



# Connections

*Connecting families facing homelessness to a better future.*

Kiara: “Bridge Communities is a blessing and a great opportunity for people who want to better themselves.”

**W**hen your child needs you at home but your job requires you to be in person, what do you do? This was the impossible question facing Kiara back in 2020.

She needed to be there for her then 10-year-old daughter as she attended classes virtually from home during lockdown, but as an essential worker, her job required her

to work in-person. She needed help caring for her daughter, so she made the difficult decision to move back in with her mother.

Originally, she was planning on doubling up with her mother for just a year as she found a new job and went back to school to become a mortician. She wanted to support families through some of their most difficult times.

Even after graduation though, Kiara could not find a job that could support her and her daughter. She still needed to complete her year-long apprenticeship to become a mortician.

Kiara started feeling guilty about doubling up with her mother. She felt she had been an imposition on her mother for too long, especially since her brother and his child were also living with her mother at this time.

“Me and my daughter began sleeping on my friend’s couch sometimes and driving back and forth,” Kiara said. “I just didn’t want to be a burden on anyone.”

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**“Bridge Communities is a blessing and a great opportunity for people who want to better themselves.” *continued***

Kiara and her daughter were bouncing from home to home, staying nights at her mother’s, a friend’s, a cousin’s. Getting her daughter to school every morning became a challenge. The family felt like a burden wherever they went and needed stability at home.

**“Bridge is a great opportunity to learn, get different resources, and better yourself.”**

It was then that Kiara realized it had become too much for her family. She knew she needed help.

“It was overwhelming. I was in a bit of a state of depression, but I just prayed about it and knew that our circumstances would change eventually,” said Kiara.

That was when a friend whose cousin graduated from Bridge Communities recommended she apply to the Bridge program. Kiara did just that, and her family was accepted.

Immediately, the stability provided by the program was a relief. “Just having my own

room and my daughter having her own room again, it put us in a better state. We can have our own place of peace,” Kiara shared.

Kiara was paired with a case manager and a team of mentors, and soon she found herself setting goals, budgeting, and working to build her savings.

“My mentors are amazing!” Kiara said. “They are very understanding, very patient problem solvers.”

With Kiara’s excellent budgeting skills, she has already paid down all her consumer debt and is now taking a focus on building savings and raising her credit score.

With the stability and support provided to her in the Bridge program, Kiara was also able to focus on her apprenticeship, the last step in her journey towards becoming a mortician and starting a career that is right for her.

Speaking of her apprenticeship, Kiara shared, “I’m just glad to be able to help guide people and talk them through the steps they need to take for their family.”

Her daughter has also been thriving in the Bridge program and is ready to start high school this fall. She has utilized several learning and enrichment resources including a career exploration workshop for teens and a gym and pool membership provided by Bridge’s Children’s program.

“My daughter is grateful to be in her own space,” said Kiara. “She’s adapting to a new school and a new environment.”

Today, Kiara continues to pay down her debt, build her savings, and work towards a career she is passionate about. With her hard work and dedication, she is set to finish her apprenticeship, increase her earnings, and exit into permanent housing for her family.

“Being in the Bridge program has been a blessing in my life. I feel like I’m at a place of peace when I go home. It’s my own home to come to,” Kiara said. “Bridge gives you the opportunity to learn and grow. I really appreciate all the help I received and will receive.” 📌

**Hope Is in  
Your Hands!**

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



## Bridging the Gap: The Need for Affordable Housing in DuPage County



Dear friends,

Our community is facing a pressing issue: the urgent need for affordable housing in DuPage County. This challenge is evident from the rising demand for services from Bridge Communities and the

powerful, moving stories shared by those we serve. The data paints a troubling picture.

Last school year, over 3,200 DuPage students experienced homelessness, highlighting the growing issue of housing insecurity for DuPage families. For a single parent with two children, the most common family configuration we serve, the financial hurdles are daunting.

To afford a basic two-bedroom apartment without being housing-cost burdened, a parent would need to earn \$24.74 per hour, working full-time. That's an annual income of \$51,460, far beyond what the average family entering our housing program earns.

With average two-bedroom rents in the area at \$1,714 a month, the gap between income and housing costs continues to widen, and with 6.8% of persons in DuPage County living below the poverty line, too many families are left behind.

These statistics are not just numbers. They represent real families struggling to navigate the perils of poverty and homelessness.

To hear the personal story of one such parent, join me at An Evening With Stephanie Land on Thursday, October 10 at 7 p.m. at College of DuPage's Belushi Performance Hall in the McAninch Arts Center. I am honored to moderate Land's presentation, which is inspired by her bestselling memoir "Maid" and the acclaimed Netflix series it led to.

Land's harrowing journey closely reflects the struggles that many parents in the Bridge program live through as they work to overcome homelessness and achieve self-sufficiency.

At Bridge Communities, we are committed to bridging this gap, but we cannot do it alone. Your support is crucial in our mission to create pathways to self-sufficiency for families in need. Together, we can build a stronger, more equitable DuPage County where every family has a place to call home.

To learn more or secure your tickets for An Evening With Stephanie Land, please scan the QR code.

Amy Van Polen, CFRE  
*Chief Executive Officer*



You  
Can Leave a  
Lasting Legacy  
of Hope

Your decision to include Bridge Communities in your estate plans is a profound testament to your compassion. By making a planned gift, you're creating a lasting legacy of kindness that will transform the lives of families facing homelessness for generations to come.

This generous investment secures the future of Bridge Communities, ensuring that our critical programs continue to empower your neighbors. Additionally, your gift offers valuable benefits, such as potential tax savings, that can support your financial goals.

To discuss planned giving options confidentially, please call Kristin Short at 630-403-5101 or email [kristin.short@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:kristin.short@bridgecommunities.org). Together, we can build a future where every neighbor has the stability and tools to achieve permanent housing.



## Q&A with Kimberly O'Brien | Mentor

**Q.** What inspired you to become a mentor for Bridge?

**A.** I am a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™, so I wanted to use my work experience to help others. A few years ago, Amy Van Polen had come to my workplace to share how Bridge Communities assists families. I believe very strongly in Bridge Communities' mission to advance the lives of local families. I started with Bridge as a part of the Direct Mentor program, and I applaud Bridge's efforts to make a space that allows me to be a volunteer mentor.



**Q.** What do you do as a mentor?

**A.** I now understand that being a Mentor is a partnership, and so much more than any one duty. I have offered financial guidance, emotional support, employment guidance, and sharing my own experiences, to name a few ways in which I contribute. Really listening to understand what the family is going through, not through my lens, but through their lived experience has been a vital part of my growth on our journey together.

**Q.** How has volunteering impacted your life or perspective?

**A.** I have received more than I give in my experience with Bridge. I see how much drive, determination, and resilience my family has embraced on their journey to being financially independent. Resilience is a common thread in all of our lives. Everyone has had to face challenge in their own life, but how do we come back, overcome, and move forward? I draw that inspiration from the family that I work with, as I have learned a lot about resilience from them.

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

**A.** My experience with my Bridge family has been made of many special moments put together. I am constantly amazed at the obstacles that have been overcome. The mom that I work with has achieved every goal that she has set for herself. She embraced budgeting and understands the vital importance of her earned income to her independence. While she has embraced the partnership with Bridge and myself, her success has come from her own spirit to overcome. It has been wonderful to have her family as a part of my life.

**Q.** What is the most rewarding part of being a mentor?

**A.** The opportunity to be a part of someone else's success in life has been so rewarding to me personally. It demonstrates to me that we do have the ability to positively impact the lives of others, and I am grateful that the family that I work with has allowed me the opportunity to be a part of their journey. I am living what I always believed, which is we are all stronger together. 📌

**Thank you, Kimberly, for your extraordinary dedication to serving the family you mentor! If you are interested in mentoring a Bridge family, please contact Director of Program Housing, Dave MacArtney at [dave.macartney@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:dave.macartney@bridgecommunities.org).**



Presenting Sponsor



## Join Us for Bridge Communities' 21st Annual Sleep Out Saturday: One Night Outside to Transform Lives

Become a Sleep Out Star and join a community of strength comprised of individuals, families, community and church groups, scouts, schools, and businesses in a countywide sleepout! Funds raised provide housing and program services for the 100+ families facing housing insecurity served by Bridge Communities this year.



**Sleep Out:** Sleep outdoors on a cold night in boxes, tents, and cars throughout DuPage County, raising awareness for the families facing homelessness in your community and making a real impact on their lives!



**Fundraise:** Use the QR code below to register for Sleep Out Saturday at [sleepoutsaturday.org](http://sleepoutsaturday.org) and create your own personal fundraising page to raise funds for Bridge Communities' Transitional Housing Program. After registering, you will have access to the SOS toolkit, full of fundraising ideas and tips.



**Learn:** Learn more about housing insecurity and the causes of family homelessness by attending the annual Kickoff Rally at College of DuPage at 6:30 p.m. on November 2. The rally features live entertainment, games, prizes and giveaways, speakers, and food before Sleep Out participants spend a chilly night outside!

**Saturday, November 2, 2024**

Or choose any night between October 25 and December 7

*Thank you to Northwestern Medicine for being  
our Sleep Out Saturday Presenting Sponsor!*

*They are a longstanding, generous partner of Bridge Communities.*



**Scan QR code  
to register.**

# Thank you for your support!

Our friends in the community make a world of difference to the families we are honored to serve. Thank you for your support of Bridge families!



Thank you, Domtar

Domtar made a generous donation of 80 boxes of paper that saved Bridge Communities and our clients over \$3,000 on copy paper. This donation helps our clients better meet their needs for work and school!



Thank you, ISP Painting

A huge thank you to ISP Painting for generously providing thousands of dollars of in-kind painting services! They volunteered their time and talents to beautify the common spaces at our Addison and Glen Ellyn locations.

Many thanks to Midwest Sport Court for being the perfect Premier Sponsor for our first ever Bridge Communities' Pickleball Tournament. You helped make this event a success!



Thank you, Midwest Sport Court



Thank you, Nicor Gas

Thank you to Nicor Gas and Inspire, their employee resource group focused on women's issues, for their incredible donation of over \$26,700! These funds were raised through their "Raising Funds on the Rooftop" event, which we were honored to be a part of.



Thank you, Harbaugh Family Fund of the DuPage Foundation

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

## GetInvolved!



Would your business, family, service or social club like to make a difference for families housed and mentored by Bridge Communities? Check out our **Get Involved** Guide for opportunities!



## Defining the Core Values of Bridge Communities: Partnership, Empowerment, Integrity, Respect, and Hope

Last year, Bridge Communities strengthened our five core values by updating the definitions, incorporating our commitment to equity and belonging, and assigning behavioral norms to demonstrate that commitment.

Every day, the clients, staff, mentors, and supporters of Bridge Communities embody our values in their work to transition families facing homelessness to self-sufficiency. We previously defined and gave examples of Partnership, Empowerment, and Integrity. Now, we share Respect and Hope:

### Respect

**Definition** - Bridge values the life experience, background, and ideas of each person. We strive for all our relationships to be trusting and non-judgmental. We treat others as we wish to be treated and see dignity in everyone we meet.

**Example** - The Healy family donated office boxes for our clients, which is just the most recent example of generous in-kind donations from their family. The Healys have repeatedly striven to give items to our clients that respond to their families' needs and honored their dignity. Their respectful dedication serves as an inspiring example of how supporters can meaningfully support Bridge families.

### Hope

**Definition** - Bridge believes that hope inspires our clients to overcome challenges, pursue their goals, and dream of a positive future. Hope is foundational to our mission and programs.

**Example** - Audrey Hepburn said, "to plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow." The sense of hope captured in that quote was embodied this summer through our garden program. Client L started gardening to learn a new skill and spend some time outside with her family, but she found even more. Working with staff, Client L's family discovered a passion for gardening. All summer long, they found excitement and joy watching the plants grow, meeting with their neighbors, and making new friends.

▶ For the stories and definitions of Partnership, Empowerment, and Integrity, check out our Spring 2024 Issue of "Connections" by scanning the QR code.



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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)

#### Get Social With Us!

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

 Bridge.Communities

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 Bridge Communities

 @BridgeCommunities





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

**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!*

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

TIME SENSITIVE MATERIAL  
PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY

Because of your help

**With your generous support, families of Bridge Communities recently reached these milestones:**

- **Client V** got a new job that's right for her earning \$25 per hour.
- **Client J**, a middle schooler, got her babysitting certification, so she can start working as a babysitter and build her savings.
- **Client N** saved \$20,000 in just over a year in the program! Now, she's working towards a new savings goal of \$45,000 and, with a Bridge scholarship, enrolled in vocational training.
- **Client J**, a teenager, has been working hard at her after-school and summer jobs and has already saved \$4,000!
- **Client J**, a Bridge graduate and 911 operator, recently showed great composure and skill helping deliver a baby over the phone while emergency services were en route.
- **Client D** earned her associate degree after going back to school to further her career.
- **Client B** graduated with her associate degree. "Getting my degree is something I've been wanting to do for forever," said Client B, "but it was through my mentors helping me that I was able to continue to grow in ways I didn't think possible."



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



Your support empowers the families of Bridge Communities as they work towards self-sufficiency, permanent housing, and a lifetime of security and success. Please make a gift in honor of Bridge Communities at [www.bridgecommunities.org/donate](http://www.bridgecommunities.org/donate)