



Connections

Connecting homeless families to a better future.

■ Kate: “I’m blessed to be here”

When Kate settled into America five years ago, she was on her way to achieving the American dream. She had a steady job with a Ukrainian company downtown, she was staying friends in the suburbs, and her English skills were getting better every day.

She had no reason to suspect that in just a few years, she’d be a single mother of twins, and on the verge of homelessness.

Her story started when she met her husband on the train. “He was sleeping next to the window—which is why I sat next to him, because I didn’t feel up to talking to anyone that morning. It was exhausting for me to speak in English!” she

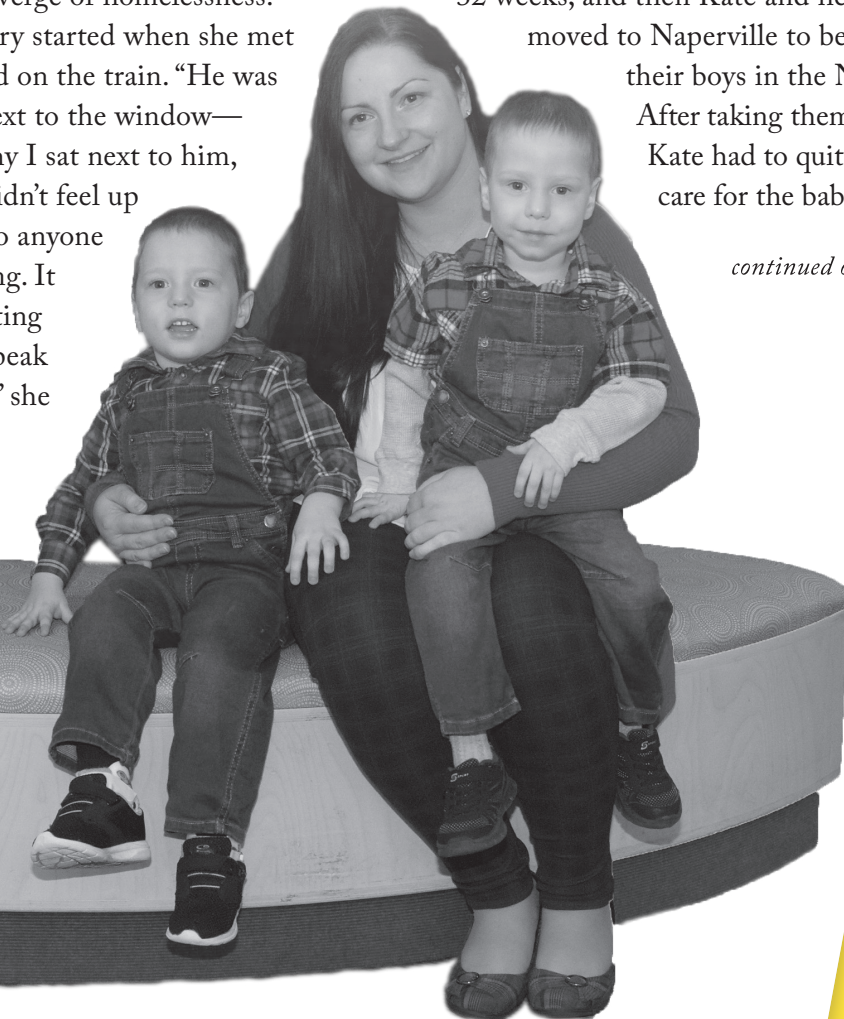
recalls. “But, he woke up and started chatting with me.”

Fast forward three years, and Kate was not only married to him, but expecting twins. Her pregnancy was anything but easy. “They kept me on bedrest in the hospital for three months, and during this time, our marriage started falling apart,” she says.

Leo and Mischa were born at just 32 weeks, and then Kate and her husband moved to Naperville to be closer to their boys in the NICU.

After taking them home, Kate had to quit her job to care for the babies, as Leo

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required extra care and feeding through a G-tube. “At this time, my husband became abusive,” she says. “But I had nothing, and no job, and I stayed.”

The last straw was in the summer of 2015, when her husband became violent and pushed her while she was tube-feeding her son. She filed an emergency order of protection, and her husband left.

But her troubles were far from over. Her parents had come to America on a visa to help with the boys, but they couldn’t legally work—which meant Kate would have to support them financially. She received emergency rent assistance from her church and got a part-time

“You can choose to be down, or you can choose to be positive. And you can become positive step by step, smile by smile.”

retail job. But, it wasn’t enough to sustain care for her family.

Though she was grateful for the help, Kate was desperate for a long-term plan. She applied at Bridge Communities that fall and was not initially accepted. “Bridge was concerned because I would not only have to support my two children, but my parents as well,” she said. “I was sitting in a parking lot, crying, wondering what I was going to do, when I decided to call Bridge and beg them to reconsider me.”

Tom Thiltgen, Bridge’s director of case management, agreed to give Kate one last interview.

“She was fully aware of the dire situation her family was in and that Bridge was the absolute best solution for her, her twin boys, and her parents,” says Tom. “Kate was very convincing and promised her full cooperation if her family was selected for entry. She has certainly been true to her word; she is working hard, loves her mentor team, and is accomplishing all of her goals.”

Kate next met with her mentors, was formally accepted into the program, and moved into her Bridge apartment just before Christmas.

“When we first started mentoring, I let Kate know that this would be a difficult program, and that some clients fail out,” recalls one of her mentors, John Gallagher of the Naperville Rotary Club. “She replied, ‘Why would anyone fail out? I feel like I won the lottery!’ Kate is focused, knows what she wants, and works hard for it.”

Kate needed to find full-time work, improve her English, and get on a path to U.S. citizenship and permanent housing—a tall order for anyone. But Kate doesn’t back down from challenges.

Within a few months, Kate completed Bridge’s employment workshop and landed a full-time job in customer care for an auto auctioneer; she and her parents all began taking weekly

English classes through Literacy DuPage; she connected with World Relief, who is helping her through the citizenship process and assisting with extending her parents’ visas; her divorce is underway; and, she has prequalified for Habitat for Humanity.

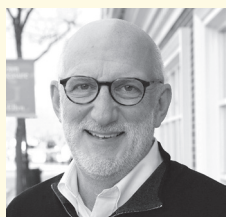
It’s a lot of work for anyone to shoulder, but Kate’s can-do attitude keeps her going. “It’s your choice how you see things,” she says. “You can choose to be down, or you can choose to be positive. And you can become positive step by step, smile by smile.”

Kate is also working hard to recover from the emotional trauma of the past few years. “Samaracare is where I get counseling, and it is one of the best things to have ever happened to me,” she says. “It helps me relieve my pressure and keep my sanity.”

Having her mentors has also kept Kate on track and supported. “I love my mentors—they have become like family,” she says. “They are so humble, open and helpful that it has really built our relationship. They help me climb and reach the things I couldn’t on my own.”

Kate has grown in confidence, and has now become a public speaker. To help spread awareness of domestic abuse and homelessness, she has courageously shared her story at events for Samaracare and the Naperville Rotary, encouraging others to help those in need.

Breaking Through with Trauma-Informed Care



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been very much in the news over the past ten years. We often associate it with war veterans, as the behavioral

health community has come to understand the life-long impact on those who have experienced severe trauma. Quoting a scholarly article, “trauma refers to an experience that creates a sense of fear, helplessness or horror, and overwhelms a person’s resources for coping.” Every Thursday morning, Bridge program staff review the social histories of families put forward for consideration for entry into our program. We know from their stories that nine out of ten – adults and children alike – have been through at least one traumatic experience, but more often multiple experiences.

We’re grateful for the new counseling partnerships we have formed with SamaraCare (formerly Samaritan Interfaith Counseling) and

Metropolitan Family Services. Both understand trauma-informed care very well. We are already seeing promising results of the counseling they’re providing to our families. Moreover, we know that our 250+ mentors and staff, paired with the best providers in trauma-informed therapy, are a powerful combination. Our partners help move our families past their trauma, and we provide the “resources for coping”, and ultimately for thriving.

Imagine the power in taking a family from a world in which the next place to stay or the next healthy meal are not certainties, to a world in which the family has hope and dreams, and takes charge of their future. Their trauma has been put behind them. THIS....is what you are making possible.

John R. Hayner,
Chief Executive Officer

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Jeanette and John Gallagher, Kate’s mentors, meet with her weekly and ensure she is on track to achieve her goals.

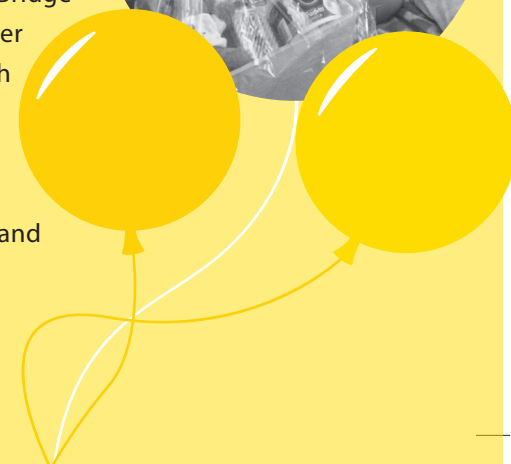
Looking toward the future, Kate is excited for the prospect of owning her own home, and one day, going back to school to become an ultrasound technician.

“Bridge has changed my life tremendously, and I do not know what my life would be without all of you who support Bridge.” she says. “I know how important this opportunity is—it is a great helping hand. I’m blessed to be here.” 📌

Happier Birthdays

Thank you to North Central College student Francesca Lenzi for generously providing birthday boxes for Bridge families! Through the Mironda Heston Scholarship for Human Service, Francesca provided 150 birthday boxes for Bridge children throughout the school year.

And many thanks as well to the Spirito! Singers, who donated several dozen more birthday bags to Bridge families on Martin Luther King Day! Between both donations, there were enough for all kids in our program, ensuring many happy birthdays and smiling faces. 📌



Q&A with Krystal Trump | Volunteer • Tutor

Q. How did you first get involved with Bridge Communities?

A. I came across a Bridge posting on a local volunteer website last summer. I was interested in tutoring because I'd tutored at many different levels during my own education and missed the one-on-one interactions with students. Luckily, many positions opened up that fall!



Q. What do you do as a tutor and volunteer?

A. I tutor three girls per week to ensure they complete their school assignments and ideally understand the concepts behind the assignments. When

they don't have a lot of work, I encourage them to talk about anything going on at school or in their lives in general. I feel it's important for kids to have role models or mentors take an interest in them at a young age; kids need to know that people care about them (aside from parents and teachers, of course). On Saturdays, I also volunteer at the Westmont LRC so residents have extended access to supplies or miscellaneous resources.

Q. What's your favorite Bridge memory?

A. My favorite Bridge memory is when one of the girls I tutor told me she was moved into a more difficult math class. She had worked really hard to be in

her current class before I was in the picture, and then to see her advancing even further was so awesome!

Q. What's the best thing about volunteering with Bridge Communities?

A. I really enjoy seeing the kids' confidence grow as they start to master the subjects they once struggled with. It's amazing to watch them embrace learning and practice concepts they previously avoided because they now know they can do it. The second best thing about volunteering with Bridge is how appreciative the staff is; they are such lovely, genuine people and it's been an honor teaming up to help their clients. 📌

You Are Changing Lives in 2017

Because of your ongoing support, we're continuing to make improvements and additions to programs for Bridge families! Here's how you're helping them succeed:

- **Behavioral and Mental Health:** We've recently partnered with Metropolitan Family Services and Samaracare as our providers for counseling. Dozens of Bridge families have started therapy since these partnerships began, and are on their way to recovering from the trauma of homelessness.
- **Libraries & Literacy:** Bridge families in Glen Ellyn recently attended a literacy night at the Glen Ellyn Public Library, where they received a tour, learned all the library has to offer, and obtained library cards. Literacy events are coming for other Bridge campuses soon!
- **Art Can Change the World:** Several Bridge kids in Naperville recently attended the "Art Can Change the World," led by College of DuPage art professor Amy Kakkuri. The kids loved expressing themselves through self-portraits and exploring their creativity.
- **Strategic Planning:** Bridge is creating a strategic plan to ensure we're best meeting our clients' needs and providing meaningful services through 2019. We've appreciated your input as we work to strengthen our organization and programs.



Bridge kids loved creating self-portrait collages in their "Art Can Change the World" class!

Fourth Annual A Chair Affair

We're pleased to announce some exciting changes for your favorite "chairity" event! This spring, A Chair Affair's annual cocktail auction & gala will be held at the brand new Elements at Water Street event space inside the Naperville Riverwalk's Hotel Indigo.

On May 18, the whimsical and unique chairs redesigned by local artists will be put on display throughout businesses in downtown Naperville. Online voting for the chairs will be available through June 8, when they'll be moved to Elements at

Water Street for the main event—and you'll have the opportunity to bid on your favorite chair at our live auction!

Tickets for the June 9 event are \$50 and include an hors d'oeuvres and dessert buffet, plus an open bar. Proceeds of A Chair Affair go directly to support the programs serving Bridge families in the Naperville area. Purchase your ticket today on www.bridgecommunities.org, and don't forget to vote for your favorite chair starting May 22!



Gala Reception & Auction Event

Thursday, June 8, 2017 \$50 ticket

Elements at Water Street (inside Hotel Indigo)
123 Water Street, 2nd Floor

6 p.m. Cocktails and Buffet reception,
Art Preview and Silent Auction

7:30 p.m. Live Auction

Proudly
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Elements
at Water Street



Partner Spotlight: Edward-Elmhurst Health

We are thankful for the human resources team from Edward-Elmhurst Health for partnering with our employment program! Jen Ullrich, System Director, Talent Acquisition has been assisting with Bridge's employment workshops since last fall by helping prepare clients for the job search process and coaching them on interviewing skills.

"Most people are not that comfortable talking about themselves, and can't always identify

their skills," she explains. "It's about helping them realize that they have these amazing skills and abilities, and teaching them how to express this in an interview."

Throughout the four-week-workshop, clients get a major boost in confidence as they become more and more secure in their abilities and their worth—which is key to landing a job offer. They not only learn how to ace a job interview, but also how to succeed while on the job and grow their careers.

Ullrich's team is also working with job applicants from Bridge Communities, and sev-

eral are going through the hiring process at Edward-Elmhurst Health. She's confident that they have what it takes to succeed. "I think the commitment Bridge gets from its clients and the requirements the clients have make a difference," she explains. "The return that Bridge gets out of the program, and the high success rate, made me want to contribute to something that would make an impact."

Thank you, Edward-Elmhurst Health, for helping our clients as they navigate the job search process and work toward a stronger future!



Bridge's Employment Director Mary Zienty (far left) and the Edward-Elmhurst Health human resources team, led by System Director, Talent Acquisition Jen Ullrich (far right) are working together to coach Bridge clients through the job search process. Thank you for believing in them!

Join us at the 9th Annual Glen Ellyn Backyard BBQ!

This year, summer won't end on Labor Day! Save the date for September 9th and celebrate with us at the 9th Annual Glen Ellyn Backyard BBQ. This family-friendly event includes food trucks, live music all day, raffles, kids activities and more—don't miss out!

Approximately 60 BBQ teams will participate in the main event, which is largest amateur BBQ competition in Illinois. They'll compete for the title in Best Ribs,

Best Chicken, Best Dish and Best Sauce—and, attendees will be able to sample the sauces and vote for a favorite in the People's Choice Sauce award.

All proceeds from the Glen Ellyn Backyard BBQ go directly to assist the homeless families served by Bridge Communities. Join us at Glen Ellyn's best party of the summer!



Glen Ellyn Backyard BBQ
Saturday, September 9, 12-10 PM
 Crescent Blvd/Glenwood Ave Parking Lot
 Glen Ellyn, Illinois
www.glenellynbackyardbbq.org



Thank you, Naperville Junior Woman's Club!

The Naperville Junior Woman's Club recently selected Bridge Communities as their Community Improvement Project, and will support us via volunteering with Bridge families and fundraising through 2018. "To select one charity is always difficult. When we chose Bridge Communities, we felt that their partnership model was a great fit for helping us achieve our goals - enhancing families' lives for the better and giving the less fortunate an opportunity to succeed," stated Angie Gianesi, NJWC President. "Our members love the hands on experience that is available through Bridge services. We truly feel that we make a difference in those few hours that



may ease the struggle for families in need. We look forward to many great memories with Bridge Communities these next two years." At Bridge, we look forward to collaborating with the NJWC as well!



The NJWC held its 50th anniversary party and fundraiser for Bridge Communities at Wentz Hall in April, featuring comedienne Kathleen Madigan. Thank you for your support!

In Memory of Bob Wahlgren

Bridge Communities lost a friend and founder when he passed away in October of 2016. Bob Wahlgren was one of the driving influences that created both the breath and bones of Bridge Communities.

Bob had a hobby of collecting hats and so he both literally and figuratively wore many hats. His first responsibility at Bridge was to lease our first apartments, raise the money needed, and gather furniture for the client families. We held no titles back then, but if we had he would have been Operations Manager, Resources Director and Co- Executive Director. He was also, from our first day, the best cheerleader you can imagine.

Bob never limited his interests to Bridge Communities. He served as the Executive Director for CHAD, an organization providing affordable housing. He founded Equity Shared Partnership, an organization dedicated to returning foreclosed homes to people in need during the housing crisis. He served for many years as an American Red Cross emergency worker. He served with many organizations working on advocacy issues to bring better, more affordable housing to poverty level families.

Bob was always willing to do whatever was needed. Not only did he serve as Chair of the Board at Bridge, he was our financial guru, construction manager and mentor. When the problem required it, Bob was willing to stain the doors and lay the tile at the apartments we were building – he was our most dedicated volunteer.

He was a visionary that saw a better way to bring housing to families in need. He was totally committed to the idea that life could be better, and all that he did moved us in that direction. We are so grateful for his efforts.

Mark Milligan

Co-Founder and President, Bridge Communities



In Memory of Jo Ann Kolkay

In December, Bridge mentor Jo Ann Kolkay, of St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church, passed away. Remembered by Bridge staff, volunteers and her client family as energetic and positive, she was a bright light to those around her. “We were deeply impressed with Jo’s caring and commitment to Grace, always providing encouragement and hope, even something as simple as celebrating Grace’s birthday with a cake,” says Frank Szymanek of St. Thomas’ transitional housing volunteer team. “We were also moved by Grace’s reaction to Jo’s passing, attending her memorial service, and Grace’s moving response at the recent mentor training. Jo clearly had a meaningful and lasting impact on Grace.”



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Connections is a publication of Bridge Communities, Inc., a program providing transitional housing for homeless families.

The mission of Bridge Communities is to transition homeless families 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, Hope, apply to everyone involved in Bridge Communities – clients, mentors, program partners, volunteers, donors, board members, staff and community.

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www.bridgecommunities.org

We want to share all the latest and greatest news from Bridge Communities with you. Keep in touch with us by connecting with us on our social networks:

-  facebook.com/bridge.communities
-  [@BridgeDuPage](https://twitter.com/BridgeDuPage)
-  [bridgecommunities](https://www.instagram.com/bridgecommunities)
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www.bridgcommunities.org

Bridge Communities is a non-profit organization that houses and mentors homeless families who live and work in DuPage County.

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

Because of you, Bridge families accomplished these following successes:

- **Raven** is now making more than \$20/hour
- **April** has paid off her car
- **Sterling** has saved more than \$22,000
- **Melissa** was promoted to a full-time supervisor at work
- **Kerry** received a promotion at work to credit analyst
- **Hamdia** purchased a new townhouse
- **Krista** has paid down all her debt
- **Zoranda** received a 10% raise at work
- **Luz's** workplace is grooming her to become a trainer
- **Jill**, a cosmetologist and Bridge graduate, helped organize a spa day for current Bridge parents
- **Hua** started a new job with great benefits
- **Latanya** received a promotion and a raise of \$5 more per hour
- **Kayla** now has more than \$14,000 in the bank
- **Gabi** received a raise at her job
- **Tony** went to Washington, D.C. with a group from DuPage Habitat for Humanity to advocate for affordable housing



Tony and a team from DuPage Habitat for Humanity traveled to Washington to meet with members of congress about affordable housing and funding for HUD programs that help keep families from becoming homeless. Pictured are Tony (second from right) with Illinois Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, IL-8 (second from left) and the Habitat team.