Dear Friends,

"I am human too and I have many of the same hopes that kids in other towns have", Maya**,** a 16-year-old girl from Bridgeport, said in a quiet voice. Maya is a teen who has had a tough life, experiencing trauma and homelessness, but has not given up on herself. She attends LifeBridge youth vocational programming and is looking forward to a day when she has a safe home, perhaps a car and a job to support herself. She is just one of all too many impacted by a broken system but is building her resiliency and getting the help she needs because of your generous support.

The last 12 months at LifeBridge have been truly transformational as we continue to answer the call to service, striving to be more planful, efficient and effective. Your unwavering support and encouragement for the critical work we do continues to keep us moving towards increased levels of excellence. And for that – we thank you!

During the year, the organization did a considerable amount of soul searching regarding the future and the deepening, complex challenges facing Bridgeport youth just like Maya. Within walking distance of our headquarters, 1,025 families with children live in poverty; city-wide 9,500 children live in poverty, a rate twice that of Fairfield County. At the same time, 60% of its students are not meeting achievement level in math and only 49% meet proficiency in language arts. Similarly, 60% of the city's children experienced some form of trauma, abuse or crime in the past 12 months and some children like Maya have experienced multiple traumas. Clearly, the current situation is untenable for both Bridgeport and Fairfield County. Equally clear is that no one organization can remove life's obstacles, challenges or trauma, nor can anyone develop and deliver a separate program for every problem a person may encounter in life.

But what we ***can*** do is build youth and family resilience, enabling each to more successfully navigate life's challenges and opportunities. "Resilience" is an often overlooked key ingredient in helping people learn how to help themselves. Simply put, resilience means "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress". What we have all learned over time is that "bouncing back" is not automatic – it is a set of learned skills that take a lot of practice and patience to take hold.

With a 169-year commitment to the community and expertise in psychological, emotional and family development, LifeBridge is uniquely poised to help the youth and families in our community learn these most important life skills. We believe so strongly in this community need that the board of directors have recently approved a refinement of our mission to: *"Partnering with Bridgeport's youth and families to build resilience."* With this mission, LifeBridge will focus its services and programs to realize its vision that *"Bridgeport's youth and families reach their full potential within a stronger community."*

Thank you for your continued support,

Alan Mathis

LifeBridge President & CEO