



# Connections

*Connecting homeless families to a better future.*

## ● Sonia: “Thank you, from the bottom of my heart”

Sonia has one of the biggest smiles and biggest hearts you can imagine. A natural caregiver, she has a gift for taking care of loved ones around her—and for two decades, she did just that as a stay-at-home mom.

Unfortunately, for Sonia, it wasn't often a happy home, because she lived under the thumb of an abusive, controlling husband. He wouldn't allow her to take classes to improve her English or to finish high school. She didn't have a dime to her own name. And, for the duration of the marriage, she was not permitted to even know about the family's finances or have a say in how the household was run.

She finally worked up the courage to divorce him in 2014 when her children were teenagers, but

her troubles were far from over. She got a job, but it wasn't enough to make ends meet. And since she'd never learned financial know-how, she didn't understand how to manage their money and household. Bills piled up quickly, leaving Sonia overwhelmed and terrified.

“When we divorced, I did not have a single clue about the responsibilities and hard work that went into maintaining

a house, paying bills, writing checks, and much less about understanding a monthly budget,” she remembers tearfully.

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## Sonia *continued*

“We were just about to lose the house and become homeless.”

Desperate to keep safe housing for herself and her two children, she visited Home DuPage, and they recommended she apply to Bridge Communities.

“At first, I was scared—but then, I thought that God might be guiding me toward Bridge Communities, and I would have faith,” says Sonia. “When I started talking to Suzanne and Will, they were such nice people, and they made me feel comfortable and secure, and I knew I was in good hands.”

Once Sonia’s family moved into their Bridge apartment, she was connected to Joe, Mary and Pam: her mentors from Immaculate Conception Parish/Daybreak of Elmhurst. Sonia says her mentors were among the biggest keys to her success in the Bridge program.

“My mentors were my angels, and they guided me through such hard times. They gave me crucial support and so many important tools, lessons, and strategies that I will forever take with me to live a successful and fulfilling life,” Sonia says. “They

**“At first, I was scared—but then, I thought that God might be guiding me toward Bridge Communities, and I would have faith.”**

taught me many critical habits and skills, such as organizing a daily and weekly schedule for myself, creating a monthly budget and

spending plan, and even learning how credit scores work and how to maintain and build my score.” In fact, Sonia entered Bridge with a credit score of under 600, and through hard work and perseverance, boosted it to a 730 in just two years!

Sonia also needed a boost in her career, but a few things had always held her back: her limited skills in English, and her lack of a high school diploma. And, thanks to her team at Bridge, she overcame both of these challenges by receiving English tutoring and earning her GED. She also

attended a Microsoft Office certification class through Bridge, as well as Bridge’s job readiness workshop. “These two experiences not only taught me professional skills, but interpersonal skills as well,” she says. “After taking these two courses, and many mock job interviews,

I felt more confident in myself. I developed and practiced new communication skills, and I finally felt that I was able to express myself clearly with other people.” Sonia has since obtained a job she loves in customer service for the DuPage County Health Department, and is proud to provide for her family.

And, since her children were older teens while in the program, they benefited from Bridge in unique ways and gained key skills that would take them into adulthood. “Both of my kids know how to budget, they’re both working and going to school, and they’re very good with money,” Sonia says.

Sonia’s daughter Cassandra graduated from high school while in Bridge, and is in the Surgical Technology program at College of DuPage. Thanks to Bridge supporters like you, she was awarded a Bridge scholarship to help with tuition, too. Cassandra also attended Bridge’s job readiness class, and holds down a part-time job while attending school. Sonia’s son Kevin works part-time and attends Harper College, and is studying to become a civil engineer.

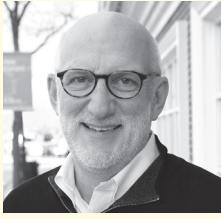
Sonia has a goal of going to college, too—and she wants to become a social worker, so that she can pay it forward and help people in need. And because of your support, she’s on a path to get there.

“Sonia really used her time wisely with us, and I’m very proud of her. She worked full time while



**Kevin, Cassandra and Sonia celebrated Cassandra’s recent high school graduation.**

## Digging Into the Data



Dear Friends,

It was just two years ago when we were awarded a grant from a major foundation, funding a multi-year project to launch the formation of a highly professional Program Evaluation function. Among the many questions we wanted to answer were: What are the key factors in our program that point to the best outcomes for our clients, in terms of financial and housing stability after exit? What changes can we make now in our services to improve those outcomes? What lasting impact has the Bridge program had on the homeless families we have served over our first 30 years?

Just over one year ago, Dr. Susan Ryerson-Espino joined our staff to lead these efforts, and lead she has! Today, 158 of the families we have served have completed detailed surveys. Respondents provided insight on their time with Bridge, and updates on their employment, income, and housing. And, 30 of these families participated in oral history interviews to share a rich narrative of their experiences.

There is still a great deal of work ahead to make full sense of what our families have reported, but importantly, the majority of respondents reported employment and housing stability. We also learned that long-term success among alumni was strongly associated with a trusting relationship with at least one mentor. This does not surprise us. Any of you who have seen our videos or heard clients speak at our events will recall that the relationships they developed while in our program were prominent in their message.

To those of you who have had personal touches with our families through your volunteerism and to all those donors who have journeyed alongside Bridge families, we both thank you and report to you that your commitments of time and dollars have been a wise investment. We promise to keep you updated as the evaluation work continues.

John R. Hayner,  
*Chief Executive Officer*

### Sonia *continued*

studying and passing her GED, and worked hard to improve her wages,” says Molly Howieson, Sonia’s case manager. “She saved money with a plan to purchase a home, and set an example for her children that education matters and is the key to a secure future.”

Sonia is so grateful to the Bridge supporters, mentors and staff who helped her get to where she is today. “Thanks to the past two and a half of years of being in the Bridge program, today I consider myself a strong, valiant and fearless woman who is confident in herself,” says Sonia. “We all deserve a second opportunity in life to move forward. And I would like to extend my thanks to you, from the bottom of my heart, for giving this to me and my family.” 🏡

## Thank You, State Farm!

We are grateful for our friends at State Farm!

In January, the corporation awarded Bridge Communities with a \$5,000 grant in support of our transitional housing program. This funding is enough to house a homeless family for more than five months! Thank you so much, State Farm, for helping connect homeless families to a better future and heal from the traumas of homelessness. 🏡



## Q&A with Jennifer Tenny | Volunteer • Tutor

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

A. I became involved with Bridge Communities as a tutor three years ago. I used to teach 4th grade, but then decided to stay home with my kids. I had recently begun substitute teaching in Naperville and Plainfield in the elementary schools, and was really enjoying being in the classroom and working with students again. I wanted to find a way to volunteer my time using my skills and after searching online, learned that I could do that through Bridge as a tutor.

### Q. What do you do as a tutor?

A. I meet with students individually for one hour a week in the LRC. I am in contact with their teachers, so I can focus specifically on the skills she requests we work on. Occasionally, we go

over the student's homework together, but typically, I use supplemental materials to help support the curriculum through enrichment activities.

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

A. My favorite memory as a tutor is actually not from a tutoring session, but from when I had the opportunity to volunteer with Bridge Communities at the Holiday party, held at the DuPage Children's Museum this past December. Two of my students were there that night, so I had the chance to see them be silly while interacting with their friends and family. One of my students, Carmen, was very thoughtful and even made a gift for me in the wood-working area! It was nice for us to get the chance to have some fun outside of the traditional tutoring setting.



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

A. The best thing about tutoring is seeing the progress the kids make and watching the light bulb go off when they get a concept. I love seeing their confidence grow when they put in the work and their efforts pay off. 📌

Are you a certified teacher interested in tutoring? We'd love to have you as a volunteer!  
Please contact Mary Slade at 630-403-5098 or [mary.slade@bridgecommunities.org](mailto:mary.slade@bridgecommunities.org).



## Bridge Program Update

Your support means that Bridge can continue to grow and offer key programming for homeless families! Here are some of the latest additions to our programs:

- **Nurture U:** Bridge held its first Nurture U event in February, offering Bridge parents a chance to take part in self-care strategies. Clients enjoyed learning about mindfulness, meditation, nutrition and more.

Thanks to your support, Bridge teens enjoyed a private tour of North Central College last fall!

# Sixth Annual A Chair Affair

**C**heers to the chairs! We look forward to welcoming you to A Chair Affair - Naperville on June 13. This spring, our exciting art auction & cocktail gala will return to Elements at Water Street event space inside downtown Naperville's Hotel Indigo.

This year, it's not only chairs up for auction—you'll be able to bid on décor and furniture for the home and garden, including a unique bar made from a vintage piano, as well as a one-of-a-kind "candelier."

Starting on May 23, Naperville retailers will begin hosting the artwork for your viewing pleasure. Online voting and photos of all the artwork will be available through June 13, when they'll be moved to Elements at Water Street for the main event—and you can bid on your favorite artwork at our live auction and take it home that night!

The early bird ticket price for the June 13 event is \$50 and includes hors d'oeuvres and dessert buffet, plus an open bar. All proceeds of A Chair Affair - Naperville go directly to support the programs serving Bridge families recovering from the traumas of homelessness.



## Gala Reception & Auction Event

Thursday, June 13, 2019

\$50 Early Bird Ticket | through June 6

\$60 Ticket | June 7–13

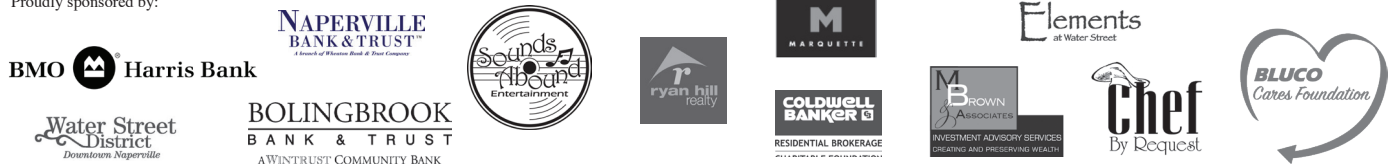
Elements at Water Street (inside Hotel Indigo)  
123 Water Street, 2nd Floor

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

7:30 p.m. Live Auction

**Purchase your ticket today on [www.bridgecommunities.org](http://www.bridgecommunities.org), and don't forget to vote for your favorite chair starting May 23!**

Proudly sponsored by:



• **Bridge Clothing Boutique:** We've transformed a one-bedroom unit on our Naperville campus into a full-fledged clothing boutique for Bridge families! Led by volunteer Kim Weeks, this boutique offers professional clothing, shoes, accessories and more for Bridge adults to wear to interviews and on the job. What's more, clients enjoy a one-on-one shopping experience with a personal shopper, ensuring that they leave with the perfect items!

• **Teens & Education:** Thanks to the generous support you provided to build our Founders Fund endowment last year, Bridge has hired Children's Program Coordinator Janet Carlson, who is establishing programming for teens in Bridge to help guide them beyond the high school years. This includes college prep counseling and workshops, tours of area colleges, job shadowing and more.

# We're grateful for YOU!

Bridge Communities is grateful for the support of DuPage County area organizations—you make all the difference in the world for homeless families building a better future.



*Glenbard West High School Dance Team*

Thank you to the Glenbard West High School dance team for your donation of tag blankets for Bridge kids—just in time for winter!



*New Life Elgin Church*

We're grateful for the New Life Elgin Church Arise Ministry, who donated personal care and cleaning supplies to stock our supply closets for Bridge families. Thank you!



*Naperville Junior Woman's Club*

Bridge is thankful for our friends at Naperville Junior Woman's Club! For two years now, the club has helped support Bridge families through their volunteerism, fundraisers and donations. In 2018, they raised \$13,500 for Bridge—that's enough to house a homeless family for a whole year!



*Glen Ellyn Police Department*

Our friends at the Glen Ellyn Police Department hosted a tour of the police station for Bridge kids. They explained all their equipment, let the kids try on helmets and even test out the siren in the police car!



*Women in Business Wheaton Chamber of Commerce*

Thank you to the Women in Business group of the Wheaton Chamber of Commerce! Your generous \$2,500 donation from your Style Showcase fundraiser last fall provided nearly three months of housing for a homeless family.



*West Suburban Community Pantry*

A big thank you to the West Suburban Community Pantry, who now provides monthly delivery of groceries to Bridge families.

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](mailto:vicky.joseph@bridgecommunities.org).



## CORNERSTONE SOCIETY

Your decision to make a gift to Bridge Communities is a personal statement about what you care about and who you are.

The Cornerstone Society honors friends like you who have made a commitment to Bridge Communities through a gift in their will, living trust, life insurance, individual retirement account or other arrangement.

Even with the new tax laws, there are many ways you can continue to help our most vulnerable neighbors. With a little creativity, you can leverage your assets to benefit you, your family and support Bridge Communities.

### TAX SMART GIFTS:

**IRA Charitable Rollover:** If you or your spouse are 70½ years old, you can make a significant gift to help homeless families without using other sources of income. You can contribute all or a portion of your minimum distributions from your IRA directly to Bridge and reduce your taxable income. Married couples can each donate up to \$100,000 from their individual IRA accounts.

**Gifts of Appreciated Securities:** Consider using appreciated stock to make your donation. You will avoid the capital gains tax on the appreciation while at the same time claim the full value of the stock as a charitable contribution.

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For more details on how you can leave your legacy, contact Senior Director Amy Van Polen at 630-545-0610 x 12 or amy.vanpolen@bridgecommunities.org.

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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.

505 Crescent Blvd., Glen Ellyn, IL 60137  
630-545-0610  
Fax 630-545-0640  
[www.bridgecommunities.org](http://www.bridgecommunities.org)

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505 Crescent Blvd.  
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137  
630-545-0610  
Fax 630-545-0640

[www.bridgecommunities.org](http://www.bridgecommunities.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 could achieve the following successes:

- **Tatiana** earned her cosmetology license
- **Renee** obtained an accounts receivable job
- **Ashley** earned a 20% raise at her job
- **Linda** began a new accounts payable position
- **Angie** started an administrative assistant position with full benefits
- **Buba and Kate** moved into their new Habitat for Humanity homes
- **Paige** got a raise and a year-end bonus at work
- **Raven** purchased a new home
- **Ayda** started a new job and is in the home-buying process
- **Danah's daughter** was named "Student of the Week" at her school
- **Maribel** started a position as an accounting clerk
- **Kelly** earned two As last semester in nursing school
- **Amber** purchased a house
- **Melody** began a job as a relationship specialist at a bank
- **Grace** became a U.S. citizen



Congratulations to Bridge client Grace, who became a U.S. citizen in January!