***Testimony 3:***

*Gabriela, Mother of 1 son with disabilities, Bridge Communities Family, Naperville Resident*

“Hello all and thank you for having me. My name is Gabriela. I am from Poland and have been a resident of Naperville since 2015. I came to America with the dream of getting an education and I am proud to say that I graduated with my bachelor’s degree from National Louis University. Shortly after that, I met my then husband and a few months later we got married, then found out we were expecting a child.  It sounds like it, but everything was not perfect.

My ex-husband was a successful director in banking but was a brutally abusive bully at home. At 27 weeks of being pregnant I gave birth to a 1lb and 6oz boy. My son Alex was born extremely prematurely with multiple cognitive and physical disabilities. After 8 years of marriage and continuous abuse, I had no choice but to file for an order of protection and a divorce. Four years later I was divorced and facing financial struggle due to Covid with little to no support from my ex-husband. To avoid bankruptcy, I had to sell our dream house in Naperville for a short sale.

With the support of many, many, good people from the City of Naperville, we were lucky to land at Bridge Communities and we were placed in a housing unit here in Naperville. Over the last few years, I was able to stabilize my income. I have worked as Polish interpreter for the State of Illinois in the Early Intervention Bureau for the last 10 years. I have paid off over $80K in debt from divorce attorney’s fees and I have an excellent credit score.

With all that hard work I pray that we can stay in Naperville. My son Alex has been a student in the Naperville school district 203 since the first grade. District 203 provides the best education and support I can ask for my disabled son. He is making phenomenal progress every day at school thanks to teachers, therapists, and all specialists in 203 which not every district provides. Alex is in a multi-needs program in 8th grade at Madison Junior High where he has medical and behavioral issues. We are also embedded in the community and go to St Raphael church in Naperville where he attends religious education for special needs. I have also been a volunteer there for a few years.

We don’t have any close family in USA because my family lives in Poland. During all these years in Naperville I am blessed to have met the most wonderful Napervillians. I have been able to rely on my old neighbors who became my friends, Naperville moms with special needs kids from Alex’s school, people from St Raphael church, and members of the Families Helping Families organization also from Naperville.

I believe “Home Is Where Heart Is” and my heart is in Naperville. I love, appreciate, and care about Naperville the same way you do, so please give my son Alex and I a chance to live here. Please vote for AHIP in Naperville.

As a note: On the projector, you can see the picture of my son Alex and Mr. Mayor (Steve Chirico) when my son was in the 1st grade. Mayor Cherico, it is today we come back to seal the deal it appears you are making with my son in this photo.

Thank you.”