



Connections

Connecting homeless families to a better future.

“I never thought I could be this happy”

On a bookshelf in Marketta’s living room, there’s all the things you’d expect to see. Framed baby photos of her daughters. A prayer devotional opened to today’s date. Pictures of family members from high school graduations, weddings, baptisms.

And in the place of honor, right in the center of the shelf? A photo of Marketta, grinning ear to ear, embraced by two of the people who helped change her life forever: her Bridge mentors, Renee and Sue.

Back in 2011, Marketta and her daughter Faith left an abusive marriage. “The only reason I had stayed with him as long as I did was because I was so afraid to be poor,” Marketta remembers. “He had always worked and I stayed at home with Faith—I had nothing of my own.

But I separated from him after he threatened to kill me, to kill Faith and to kill himself.”

For three difficult years, Marketta and Faith bounced from one couch to the next, never allowed to stay longer than a few weeks or months at a time. They landed at her mother’s home in February 2014. But Marketta was given a firm deadline. By June 1, Marketta and Faith had to be out of the house—for good.

Marketta began to scramble, desperately looking for a solution. She looked into homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, cheap motels. She applied to Bridge Communities that spring, went through a rigorous

continued on page 2



Fall 2019

Bridge Communities is “the glue” 3

Q&A with Kim Weeks 4

Bridge Wins Alford-Axelson Award 4

Bridge Programming Update 5

The Options Are Yours 5

Partner Spotlight: Lisa Polezoes 6

We’re Grateful for You! 6

Sleep Out Saturday 7

Because of Your Help 8

“I never thought I could be this happy” *continued*

interview process—and that May, she and Faith moved into their own two-bedroom apartment.

With her own address for the first time in three years, Marketta felt a huge sense of relief. But, she soon realized how challenging the Bridge program could be. “At first, I would cry all the time,” she admitted. “It was very hard to have my finances controlled by other people and have my mentors look at my bank statements.”

Her mentors introduced the idea of an envelope system, where Marketta’s paycheck would be allotted into cash each week, then separated into envelopes labeled “Groceries,” “Gas,” “Phone,” and so forth. Once she hit her budget for the week, she wouldn’t be allowed to use credit cards for any

“Being in Bridge makes me want to help people and pay it forward,” she says. “Before Bridge, I never thought my credit could be this good, I never thought my family could be this great, I never thought I could be this happy. Thank you!”

extras. Marketta was reluctant to try it, thinking she’d never be able to manage it, especially not on her small CNA salary.

Days later, Marketta was in the waiting room during an oil change, talking on the phone to a relative about her skepticism on the envelope system. After she hung up, the gentleman next to her said, “I couldn’t

help but overhear you—I’m a financial planner, and I promise you, this envelope system will be the best thing that ever happened to you.”

She took it as a sign, and decided to go all in on the envelope system. “That’s when I saw real change in my life,” says Marketta. “I began to save, and ended up saving \$9,000 over two years. Plus, my credit score went from a 550 to a 740.”

Marketta went all in on the Bridge program at this point, too. She began to search for a better-paying job through Bridge’s employment program. She started attending Bridge’s nutrition workshops, and worked one-on-one with a dietician to learn how to cook healthy, affordable crockpot meals. “The program was hard in the beginning, but it got better,” she says. “I had to be humble, because the only way to succeed is to admit when you need help.”

The biggest changes of all for Marketta came once she let her mentors into her heart.

“Renee and Sue were always there for me, and they became my support system,” she says. “They were always tough—but I knew it was because they loved me. They really became like family. They helped me find my faith in God and taught me the power of prayer. And, they helped my daughter with her father issues, too.”

By the time Faith was just

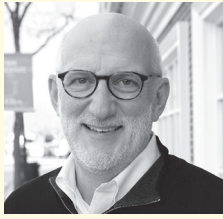


eight years old, she started to show signs of depression related to her past trauma. The family’s mentor team and case manager quickly helped Faith into weekly counseling sessions, which made a huge positive impact in her life. Faith was also paired with a Bridge tutor, Sharon, who provided the patience and compassion Faith needed to get back on track in school.

Bridge also connected Marketta to Kerry O’Brien of Prairie State Legal Services to ensure Marketta could obtain child support—a big hurdle for her. “I didn’t want the child support at first, because I really didn’t want to have anything to do with my ex,” she explains. “Kerry made me understand that by not pursuing child support, I wasn’t being fair to my daughter—because that was her money and she deserved it.”

“Marketta was so dedicated to working on her financial goals like her budget, building savings, and improving her credit score, in order to make a better life for her daughter and

Bridge Communities is “the glue”



Dear Friends,
“I never thought I could be this happy.” Those words alone bring great joy and inspiration not only to Marketta’s mentors Renee

and Sue, but to the legions of other volunteers and Bridge staff who walk beside our families in their journey from homelessness to hope.

I met recently with a new Bridge friend. I described to him our several key constituencies: families with the courage and wisdom to ask for help; program partners and volunteers with compassion and willingness to make significant commitments of their time; and donors who want to invest in solutions with deep and lasting impact. “So Bridge is the glue that holds that together?” he asked. And with that question, he crystallized the essence of Bridge’s essential role.

Marketta’s story is one for the record books—and worth noting that it required a two-income household for Marketta and her husband to realize their dreams of homeownership. For many of the families we serve, the income required to afford homeownership or even market rate

rental in DuPage County remains a challenge. Though wages have increased in recent years in response to a tight employment market, prices for both home-buyers and renters have significantly outstripped wage increases.

But Bridge’s supporters should take heart in what we’ve done together over the past decade in the face of this challenge. Today, donors subsidize the program fees to allow Bridge to serve 10 more families in transitional housing each year than before. Donor contributions allowed Bridge to expand its housing portfolio by some 50 apartments. Many of those apartments are used as affordable rental options to our clients as they exit our program – particularly those whose households remain single income.

Bridge Communities is proud to have been simply “the glue” that made possible the hopes and dreams of so many...including all of you.

John R. Hayner, *Chief Executive Officer*

herself,” say her mentors Sue and Renee. “We were so impressed with her hard work! It was such a rewarding experience to get to know Markeeta and be a part of her amazing journey.”

Marketta continued to work hard, and after her time in Bridge’s transitional housing program, she stayed on in her apartment as a renter—all while diligently saving and giving Faith a safe and secure life.

“Growing up, I never had stability—I went to a different school every year, always moving around,” she says. “I’ve learned from having this stability, and I

know that made change happen for Faith. She’s not this sad kid anymore. She’s always smiling now. Being in Bridge made us love each other more.”

And, after the Bridge program, Marketta reconnected with her childhood sweetheart, Patrick. “He’s calm, he has an excellent work ethic, and he makes me a better person,” she says with a smile. “I also taught him how to budget the Bridge way, and now he’s the biggest saver in the family!”

They married in late 2016, and a year later, welcomed daughter Serenity to the family. This past

July, Marketta and Patrick proudly became the owners of a beautiful three-bedroom, two-bathroom house. And joining them at these milestone moments? Renee and Sue, who are still part of her family.

Marketta will forever be grateful for you for helping her build her life into what it is today.

“Being in Bridge makes me want to help people and pay it forward,” she says. “Before Bridge, I never thought my credit could be this good, I never thought my family could be this great, I never thought I could be this happy. Thank you!” 📌

Q&A with Kim Weeks

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

A. My good friend, Jennie Gates, is a former employee and current volunteer. I approached her with an idea about helping provide professional clothing for Bridge clients. I learned that Bridge already had a small supply of clothing and an outside resource for clients, and I began to help.

Q. What do you do as a BCB volunteer?

A. I started by cleaning out and organizing the existing closet of clothing and accepting new donations. Soon after, I floated the idea of having a bigger facility and a more retail-like atmosphere. I was thrilled that idea would become a reality. Bridge dedicated the current space and readied it for us with paint, shelving and new lighting. My husband built three dressing rooms, and I filled it with the existing supply and many new clothing donations. Thus, the Bridge Communities Boutique (BCB) was born. We have since been blessed with more volunteers including Bev Mitchum, who helps in all aspects of running the BCB, and Kelley Cleary and Beth Gemkow, who outfit clients during styling events. Marberry Cleaners also fulfills a huge need for us by donating dry

Bridge Clothing Boutique Volunteer

cleaning services for clothing donations. Now that the BCB is fully operational and quite fabulous, we are assisting more clients than ever.



Q. What's your favorite Bridge memory?

A. A client came in around Christmas and shared with me that she was so grateful, proud and happy to be out of the abusive situation that she had been in, and that she and her kids were well on the road to self-sufficiency and freedom from fear. We ended up hugging and in tears. The strength and courage of clients that I meet never ceases to amaze me.

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

A. I have loved working with clients. It is a pleasure and a privilege to watch them try on clothing and discover how great they look, and to see, in that moment, their spirits and confidence lift as they prepare for an interview or a new job. I am truly honored to be among those who get to provide that experience for them, and I am grateful for the donors who make it possible. 📌

The BCB is accepting clothing donations! To set up a time to donate, please email clothes.boutique@bridgecommunities.org.

Bridge Wins Alford-Axelson Award

On May 2, Bridge Communities was honored with North Park University's Axelson Center for Nonprofit Management's 2019 Alford-Axelson Award for Nonprofit Managerial Excellence!

Out of thousands of nonprofits in the 7-county Chicago area, Bridge Communities was chosen as the sole organization with the top marks in vision, strategy, board governance, quality programs, and sound financial practices. It's quite an honor, and we are humbled to be in the company of past honorees, such as The Shedd Aquarium, Metropolitan Family Services and The Greater Chicago Food Depository.

We couldn't have been awarded this distinction without the support of friends like you. Thank you for bringing homes and hope to homeless families working toward a better tomorrow!



Bridge's Senior Director Amy Van Polen and Manager of Foundation and Corporate Relations Andrea Carradus accepted the Alford-Axelson Award on behalf of Bridge Communities.

Bridge Programming Update

Because of you, Bridge children and parents have more opportunities for growing and learning than ever before! Check out some of the latest programs they've participated in this summer:

- **LRC Family Programs:** We've ramped up our programming at the Learning Resource Centers (LRCs) to offer several family-friendly activities, including a Mother's Day breakfast and crafts, an Earth Day event with healthy treats, and a science night, where the kids enjoyed making slime!
- **Argonne National Laboratory Field Trip:** Bridge teens learned to code robots to complete a maze by using iPads. One teen even wowed the Argonne team by completing the course on his first try!
- **How Not to Marry a Jerk or Jerkette:** In July, Bridge offered a 4-week workshop all about topics relating to healthy relationships ranging from significant others, to family, friends and others. Bridge parents learned how to improve communication and built problem-solving and coping skills in this life-changing class!
- **Life Skills for Kids:** Several Bridge children participated in evenings at an LRC's "Bridge Bistro," where they prepared and served a meal together, played games and talked about the importance of gratitude.



The Options Are Yours

Many Bridge friends like you are wondering how the changes to the tax laws will impact their opportunities for charitable deductions and the best choices for giving. While we recommend that you speak with your financial advisor to determine your best options, below are a few considerations.

If you or your spouse are 70 ½ years old, you can make a significant gift without using cash from other sources of income. You can contribute all or part of your required annual distribution from your IRA directly to Bridge and reduce your taxable income.

After determining that Bridge is a qualified charity to receive IRA distributions, Bridge friend and donor Micki Wilverding made the decision to increase her giving in support of the employment and mentoring programs. "Knowing that my charitable gifts no longer benefited me through itemization, I made the decision to give in a manner that decreased my taxable income. A gift directly from my IRA achieved my giving and tax goals," Micki shared.

Consider using highly appreciated assets such a stock, real estate or other property to make your "cash" donation.

Gift annuities are a wonderful gift option that converts

a low-interest investment into a fixed income for yourself or a loved one while also making sure that Bridge receives a charitable gift upon your death.

A Donor Advised Fund or a gift of life insurance are other giving options that can maximize your giving goals and lower your tax burden, both immediate and upon your death. You can make a larger contribution to your Donor Advised Fund in one year to maximize your charitable deductions, and still provide support to Bridge in subsequent years' giving.

Please review the enclosed *The Options Are Yours* to read more about how you can maximize your tax benefits and charitable giving goals. If you have questions, please call Amy Van Polen at 630-403-5090.



Micki Wilverding chooses to give through her IRA distribution.

We're grateful for YOU!

Friends in the community like you are changing lives for Bridge families each and every day. Thank you for your outstanding support!



Coldwell Banker Charitable Foundation

A big thank you to Gail Niermeyer and the team from the Coldwell Banker Charitable Foundation for your event sponsorship and continued support of Bridge families!



Naperville Newcomers and Neighbors Club

The Naperville Newcomers and Neighbors Club provided some fantastic curb appeal by planting and gardening at a Bridge Naperville campus this spring. Thank you!

KNOX GARDEN WALK

Hosted by Presbyterian Women

This summer's Knox Presbyterian Church Garden Walk raised _____ for Bridge families—thank you for your outstanding support!

We are grateful to Steamboat BBQ in Wheaton for their amazing support of Bridge Communities. Not only did they serve as King of the Stage sponsor for the Glen Ellyn Backyard BBQ, they also hosted our volunteer appreciation luncheon, held a "whole hog" prep class to benefit Bridge and donated a catered party to the BBQ's raffle!



Steamboat BBQ in Wheaton



Scott Elementary School in Naperville!

Thank you to the students of Scott Elementary School in Naperville! Students made & sold bookmarks and bracelets over their spring break to benefit Bridge families—and ended up raising \$170.25! That's enough for 5 nights of housing for a homeless family in need.

Naperville Area Chamber of Commerce's A TEAM The Naperville Area Chamber of Commerce's A TEAM group generously held a personal care & cleaning drive for Bridge families this summer. Thank you for helping Bridge families make ends meet!

Would your organization or employer like to make a difference for homeless families? Let us know—we have service and volunteer opportunities available! Please contact Community Outreach Coordinator Vicky Joseph at vicky.joseph@bridgecommunities.org.

Partner Spotlight: Lisa Polezoes

As a longtime DuPage County resident and a human resources professional, Lisa Polezoes was seeking a volunteer opportunity within her community where she could put her skills to use. And last year, through a colleague and Bridge supporter, she learned about Bridge Communities' employment workshops.

"The interviewing process can be scary and intimidating for anyone, and I wanted to help Bridge clients in this area," says Lisa.

She soon began assisting at Bridge's four-week job readiness sessions in Glendale Heights and

Naperville—and before long, she was co-teaching the classes. In these workshops, Lisa teaches clients not only how to overcome nerves and ace an interview, but how to maintain their jobs and build a sustainable career.

"It's amazing to see the confidence that clients can build in just four weeks," says Lisa. "They become like different people, and they are all motivated to do a great job. It's so rewarding, and I feel that I get so much more than I give."

Thank you, Lisa, for helping Bridge clients achieve success!



Lisa Polezoes, Vice President of Human Resources at Northwest Pallet Services (left) and Bridge's Director of Employment Services Mary Zienty (right) collaborate to help Bridge clients reach their employment goals.

Would you or a colleague like to help Bridge clients reach career success?

Contact Bridge's Director of Employment Services Mary Zienty at mary.zienty@bridgecommunities.org.

Join us at the 16th Annual Sleep Out Saturday!

Spend a night outside & fight homelessness between October 5-December 7

Join us and hundreds of Bridge supporters this fall for Sleep Out Saturday. When you sleep out, donate or fundraise for Sleep Out Saturday, you'll build a brighter tomorrow for the homeless families in the Bridge Communities transitional housing program.

Register today at www.sleepoutsaturday.org!

You Pick the Date!

The countywide sleep out will be held on Saturday, November 2, but this year marks the first **"You Pick the Date" sleep out event! Sign your group up to participate for any night convenient to you between October 5-December 7.**

Personalize Your Sleep Out Saturday Experience

Whether it's your group's first year or your tenth year participating in Sleep Out Saturday, Bridge Communities is there to help you to make it the best experience possible! We offer complete Sleep Out Saturday toolkits with activities, movies and more, to make your experience memorable and life-changing.

Plus, this year we're offering visits from Bridge Communities staffers and client speakers to your Sleep Out site, to share personal stories of homelessness and how you're making a difference!

If you're looking for an experience that will

- Build empathy
- Lead to a better understanding of poverty in your community and
- Teach effective ways to fight homelessness, then

Sleep Out Saturday is right for you!

Gold Sponsors:



Silver Sponsor:



Sign up now!

Who can sleep out? Everybody! Here are the 3 types of participants:

- **Groups:** Adults, children or teens from a community organization, faith-based group, or Scout troop, plus the group leaders who will supervise their group's Sleep Out Saturday participation.
- **Sleep Out Stars:** Families or individuals who are participating independently.
- **Business Leaders for Bridge:** Business leaders, networking groups and young professionals looking to make a difference.



Register or make a pledge to support a participant at www.sleepoutsaturday.org, and for more info, contact Margo Matthew at margo.matthew@bridgecommunities.org or 630-403-5091.

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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

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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.

TIME SENSITIVE MATERIAL
PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY

Because of your help

Your support made the following successes possible for Bridge families:

- **Maria** earned an associate's degree and graduated with honors
- **Marsa** received a 10% raise at work
- **Denise** paid off all her debt
- **Marketta** purchased a house
- **Heaven** graduated with a bachelor's degree
- **Shaveena** bought a home
- **Shantae** raised her credit score by 200 points
- **Ashly** earned a \$2,000 college scholarship
- **Tatyana** passed her certifications to become a phlebotomist
- **Kristina** raised her credit score to the 700s
- **Michelle** was named a shift lead at her job
- **Elvire** received a promotion and raise at work
- **Precious** paid off \$13,000 in debt this year
- **Jocelyn** has saved more than \$10,000
- **Ashley** purchased a house through the NACA program

Please consider giving to Bridge families as they work towards their goals of new employment, financial security, and permanent affordable housing. Make a gift at www.bridgcommunities.org.



Congratulations to Bridge graduate Ashley on the purchase of her house!