

PAY IT FORWARD FUND IN MEMORY OF RONN FLETCHER

I. PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

(One page only. This page will be shared with Grant Committee Members.)

Date: 5/15/24

Contact Information:

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FEIN: 81-0555073 Year Incorporated: 1989

Has your nonprofit previously applied to the Community Foundation: Yes x No ___

Field/s of Interest:

___ Arts, Culture and Humanities ___ Environment/Animal Welfare ___ Health
x Human Services ___ Education ___ Religion

Organizational Information:

Geographic Area Served: Chester County
Annual # of Clients & Description of Population Served: 75 individuals served annually. We serve families facing homelessness, primarily comprised of single mothers and their dependent children.

Mission Statement: The mission of Bridge of Hope is to engage Christian faith communities in ending family homelessness through neighboring relationships that demonstrate Christ's love.

Organization Description:

Annual Budget \$839,922.83 ___4___ # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
___81___ % of budget for program expenses ___13___ # of Board Volunteers
___4___ % of budget for administrative expenses ___114___ # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
___15___ % of budget for fundraising expenses ___4,560 (2023-24) # of Volunteer Hours
100 % total

Top 3-5 funding sources: Beiler-Campbell Charities, Bentley Systems, Inc., Huston Foundation, JS Herr Foundation

Proposal Information:

Grant Amount Requested: Year 1 \$30,000 + Yr 2 \$20,000 = Total \$50,000 (Maximum \$50,000 Total)
Summary Description of **Paradigm-Shifting** Grant Purpose: Bridge of Hope Chester County launched new approaches to the housing crisis that are indeed a paradigm shift, moving from solely providing services and rental assistance to now also assuring that affordable housing units remain available for families in Chester County for years to come, while also generating earned income for Bridge of Hope to be able to expand capacity in the years ahead.



Bridge of Hope was founded in Chester County, and has been ending family homelessness for more than 30 years locally since 1989 and nationally since 2002. The Bridge of Hope model is a unique solution to family homelessness that differs from the traditional shelter or transitional housing program. **We work collaboratively to help families move into safe and sustainable housing, and achieve long-term stability by providing comprehensive post-shelter and Whole Family Case Management services for 12-18 months.** Rental assistance is also provided on average for 6-8 months on a decreasing basis to coordinate with education or job training opportunities, which helps families begin working on financial goals. Families are accepted into the program regardless of race, ethnicity, faith or past experiences.

The Bridge of Hope model includes a distinctive component called Neighboring. Neighboring is provided for each family by a group of 6-10 trained volunteers from a local Christian church/group who build intentional relationships of support. Neighboring Volunteers walk alongside the family facing homelessness providing tangible and emotional support; such as emergency childcare, help to find housing and move in, networking through their social connections, a ride if transportation breaks down, encouragement and friendship. Data continues to show that support systems are critical for ending family homelessness in every community. (Bassuk, 2015, Services Matter: How housing and services can end family homelessness.)

The Bridge of Hope network includes 21 Bridge of Hope locations across the country. Bridge of Hope Chester County is an affiliate which operates under the umbrella of Bridge of Hope Inc. (i.e. Bridge of Hope National), along with Bridge of Hope Lancaster. All other affiliates operate independently. Bridge of Hope National's board is the governing board and Bridge of Hope Chester County also has a "community board" that oversees programming, serves as ambassadors and fundraisers in the community.

Funding Request:

Family homelessness has been increasing due to the skyrocketing cost of housing combined with inflation and residual impacts from the pandemic. Bridge of Hope Chester County ended homelessness for 16 families (50 parents and children) in FY 2023-24. Our goal for FY 2024-25 is to serve at least 19 families by March 31, 2025, the end of our fiscal year.

Family homelessness is a reality in our community. The Pennsylvania Department of Education reported more than 1,900 students in Chester County experiencing homelessness in the 2021-22 school year. This is a significant increase from the previous year. Family homelessness is often hidden because rather than seek services, families attempt to live doubled-up, on couches, in

cars, or in motels, in order to stay together. We believe children are the most vulnerable population experiencing homelessness, and therefore serve families with at least one dependent child under the age of 18. According to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, more than 80% of these families are headed by a single mother, also typical of families served by Bridge of Hope.

Chester County has a severe shortage of affordable housing, and the cost of rental housing has skyrocketed. The number of calls for help to our office has increased by 351% over the past three years. Single parent families are particularly vulnerable to the housing crisis, and need support to improve their financial position. Bridge of Hope ensures that families have the long-term resources to remain housed and end the cycle of homelessness.

In Bridge of Hope, the adults seek employment within a career that meets the family's financial needs while working to better their education, earning power, and establish a solid financial plan for their future. Without a home, a family's ability to meet other basic needs is extremely challenging, so we provide first months' rent and security deposit to move into a safe and sustainable apartment of their choice. Through rental assistance provided on a decreasing basis and holistic case management services offered, families achieve three main outcomes at successful graduation: safe and sustainable housing, improved financial position through job training and employment, and supportive Neighboring relationships.

In the past, Bridge of Hope's approach has focused on providing rental assistance to help families obtain permanent housing. However, **the affordable housing crisis** has pinched more families out of housing, more calls for help and a continued decrease in the supply of affordable housing for the years ahead. In 2023, our board approved an ambitious 3-year strategic plan that includes a significant paradigm shift in the way Bridge of Hope approaches housing solutions.

In 1989, Bridge of Hope began by co-signing every lease for families in the program. By 1995, Bridge of Hope had become known enough in the landlord community that we were able to stop co-signing and simply give our word to landlords that we would provide rental assistance for 6-12 months, if they rented to families we were serving. This practice continued until 2021.

Following the pandemic, as the housing eviction moratorium was lifted, the rental housing market saw prices escalate at surprising levels and families seeking affordable housing had nowhere to turn. Over three years (2021-2024), calls for help to Bridge of Hope Chester County have increased by 351% and families facing homelessness were continually boxed out of the housing market.

Bridge of Hope began exploring a multi-prong response to the housing crisis, beginning in the fall of 2022, launching a Housing Task Force and a new strategic plan that outlines a 7-prong approach to the housing crisis, in recognition that there was not one simple solution to this extremely complex nation-wide crisis:

1. Increasing landlord partnerships.
2. Increased rental assistance funds made available per family as monthly rents continue to escalate.
3. Begin Master Leasing properties for high barrier families.
4. Lease Guarantor agreements for high barrier families.
5. Accept donated rental housing units to use for affordable housing for families we serve.
6. Purchase 2-3 units in Chester County to use for affordable housing for families we serve.
7. Collaborating with donors, churches and other nonprofits to explore affordable housing options/partnerships for families we serve.

This multi-prong approach to finding affordable housing, which we began a year ago, is already paying off for families in Chester County. This past year, we:

- Increased landlord partners by 10+%
- Provided several lease guarantees for families unable to find housing (essentially guaranteeing rent without co-signing lease)
- Initiated conversations with several churches about use of their property for affordable housing
- Received our first donated property (on 12/29/23) of a two-bedroom condo in Chester County, with renovations funded by Westminster Presbyterian and Frazer Mennonite Churches) and a family moved in on March 30, 2024. The rental income from Bridge of Hope properties will be used to fund Bridge of Hope programming in the years ahead, essential providing earned revenue for our organization in a way that is profoundly mission-centric by providing rental assistance for future families, thus paying it forward.

Five of these 7 approaches to the housing crisis are indeed a paradigm shift for Bridge of Hope Chester County organizationally, moving from solely providing services and rental assistance to now also assuring that affordable housing units remain available for families in Chester County for years to come, while also generating earned income for Bridge of Hope Chester County to be able to expand capacity in the years ahead.

We respectfully request a grant of \$50,000 (\$30,000 in Year 1 and \$20,000 in Year 2) to support this multi-pronged approach to reduce the amount of time families are seeking housing and assist in ending homelessness for more families in Chester County.

It is critical to fund this now because families experiencing homelessness should not have to wait four months for a home. Our Bridge of Hope benchmark goal is 60 days or less for finding housing after we begin services for a family. In FY 2021-22 and 2022-23, the average number of days families were seeking housing was 99 days and 126 days, respectively. In FY 2023-24, that number dropped to 60 days. This was a direct result of our team beginning to implement these new housing strategies. Our goal is to continue to build partnerships and a multi-prong approach to continue to see this number below 60 days of seeking housing.

Timetable:

Already completed:

- Secure property management firm to work with for units we own and masterlease.
- 100% of Neighboring Volunteers receive training on how to engage in housing search, as applicable for their families. And increase NV ownership in their role in the housing search.

By March 2026:

- Collaborate with 1-2 churches who own property/land to create affordable housing opportunities for families in Bridge of Hope. **In process.**
- Begin implementing 2+ master-leases to access more affordable housing and decrease days to house. **In Process.**
- Secure and implement 2-4 donated/purchased rental units in Chester County. **In process – condo donated 12/29/23. Seeking to raise \$400,000+ more for 2 more units.**
- Reach less than 60 days to house, with 80% of families moving into housing within 60 days or less. Achieved 60 days for fiscal year ending 3/31/24 and working to continue that downward trend for the coming years.
- Identify and expand our bank of potential landlord partners, from 27 to 57, to draw on and build from in housing families. **In process.**

Impact and results:

Impact and results will be demonstrated through ending homelessness for more families. In the current FY 2024-25 our goal is to serve at least 19 families, an increase from 16 families last year and 15 and 11 families in the two prior years. The three objectives of Bridge of Hope are (1) to help families achieve safe and sustainable housing by improving their financial position, (2) building strong and resilient families, and (3) experiencing supportive Neighboring relationships. Together, these goals ensure that families achieve the wellness and long-term resources needed to remain housed and financially stable. We track the results of the three outcomes (safe and sustainable housing, strong and resilient families and supportive Neighboring relationship)

through the guidance of 12 benchmarks. Those benchmarks include: 80% of families move into housing in less than 60 days, 80% of families' increase income, 80% of adults are employed upon exit from the program, 100% of families receive comprehensive assessments and screenings, and 100% of families are connected with a group of Neighboring Volunteers.