



Connections

Connecting homeless families to a better future.

Shavon: “I feel I can do anything now”

One of the greatest joys at Bridge Communities is witnessing the long-term impact you have made on our families. Homeless families who came into our program broken and afraid—and exited ready to spread their wings and fly. Families just like Shavon’s.

Before coming to Bridge Communities more than eight years ago, Shavon had been in and out of abusive relationships her entire life. She had suffered physical and emotional abuse as a child, and then as a result, had difficulty with healthy relationships as an adult.

She had suffered abuse by her son’s father for a long time, but the final straw came when her son was just an infant. “When my son was 6 weeks old, I went back to work. I came home and my son’s father had cut every cord on every electronic,” Shavon explained. “He literally destroyed the whole house, and it was not even livable

anymore. So, I picked up my kids and went and lived with a friend for a small period. I did get an apartment, but it was in a really bad neighborhood. It got to a point that we wouldn’t even sleep in the bedroom because we were afraid of bullets coming through the windows. Eventually I left the apartment and ended up living in a shelter.”

While the shelter offered her safety and a roof over her head, Shavon knew she had to find a home for her and her

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kids. She learned about Bridge Communities through an internet search, interviewed and was accepted into Bridge.

“I think back on those days before Bridge, when I dreamed that one day I was going to be in leadership. And today, being in a place I always dreamed I’d be ...”

“When we entered the Bridge program, the support I received was amazing,” she said. “I had never had anyone believe in me more than I believed in myself. The support, the hugs—I didn’t come from a family that hugged – the hugs were real and full of love. I’d always felt that I had nothing but myself, and the support that I got at Bridge was unbelievable.”

With the help from her mentors from Corpus Christi Catholic Church, Pat, Mary Ellen and Patty, Shavon began the difficult changes needed so that she could secure a better future for herself and her children.

“One of the things that was the most challenging was admitting I needed help. Going into the Bridge program let me know that it was ok to ask for help,” she says. “And Bridge helped get me and my

parents into counseling services together. I wanted to forgive them, so that I could move on with my life. That was life changing and made me a better parent as well.”

Her kids greatly benefited from the Bridge program, too—through Bridge’s education program, her son Elijah had an Early Childhood evaluation and was quickly placed into preschool, and her daughter Jayla obtained a tutor. “My daughter was in 3rd grade and reading at a 2nd grade level,” Shavon explains. “[After tutoring] she was in 4th grade reading at a 5th grade level.”

Through her mentors’ and case manager’s encouragement, Shavon gained the confidence to try to move up in her job. “I interviewed for a training position at my job—before that, I hadn’t interviewed for 12 years because I had been stuck in the same job for so long,” she said. Six months after she got that first training job, the company had her interview against five other candidates vying for a regional trainer position. “When they called me and told me I had that job, I can’t even explain to you the joy I felt in my heart. The biggest accomplishment I have is believing in myself and striving to work harder. I feel I can do anything now.”

Shavon rapidly proved herself and moved up the corporate ladder, and in 2014, she graduated from Bridge when her company promoted her to a branch in Kansas City. She’s since been promoted to a Quality Control Manager, and just celebrated 19 years with her company.

And in the following years, Shavon’s children have continued to flourish. “Jayla is now 16, is getting straight As in school, and wants to be a pediatric nurse. Because her GPA is so high, for her junior



The Greatest Among Us



Dear Friends,
Who would have thought as recently as a month ago that a pandemic theme would pervade our communications and consume most of our daily efforts? We want you to know that our client families continue to be safely housed and basic program elements have continued without interruption, and all apartment buildings continue to be regularly cleaned and disinfected safely.

Thanks to technology, we've moved almost every service to remote as we all support social distancing. I know our mentors and volunteers miss seeing our client families in person, and we miss seeing one another, and look forward to the day when the gratification of work in proximity returns.

We are turning our sights to the economic recession that has already taken hold. Our talented Employment Team of Mary, Dorothy, and Jodi have begun to host online job readiness workshops and expanded our LinkedIn Learning courses, adjusting our programming to meet the challenges of a shocked economy. More than ever, Bridge strives to provide each of our clients the skills and education needed to earn a living wage and sustain permanent housing.

I know with certainty that Bridge would not be in such a position of strength to face this pandemic without your many years of commitment. You will read in this newsletter stories of how the Bridge staff has responded to imposed threats, in full cooperation with you and our partners in faith communities, government, health care, and human services. If you can, please consider sending a gift today so that we can meet our clients' ever-increasing needs. I thank you for your continued generosity.

I end with special thanks to those of you employed in health care, who risk your own health in service to others. There are a great many of you across our thousands of friends and we have already heard some of your stories. Please know that you are joined by several of Bridge's very own clients who are in frontline health care jobs. They too faithfully report to their jobs at medical facilities every day. In these difficult times we proudly count them, along with you, as *the greatest among us*.

John R. Hayner,
Chief Executive Officer

year next year, she will only go to high school half time and the other half she'll be taking college courses toward a nursing degree," says Shavon proudly. "And Elijah is doing very well, too. He's in fifth grade, he's into basketball, and loves school—especially math."

Her family is also about to grow. She's now engaged to her love of the past five years, and they plan to marry later this year. "He is from Kansas City and has a loving family,

and he treats me and my kids wonderfully," says Shavon. "And about four months ago, Elijah asked him if he could start calling him 'Dad.'"

Shavon will always remember you for transforming her life forever. "I think back on those days before Bridge, when I dreamed that one day I was going to be in leadership. And today, being in a place I always dreamed I'd be, sometimes I find myself crying with happiness. I get emotional

when I look back, because I've accomplished a lot of things thanks to your support," she says. "Bridge Communities changed my life when I was in a place where I thought no one cared about me. And I just felt so defeated. But that support and motivation that my mentors and case manager gave me—I wish everybody in the world could have that kind of support. We'll never forget how well you treated us. Bridge will be a part of my life forever!" 🏡

Q&A with Kathleen McTighe | Volunteer Tutor

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

A. I first learned about Bridge Communities when I was invited by a friend to their Spring Luncheon. I was so impressed with what Bridge was doing for families, and I learned that there were opportunities to become a volunteer tutor. After I retired from elementary teaching more than two and a half years ago, I started tutoring two siblings, a kindergarten boy and a first grade girl. A few months later, I also started tutoring another sibling set. It has been an amazing volunteer job, and I am very grateful that I have had the opportunity to work with such wonderful children.

Q. What do you do as a tutor?

A. The most important thing I can do as a tutor is establish trust and a good relationship with my students. They have been through the trauma of being homeless, and they need to know that I am always there for them, especially with their schoolwork. I work in close cooperation with their teacher and parents to ensure what I do enforces and strengthens their work in the classroom. I try to make the learning fun when they are in tutoring. Bringing books from the library and creating fun games to play usually helps them look forward to the time we have together without ever realizing that they are learning many important academic skills.

Q. What's your favorite memory as a Bridge tutor?

A. I started tutoring a boy in June who was going to begin kindergarten in August. He hardly knew any letters, he didn't know any sounds of letters, and he couldn't write anything but his first name. He was like a sponge, though. He would run into the LRC because he couldn't wait to get to tutoring. We spent the summer learning the letters and the sounds that go with each one. We only



were able to get to "H" by the time school started. Luckily, he had a wonderful teacher who gave him great support throughout the year. We kept working on the letters and sounds in tutoring, too. My favorite memory in tutoring was the day he started reading his first book to me! By the end of kindergarten, he was able to read independently and was at grade level. To see his joy at being able to read was an incredible gift!

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

A. It's knowing that I have an opportunity to make a difference in a child's life, and knowing that I am a part of a large community of people striving for the same goal---to help families get back on their feet and to help them to learn the skills they need to be independent and thrive. The expression, "It takes a village to raise a child," is how I see the role of Bridge Communities. It has been very rewarding to work with my students and watch them grow, and I have loved getting to know their families. I am so grateful and humbled to be a part of this wonderful organization that truly changes people's lives. 📌

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.

Partner Spotlight: The Driskill Foundation

The Driskill Foundation is a Naperville-based foundation whose mission is to ignite the young people of Chicagoland and DuPage area to develop and unleash the power of their curiosity and creativity. The foundation hopes to inspire young people to live lives filled with meaning, passion, purpose, hope, and a thirst for knowledge. In the fall of 2019, for the first-time, The Driskill Foundation awarded Bridge Communities with a \$20,000 grant to provide our youngest clients



THE DRISKILL FOUNDATION

with scholarships for after-school and summer enrichment activities and camps. As a result of this generous grant, Bridge will be able to give 75 scholarships to Bridge children this year so they can have new learning experiences that they would otherwise not be able to afford. June Barnard, President and CEO of The Driskill Foundation, recently said, “We are proud to have a small part in all the incredible work you do!” Thank you, Driskill Foundation!

In Memoriam | Lisa Garrow

In March, Bridge graduate, Lisa Garrow, our “Life Transformed Honoree” from Bridge’s 2018 Celebrating Women, Transforming Lives Spring Luncheon, passed away. Lisa was a seasoned HR professional and spent many years sharing her skills and gifts as a volunteer with the Bridge employment team. “Lisa was kind, gentle and exhibited a gracious spirit while encouraging clients through the oftentimes tricky job search and interview process,” says Mary Zienty, Bridge’s Director of Employment Services. “In addition, Lisa was a wonderful networking partner, providing job leads and even interviewing prospective clients who might be a good fit with her employer.” Lisa and her warm smile will be missed by all of us in the Bridge family.



Circle of Hope

Now more than ever, Bridge families need consistency, step-by-step support and hope to overcome the issues that led them to homelessness.

You can give homeless families the hope and the reliable support they need. Become a Circle of Hope donor today!

By joining the Circle of Hope, your monthly or quarterly gifts ensure a consistent and reliable source of support to Bridge Communities families, and provide housing, mentoring, employment services, children’s services and so much more.

To join the Circle of Hope, visit

www.bridgecommunities.org/Support-us/make-a-gift/donate-online

and select “Monthly” or “Quarterly” for your donation choice.

Thank you for being a friend we can count on!

The COVID-19 Crisis and Bridge Communities

In these uncertain times, donors, supporters and community partners like you have rallied together in support of Bridge families. Thank you for being a lifeline to homeless families in our community! Here's just a few examples of how Bridge friends and families have risen to the occasion in recent weeks:


Welcome home

A warm welcome to Jennifer's family! They moved into their Bridge apartment in mid-March thanks to their amazing mentor team from St. Raphael Catholic Church in Naperville. This team did not want to see Jennifer's family homeless for one more night, and quickly mobilized to bring them into the safety of a Bridge apartment. Special shout out to Judy, Tom, Tom, Carol, Mary Ellen & your families for your heroics!

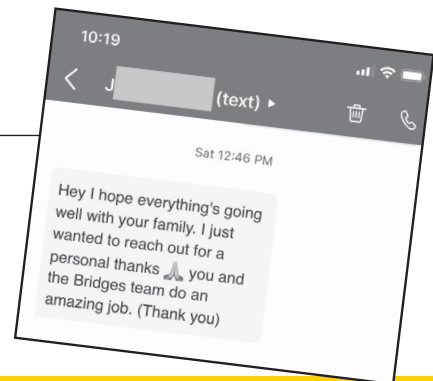


Bridge kids have been e-learning like champs! A big shout-out to Bridge's amazing volunteer tutors, who have been there to tutor Bridge kids remotely and keep them on track this spring. And three cheers for Bridge parents, many of whom are juggling homeschooling with working remotely!



Our community has banded together to make sure all Bridge families have their basic needs met! This includes mobile food pantry deliveries at all our campuses each month, thanks to our friends at West Suburban Community Pantry. We appreciate you helping Bridge families get their food safely!

We received this kind thank-you text from Bridge client J after Children's Program Coordinator Michelle stopped at his apartment building to deliver paper towels! Your support means that Bridge staff can be there for clients in these difficult times—thank you!



Bridge families need your help now more than ever! Please keep our families in safe homes and make a gift in their honor at www.bridgecommunities.org.

Notes of Gratitude

"Although my toddler is completely off a schedule, and we are trying to get in a routine of things, I am grateful that I get to spend this time with her. I am also glad that I have this time because I've been able to tackle tasks around my apartment that I haven't been able to get to. I am appreciative that I have a warm place with lights and running water. I am appreciative that I can feel peace, being in my own home during such a chaotic time." -Bridge client K

"In times of hardship and uncertainty, we need to dig deep. Every day, I find beauty, joy and peace. This may be a lesson, one in which we will show kindness to mankind and nature. I am eternally grateful for this opportunity Bridge has given my family. I will always treasure the gift of independence and confidence they have restored in this single mom of three." -Bridge client M



Bridge mentor Maggie Keshen created cloth masks for her client T, and all of T's coworkers, too! T is an essential worker at a hardware store and serving the public every day. Thank you, Maggie and T, for all you do!

Employment Update

- In April, Bridge launched its first remote Job Readiness workshop, with both daytime and nighttime sessions available to accommodate clients.
- Clients have been updating their employable skills via LinkedIn Learning classes provided by Bridge.
- The Bridge employment team has helped clients register for unemployment benefits as needed.
- Bridge has maintained a running list of job opportunities available for clients who need them.

Children's Program Update

- In early April, Bridge held a virtual spirit week for families, volunteers and staff. We all enjoyed the participation and seeing photos of everyone's creativity!
- Bridge held virtual meet-ups for teens and tweens, covering coping skills and fun activities while safe at home.
- Bridge launched a series of virtual classes for families, including a Parenting Workshop for parents of teens, and a virtual ACT prep class.

Please consider donating to Bridge's critical employment, education, and children's programming as we pivot all essential services so to ensure our families continue to thrive. Your continued commitment is needed now more than ever. Thank you!



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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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CARES Act: How Does it Impact You?

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) provides more than \$2 trillion in relief for Americans, businesses, and organizations effected by COVID-19. The CARES Act includes several temporary tax changes and incentives that may affect your charitable giving options and opportunities.

Tax Benefits for Standard Deduction Households

- Taxpayers who take the standard deduction are allowed an above-the-line deduction up to \$300 per filing household for charitable contributions made to a qualified 501(c)(3) charity during 2020. This excludes giving to your donor-advised fund (DAF) and private foundation.

Tax Benefits for Itemizing Households

- Taxpayers who itemize their annual returns are allowed a temporary increase on deductions for 2020 charitable contributions. This excludes giving to your donor-advised fund (DAF) and private foundation.
- The deduction limit of 60% of Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) for cash gifts is suspended for charitable contributions made to a qualified 501(c)(3) charity.
- The deduction limit of 30% of AGI for contributions of appreciated assets such as stock, mutual funds, real estate or closely-held business interests) remain unchanged.
- Itemizing taxpayers may potentially deduct up to 100% of their 2020 AGI via charitable gifts. Taxpayers who make this 100% of AGI election can also carry forward unused qualified cash gift deductions up to five years.



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Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) Waived for 2020

- Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from 401(k)s, 403(b)s, IRAs (including traditional and Roth) accounts have been waived for 2020.
- If you have already taken your RMDs, it may be possible to replace the funds. Please speak with your advisor to determine if you qualify.

Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs)

- While RMDs have been waived, Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) from traditional and other IRAs are still allowed and encouraged as an excellent tax-advantageous giving tool. Consider giving QCDs in lieu of other taxable assets to offset RMDs in future tax years.
- Annual QCD limits remain at \$100,000 per individual and \$200,000 per couple.

Tax Benefits for Corporate Giving

- Gross Income-based limitations are increased to 25% for charitable contributions made in cash to a qualified 501(c)(3) charity.

Contact Amy Van Polen, Senior Director at (630) 545-0610 ext. 12 or amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org or your advisor to learn more about how you can benefit from the CARES Act and support Bridge Communities.

Information originally authored by DuPage Foundation, Bridge Communities' Endowment Fund partner.



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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 and your support, Bridge families reached the following achievements:

- **Ambar** purchased a condo
- **Ashley** began a job as an HR coordinator at \$17/hour
- **LaShawna** got straight A's her first semester in college
- **Kayshia** reduced her debt by \$20,000
- **Falisha** purchased a townhouse
- **Josie** started a new job at \$18/hour with benefits
- **Jocelyn** is earning an A in her surgical technician program
- **Marsa** brought up her credit score by 200 points
- **Breyana** earned all As and Bs in college last semester
- **Sio** celebrated her pinning ceremony in nursing school
- **Hanan** paid off all her debt and now has money in savings
- **Nancy's** children both earned straight A's last semester
- **Christina** reduced her debt by \$14,000
- **Stormy** paid off two credit cards in three months
- **Latasha** was named Employee of the Month at her job
- **April** started a job at a hospital, earning \$18/hour

- **Isaamar** raised her credit score to 700 and is working to purchase a house
- Bridge graduate **Gloria** opened her own small business

You are needed now more than ever. It is only because of you that Bridge can provide a safe home to homeless families as they work towards their goals of new employment, financial security, and permanent affordable housing. Make a gift in honor of Bridge families at www.bridgecommunities.org.



Bridge grad Gloria proudly shows the Certificate of Ownership for her small business. Congrats, Gloria—we knew you could do it!