



Impact Report 2023



From Yoyo's Desk

Dear Friends,

I am honored and humbled to join Bridges Homeward as Executive Director this year. Over the last few months of observation and engagement, I have been impressed by our staff's core values, personal experiences, passion, and dedication to our mission. The most significant aspect is their integration of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion concept into daily practices and service to our youth and families.

I am pleased to present our 2023 Impact Report, a reflection on the tangible progress we've made in permanency work for children, youth, and families facing instabilities.

As you review the report, I invite you to open your ears to listen to their voices, open your eyes to witness their perseverance, and open your heart to experience their resilience. This can be seen through Analise's story, finding family through community; Sarah's story, finding independence; intensive foster care parents Andrea and Greg's story; brothers Chance and Zach's story, finding family through determination; Sandra's story, finding permanency through stability; or teenager Maria's story, finding permanency and education.

Reflecting on these narratives, I am truly empowered by their determination, persistence, resilience, nurturing, and sense of hope.

I would like to sincerely thank you for your continued support as we strive to make a lasting impact on the lives of those we serve. Together, we are making a meaningful difference.

Sincerely,
Yoyo Yau
Executive Director



Our Mission

To provide high-quality support and advocacy for children, adults, and families to develop and nurture safe, permanent relationships and maximize individual growth.

Our Programs



Our **Adoption program** works to ensure that all children and teens have the opportunity to grow up in a safe, healthy, loving family that provides unconditional love, a sense of security and a community for the child to call their own. We typically work with youth who face the greatest challenges to adoption including older children and teens, sibling groups, and children with significant medical, developmental, emotional and/or behavioral needs.

Our Impact in Adoption

18 adoptions, one guardianship legalized

Ten youth were adopted by biological relatives, and four youth were adopted by long-term foster parents

48 youth supported and stabilized

We kept twelve sibling groups together through adoptive placements and matched two youth with pre-adoptive families.

Families celebrate the adoptions of three siblings on National Adoption Day, 2022.



“Since my son's case was moved to Bridges Homeward, the care and respect that is shown and given to my son is just amazing. We love our social worker and we're glad she is on our team!”

- BRIDGES HOMEWARD ADOPTIVE PARENT

“[Our social worker] Livi has made the long process of adoption feel like we are in this together, as a team. Our children admire and look up to her. They cannot wait to share what they love with her! We feel so good knowing she shares the same concerns and admirations as we do. She is a very important person in our lives.”

- BRIDGES HOMEWARD ADOPTIVE PARENT



Finding Family Through Community

Analise was placed in the care of the Department of Children and Families at the time of her birth, when she was identified as a substance-exposed newborn. Analise was admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) immediately after her delivery to address symptoms of drug withdrawal. During her NICU stay, Analise underwent additional testing that revealed a complex heart defect.

Analise was referred to Bridges Homeward in June of 2022. At that time, she was living with a medically-specialized foster family, Janet and Dana. The couple provided exceptional care for Analise but they were unable to make a commitment to care for her permanently.

Children with complex needs like Analise's can be challenging to match with adoptive families. Because the demands of their care can be intimidating, these children often find families from among their "natural networks," those people who already know and love them. This was the case for Analise. Her foster mothers' close friends, Shannon and Heather, expressed their interest in adopting Analise.

They had known Analise for most of her life, understood what caring for her would require, and adored her. After we reached out to discuss the adoption process, Shannon and Heather quickly submitted a formal adoption application and were soon approved to adopt.

Typically, the process of transitioning a child to a new home occurs over several weeks. But because Shannon and Heather already shared a close relationship with Analise and spent time with her frequently, Analise felt comfortable in their presence. Because they'd already babysat for Analise many times, the couple had been trained in managing Analise's medical needs, and Analise had already developed a trusting relationship with her new pre-adoptive parents. Transitioning Analise to her new home was a very natural process for the new family, and Analise moved to her pre-adoptive home in October of 2022.

While Analise's transition was easier than most, she still had a lot to adjust to. She had been the youngest child in her foster family but became the older child in her pre-adoptive home; she needed to learn to share her parents' time and attention, as well as her toys, with Shannon and Heather's one-year-old daughter. She needed to learn a new family's routines, their parenting style and expectations, and the sounds of their home at night. All of these changes are hard on children, and we work to help their new caregivers recognize the demands that are placed on children when they join a new family, and to support both children and adults in navigating all the changes in their lives.

Kinship or "child-specific" matches like Analise's bring a multitude of benefits for both children and their adoptive parents. Shannon and Heather have a built-in support network of people who understand first-hand the challenges of caring for her complex needs, and Janet and Dana are always available to answer any of their questions and to provide childcare support when needed. Though Analise's relationships with her long-term foster parents have shifted in some ways since she left their home, she has not had to endure the separation and loss of her trusted foster parents as many children do when they move to adoptive families. Analise still sees Janet and Dana multiple times every week, and both families celebrate holidays together, attend the same church, care for each other's children, and provide support to each other daily.

Analise's adoption was finalized in July 2023. In the courtroom she was surrounded by her two families: Shannon, Heather, and their daughter, and Janet, Dana and their children, all of whom were delighted to celebrate Analise's permanent place in their lives.



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are now a very natural part of the culture of the Adoption team and are included in nearly all of our discussions, from formal clinical case presentations to casual lunch-room conversation. Our staff feel more comfortable and prepared when approaching conversations around race, gender identity and sexuality with pre-adoptive parents. Our hiring approaches have increased priority placed on expanding diversity. We remain committed to furthering our own knowledge, awareness and sensitivity with the goal of creating a more supportive, diverse and equitable workplace and community.

Our **Developmental Disabilities program** provides training, advocacy and social opportunities to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. We offer the people we serve skills and knowledge to help them strengthen the relationships they rely on, and opportunities to make their lives easier, richer and full of bright experiences.

Our Impact in Developmental Disabilities

We served 130 children and 340 adults with disabilities and their families

28 families gained life and permanency skills

through our Agency with Choice program. We helped each of those families decide what kinds of services they need; helped families increase their own agency in getting the services they need

19 families remained together

thanks our Intensive Flexible Family Support Services (IFFS) Program. The IFFS program serves families whose children are at risk for out-of-home placement. Our IFFS program helps families keep their children safely at home.

42 individuals safely pursued their education

through our collaboration with the Department of Early and Secondary Education's (DESE) collaboration with DDS. The individuals in this program have an Individual Education Plan, live in their home, and would be at-risk for placement in a residential setting, if not for the case management and extensive in-home services provided through this program.

Our Family Support Center hosted enriching trainings and celebrations

Our families loved our Spring Dance, afternoon bingo, and Cookie Monstah parties! We also hosted training on topics ranging from Attainable Savings Plans to Guardianship to Adult Foster Care.



"I am grateful for all of Bridges Homeward's support."

- INDIVIDUAL WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Our team continues to be actively engaged in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work that is firmly embedded in Bridges Homeward. We meet regularly to educate ourselves and discuss how values and practices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion relate to the work that we do with our families. We regularly discuss instances of possible microaggressions against our families and consider different responses to them. The knowledge we gain, we continuously attempt to apply to our work and to our personal lives.

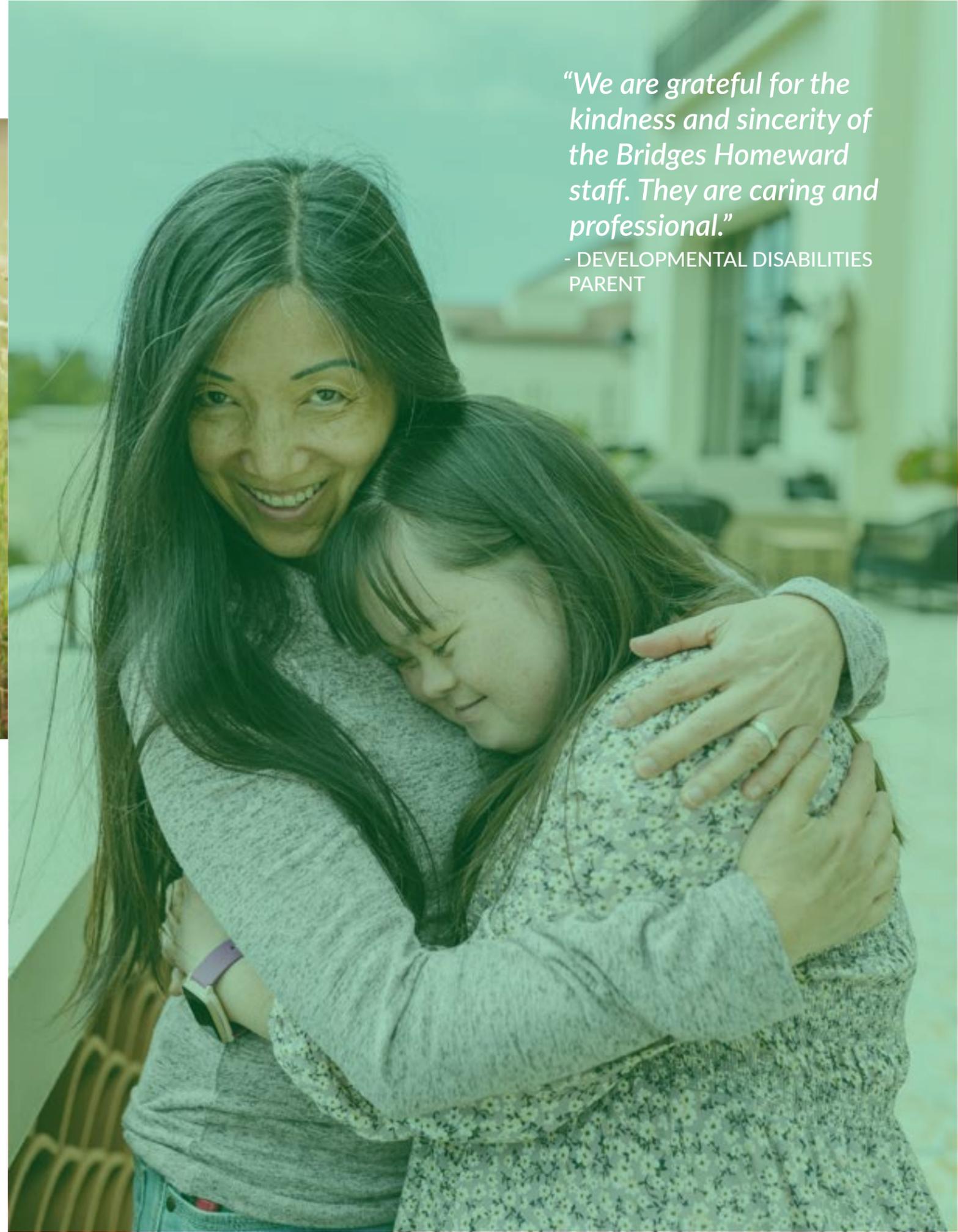
Finding Independence

When we first met Sarah, an adult woman with developmental disabilities, she and her four-year-old daughter were renting a room in a 5-bedroom house infested with rodents and insects. Each of the other bedrooms had two or three men living in them, and there were no other women in the house. Understandably, Sarah was concerned about her daughter's safety and health and was desperate to protect her, but she was unsure what she could do. Naturally, changing Sarah's living situation was our first priority.

Sarah's Bridges Homeward case manager Danielle collaborated with the Department of Developmental Services to secure emergency housing for Sarah and her daughter for about a month. During that time, Sarah and Danielle worked hard to find an income-based apartment for her. They were successful, and Sarah moved herself and her daughter into their new home.

With safe and stable housing secured, Sarah was now able to focus on improving her relationship with her family. First, she wanted to improve her parenting skills. Sarah enrolled her daughter in school and took a more active role in her education. With Danielle's help, Sarah made a budget, learned to shop more economically, and started creating schedules to keep her family organized. As Sarah's parenting and household management skills grew, so did her confidence that she would be able to provide for herself and her daughter.

Sarah and her daughter's lives are so different today from one year ago. She has an apartment, she has a network of support, and she is able to advocate for herself and her daughter. She is no longer living in a rodent-infested room in a house with men she did not know. She is no longer unsure of what to do to help her daughter and herself. Sarah has brought safety and stability to her family. She has given her family permanency on a new level.



"We are grateful for the kindness and sincerity of the Bridges Homeward staff. They are caring and professional."

- DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES PARENT

Our Family Services program recruits, trains and supports adoptive and foster parents from the very beginning of their adoption or foster care journey to the very end, ensuring that they are prepared to offer a safe, loving and therapeutic home to the children they will care for.

Our Impact on Foster and Adoptive Parents

We opened four new foster homes

We supported 19 foster homes, totaling 31 beds for youth in foster care

13 new families were approved to adopt

We worked with 64 families waiting to adopt this year!

22 families completed Foster and Adoptive Parent Trainings

We offered three Foster and Adoptive Parent Trainings this year

Our Weekend Family Connections Program Grew

We opened six new Weekend Family Connections mentor homes and matched four mentor families with youth from St. Anne's Home



We had so much fun connecting with communities this year!



"I particularly appreciate Bridges Homeward's patience and cohesiveness across the agency. [They] are creative thinkers and it's good to have support for families that can think outside the box, as every child and situation is different."
- BRIDGES HOMEWARD FOSTER PARENT

Congratulations to Andrea and Greg Seay, our Vivienne Campbell Foster Parents of the Year!

Andrea and Greg have been Intensive Foster Care parents at Bridges Homeward since 2017. As foster parents, they are "naturals at creating a warm, safe, predictable home environment where youth in foster care feel free to be their unique selves without judgment." Andrea and Greg are known for being wonderful advocates for the youth they care for!



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

It is essential that our Intensive Foster Care families reflect the identities of the youth we care for. This year, we identified areas of need by analyzing data from the youth referrals received from the program. It was clear that there is a significant need for foster families who are affirming and prepared to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. As part of the effort to recruit more LGBTQ+ families, we attended Boston Pride and hosted a Pride themed informational session. We look forward to facilitating more targeted recruitment activities in the year to come.



“Bridges Homeward is amazing! We tell everyone we know how great you are.”

- BRIDGES HOMEWARD
ADOPTIVE PARENT

Finding Family Through Determination

In 2021, brothers Chance (age 6) and Zach (age 8) moved into Manuel and Penny's Bridges Homeward foster home. Chance and Zach had experienced neglect and trauma in their young lives, and had moved multiple times already in the foster care system. Because of their unstable histories, they had special needs, including emotional, behavioral, and learning needs. Additionally, Zach and Chance had been separated from their older sister Lily, who was in a foster home about an hour away from them.

The brothers needed a loving family that was able to provide a high level of care and stability for them, to help them feel safe. They also needed foster parents who would value and respect their birth family connections. Manuel and Penny were just the right parents to meet these needs. They were warm and welcoming to Chance, Zach, and their sister, and they were strong advocates for the boys' educational needs.

With the care and determination of Manuel, Penny, and the Bridges Homeward Intensive Foster Care team, Chance and Zach stabilized while their permanency planning efforts continued. The Department of Children and Families' goal for the boys was for them to be adopted. The search for an adoptive family began, and a family was quickly found after one of our Foster Care staff and a Family Services staff began talking about the brothers! Upon hearing about Chance and Zach, our Family Services team knew we had a family with the strengths and skills to provide a loving, nurturing, and trauma informed home for them.



After many meetings with our team, the Peters family committed to adopt Chance and Zach. After a typical transitional period, Chance and Zach moved into their permanent home before the start of the school year in the fall of 2023. We continued to work with the Peters family following placement. We focused on maintaining the brothers' connection with their sister and other biological family members. Their adoptive parents have been very successful in including their sister in Chance and Zach's lives. After getting to know her brothers' adoptive parents, the boys' sister told the adoptive father that she was relieved to see how loved and well cared for her brothers were in their new home.

Everyday, our staff utilize a number of tools to move children toward permanency. We are so happy to celebrate Chance and Zach achieving permanency through the collaboration and intuition of our talented staff!

The **Family Stabilization program** provides services designed to stabilize families as well as young adults transitioning out of foster care. We ensure that they have the skills, resources and family connections they need to be successful.

Our Impact on Family Stabilization

164 children and 95 families received holistic support and care

Our team works closely with parents and children to find creative solutions to their problems. We provide twice-weekly face-to-face, intensive clinical support, conflict resolution, and behavior management to our families.

84 young parents were stabilized

thanks to our Young Parents Support (YPS) and Healthy Families Programs. We meet with young parents (ages 23 and younger) in their home or community to provide case management support and offer parenting skills, training, and resources.

12 young adults gained independence

as they transitioned from foster care into adulthood, thanks to our Independent Living program. We provide apartments to young adults (ages 18 to 22) so they can attend school and maintain their relationships with family, friends, medical providers, therapists, and their identified community. We meet weekly with our residents to discuss their progress towards their goals. We support these young adults to develop skills and abilities needed to live successfully as an adult, establish and promote lifelong connections, achieve educational and vocational goals, and successfully maintain employment.

Families were supported in four different languages

We helped families whether they needed support in English, Spanish, Portuguese, or Haitian Creole

"I am very, very grateful and I will always be grateful because thanks to this agency I have achieved so much."

- YAZMIN, INDEPENDENT LIVING RESIDENT



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

We are intentional about having conversations about race, systemic racism, and racial injustices and recognize the importance of sharing the same values while being aware of our own biases as we support our families. Our greatest strength comes from the staff who make up our team. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is ingrained in who we are and what we do. The team's commitment to DEI is not only evident in the make-up of the team but is also reflected in our interactions and the work we do with the families we serve. We strive to continually elevate underrepresented groups and marginalized populations as we recognize the importance of advocacy and their voices being heard. Our team is constantly exploring how we can better support Bridges Homeward in DEI initiatives to make our agency a workplace which fosters an equitable environment.

Finding Permanency Through Stability

When we first met Sandra, she was living in a rented room with her three year old son Angel. Sandra and Angel were in a fragile place, as they were recovering from a violent chapter in their lives. Sandra's ex-boyfriend had recently been arrested and was no longer in their lives. But he had been an abusive partner towards Sandra, and Angel had witnessed at least one incident of violence. The family was socially isolated, and Sandra lacked the appropriate resources to adequately care for Angel.

Our Family Support & Stabilization Manager Rosa sat down with Sandra to set some goals to improve her family's safety and stability. Sandra wanted to work on rebuilding her relationships with family and friends, create a safer home environment for Angel, and connect with community resources that could support them.

Sandra felt particularly passionate about reconnecting with her mother and sister. Sandra loved her mother, but their relationship had seen some rocky points in the past. Rosa helped Sandra work on being patient with her mother, who just wanted the best for her.

Sandra started to build trust with her mother and eventually moved into her mom's apartment, where both Sandra and Angel were able to have their own space. After this transition, Sandra regained a safe, nurturing relationship with her mother and sister. In just a few months, Sandra's relationship with her family had improved so much that she was able to rely on both her mother and sister to help care for Angel.

Sandra and Rosa discussed many ways Sandra could ensure a safe home environment for her son. One of the most important things they discussed was the impact of domestic violence on children. Rosa and Sandra talked a lot about what healthy adult relationships look like. Sandra learned how to identify the differences between relationships based on equality and respect and relationships based on power and control.

With Rosa's help, Sandra was able to build her family's sense of permanency, stabilize Angel in his new home, and set herself and her family up for success with new connections and resources. We are extremely proud of the work we accomplished with Sandra! Making changes can be hard but when a family's needs are expressed, explored, and met, it can result in a safe, supportive, and stable home life. This family is a great reminder that with intentionality, focus, collaboration, and care, we can provide a safe space for families to take the next steps in their process.



"Our workers were always respectful and spoke very coherently. Bridges Homeward was very educated and understanding. My daughter was able to grow a lot and my relationship with her flourished as a result. We have been able to have conversations with one another and understand each other much better after working with Bridges Homeward."

- BRIDGES HOMEWARD PARENT



Our **Intensive Foster Care** program provides youth who were born exposed to substances, who were subjected to abuse and/or neglect, or who have complex medical needs the opportunity to live and thrive in a safe, nurturing family and community.

Our Impact on Intensive Foster Care

28 youth in foster care were supported and stabilized

15 youth achieved educational goals

Including one youth who graduated high school, and one young adult enrolled in college

Four youth were reunited with their birth families

100% of youth in our care had at least one permanent connection

69% of all youth were enrolled in therapy
37.5% of eligible youth held jobs



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

This past year, we continued to be intentional in hiring a more diverse staff and increasing visibility and representation for youth and families who historically have been underserved by federal programs. We worked with our agency's communications team to write blogs discussing the importance of foster families supporting youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, and how to support transracial placements. We continue to focus on supporting youths' cultural identities while they are in foster care with us. We ensure that each youth spends time with their family, and we advocate for youth to have proximity to their birth cultures through foster placements and/or having them continue attending school in their community.



"Bridges Homeward is great towards me and I feel safe and cared for during my stay."

- YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

"My Bridges Homeward social worker is awesome sauce!"

- YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE



Finding Permanency, and Education

After being adopted twice, living in four different foster homes, and three hospitalizations, teenager Maria came to the home of Bridges Homeward foster parents Carol and Richard. Maria had a history with depression, self-harm, suicidal ideations, and one documented suicide attempt. But Carlotta and Kwesi are experienced, kind, and persistent foster parents, and went to work helping Maria feel safe and supported in their home.

One of Maria's permanency goals was to maintain a relationship with her adoptive mother. With Carol and Richard's guidance, she learned to set boundaries and engage with her mother in a healthier way. After attending a family reunion with her adoptive mom, Maria slowly started to build positive connections with other members of her family, including her aunt Jenn.

Jenn took an interest in Maria, and supported her goal of going to college. Jenn took Maria on college tours and helped her submit her applications. In the spring of 2023, Maria was accepted into her top two choices. She started her first semester at the University of Massachusetts Amherst this fall! Her aunt Jenn took her to her orientation weekend.

Maria's legal permanency goal is for her to transition to an Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, but Maria has lots of support and love in her life as she transitions into college life. In December of 2022, Carlotta and Kwesi King made a Permanency Pact with Maria. The couple has agreed that they will continue to be a resource during her time in college and that Maria can spend holidays and summers with them. Maria feels a part of the foster family and is excited to start her new journey.



Our Financials



FY23 Financial Breakdown

Sources of funds & expenses for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2023.

FY23 Income: \$7,611,625



Program Revenue
\$6,262,300

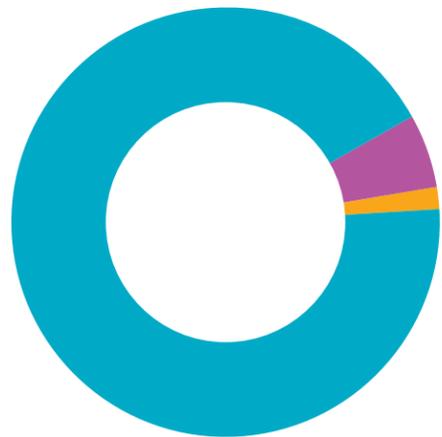
Donations and Grants
\$776,600

Investments*
\$410,800

Rent
\$128,300

United Way
\$33,625

FY32 Expenses: \$8,057,300



Program Expenses
\$7,555,000

Advancement
\$374,850

Rental Expenses
\$127,450

During our fiscal year 2023, the Board and Senior Leadership Team made the incredibly difficult decision to close our Congregate Care program. As a result, the agency incurred additional costs in the final closure of the program. In spite of those losses, Bridges Homeward remains financially strong.

Our FY23 Board of Directors

Ruth Whitney, President & Chair of the Board
Erika Eurkus, Vice President
Debra Wekstein, Vice President
Dennis Scannell, Treasurer
William J. Mostyn, III, Assistant Treasurer
Sally Martin, Secretary

Debjani Banerji
Claudia Garcia
Joseph Giso
Kimberly Green Goldstein
Lajiah Kirby
Patricia Welbourn Lorsch
Sean Murphy
Lisa Rodericks
Beth Simon
Susan Spurlock
Heidi Steinert
William Tsoules
Selam Woldeeslassie



Thank You to Our FY23 Visionary Partners!



The Kraft Family



* The agency maintains funds in an investment portfolio with an annual draw down of 4.75% of the previous 3 years balance. An annual audit is available upon request.



BRIDGES HOMEWARD

Finding Family Everywhere
www.bridgeshomeward.org