

Partners in Hope

Supportive friendships for lasting impact

September 2023

From the Desk of the Executive Director

Stability through Sustainable Transportation

You may recall the plea in July asking for immediate transportation assistance for a mom needing a car. She had been driving a vehicle with more than 200,000 miles, and the cost of inspection repairs was more than the vehicle's worth.

Due to the generosity of our donors, we are pleased to report we were able to purchase a reliable used car for this mom. ***Her gratitude is overwhelming! She knows this was a gift from God.***

Recognizing that transportation is one of the most critical factors in establishing stability in our moms' lives, **we are developing a task force to address the growing need for safe, reliable, affordable transportation.**

We are incredibly grateful for all the donations and assistance. Several generous supporters blessed us with cars donated to moms, and we've financially supported moms

with insurmountable repair bills. However, this situation is not sustainable.

You and I may not think twice about the \$90 oil change and \$100 annual inspection fee, but I suspect we are not so happy when our mechanic tells us we need brakes, new sparkplugs, a new starter motor, and a battery with a cost of \$1,238. Maybe the bill is paid with a credit card, knowing it will get paid off in a month or two.

For the moms we serve, a credit card is not a possibility. The realization that they cannot pay for the repairs often sends them into a downward spiral as they attempt to balance paying rent, daycare, groceries, and gas from a job that pays \$17.50 an hour.

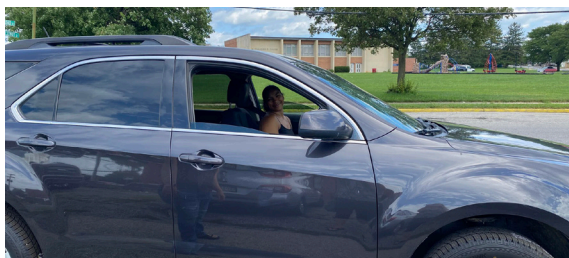
I was unaware until recently that the average cost of a used car in America is over \$29,000! Unsurprisingly, our single moms cannot afford anywhere near that amount for a used car.

So here is our plan for the task force. We are enlisting the support and guidance of several well-known central Pennsylvania auto dealers. Further, we are applying for grants to help create a fund specifically for transportation challenges, whether it be car purchases, repair bills, contracts with third-party vendors to safely transport children to daycare or from school to after-school programs, or even weeks' worth of Uber expenses incurred while a car was being repaired.

The bottom line is we cannot fix this problem on our own, so we are enlisting the help of smart, resourceful, concerned folks in the community.

If you have questions or comments or wish to be part of the solution, please do not hesitate to reach out!

Kevin Lutz
Executive Director



"I love you guys and I am so thankful and appreciative of everything you do for me."
~Natalie

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17

We are so grateful for God's blessing through the generosity of our supporters. We were able to help Natalie purchase a quality used car. Prior to entering our program, Natalie was living in a motel with her young son. Now she is in safe housing, seeking to increase her work hours, her son is doing well in daycare, and she meets regularly with her Neighboring Volunteers who support and encourage her.

**Names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the family.*

I Now Know What Home Means to Me

For seven years, Kara suffered extreme abuse from a partner she and her young children had been living with. The abuse was so severe that she recently had surgery to repair broken bones. A friend discovered Bridge of Hope Harrisburg Area and called repeatedly, desperate to determine if Kara qualified for the program. Kara applied, and about a month ago, she came into our program.

Kara wanted to leave her abusive situation many times, but her fear and insecurity held her back. *“I lost my sense of self. I felt broken down and depleted, but in my heart, I knew I needed to keep going to provide a better life for my children,”* she explained.

By the time she entered our program, she had fled her domestic violence situation and moved into a new home but was facing eviction due to the inflated cost of rent and protracted child custody hearings. Kara is still in and out of court, fighting to keep her children safe, all while still recovering from surgery.

When asked what home means to her, she responded you can have a house, but that does not make it a home. For Kara, it is easier to say what home is not. Home is not someone yelling so loudly at you that their voice is booming off the walls, cabinet doors continuously slammed, or the constant feeling that you are “walking on eggshells.”

Since she found her new home, she now knows the meaning of home. *“Home is where my children and I are safe. The echoes of little feet pattering against the floor, toys scattered about, and endless bouts of laughter,”* she exclaimed. *“Walls that hold heartfelt memories.”*

But, Kara is struggling to keep her new home. Like so many renters today, the escalating cost of rent has not kept up with wages, resulting in renters being severely rent-burdened – more and more income is spent on rent. This makes paying for childcare, groceries, utilities, and other expenses difficult.



“In the future, I want to have a stable career and income. I want my children to be their happiest selves and learn who they are in a healthy environment surrounded by love and support.”

Kara desires to increase her income, and she is seeking new employment. “Kara is new to our program and very mature for her age,” said Dianna Thomas, program support specialist for Bridge of Hope Harrisburg Area. “Despite everything she has been through, she is willing to work hard to change her life.”

As Kara continues her journey to a new life, she states, “Bridge of Hope Harrisburg Area has been such an encouragement walking alongside us. They have given us the reassurance, compassion, and encouragement my

family desperately needed. It made me realize there are still genuine people that you can trust to have your best intentions at heart and truly live by that.”

Thomas continued, “Kara is a wonderful mother and only has her children’s best interests in mind. She has high hopes for her future and for her children to heal from their past experiences.”

Kara has witnessed how delicate life is and how quickly someone can disregard the fragility of life.

“I have walked through the darkest valleys of life. It has taught me to weather the storm, and the sun will rise again. Despite these valleys, I am reminded that my life is meaningful. I am here for a reason.”

“In the future, I want to have a stable career and income. I want my children to be their happiest selves and learn who they are in a healthy environment surrounded by love and support,” Kara shared. “I want to stop living in fear and start living for the present. I want to regain my sense of self-worth and heal to close this traumatic chapter in my life.”

**Names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the family.*

Why We Focus on Women and Children Facing Homelessness

Traditional images of homeless people often focus largely on the “street homeless”—those living on the streets, sleeping under bridges or on park benches, begging for food, or playing music for donations. But this picture only reflects some of those who are homeless.

Since they are unlikely to be found living on the streets, families who are homeless often remain uncounted and unseen.

They may be staying with friends or family, in a domestic violence shelter or other transitional living program, or staying in a hotel. They may also temporarily reside in a dwelling that is overcrowded or unsafe, or they may face imminent eviction with nowhere to go.

Homeless families comprise roughly one-third of the total homeless population and approximately 1.6 million children will experience homelessness over the course of a year.¹

And more than 80 percent of all families experiencing homelessness are headed by women. These single mothers are typically in their late twenties and have two children.²

Thus, our program focuses on where the need is greatest and where we can positively impact the future of children.

Women and children who experience homelessness have some vulnerabilities that are less likely to be experienced by their male counterparts. According to The Institute for Women, the median weekly income for women working full-time in 2012 was 80.9 percent of what men

earned. As a result, housing costs exhaust a greater percentage of earned income for female-headed families. And for many of these families, the cost of childcare exceeds the cost of rent.

Increased rental costs and a tight Harrisburg region market have compounded this. *A recent study by Rentcafe.com named the Harrisburg area as the most competitive small rental market in the U.S. in peak rental season, with 16 apartment seekers vying for the same rental unit.* The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Harrisburg is \$1,325. Financially, our moms whose average salary is \$17.50/hour can not afford these rental rates.

In addition to financial challenges, another significant vulnerability is that of domestic violence and abuse. Research from across the country suggests that as much as 13% to 50% of women experiencing homelessness cite domestic violence as a primary cause. Ninety-two percent of homeless mothers report experiencing severe physical or sexual assault at some point in their lives—illustrating a strong correlation between violence and family homelessness.

Of the 12 moms in our program, five have experienced childhood abuse, and seven have experienced domestic violence. *This means 58.3% of our moms suffer from the effects of domestic violence as adults, more than the research across the country reports.*

Nine of our moms have been diagnosed with behavioral health issues such as anxiety,



depression, bipolar disorder, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Our case managers assess the needs of each family member. Through rental assistance on a decreasing basis and working on budgets, they help improve their financial position. Referrals are made to community career and employment services, subsidized child care, mental health and domestic violence services for moms and their children, TANF, SNAP, and others. Case managers foster connections to Neighboring Volunteers where families experience positive relationships and expanded community support.

Through the Neighborhood of Support, families, Neighboring Volunteers, and the case manager create a community that provides encouragement and emotional and tangible support for the family to reach their goals.

As a result, Bridge of Hope Harrisburg Area ends homelessness one family at a time.

Thank you to everyone who made our 2023 Family and Friends Picnic a success!

Yummy chicken, delicious snowcones, lots of bubbles, water slide, and train rides...



**Mark Your Calendars Now for Our 2024 Gala
May 11, 2024 | Best Western Premier, Harrisburg**

**Do you have a passion for helping homeless moms and their children?
Become a part of our team with this exciting job opportunity!**

Development Coordinator

We are searching for a dedicated and socially conscious Development Coordinator to assist our affiliate's Executive Director in creating and implementing strategies that ensure sustainability and organizational growth.

Your expertise in supporting development efforts will assist our organization in improving business opportunities, strengthening relationships with clients and donors, streamlining development processes, encouraging organizational growth, researching and identifying funding opportunities, and promoting the organization's mission and values to external stakeholders.

This position is full time at 35 hours/week with a flexible schedule. Visit our website to learn more:
<https://harrisburg.bridgeofhopeinc.org/about/job-opportunities>

The mission of Bridge of Hope Harrisburg Area is to engage Christian Faith Communities in ending family homelessness through neighboring relationships that demonstrate Christ's love.