




**AT THE
CROSSROADS**

ATC lobby mural by Miguel Perez



20TH ANNIVERSARY NEWSLETTER

**STORIES FROM ATC'S
CLIENTS, COUNSELORS,
& COLLABORATORS**



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Letter from the Director
Cindy L. Myers, Ph.D.



Happy 20th Anniversary to ATC! My name is Cindy Myers and I am the Interim Executive Director of At The Crossroads. As many of you know, we are in a growth stage and I am here to help smooth the way. And boy is it fun to be here! ATC hums with the passion we all have for supporting our clients’ well-being.

Rob Gitin, ATC’s founding Executive Director, created something amazing. When he and Taj Mustapha first founded ATC—armed only with PB&J sandwiches and the belief that there was a better way to reach San Francisco’s most disconnected youth—they had no idea that their project would turn into an organization that would provide unconditional support to over 8,000 youth experiencing homelessness.

Rob’s stepping down marks the beginning of a new era. Besides this changing of the guard, we have also moved into our new home at 167 Jessie Street. So much change in one year can feel jolting, but this is a sign that the organization is moving into a new stage of maturity. I can confidently say that ATC is strong, vibrant, and ready to enter its next phase.

Our client relationships are the rock at our core; that immovable commitment that keeps us showing up every day, year after year. What ATC does differently is simple, though not easy: we form relationships with clients that are not limited by time, space, or a singular agenda. We don’t impose a “program” on our clients—we build a relationship with each one. Let me illustrate with a true-life story:

Chiara (not her real name), a client we have seen on outreach for 10 years, opened up to us about the impact that seeing ATC night after night has had on her life. She is someone who has experienced a lot of trauma on the streets and has a hard time trusting service providers. ATC has been one of the only support systems that she regularly engages with. Coming to our office, however, has always been out of the question for her. Her mental health challenges make her too frightened and wary.

ATC never stopped providing Chiara with the support she needed directly on the streets, from bringing her diapers to helping her navigate various city bureaucracies. She told us that seeing Rob and ATC counselors would remind her of her humanity. With Rob’s departure, she still connects with ATC counselors on outreach—at times, even crossing the street to come talk to us. With everything going on in her life, she says that seeing ATC at night on the streets tells her she is going to be okay.

Chiara’s story represents a lot of our clients’ stories. Building long-term relationships with the hardest-to-reach youth on the streets takes time. It takes persistence, and the result is different for each person. Sometimes it leads to a client finding long-term housing, or getting the supplies they need to be safer on the streets. And sometimes, it leads to a client feeling a little more centered and a little more human.

As we look toward the future, we are certain of one thing: we will continue to go to the streets to provide much-needed support to youth experiencing homelessness. Now our Board is searching for the next Executive Director who will build on our strengths, respond creatively to unmet needs, and collaborate effectively with our many partners throughout the city. Your involvement makes it possible for us to form the relationships our clients need and can’t find anywhere else. As we embark on the next 20 years of At The Crossroads, we also look forward to including you in this amazing journey!

You may notice that we use they/them/their/themself as singular pronouns. We’ve chosen to do this because using gender-neutral language aligns with our core value of respecting individuality.

Electronic copies of previous newsletters are available at www.atthecrossroads.org/newsletters

MISSION

At The Crossroads reaches out to homeless youth and young adults at their point of need, and works with them to build healthy and fulfilling lives.

CORE VALUES



Prioritizing meeting the needs of our clients first



Making services as accessible as possible



Supporting empowerment



Respecting individuality

WHAT WE DO

ATC walks the streets of the Mission and Downtown/Tenderloin to reach disconnected youth on their own turf. We hand out basic necessities like food, socks, and hygiene supplies, and build counseling relationships with youth.

We focus on youth who have fallen through the cracks of other services, and would not get support without us.

We meet with clients 1-to-1. We listen to them talk about anything they want, with no agenda and no judgment. We help them identify goals, figure out who they want to be, and how to become that person.

We keep working with clients after they leave the streets. We continue to support them for as long as they want, helping them build outstanding lives, not just lives of subsistence.

We partner with other organizations, connecting our clients with resources such as jobs, housing, education, healthcare, and mental health services.

We work with the government at the city and state levels to improve the continuum of support for all disconnected young people.

Volunteer shout-out : Lauren



“I don’t look at it as a volunteer thing. I look at it as part of life. It’s become every week for six years.”

Every year, volunteers save At The Crossroads thousands of hours, enabling staff to prioritize the needs of our clients and make sure that each person feels cared for and valued. Lauren has been an ATC office volunteer for six years and counting, doing everything from packing food boxes and prepping socks to processing in-kind donations and helping us with database projects. We are incredibly grateful to Lauren for everything she does for ATC’s clients!

Twenty years and counting

Looking back on our first 20 years of providing services to youth on the streets of San Francisco, we got curious about just how many miles we’ve walked and how much candy was involved. The short answer is ‘a lot.’ We crunched the numbers and here’s what we found!

175,760

The number of candy packs we’ve distributed since our founding. That’s about 66,000 pounds of sugary goodness.

60,000

The number of pounds of food ATC distributed last year, which is equivalent to 90 meals per day, every single day.

8,000+

The number of clients we’ve worked with since 1997.

18,048

The total number of miles we’ve walked on outreach. That’s equivalent to three round trips from San Francisco to New York.

83,388

The number of sandwiches we’ve handed out on outreach. Laid end-to-end they would reach from Montgomery BART to Ocean Beach.

4,016

The number of nights of outreach. When you add up the hours, that’s a little more than 11 years.

61,120

Total pairs of socks we’ve distributed. Currently, our socks are provided by Bombas, a company that donates one pair for every pair they sell.

0


The number of clients we’ve kicked out of our program in more than 20 years.



Building Long-Term Relationships with Young People

It always begins with a friendly “hello,” followed by an offer of candy, a pair of socks, or a sandwich. Every one of At The Crossroads’ clients first meets us on nighttime street outreach, and many of them could tell you the exact corner they met us on and what was happening in their lives at that moment. What often begins as a question—who are these strangers with giant backpacks?—can evolve into a conversation and eventually a long-term relationship. For some young people, the relationship they develop with ATC can become the building blocks with which they begin to create a healthy and happy life.

ATC was founded in 1997 and began meeting clients on outreach in 1998. Over the last 20 years, we have had the privilege of working with more than 8,000 youth on the streets of San Francisco. In honor of our 20th anniversary, we invited some of our longtime clients to share their stories with the larger ATC community.



“You cannot change your past but what you do with your future counts.”

-Barbie, ATC client for 18 years

Barbie first met ATC more than 18 years ago on 16th Street in the Mission, and was initially skeptical of the counselors who approached her. “I wasn’t familiar with the kind of support they were offering,” she said, “But they became familiar faces in the area and I kind of warmed and opened up my heart. ATC has been supportive ever since.” Barbie describes herself as the kind of person who looks for the positive in every situation, no matter how difficult. She was incarcerated for seven years and in one of the many reflective letters she sent to us during that time, she wrote, “You cannot change your past but what you do with your future counts. The day I am released from this facility I will always put my best foot forward.”

While still incarcerated, Barbie started outlining her short- and long-term goals, and has been steadily working toward them since her release, with the support of ATC counselors and her larger

community. In the last few years, Barbie completed parole two years early (which is almost unheard of), got a full-time job with the city, started her own family, and became a motivational speaker for high schoolers. She loves giving back and being a role model for young people. “When I talk to those kids I think I inspire hope. I’ve been in their shoes and I give them the truth of the streets: it’s a dangerous place, it’s no place for love. If you want to succeed, you stay in school. If you want love, you stay connected to the people who are positive and who you feel safe around.”



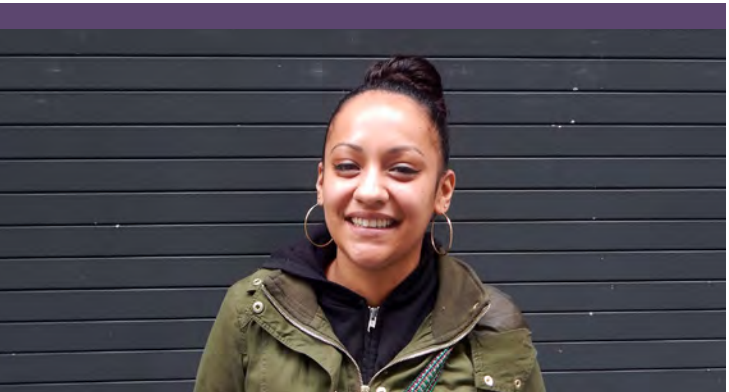
“I asked myself what was going to come after the event. We decided to keep it going with a community basketball team.”

-Amati, ATC client for 10 years

ATC’s clients talk a lot about their communities and the desire to give back, whether providing support to friends and family or creating their own programs. Amati, who started working with ATC 10 years ago when he was still in high school, is now a community leader. Last year he helped form the Stop the Violence Coalition aimed at ending gun violence. The coalition threw a huge event in the Tenderloin, out of which he co-founded a youth basketball team. “I asked myself what was going to come after the event. We decided to keep it going with a community basketball team and got some kids signed up. Our first game was last November.” Within a very short time, the team has traveled to and played in national tournaments. Amati is also focused on providing his players with the kind of support he didn’t have as a student. “We’re trying to figure out how we can help them in school. It isn’t just basketball, it’s actually a program. We also provide youth jobs for some of our players.”

You can listen to Barbie, Amati, Julia, Maxine, and other clients tell their stories in their own words as part of our 20th anniversary oral history project at

atthecrossroads.org/atc-oral-history



“I live for every moment that I see a young woman step into her power.”

-Julia, former ATC client for 10 years

Julia is a former ATC client for 10 years who currently works with the community as the Program Director of the Youth Detention and Re-entry Programming at Young Women’s Freedom Center. She feels a lot of connection with the women in her program and says that she has a lot of joy for the work, “I live for every moment that I see a young woman step into her power and be able to use her voice and to tell us what she’s going to do.”

When ATC first met her 17 years ago, she had been in and out of foster care and was recently released from Juvenile Hall. Like a lot of youth we meet on the street, she was both cautious and curious about ATC, but she knew from our reputation in the neighborhood that we might be able to assist her with basic needs. One of the things Julia remembers about her early meetings with ATC was the personal connection. “Being on the streets, people walk past you because they have to get to work or they’re going to be late—whatever’s busy in their lives. It was a very humanizing thing to have ATC counselors look at you and talk to you and follow up with what they say they’re going to do.”


Julia knows from experience that it can take a long time to build a solid foundation for a healthier life, and that there are often obstacles to progress. When she was 18, she started a job as an educator and organizer, giving her the opportunity to work with young women who had gone through similar experiences to her own. “The job just made me feel really strong in my life. I got to go to Washington, D.C. and learn a little bit about policies that directly impact us on the streets.”

Even though she loved the job, she found the transition to being fully on her own for the first time difficult. “I was working, I had just gotten my own apartment and it was a little bit lonely living by myself. I was exploring this new world but also still had love and respect for that other world.” As Julia describes it, “I stepped back from the job and went kind of fulltime back into the streets.” Then she lost her apartment. “I remember the moment that they put all my stuff from my apartment out on the street; everybody picking through it because I didn’t have anywhere to put it. So this great apartment that I had, I was now kind of living in front of it.” The path to happiness and success is often not linear or easy. “People want to think that once you’ve got it, you’ve got it. But I just didn’t have it yet.”

From where she sits today, Julia sees all of these moments as a part of her life, “They’re part of what has shaped me for today so I can’t

be mad at those things. I don’t know if that was just part of my journey; maybe there’s a purpose for everything. Who knows why things happen the way they do.” What she does know is that now, she is very deliberate about her decisions. “Definitely makes me think now when I have my apartment, like, take everything nice and slow, let’s write everything down, let’s understand the paperwork.”

Today, in addition to her job at Young Women’s Freedom Center, Julia is working toward an Associate’s Degree in Women’s Studies and hopes to eventually transfer to a four-year school. One of her other goals is to buy a home for herself and her six-year-old daughter. Julia describes how she loves being a mother to her: “She’s just amazing and I forget sometimes that she’s growing up with a different experience than I had. She just—she’s so happy.” These days, Julia looks to her future with the perspective she’s gained from her past. “I’ve had some opportunities, I feel like I can make it. I didn’t always know what tomorrow or the next year would bring, but I feel like I have a little bit better of a handle on things now.”



“Even though I can’t give her whatever it is that she wants whenever she wants, my daughter knows when I have it, she’ll have it. I keep telling her the sky is the limit.”

-Maxine, ATC client for 15 years

Like Julia, one of Maxine’s key motivations for working toward a healthy and fulfilling life is being a parent. Maxine first met ATC around 2003 when she was in her early 20s and in school. As she recalls, her first thought was, “Ooh! Free sandwiches!” Since then, she’s worked with several different counselors at ATC and describes how she’s enjoyed the consistency between each person. “Every counselor I’ve had has been awesome. I’ve gotten a piece of them just like I give them a piece of me. I feel like one counselor is every counselor, so At The Crossroads is just one for me.”

She’s now working as a dental hygienist and is raising her 10-year-old daughter, whom Maxine calls her “little activist girl.” Maxine admires all the things her daughter has done: “She’s led Malcolm X rallies, she’s been an emcee for her after school program, she’s made a rap video. She’s done a lot of stuff for a little 10-year-old little self. I’m proud of her. She has no fear of things. She goes into it with eyes open and ears open and heart wide open. It’s amazing.” Maxine works to be able to provide her daughter with as much as she can, “Even though I can’t give her whatever it is that she wants whenever she wants, my daughter knows when I have it, she’ll have it. I keep telling her the sky is the limit.”

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Rob Gitin: 21 Years of At The Crossroads



Left: Rob Gitin talking with a client on street outreach in 1998. Right: Rob celebrates with longtime clients Rashad, Maxine, and their daughter at ATC's 2017 holiday party.

"I think it's such a core thing: we all want that sense of belonging to someone and something. One of the things that this work has taught me is that we all think about how important it is to have people in our lives who love us—it's equally important to have people in our lives to receive our love.

The loneliest feelings are not just when you don't feel like you have someone there during your darkest moments, but when you don't have someone during your best moments. That's one of my favorite things about the relationships we build at ATC: we get to have *all* of those moments with our clients. We're not just there in a crisis, but we're there in their best moments, in their moments of pride and of accomplishment."

—Rob Gitin, Co-Founder of At The Crossroads

It all started because Rob Gitin and Taj Mustapha had an idea. After learning about homelessness in America while in class at Stanford, they both got hands-on experience by working at a youth drop-in center in San Jose. Before long, Rob and Taj realized that they shared the same vision—a new kind of program that would serve young people who are the most disconnected and the hardest to reach.

To make this vision a reality, Rob and Taj founded At The Crossroads in 1997. From the beginning, they built ATC around a client-centered approach. Rather than telling young people what to do with their lives, Rob and Taj took the time to really listen. They went directly to the streets, and designed their support services to meet the needs and wants of the city's most overlooked youth experiencing homelessness. In the spring of 1998, armed with backpacks full of snacks and supplies, they began doing nighttime street outreach in the Downtown and Mission neighborhoods of San Francisco. In 2001, Taj left ATC to pursue a career in medicine, and Rob stayed on to lead the organization.

Since then, ATC has flourished in ways that our founders could have never predicted. What began as a two-person outreach team working out of a garage has grown into a staff of 17 that just moved into a beautiful new office. With Rob at the helm for the past 21 years, ATC has served over 8,000 young people on the streets. We have strengthened and expanded our outreach, counseling, and advocacy work—but at the core, our mission and philosophy remain the same. It's about meeting youth where they're at (literally and figuratively). It's about practicing a non-judgmental approach, and empowering each person to define their own goals and their own success. It's about building long-term relationships, and sticking with our clients through the ups, downs, twists, and turns.

Over the years, Rob took on many roles at ATC. Not only was he an original Outreach Counselor, he was also a mentor, a volunteer coordinator, a grantwriter, a fundraiser, a big-picture strategist, and a fierce advocate. It didn't matter where he was or what he was doing—Rob never failed to put our clients first. He worked tirelessly to ensure that the voices of ATC's clients were heard, and that the needs of disconnected homeless youth were represented at the community, city, and state levels. Through it all, Rob never lost touch with his counseling roots. His work with many clients spanned 10, 15, or even 20 years, and he always made them feel seen, cared for, and deserving of an outstanding life.

It's no understatement to say that ATC would not be what it is today without Rob Gitin. Because of his bold vision, his belief in the transformative power of long-term unconditional support, and his unshakable dedication to our clients, thousands of youth have received the compassion and care that they deserve. Rob has moved on from his role as Executive Director of ATC, but his legacy will endure. Whether our counselors are hitting the streets with backpacks full of supplies, a young person opens up to us for the first time, or a longtime client knocks on our door because they know we'll be there for them no matter what—Rob's impact will be felt for years to come.

Thank you, Rob, for everything you have done for At The Crossroads and our clients. Your vision inspires us all to keep doing this important work. While we could never quite fill your shoes, we will do our very best to carry forward the lessons we have learned from you as we begin the next chapter. It won't be easy, but we know that At The Crossroads will continue to thrive thanks to your passion, determination, and leadership for the last 21 years. ♦



"I'll never forget seeing Rob out here night after night, year after year; even if we didn't talk to him, he was still there. When I became a father, I needed help and wasn't sure who to trust or where to start. I started talking to Rob about my son—who is 17 now—and he helped me get things going. An ID, a driver's license, diapers, all of that. I'll never forget it."

—Geno, former ATC client

"I am a 21-year client at ATC. All I can say is I am forever grateful to Rob and his hand-picked staff and their amazing capacity to give and love in such a pure and genuine way. Without their help, I can 99% guarantee I would not be alive. From their example I was taught I was worth love, I was worth life. Thank ALL of you so much."

—Serina, former ATC client



A lot has happened over the past 21 years! These are some of our favorite photos of Rob Gitin with At The Crossroads' clients, staff, and community members.



ATC Counseling Evolves to Stay True to the Mission

At The Crossroads was founded with a clear and unique mission: to support young people on the streets of San Francisco who are disconnected from other programs and have fallen through the cracks of traditional services. ATC’s programs were developed around the needs of these youth, and our organization formed a set of core values to guide our work and to ensure that everything we do centers our clients: prioritizing the needs of our clients first; supporting empowerment; making services as accessible as possible; and respecting individuality.

Over the years our core values haven’t changed, but our day-to-day work has slowly evolved to continue meeting the changing needs of youth on the streets. For our 20th anniversary, Program Managers Anna Fai and Demaree Miller sat down to talk about ATC’s programs, our core values, and what our work actually looks like on the ground.

Prioritizing the Needs of Our Clients First

Every year, ATC distributes tens of thousands of supplies to our clients on street outreach and during counseling meetings. Providing critical supplies like food, clothing, and hygiene items is one of the cornerstones of our programs because it helps our youth to meet their most basic needs. In turn, this can create the space needed for our clients to begin thinking beyond the next few hours or days, and reflect on their lives in a more holistic way. Demaree, who has been with ATC for three years, describes how important it is to meet clients’ immediate survival needs, “We have clients with big dreams and big ideas of what they want to do, but their main priority is just finding a place to stay for the night. There are so many immediate needs that it’s hard for them to vocalize their long-term goals.”

If and when our clients feel like opening up about their lives, we are there to listen and to begin building long-term supportive relationships on their terms. For some young people, it takes years before they decide to work with us more closely. Some never do, but we’re still happy to support each and every one of our clients in a way that works best for them. Demaree says that it can take time to start having deeper conversations with a new client. “So much of it is just hanging out and listening and being a good sounding board. It’s not until you’ve worked with someone for a couple of months and had a couple of one-to-one meetings that you can start reflecting back what they said to you.”

“We have clients with big dreams and big ideas of what they want to do, but their main priority is just finding a place to stay for the night.”

-Demaree, ATC Program Manager



Program Managers Demaree Miller and Anna Fai

Supporting Empowerment

Once a client begins to work with us more closely, we can begin to help them identify what their goals are and provide them with whatever support they need as they work toward them. According to Anna, who has been with ATC for seven years, it takes a special kind of listening to identify what a client’s goals are. “I have never heard a client say, ‘Here are my goals.’ And they might not call them goals. But through meeting with them every week, those kinds of things come up organically. Some clients are very sure of their goals, and some are not so sure.”

Often, the process of empowering our clients is simply reflecting their amazing qualities back to them in a way that encourages them to see these qualities more clearly. Demaree describes this process, “We work with so many bright people and so many ambitious people and I think a thing that happens often is ... our clients don’t even know how talented they are. Or how special they are.” Demaree says that his job is to listen carefully, “They’ll name all these amazing things they’re doing. They’re dancing. They’re writing. They’re making music. They’re doing community work. They’re feeding their friends. They wanna stop smoking. They wanna start their own nonprofit.”

After working with a client over time, Demaree checks back in with them about where they’re at with their plans, “As we build long-term relationships, I go back to it. I say ‘How’s this been going? I know you wanted to work on this organization. Has that worked at all? I know you wanted to start this nonprofit. Do you know how that would go?’” As clients begin to articulate what their long-term goals are, counselors can support them as they break these goals into smaller, manageable steps. We see each step accomplished as something to be celebrated.

Making Services as Accessible as Possible

For some of the people we work with, we are not the first program they have participated in. Services are often designed to be one-size-fits-all, and many times this doesn’t work for our individual clients and their needs. This can lead to clients becoming disillusioned about ever accessing the support they want and need. Other people

have never even walked through the door of a service provider. From street outreach to On-the-Spot counseling, we are committed to meeting clients where they are at and reducing barriers to entry. As Demaree puts it, “We’ll do whatever we can to make ourselves as accessible as possible to the people we work with, and ATC will bend over backward for the client rather than the other way around.”

Remaining as accessible as possible requires that we think creatively about how best to support clients whom we often see on the streets, but haven’t yet connected with us in a deeper way. For many years, one way that we found we were best able to support certain clients was when we ran into them during the day, and offered them a meeting or a hot meal right then and there. Staff found that this allowed us to reach people who, for whatever reason, weren’t accessing our services outside of nighttime outreach. In 2013, we received a funding opportunity for this daytime work and created a program called On-the-Spot in order to allocate time and resources to it.

“On-the-Spot counseling is about going out to the streets rather than waiting for clients to come to us,” explains Demaree. “We walk through the neighborhood, take people to get hot food, and we hang out a lot and discuss things. When we can, on an individual basis, we take someone inside a restaurant and then we start counseling. The main goal is to build counseling relationships with people that are hard to reach.” Anna adds that “There are clients who are not calling, who don’t have phones, who don’t know where the office is or would never come here, and these are the youth we mean to serve.”

Continuing to prioritize accessibility is an ongoing conversation. Demaree describes the difficulty, “Reaching our youth I feel is especially challenging. We have so many clients that come to us, we have so many people that trust us, but there’s still a core of young adults we work with that won’t call the office or won’t come to the office.” For Demaree and Anna, figuring out how to connect with these youth is a priority. They regularly discuss ideas about what could help ATC build trust with these youth, from securing studio time for our clients who are passionate about making music, to “spending more time with community members and adults to build a stronger presence on the streets.”

Respecting Individuality

Respecting individuality for ATC means providing support unconditionally, no matter what a client is going through or how they show up for our time together. In over 20 years of working with youth experiencing homelessness in San Francisco, we have never kicked a client out of our program. Anna says, “It’s OK for clients to get mad, this is an OK space to say, ‘I want my stuff and I want to get out of here.’ That’s totally fine, they can feel whatever they feel. It’s safe to do that and they can still come back next week.” Creating a safe space for this kind of honesty helps us to better serve our clients as individuals. It also means that youth are able to provide feedback on how ATC’s services are or aren’t working for them. We listen to those insights and adjust our approach, which ends up working better for both our counselors and our clients.

Demaree adds that showing up for our clients as individuals requires that our counseling staff develop a strong foundation of their own. “I think in order to do this job, you need a strong sense of self. You need to be firm in what you believe in and who you are.” When you’re coming from a solid place, Demaree says that you will be

“It’s OK for clients to get mad ... they can feel whatever they feel. It’s safe to do that and they can still come back next week.”

-Anna, ATC Senior Program Manager

better able to see the client for who they are and not project your own outlook onto them, “You’re working with people that you cannot assign your values to, your life to. Sometimes I work with clients who are so far removed from anything I’ve had to deal with, from anything I’ve had to process in my life. And it’s about not assigning my values, I’m not assigning mainstream value systems. But actually listening to the things they value, the things they care about and caring about it, too. Being with them in the moment, being with them in the situation.”

While we see some youth for counseling meetings or on outreach regularly, sometimes we don’t hear from clients for a few months or years. Working within the realities of clients’ lives means understanding that they won’t always want to or be able to reach out to us. Our support is consistent, long-term, and unconditional because we know that building the life you want for yourself can be a long and winding process.

Looking Ahead

As we look toward the future of ATC, we’re asking lots of questions about how to best serve our clients and how to build stronger relationships with people who aren’t our clients but who are important members of the communities where we work. While our core values remain consistent, we’re discussing new ways to make our services accessible to the youth we haven’t yet reached, and to show both our current and future clients that At The Crossroads is here for the long haul to support them in building healthy and fulfilling lives for themselves on their own terms. ♦

20 Years of Services by the Numbers

- 4** Number of nights per week we do outreach in the Downtown/Tenderloin
- 50** Average number of clients we see every night on outreach
- 1,300** Number of individual clients we saw last year
- 60** Average number of counseling meetings with clients we have each week
- 350** Referrals we gave to clients last year to help them meet their needs



We're Home!

It's been a whirlwind of a few years, but this January, At The Crossroads finally moved into our brand new, long-term home at 167 Jessie Street.

For ATC, home is not just a physical space; it's where you feel safe, cared about, and comfortable. In our work we try to build this sense of home for our youth every day. From the moment our clients step through the front door of our new office, they know that this space is for them. We commissioned murals painted by local artists, and have more spaces than ever before for clients to meet with counselors. The location is easily accessible for our youth and will be our home for years. That proximity to the neighborhood where we see most of our clients is crucial.

Having a long-term home contributes to the sense of stability that At The Crossroads is able to provide our youth, and the importance of this consistency can't be overstated. No matter what happens in our clients' lives, they know that when they call on ATC, they'll be met with unconditional support. And now, thanks to the incredible generosity of our community, ATC knows that our youth will be able to find us.

A few months ago, a client we hadn't heard from in months unexpectedly showed up at our office, having recently left the hospital against medical advice, carrying all of his belongings in a duffel bag. With the support of staff, Program Manager Demaree Miller was able to meet with him for four hours—much longer than usual. Demaree calls it the hardest day he's had in his three years with ATC. But this meeting revealed something positive to Demaree as well. "Looking back on it, I realized there was something really beautiful about it, too: He knew where our new office was. One of my biggest fears about moving was that people wouldn't be able to find us, but they can and they do."

Thank you to everyone who contributed to making our forever-home possible. The generous support of our community has ensured that At The Crossroads will be able to provide unconditional support to San Francisco's most disconnected homeless youth for decades to come. ♦



Above and below right: Each ATC client gets to choose their own groceries and snacks from our prep room every week.



Left: Clients are able to choose one full outfit a week and we try to make it as fun as possible by having lots of choices.



Above: ATC community members take a tour of our new office at the Building Home Campaign thank you celebration. Left: The exterior of our new home at 167 Jessie Street in Downtown San Francisco.



Above: ATC staff members tour the office under construction. Below: Detail of the third floor mural by local artist DJ Agana.



"I have cousins I grew up with who have become homeless. Because of this, I realize that if a couple things had gone differently in my life, I could be in a similar position to ATC's clients. I want ATC to be around for a long time to help those whose lives took an unfortunate turn navigate their way to better opportunities."

-Loren Taylor, Capital Campaign Committee Co-Chair on why ATC is important to him



In the spring of 2017, At The Crossroads launched the Building Home Campaign. We received an extremely generous \$1.34M grant from the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development, and our team set out to raise the additional \$2.7M needed for the project. Thanks to the tireless efforts of founding Executive Director Rob Gitin, Klein & Roth Consulting, and our Capital Campaign Committee, ATC successfully raised more than \$4M!

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Working “To bring a piece of humanity back to people”

No matter where you stand on the issue of gentrification, it is undeniable that San Francisco has changed dramatically over the last 20 years. Due to a series of factors, including two tech booms, an influx of new residents with rising incomes, and policy changes, the cost of living has skyrocketed. This has made it increasingly difficult for lower-income residents to get by. Here is a snapshot of a few of the ways that the cost of living has increased in San Francisco since 1998 (not adjusted for inflation):

Median rent for a two-bedroom apartment in San Francisco
1998: \$2,000
2018: \$4,400

Price of a MUNI ticket
1998: \$0.35 (youth), \$0.70 (adult)
2018: \$1.35 (youth), \$2.75 (adult)

Price of a 1/4lb cheeseburger at McDonald’s
1998: \$1.95
2018: \$5.79

At The Crossroads invited two peer providers, Mary Howe and Maurice Byrd, to discuss their experiences in a changing San Francisco and how they’ve seen their work with homeless youth evolve as a result of gentrification.

Mary Howe is the founding Executive Director of the Homeless Youth Alliance (HYA), which supports youth on the streets of Haight Ashbury and Golden Gate Park. Like At The Crossroads, HYA aims to meet youth experiencing homelessness where they are, and to help them build healthier lives. HYA uses a harm reduction approach, which consists of non-judgmental outreach, one-on-one counseling, medical and mental health care, as well as creative and educational workshops, syringe access and disposal, and referrals and information.

“We could use some basic education of how to be in community...We have to learn to exist together and to help each other at every point or else we’re never going to get out of this.”
-Mary Howe, Homeless Youth Alliance



ATC collaborators Maurice Byrd and Mary Howe

Maurice Byrd is a licensed marriage and family therapist with the Center for Harm Reduction Therapy in San Francisco and Oakland. Maurice partners with many organizations, and works as a therapist for clients of Homeless Youth Alliance. For the last seven years, he has also worked closely with counselors at At The Crossroads to provide training and support. Maurice is a published author whose most recent work can be found in the anthology, *Decarcerating America, From Mass Punishment to Public Health*, which advocates for the use of a harm reduction approach to ending mass incarceration.

From 2001 to 2013, HYA operated a drop-in center on Haight Street which was renowned for the sense of acceptance, safety, and belonging that they were able to provide to youth. For Mary, HYA’s drop-in was a place where homeless youth could “come in exactly as they are” and access a range of services, all while experiencing safe haven from the street. Anywhere from 45 to 150 youth would visit HYA’s drop-in on any given day, and from their home base, they helped youth transition permanently off the streets. Some of their participants have been hired as staff members, others have gone on to college, launched their own careers, or started families of their own.

In 2013, HYA’s landlord refused to renew their lease, displacing the nonprofit. While losing the drop-in did not stop HYA from doing their amazing work, it has forced them to move their operations out-of-doors, offering services on a “mobile outreach basis.” They still provide medical and mental health services, workshops, needle exchange, and more, but without the sense of privacy and safety of their drop-in center. In 2016, HYA was able to secure an administrative office, but they are still on the hunt for a permanent home for their services where youth experiencing homelessness can be welcomed.

Losing the drop-in center is just one of the ways that Mary and Maurice have witnessed San Francisco change over the last 20 years. As San Francisco has become increasingly expensive to live in, it’s become much more difficult to help youth transition off the streets. Many people who have lived in the city for years have left because they have no other choice. Maurice, who was born and raised here, talks about how there’s been “a huge black flight out of San Francisco,” as well as what he describes as a surge in “hostility towards poor folks.”

In the eyes of Mary and Maurice, as the population of San Francisco changes dramatically and the number of new residents grows, day-to-

day life has become harder for people who live on the street. There have been specific policies passed that target people experiencing homelessness, like the sit/lie ordinance, which passed in 2017 and made it illegal to sit or lie down on the sidewalk. Not to mention an increase in outright antagonism of homeless people by the police and by housed residents of the city.

When asked what keeps them in this city, both Mary and Maurice cite their work as one of the main reasons. Maurice says that he’s passionate about San Francisco because he’s from here. He talks about how through his work, he hopes to “bring a piece of humanity back to people.” Mary describes how lucky she feels to love her job and to get to work with such “amazing and hilarious and resilient” people who make the work “fun, even in the darkest moments.” In their work, they’ve seen firsthand what is possible when you provide unconditional support to youth on the streets. They’ve also witnessed how even the smallest acts can sometimes have a huge impact on the lives of young people experiencing homelessness.

Over the next 20 years, Mary and Maurice would like to see a lot of progress in San Francisco. They’d both like to see housing for everyone (who wants it) and more spaces where people can feel safe—like drop-ins and shelters. Maurice says he’d like people in the city

Myths and facts about homelessness in San Francisco

Thinking about homelessness can be overwhelming, and there’s a lot of misinformation in the news and on social media. Read on for our responses to some common misconceptions about homelessness.

Myth: Homeless people in San Francisco come from elsewhere.
Fact: 69% of people had housing in San Francisco before they became homeless and 72% of those people have been in San Francisco for at least five years.¹

Myth: There are significantly more homeless people in San Francisco than there were just a few years ago.
Fact: The total homeless population in San Francisco is slightly smaller than it was three years ago (7,499 in 2017 down from 7,539 in 2015).² It can seem like there are more homeless folks now because there are fewer places for them to live peacefully due the current construction boom and more laws specifically controlling where they can and cannot rest in public.

Myth: Homeless youth don’t work and need to get jobs.
Fact: 68% of homeless youth surveyed in the 2017 San Francisco Point In Time Count were working or enrolled in school. 67% of ATC clients are currently working and 76% of our long-term counseling clients have improved their legal income. In a rental market where the median price for a studio is more than \$2,000, youth who work minimum wage jobs (\$15 per hour) find it difficult to secure stable housing.

Myth: Homelessness is the result of personal failure and bad decisions.
Fact: People become homeless due to a combination of economic, social, and health-related factors. Once someone loses stable housing it’s extremely difficult to build and sustain a healthy life, but long-term unconditional support can make this more accessible. More than 90% of ATC’s counseling clients achieve one or more of their goals, including finding stable housing, addressing substance use issues, improving their health, or finding employment.

“My job as a therapist is to offer people different experiences. I think this work is really important for people to figure out where they’re at, and where they want to be, and how much we can support them doing that.”
-Maurice Byrd,
Center for Harm Reduction Therapy

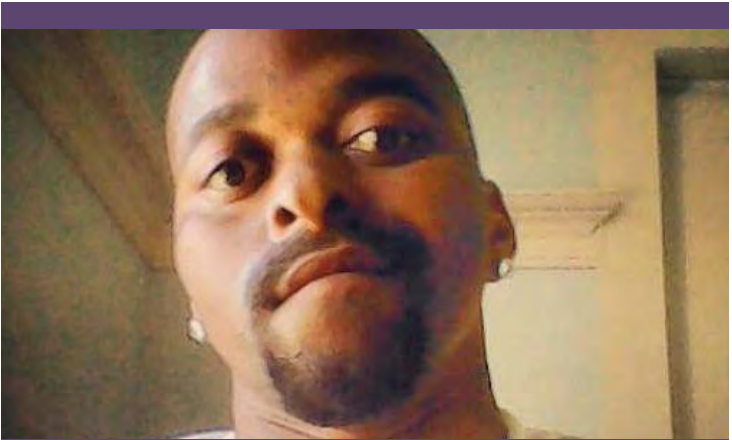
to move away from an “us and them attitude” and towards a more community-oriented approach. Mary describes a similar vision, “We have to learn to exist together and to help each other at every point, or else we’re never going to get out of this.” Even with all of the negative changes they’ve seen over the last 20 years, they both hold on to hope that San Francisco can become a place that is inclusive of all of its residents, not just some. ♦

Myth: The situation is hopeless.
Fact: Homelessness is a complex issue but it is far from hopeless. There are dozens of local organizations working to support people who are currently homeless as well as working to prevent homelessness in the first place by addressing its systemic causes. At The Crossroads focuses on supporting disconnected homeless youth and working with them to build healthy and fulfilling lives. Other agencies focus on goals like empowering incarcerated people to earn high school diplomas (Five Keys Charter School), making medical and mental health care more accessible (Homeless Youth Alliance), caring for chronically homeless veterans, providing mobile shower facilities (Lava Mae), working on public policy at the local and state levels, and there’s even a group that provides pet food for the companion animals of homeless folks (Project Open Paw), just to name a few.

Myth: There is nothing I can do.
Fact: There are so many ways to get involved and make a difference. Donate money or volunteer with an organization supporting homeless folks. Educate yourself on the systemic causes of homelessness and on laws that impact the homeless population. Last but not least, get to know the homeless people in the neighborhoods where you live and work. As Mary Howe, Executive Director of Homeless Youth Alliance says, “The gift of acknowledgment and a little conversation has the power to give people their value back that has been taken from them by being ignored day after day.”

1. <http://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/San-Francisco-PIT-Executive-Summary-FINAL-6.21.17.pdf>
2. https://sfgov.org/lhcb/sites/default/files/2015%20San%20Francisco%20Homeless%20Count%20%20Report_0.pdf

Getting into housing in the first place was a long and very difficult process for Maxine and her family. Now that they’re housed, making the rent is an ongoing challenge, but they’re committed to finding a way. As Maxine puts it, “The rent will be late sometimes, but the rent will be paid.” In the midst of it all, Maxine also takes the time to think about her own future goals. “I can still go back to school, I can still finish my education, I can still get a degree. Those are long-term goals. It’s no problem, school isn’t going anywhere. I can be 50 years old and still go back to school.” Maxine draws inspiration from the long line of strong women who have come before her, “I come from a family where women take care of themselves so I’ve just got to figure mine out. I tell my daughter, ‘Look at your heritage, look at where you come from. Don’t ever give up.’”



“I want to become a mentor and an advocate ... I want to help people and love the fact that I could have the very thing that they might need.”
-Twan, ATC client for 6 years

Looking forward and having a sense of purpose can be transformational for many of our clients. Time and time again, we

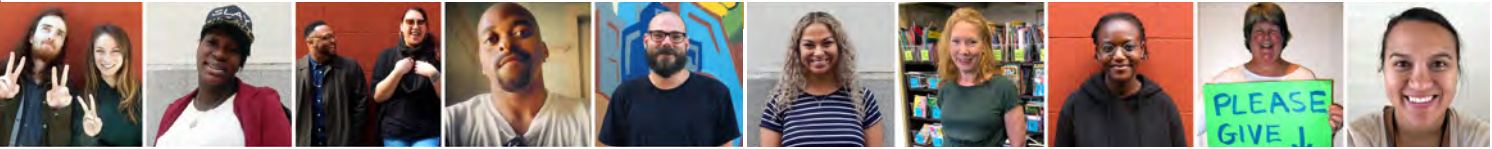
find ourselves in awe of their resilience and their ability to move past obstacles in pursuit of a future they envision for themselves. Twan, who started working with At The Crossroads in 2012, is one of these clients. He is a poet, artist, and musician who has worked hard to choose optimism and make the most of difficult circumstances. Though he’s incarcerated, he earned his high school diploma through the Five Keys Charter School program last spring.

In a letter to At The Crossroads he wrote about what he plans to do next, “Now that I’ve graduated, I’m taking every step within my means to commit, concentrate, and put forth the energy into my Associate’s Degree. I know what I want in life and I am the master of my choices and decisions.” Twan’s desire to be a resource for those around him drives him toward his long-term goals. “I chose Psychology because I want to become a mentor and an advocate for individuals who have no voice, teens at risk, and adults who need help. I want to help people and love the fact that I could have the very thing that they might need. I also hope to use my own experience to help those who are willing to receive help.” Twan also finds inspiration and perspective from art and poetry. Recently, he signed a letter he wrote to us with a quote from Shakespeare, “There is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so.” From his writing, it’s clear that Twan sees the possibility of self-reflection to shape his life in powerful ways.

Over these last two decades, it has been an honor to be a part of our clients’ lives, to be there with them on their happiest days and on their hardest. We’ve seen firsthand that there’s no limit to what our clients can achieve, and we firmly believe that every one of them deserves to build a healthy and fulfilling life on their own terms. Anniversaries tend to make people reflect on the past, and At The Crossroads is no exception. We’re proud of what our clients and our organization have accomplished, and we feel privileged to be able to keep doing this work. Each night is a new opportunity for us to connect with our community, one sandwich, toothbrush, or conversation at a time. And like many of our clients, we’re looking toward the future. A few years ago Twan wrote to us, “All is well with me. I’m evolving.” We like to think that’s true for At The Crossroads as well. ♦



Our oral history project is online!
In celebration of our 20th anniversary, we interviewed more than 30 people who have played an important role in our story. You can hear ATC clients, counselors, staff, volunteers, board members, collaborators, and community members share a slice of our history in their own words and voices.
Listen at atthecrossroads.org/atc-oral-history/



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