacy gift can help make that possible for generations to come.

By including Bridge Communities in your estate plans, you can create a meaningful legacy while helping families move from homelessness to stability and hope.

Legacy gifts can take many forms, including through your will, IRA, 401(k), or other assets, and any amount can create a meaningful impact. When you let us know about your gift or use our free online planning tools, you become a member of the Cornerstone Legacy Society.

Your legacy can do more than make a gift. It can change a family's story.

Scan the QR code to learn more and begin planning your legacy today.



Q&A with Sara Stolmeier | Board Chair

Q. What inspired you to join Bridge Communities' Board of Directors?

A. I was struck by the generational impact of Bridge Communities. When a family finds stability, the benefits extend far beyond the immediate need for housing. I've seen children that can now focus on school, build confidence, and dream about their future. It's inspiring to see how Bridge helps create a foundation that can change the trajectory of an entire family's life.

Q. What do you do as a board member?

A. As Board Chair, I help shape the organization's strategic direction and work closely with Amy and the leadership team to support Bridge's mission. My favorite part is exploring new ways to grow the number of clients served.

Q. How has volunteering with Bridge impacted your life or perspective?

A. Volunteering with Bridge has opened my eyes to the reality of "invisible" homelessness in our community. Many families facing housing instability are working hard and doing



everything they can to provide for their children. I'm reminded that we never truly know what someone is going through. It compels me to lead with empathy and understanding.

Q. Is there a particular moment you're most proud of in your volunteer work?

A. One of the most memorable moments is seeing a mom get the keys to her new apartment. Knowing that her family will now have a safe place to sleep, learn, work, and thrive is thrilling.

Q. What would you say to someone interested in joining Bridge Communities' Board?

A. If you're passionate about making a meaningful difference for families in our community, I would encourage you to get involved. The Board is made up of smart, dedicated people who care deeply about Bridge's mission and are committed to creating lasting change. It's incredibly rewarding to work alongside a team that inspires me to do more. 🏡

Thank you, Sara, for your dedication to helping the families served by Bridge Communities!

If you're interested in learning more about our Board of Directors or leadership committee service opportunities, please contact Amy Van Polen at amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org.

SAVE THE DATE

Sleep Out Saturday

Saturday, November 7, 2026

Throughout DuPage County

Register today for an empathy-building night outside to support families facing homelessness!



Presented by
Perma-Seal Basement Systems, Inc.

Giving Tuesday

Tuesday, December 1, 2026

Online

You can help families overcome homelessness and have your gift doubled thanks to Giving Tuesday Matching Sponsor, BMO.



Wine Women & Shoes

Saturday, March 13, 2027

Drury Lane, Oak Brook

Save the date for this fabulous, high-energy event featuring an unforgettable day of fun & philanthropy.



Scan the QR code to visit our website and learn more about these exciting, upcoming events. Never miss an event update! Follow Bridge Communities on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.



Lights Out for Homelessness!

Help out, sleep out! Join us for Sleep Out Saturday on November 7th!

Trade a night in your warm bed for a night outside supporting a cause that matters. Sleep Out Saturday is a night dedicated to raising funds for and awareness of families in our community facing homelessness.

By sleeping out, you ensure that 100+ families facing homelessness have a safe place to call home. It's empathy in action and is sure to be a night you won't soon forget.

Get Your Sleep Out Started Right!

You won't want to miss our **SOS Kickoff Rally at College of DuPage's Lakeside Pavilion on November 7th from 6:30-8pm.**

There's going to be live entertainment from School of Rock, games, prizes, soup and bread, plus the inspiring story of a graduate from the Bridge program.

This Rally is the perfect way to fuel up and get connected to the cause before you sleep out!

The Difference You Make

Since its launch, Sleep Out Saturday has raised more than \$1 million to support the families in our program. Your night outside creates lasting change for families working toward independence and stability.

Whether you sleep out with friends, family or by yourself, this is community action at its finest.

Head to SleepOutSaturday.org to register or learn more. See you under the stars on November 7th!



Scan the QR to register and learn more!



Presented by
Perma-Seal Basement Systems, Inc.

Special thanks to all our sponsors, especially Perma Seal, Northwestern Medicine, Bank of America, and College of DuPage



Thank you for your support!

Our friends in the community make our mission to empower families to overcome homelessness possible. Thank you for your lifechanging support!



Thank you, Bob Fornatto

Bob donated his used car to a Bridge family in need of reliable transportation for work and school. Because of his support, this family is now on the road to success!



Thank you, 100 Women Who Care Naperville

This incredible group of women raised over \$15,000 for Bridge through donations from their members. Thank you for being a force for change in our community!



Thank you, DuPage Foundation, the Harbaugh Family Fund, and the Darnall Family Fund

We are deeply grateful for DuPage Foundation, the Harbaugh Family Fund, and the Darnall Family Fund's generous \$25,000 grant in support of our Children's Program.

GetInvolved!



You can make a difference for your neighbors facing homelessness! Check out our Volunteer page by scanning the QR code for opportunities to get involved.



Thank you, Dawn Struxness

Thanks to a generous donation from Dawn, children in the Bridge program were ready to go back to school with backpacks full of school supplies!



Thank you, Associated Bank

For the third year in a row, Associated Bank has generously given us a grant to help fund our mission. Their support makes a world of difference for Bridge families.

The Difference Our Mentors Make: Results from our Mentor Feedback Survey

At the heart of Bridge Communities' work is a powerful relationship, the bond between mentors and the family they support. Nearly 300 volunteer mentors help make our mission possible by partnering with clients and offering guidance as they work to overcome homelessness.

This spring, we surveyed our current mentors to learn more about their experience, and the results reinforce the importance of the relationship between mentor and client. It also shows that mentors recognize their role as one of the most meaningful ways to invest in a family's path to stability.

Here's what mentors had to say:

- **91%** felt well supported by Bridge Communities case managers and staff
- **88%** would recommend mentoring to a friend or family member without hesitation
- **100%** of respondents said mentoring has had a positive impact on their own lives

Mentors described gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges local families face and a renewed sense of gratitude and perspective in their own lives

For many mentors, the experience goes beyond volunteering. It becomes a genuine partnership built on trust, encouragement, and shared milestones. As one mentor

shared, the experience offers "an intimate understanding" of what families are up against, and the chance to be part of real, lasting change.

If you've ever considered becoming a mentor, there's no better time to start! Bridge Communities is hosting our next Mentor Training on Friday, October 2, 5:30-8:30 p.m. and Saturday, October 3, 8:15 a.m.-4 p.m.

There new mentors will learn about the tools, resources, and support systems that guide a family through the Bridge program. Training covers everything from understanding available resources to building strong, trust-based relationships with the families you'll support.

Interested in becoming a mentor? Scan the QR code to learn more and register for Mentor Training on October 2-3. If you have any questions, please contact Jodi.Fegter@BridgeCommunities.org.



Learn more
about mentoring



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Amy Van Polen, Chief Executive Officer

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

The mission of Bridge Communities is to partner with families and their children, providing stable housing and transformational support so they are empowered to overcome homelessness and thrive for generations to come. Our vision is a community where all families are healthy, financially stable, and living in affordable housing. Each of our core values—Partnership, Hope, Integrity, Respect, and Empowerment—apply to everyone involved in Bridge Communities.

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

www.bridgecommunities.org

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www.bridgecommunities.org

Bridge Communities is a nonprofit organization that provides families facing homelessness with stable housing and transformative support to help them thrive.

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 J** has completed her LPN, graduated from our Transitional Housing Program, and is moving into our Pathways Program for affordable post-program housing.
- **Client R**, a recent graduate, reached out to our Children's Team to say "Thank you for everything that you've done for me and my boys... you were the easiest to talk to and get comfortable with."
- Before Bridge, **Client D** and his mom didn't have much stability. Now, instead of worrying about the future, D is finally able to focus on his academics and sports. In an essay, D shared, "I made a promise to myself that I will not let my family or my future family go through the things my mother had to endure in our journey."
- **Client C** is on track to complete her associate degree this December, with plans to earn her bachelor's degree as well!
- Little **C** started his first day of daycare! His mom, **Client M**, shared that it feels like just yesterday he was a tiny baby, and now he is putting on his little backpack and stepping out into the world. Both C and M are doing great in taking this big next step!



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



When you journey alongside the families of Bridge Communities, you empower families as they work towards self-sufficiency, permanent housing, and a lifetime of success. Please make a gift today at www.bridgecommunities.org.