



Connections

Connecting homeless families to a better future.

■ Ruthilah: “You gave me my life back”

For many years, Ruthilah’s life as a substitute teacher was happy and stable. She and her son Wyatt lived with her partner and his two children, and they enjoyed all the perks of a typical, middle-class life.

But, things started to turn when her partner lost his job and began having health issues. Suddenly, Ruthilah was supporting five people on a sub’s wages. They were falling behind—and then the school year ended. And so did her job, leaving them with no income at all.

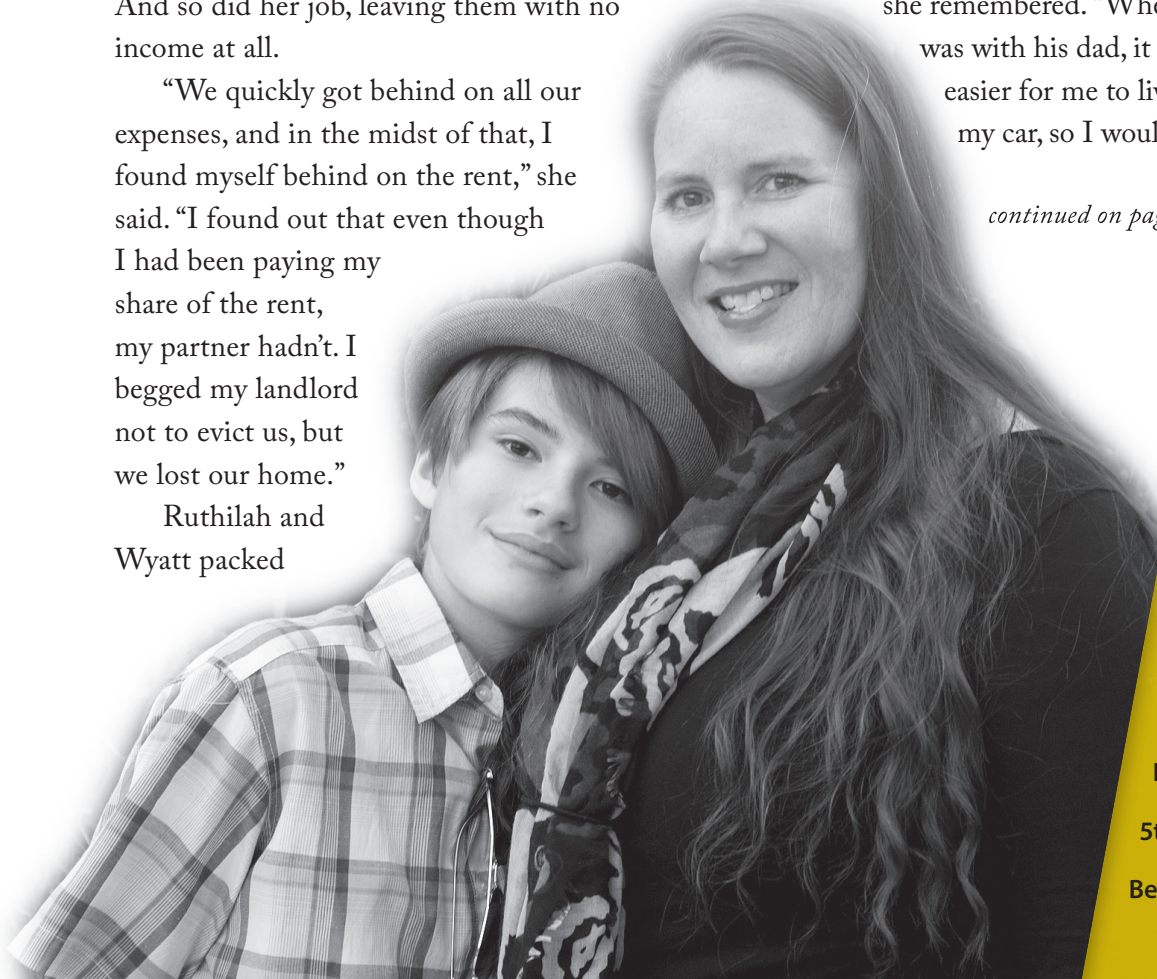
“We quickly got behind on all our expenses, and in the midst of that, I found myself behind on the rent,” she said. “I found out that even though I had been paying my share of the rent, my partner hadn’t. I begged my landlord not to evict us, but we lost our home.”

Ruthilah and Wyatt packed

their bags and left the relationship, but it didn’t make it any easier to find a home for just the two of them. Since it was summer, Ruthilah didn’t have another teaching job lined up, and had no way to verify income for a landlord. She’d never felt more hopeless when she was reduced to living out of her car.

“When my son was with me, we stayed on couches, in living rooms of friends, with family, even with friends of friends,” she remembered. “When he was with his dad, it was easier for me to live in my car, so I wouldn’t

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feel like a burden to others. But Wyatt saw what was going on, and he had absorbed all my panic and my fear.”

A family member suggested Bridge Communities, and she immediately applied. Bridge had recently expanded with a new apartment building, and there was an opening for Ruthilah and her son. They were in the safety of a Bridge home just in time for a new school year. “When I got the keys to our apartment, it was absolutely fantastic,” she said. “Bridge was fabulous with helping my son get registered in his new school.”



“My mentors were amazing, and like family to us. Having help to figure out insurance, health care—it’s like a full-time job! It was their help that made a difference.”

Next up was getting Ruthilah back into a school—to teach. “I had recently completed my masters degree to become a teacher. And it had been challenging to obtain a full-time job. I had never expected I would be in that position.”

She worked with Bridge’s employment program, and was thrilled to find a full-time job teaching Contemporary History at a charter school on Chicago’s North Side.

Coming into the Bridge program also led to amazing opportunities for Wyatt, who had just been entering the sixth grade. “He had always wanted to play in band in middle school,” said Ruthilah. “There was a Bridge mentor who had a grown son with extra instruments, including a trombone, and they donated it to my son. He taught himself all summer how to play it by studying YouTube videos. By the time he started band in seventh grade, he’d worked his heart out and was ready.”

Wyatt also benefited from the stability of a fantastic DuPage County school and the activities it provided. “He’s just blossoming, and doing so well in school,” Ruthilah said. “He’s also in student council and Boy Scouts, and these are things he didn’t have for a long time.”

Ruthilah’s mentors also helped her prepare for a future beyond Bridge. “My mentors were amazing, and like family to us,” she said. “Having help to figure out insurance, health care—it’s like a full-time job! It was their help that made a difference.”

After two years in Bridge, Ruthilah and Wyatt were

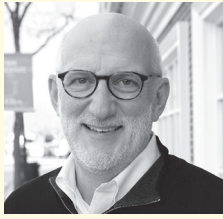
thrilled to move into an apartment of their own in the same school district. “Wyatt is excited to start high school in the fall and is already participating in some band activities there,” she says. “We have decided to stay in this district until he graduates high school. It really means that this town is home.”

She’s saving for a new house, and hopes to buy one later this year. Ruthilah pays her good fortune forward every day at her teaching job—because soon into her position, she found that she had something very unique in common with the kids.

“I’ve had several kids in my class who were experiencing homelessness,” she said. “And my experience has given me an opportunity to connect with these kids—and I’ve become like a mom to many of them. These kids motivate me, and I motivate them.”

She’s grateful for her time in Bridge, and for gaining the tools and confidence to never become homeless again. “For so long before Bridge, I just had to settle for what I could get, and it was a very hard thing,” she said. “My focus is to give my kid the things he deserves. There was a while when I couldn’t, and it just feels good now. Bridge gave me the ability to be the mom my kid deserves. And you gave me my life back.” 🏡

30 Years of Kindness



Dear Friends,

It was the great thrill of my life and my career to join Bridge Communities over six years ago. It has been the great privilege and joy of my career to have been able to count co-founder Mark Milligan – even to this day – as professional colleague, mentor, and friend. I know that I speak for all of our staff, board, and many partners in the community when I say that we’re so glad that Mark has continued with us to reach our 30th anniversary year.

Month after month, year after year, we continue to be amazed at the good fortune that seems to come our way – generous new donors bringing us game-changing opportunities, very talented new staff and board members, the fresh ideas and heroic efforts of our many mentors and volunteers, and the extraordinary commitment of our Program Partners – now 50+ strong – many of whom have been with us since the very early days – 1988.

So how it is that we have been so blessed? I nominate kindness as the unifying theme, and I nominate my good friend Mark as our “King of Kindness.” In a world that can often seem so cold, kindness gets attention, kindness is contagious, kindness creates its own momentum, kindness pays back and pays forward. Kindness has brought many of you to our door. And for the 800 families who have passed through our doors in the past 30 years – many of whom have not known kindness – kindness lead the way in their life transformations.

May this culture of kindness be our unifying theme for the next 30 years and beyond. My thanks to all of you for playing your part in it.

John R. Hayner,
Chief Executive Officer

You made these Bridge programs possible! Because of you, Bridge families are continuing to grow and thrive—and so is our organization! Here’s how you’re making an impact:

- **Active Parenting:** More than a dozen Bridge families attended an Active Parenting workshop series held in conjunction with the YWCA and Project HELP. They learned not only how to prevent problems and improve communication, but also how to care for themselves as parents.
- **Science Nights:** Bridge kids have enjoyed Science Nights at the LRC, where they’ve conducted science experiments, including measuring reaction times, building marshmallow structures and creating fizzy volcanoes!
- **Nutrition Classes:** Bridge families are getting a taste of healthy living through nutrition workshops! The classes include demos, tips and recipes for busy working parents.
- **Program Evaluation:** Thanks to a magnanimous contribution from an anonymous funder, Bridge now has the resources to onboard a Manager of Data and Evaluation. Susan Ryerson Espino joined the staff and has embarked on a long-term project to ensure that Bridge is, and has been, carrying out our goal of connecting homeless families to a better future. Susan will be leading this comprehensive project, which will include surveying and interviewing hundreds of past clients, launching case studies, improving standards and benchmarks, and more to ensure that we can track the transformations you’ve made possible for homeless families. We’re excited about this one-of-a-kind opportunity that sets us apart from other social service organizations, and we look forward to updating you with our findings!



Bridge kid Audrey enjoyed making roasted vegetables with her mom after attending the Nutrition Workshop this winter!

Q&A with Phyllis Perkins | Volunteer • Tutor

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

A. I first heard of Bridge Communities in the bulletin for St. Raphael's Church, when I read that there was a need for certified teachers willing to tutor. I am a retired French and Spanish teacher, and I thought that perhaps I could help. I met with Michelle Stasi, and she told me that Bridge Communities was working with a family from Cameroon, where French is the official language. She thought that I might be interested in tutoring the son, Darius, who is now 10 years old. I agreed!

Q. What do you do as a tutor?

A. I meet with Darius 3-4 times per month. I'm in contact with his 4th grade teacher and his ELL teacher, so we exchange e-mails every week regarding what he is learning in class so that I can focus on that during the tutoring session. We've worked on Social Studies, a bit of Science, Math, Reading and Writing.

Q. What's it like tutoring in another language?

A. What I find to be truly noteworthy is the improvement in Darius' proficiency in English. I'm amazed at how quickly he has moved towards fluency; his listening comprehension skills are commendable and his speaking, reading and writing skills in English are impressive. I

keep reminding myself that he has been in the U.S. for less than one year! Darius is very curious and has lots of questions, so I really enjoy working with him. There are times when we have a good laugh. Here's an example: We were reading a passage about tennis, and I suggested that we take turns reading aloud. Darius started reading, and every once in awhile I asked, "Is it my turn?," and he would say "No," and keep reading. He finished the passage and we turned the page to find questions with multiple choice answers. He said to me, "Now it's your turn."



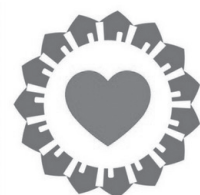
Q. What's the best thing about volunteering with Bridge Communities?

A. Although I have been tutoring through Bridge Communities for only 9 months, I am grateful for the support and the accessibility of the mentors and Bridge team. I communicate with Michelle Stasi frequently and anytime I call, she is available and willing to talk. She is always pleasant and encouraging. 🏠

Are you a certified teacher interested in tutoring? We'd love to have you as a volunteer! Please contact Michelle Stasi at 630-403-5097 or michelle.stasi@bridgecommunities.org.

Thank You, Love Your Neighbor!

When Bridge client April graduated from the program late last year and purchased a new condo, she was in for a fantastic surprise: our friends from Love Your Neighbor, a nonprofit specializing in interior design, worked with her to make her new space into a true home! Love Your Neighbor not only designed the layout, but also provided furniture and accent pieces. Says April, "We absolutely love our new home! Thanks again for everything you have done for us. Words can't even express how much all of this means to us. God bless you all!" 🏠



love your neighbor

We're grateful for YOU!

By supporting Bridge Communities, you are making it possible for homeless families to build a better future—thank you!



Altar'd State

Thank you to our friends at the Altar'd State Oak Brook location for making Bridge Communities their "Mission Monday" charity during the holiday season, and raising nearly \$6,000 for Bridge families!



Convergent Technologies

We're grateful for Convergent Technologies in Schaumburg, who delivered an entire truckload of cleaning products for Bridge families this winter, along with \$500 in quarters for their laundry needs!

Thank you, Naperville Junior Woman's Club, for selecting Bridge as your Community Improvement Project this past year. We appreciate your volunteerism and support!



Naperville Junior Woman's Club



St. Mark's Episcopal Church

Our friends at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Glen Ellyn hosted Soup & Bread this winter, a fun-filled potluck and concert event raising \$1,600 for Bridge families. Special thanks to Compass Mortgage for sponsoring the Blackhawks raffle!



Coldwell Banker's Naperville office

Our friends at Coldwell Banker's Naperville office recently donated 17 laundry baskets full of cleaning and personal care products—one for each Bridge family living in the South Naperville campus! Thank you for your generosity.

30 Years of Homes and Hope

It's been 30 years since Bridge's cofounders Mark Milligan and Bob Wahlgren housed the organization's first homeless family—and we're embarking on festivities all year to honor the movement they started to fight homelessness in DuPage County! Join us this year as we celebrate the transformations of more than 800 Bridge families & 30 years of homes and hope.



- **Throwback Thursdays:** Check out Bridge's Facebook and Instagram accounts every Thursday for a #tbt photo and story from the past 30 years of Bridge. You may recognize yourself or someone you know!
- **Pearls of Wisdom:** On the last day of every month, visit our website and YouTube page for a "Pearls of Wisdom" story and video of a Bridge friend, volunteer or graduate, sharing what they've learned from working with Bridge and helping homeless families.
- **30th Birthday Bash:** Save the date for Friday, September 21 and celebrate with us at The Planter's Palette! This special night will feature raffles, food stations, music, dancing and more as we honor 30 years of service.

The Bridge Communities Founders Fund **Unlock Their Potential**

With the 30 year anniversary of Bridge Communities, we also take note another significant milestone: Bridge's beloved cofounder, Mark Milligan, will retire from the organization on September 30.

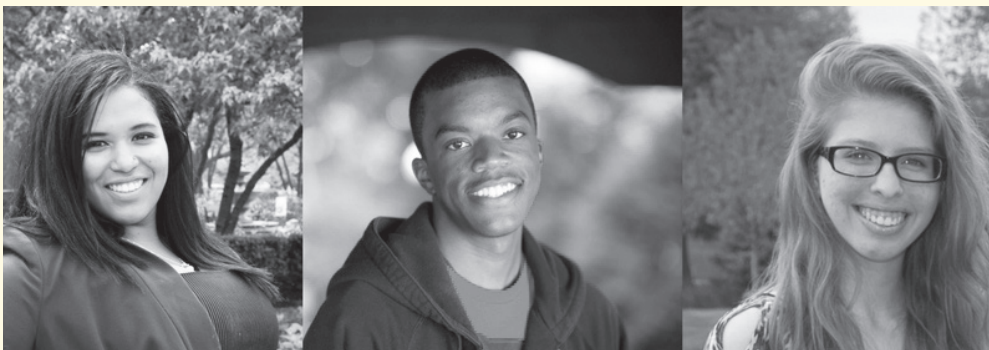
While we'll miss Mark as he embarks on his well-deserved retirement, he and Bob Wahlgren leave the organization with a precious legacy—and you can be a part of it.

In honor of both Mark and late cofounder Bob Wahlgren, we're launching the Bridge Communities Founders Fund this year, an endowment designed to support the educational needs of high school-aged teens

in Bridge families. By supporting this fund, you'll ensure that Bridge teens have access to post-high counseling regarding options for college, technical schools and vocational programs; ACT and SAT tutoring; personalized help for teens and their parents to understand and apply for financial aid; career assessment; and more.

"It was a really easy decision to direct the proceeds of the Founders Fund to aid high school students as they graduate," says Mark. "Bridge was founded because Bob Wahlgren and I both had experienced seeing homeless children in the community and wanted to do something more productive for them."

Learn how you can build on Mark and Bob's legacy for Bridge teens, and ask Resource Development Director Amy Van Polen about the Founders Fund today! Call 630-545-0610 x12 or e-mail amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org to unlock the potential of Bridge teens.



Fifth Annual A Chair Affair

We're looking forward to welcoming you to A Chair Affair on June 7! This spring, our annual art auction & cocktail gala will return to Elements at Water Street event space inside the Naperville Riverwalk's Hotel Indigo.

If you have never attended before, this is the year to join us! New for this year, the event will feature one-of-a-kind artwork for your lawn and garden in addition to the 20 chairs, redesigned by local artists and designers.

On May 19, you'll start viewing the artwork throughout Naperville. Online voting for the chairs will be available through June 7, when they'll be moved to Elements at Water Street for the main event—and you can bid on your favorite chair at our live auction and take it home that night!

Tickets for the June 7 event are \$60 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 19!



Gala Reception & Auction Event

Thursday, June 7, 2018 \$60 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

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 Chad Pedigo *Director of Community Engagement*
 Lisa Doyle *Marketing and Communications Manager*
 Vicky Joseph *Community Outreach Coordinator*
 Susan Hacker *CFRE Manager of Donor Relations*

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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630-545-0610

Fax 630-545-0640

www.bridgecommunities.org

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- bridgecommunities.wordpress.com
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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:

- **April** purchased a condo
- **Cashmere** now makes more than \$18.50/hour
- **Jen** moved to daytime shifts at her job and got a raise
- **Rafael** was promoted from temporary to full-time permanent at his job
- **Ivy** moved into her Habitat for Humanity home
- **Maribel** is on track for U.S. citizenship
- **Tatiana** obtained a patient care representative job at a hospital
- **Siomara** started nursing school
- **Gabi** purchased a new house
- **Cynthia** earned her associates degree and is now working toward her bachelors
- **Connie** got a job in customer care
- **Kate** was accepted into the Habitat for Humanity program
- **Buba** accepted a full-time position working at a hospital
- **Tonya** purchased a townhouse
- **Maria** got a 20% raise at work



Congratulations to Bridge kid M, whose tornado project earned him a medal at his school's science fair!