

## Fall 2019: Navigating the Complex Maze of Services

With this newsletter, we seek to shed light on the barriers, obstacles, and dead ends our clients face as they access services in order to meet their basic needs. Our goal is not to criticize or single out other providers or agencies, but to reflect our clients' diverse experiences and offer a deeper understanding of the unique challenges of navigating the social service landscape.

## ATC's Clients Share Their Experiences Accessing Services



**“It’s super hard to get back to where I was at. All these offices that are supposed to help you are not helping. They’re so fast to give you the boot and kick you out.”**

—Karen, ATC client for 3 years

### A Complicated Maze

Imagine that in order to access your basic needs every day, you had to navigate a very complex maze. Routines that you might currently take for granted—like eating, going to the bathroom, taking a shower, sleeping—would instantly become incredibly long and arduous. First, you’d have to decide which direction to go in order to meet your most immediate need; then, every new turn would have the potential to present a new challenge—if you prioritize finding a bed to sleep in, you might have to give up your belongings or miss an important appointment. If you go to work for the day, you may forgo having a place to sleep for the night. Every decision you make in this winding maze has a cost that affects your ability to travel forward—and by the middle of the maze, it’s unclear if you’re still at the beginning and what might be waiting at the end.

This analogy illustrates a small fraction of our clients’ experiences as they try to navigate social services. Often they are met with long waits, inefficient systems, difficult decisions, and sometimes, the end result is not getting their needs met. For 22 years, At The Crossroads has

aimed to reduce barriers to accessing services and stood with clients as they navigate complicated systems while also aiming to survive, thrive, and accomplish their individual goals.

We sat down with four clients to talk about their experiences accessing services—including housing, shelter, government assistance, getting food to eat and clothes to wear, and applying for a government-issued ID. Each client had more stories to tell than we are able to share in this article, but we hope that this serves as a window into some of the challenges our clients face as they try to address their basic needs.

### Getting Temporary Shelter

Ending up outdoors can happen quickly, but getting back indoors, even temporarily, can be an incredibly complicated process. By the numbers alone, there are not enough shelter beds available in San Francisco to meet the demand. In both traditional shelters and Navigation Centers, the city has a total of 2,105 beds. According to the 2019 Point-in-Time Count, there are 8,011 people experiencing homelessness in San Francisco, 65% of whom are without shelter. Not only is the need greater than the supply, but the process of accessing shelter beds is complicated. You cannot self-refer to get into a Navigation Center, you have to be referred by a member of the Homeless Outreach Team or by the police. Additionally, there is a Shelter Reservation Waitlist, but it is over 1,000 people long. When your name is on the waitlist, you need to be able to

call and check your status regularly, which can be challenging if you don’t have access to a phone.

Over six months ago, Karen and her husband lost their housing, increasing the challenges they face as they try to support themselves and their family. Karen has been an ATC client for three years and is caring, determined, and passionate. Her family is incredibly important to her. During Karen’s interview, it was clear how much time and energy she has put into trying to re-obtain housing. Karen has tried three times to get a 90-day bed by putting her and her husband’s names on the San Francisco’s Shelter Reservation Waitlist, operated by 311. When a couple submits their names together to this waitlist, they are not guaranteed that they will be placed at the same shelter.

While waiting for the 90-day bed, Karen and her husband were also working with a caseworker to secure an alternate shelter placement through a different system which would have granted them temporary beds in the same location. After four months, when their names reached the top of the 90-day bed waitlist, they tried to check in with their caseworker about the status of the alternate placement but could not get ahold of them. They decided to turn down the 90-day bed in order to wait for the alternate placement where they could both be in the same location. The next day, they found out that they had not been approved for the alternate placement. Having turned down the 90-day beds, they had to start the process all over again.

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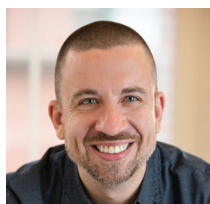
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## Letter from Executive Director

### Charles Lerner, MFT

Dear ATC Friend,

A lot has happened since our last newsletter. At The Crossroads held its 10th Annual Summer SunDay in June and last month we hosted the “Be Bold with ATC” mobilization event. You will be hearing a lot in the coming months about ATC “getting bold”. We have also set several key initiatives for this coming year that you can view on the back cover of the newsletter. I recently read an article about being bold for change. The author stated that being bold requires three things: (1) being courageous to try new things and stand up for your convictions; (2) being an example to emulate; and (3) believing in yourself and that you can create change.

ATC is going to be courageous and create a bold vision for our future. It is our goal to increase our impact and become a louder voice at the table. ATC’s model of connecting with young adults experiencing homelessness will not change. We will continue to practice radical empathy and be an example for how you help others with dignity and humanity. We will continue to believe in our clients and the idea that they can create healthier and happier lives for themselves. ATC will never give up on the belief that the systems designed to help our clients can change for the better.

In this newsletter, you will read about several ATC clients and the barriers that they have faced in accomplishing what they want for themselves—whether that is feeling safe, having enough to eat, finding stable housing, or getting an ID in order to get a job or access additional services. We want you to learn about their journeys in their own words. You will see just how bold our clients are in building the lives that they want for themselves—even in the face of tremendous challenges. There is a lot our clients can teach us about being courageous and believing in our ability to create change.

One last thing—I encourage you to participate in the maze activity on pages 8-9 of the newsletter. I expect that the exercise will have an impression on you. Please feel free to reach out to me and tell me what you think after doing it.

On behalf of the At The Crossroads team, I want to send my best wishes to you for a happy, healthy, and joyful holiday season. I hope that you are surrounded by love and peace. Thank you for being an important part of the ATC family.

With gratitude,

*You may notice that we sometimes 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. We have also done this in certain cases to protect our clients’ anonymity.*

*Electronic copies of previous newsletters are available to view at [www.atthecrossroads.org/newsletters](http://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, health care, 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 SHOUTOUT: GUS



Volunteering with young people has always been a part of Gus's life. So, four years ago when Gus did an online search for volunteer gigs, he resonated with our mission of supporting young people navigating life's ups and downs. He's been volunteering at ATC weekly ever since. One of his favorite activities is filling food boxes for our clients, as it allows him to learn more about the people we work with and it gives him a chance to connect with our counselors. We're so appreciative of Gus's long-term support of our work and his positive attitude!

## GET INVOLVED WITH ATC

### Make a donation to support ATC's work

The only way At The Crossroads can accomplish our mission is with the generosity of individuals who believe in our work. If you think every homeless youth deserves the chance to build an outstanding life, please support us!

**Learn more and donate at [www.atthecrossroads.org/donate](http://www.atthecrossroads.org/donate).**

### Become a volunteer

Do you have free time in the morning or afternoon? Want to learn firsthand how we support San Francisco's most disconnected youth? Become a volunteer and pitch in on a number of tasks that help keep ATC strong. **To learn more, email [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org).**

### Get your company involved

When companies and their employees engage in our work, it can have a huge, positive impact. There are many meaningful ways that you and your coworkers can support ATC. **To figure out how to get your company involved, email [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org).**

### Connect us to new clothing donations

ATC is always looking to build relationships with stores and businesses that are able to donate new clothing and shoes for our clients. If you can connect us with a store or clothing manufacturer who may be able to donate these items, **please email [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org).**

### Learn more about ATC

- **Check out this video featuring our clients, in their own words,** produced by local production company, Criminal: [bit.ly/ATCclientvideo](http://bit.ly/ATCclientvideo).
- **Watch a 15-minute documentary** about our clients and our work: [bit.ly/ATCdocumentary](http://bit.ly/ATCdocumentary).
- **Sign up for our email list** to learn about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, organizational updates, and more ways to get involved: [www.atthecrossroads.org](http://www.atthecrossroads.org).

I have been employed the whole time and that's why it's so frustrating. You can have a job and still have nowhere to live.

-Donny, ATC client for 1 year



*(Continued from front page)*

Karen feels like she is trying everything that she can to get into shelter and to make decisions to increase her and her husband's stability, but it's not working: "I'm trying to access the services, I didn't say no to your bed because I didn't like the place that you have for me. I said no because somebody promised me a bed with my husband at one shelter, where we could make our lives so much easier." Even though it would have been much simpler to stay together, Karen regrets turning down the 90-day bed: "I would probably still be there right now. I would have all my documents. I would probably still have my purse. I lost all our ... documents. Social Security numbers, birth certificates, like, it's deep."

The last six months of being on and off the streets and trying to access services have taken an extreme toll on Karen. She wonders if people running all of these programs understand how difficult it is to experience homelessness. "If you guys put somebody from city hall outside with a blanket, you guys won't make it. You will get beat up and robbed, and if you don't know where to sleep you might not wake up tomorrow." She also feels that there's a misperception of people on the streets: "I feel a lot of people are like, 'Uhh the homeless, uhh gross.' I don't want to be homeless! I want to take a shower every day. I want to go get a job. I want to do shit. I want to get back to my life ... and it's super hard to get back to where I was at. All these offices that are supposed to help you are not helping. They're so fast to give you the boot and kick you out."

## Securing Housing

Often, people assume that if someone wants to get housing, they must simply apply, follow the required steps, and they will be housed in a timely manner. In reality, the process is almost never that straightforward. Depending on a variety of factors, including one's age, ability, lived experience, and barriers, the process of securing housing can take months and in many cases it takes years. The city has rolled out a new system that is designed to prioritize housing Transition Age Youth (TAY) and to reduce the length of time it takes. However, there is no guarantee that a person's case will be given priority status, and even when it is, it still may

take time to be connected with housing. There is the option for youth with priority status to receive a temporary placement, but these spots are not guaranteed and may only be short-term. For every young person who is given a slot, there are many more who are not.

Donny is 25 and has spent most of the last seven years of his life couch surfing and moving around. As he talks about his experiences, he maintains a warm smile and he describes himself as "a positive person, even when bad things happen." He recently moved into his first apartment and the whole process took 11 months, from first applying for an available housing slot to actually securing his own place, during which he continued to live on and off the streets. You can read more about Donny's experience on pages 6-7 of this newsletter.

A year ago, Donny was offered the opportunity to apply for permanent housing. Due to multiple miscommunications between agencies regarding



there for like six months too. I used to sleep in the basement ... put some neck pillows down, take a quick little nap." It was a particularly difficult winter to be outside. "I just wanted to stay warm and it didn't work out like that. You know how cold it was last year? Around this time? It was so cold." His experiences trying to get housing were very discouraging. "I have been employed the whole time and that's why it's so frustrating. You can have a job and still have nowhere to live. What am I working for at this point?" Several times, Donny considered moving away or, at least, giving up on trying to find housing in San Francisco, even though his job is here and he has a lot of family in the city.

Now that he's housed, he's very grateful but, as a result of his experiences, Donny is afraid to voice any concerns that may come up about his new living situation: "I'm just scared honestly, that I say something and then I'm out again ... With my luck that would happen." Also, his commute from Richmond to the city is long and costly. "My issue living in the city is the BART transportation thing—that's expensive. I don't even have the money for that." Sometimes he's faced with the challenge of needing to get to work but being unable to afford the train fare.

For LeBron, getting "document ready" was the biggest obstacle to getting housed. LeBron is an easy-going person who values his friendships and is incredibly thoughtful about his experiences. He's been working with ATC since 2016. While living in a transitional housing program for TAY, LeBron was offered a permanent housing spot and immediately said yes. The only requirements were that he have a Social Security card and California ID, and register for General Assistance. It sounds simple—but it was not a straightforward process.

Half the times you ask for help and you try to receive it, you're just going to get a whole bunch of bullshit.

-LeBron, ATC client for 3 years

## Navigating Government Offices

Accessing services often requires that you present various identification documents; most often state-issued identification, a Social Security card, and birth certificate. If you have never had a Social Security card then you have to go to the Social Security Administration office and show a certified copy of your birth certificate along with a state-issued ID or US passport. But in order to obtain an ID or passport, you need a Social Security card. If you are missing any of these

documents, the process becomes much longer and more complicated.

As LeBron worked on getting “document ready” in order to accept his housing opportunity, he faced challenges getting a Social Security card. “When you don’t have a Social Security [number], it makes everything twice as long than what it should be.” Because he didn’t know his Social Security number, he went to the SSA office and tried to get the number using his name, but they were unable to locate his number. He went back several times and it wasn’t until he went with a counselor from his housing program who helped advocate for him that they were able to sort the issue out.

After several early-morning appointments, he felt frustrated: “Honestly, my fourth visit to the SSA building was like, ‘Is it really worth it?’” But LeBron refused to give up: “I’m more so of having temporary thoughts, like, ‘Oh, what if I did drop doing this?’” The entire process took about two months, after which LeBron was able to move into his new apartment. “I ended up getting my housing ... I think it was 11 days after my birthday, and in my eyes, it was the biggest birthday you can get, signing your first lease.”

Other clients also face challenges when they try to access government assistance programs. Dustin, who has been working with ATC since 2014, has attempted in multiple ways to access different kinds of government programs for which he is eligible. He is incredibly independent and usually prefers to find solutions on his own, but was willing to try applying for cash aid or County Adult Assistance Programs. With his ATC counselor, he went to three appointments in one week, and he remembers being told that he would receive \$66 a month in county assistance for working three days a week. Dustin doesn’t think this trade of his time for that level of support makes sense: “How does that add up when the minimum wage is [nearly] \$16 an hour? How do you know three days a week adds up to \$66? Whatever they’re doing down there, it just didn’t work out for me.”

When Dustin applied for a CalFresh EBT card—which offers a stipend for “low-income individuals ... to buy food at retail food outlets, grocery stores, farmers markets, and some restaurants”—he was also offered the option to apply for a state program that provides discounted cellphone services. He completed the application with his ATC counselor in mid-February and a month later, received notice that the phone had been delivered in the mail, but it hadn’t been. When Dustin reached out to the phone service program, they told him to call the phone distribution service, who reported that they never received any information from the state phone program. “It was like a wild goose chase for some of the things that they said they would mail, like my phone. It was like two or three times we were told that they mailed one

and mailed another one and it never came.” Dustin and his counselor decided to go directly to a phone distribution booth together so that he could be sure to get a phone. He now has one, but according to Dustin, since the number belonged to someone else originally, notifications and calls for that person use up a big portion of his monthly data allotment.

It was hard for Dustin to decide to seek help from programs and services in the first place and when they haven’t met his expectations, it makes him lose trust in government agencies and providers. He feels reluctant to share more information about himself, if he won’t actually receive help as



a result. “That the government would have me on record as someone that they’re providing for and I don’t know what they do with that ... But the way that I’ve been treated hasn’t been that good, so I’m not going to help them.”

### Ideas for Improvement

At ATC, we believe that our clients are the experts on their lives and what they need. We asked each of the people interviewed for this newsletter if they had ideas for how social services could be improved to better meet their needs. And every one of them had an answer. Dustin wanted the services provided to be more accurate to what is advertised—he felt that in certain instances, he had been promised things that were not ultimately delivered. Donny wished that all programs, including ATC, were easier to find in the first place: “You all need a billboard ... You know what I’m saying? More people need to know about this, just the programs in general.”

Karen thinks it would be really helpful if all of the services were centralized, which is something that the city is trying to do. “I feel like one entity should be in charge of all of it so that this person doesn’t say that that person didn’t meet with you ... That’s where a lot of things are getting miscommunicated.” She thinks it would save a lot of time and energy and increase accuracy if instead of going to a bunch of different places and telling them the same things, there was a

central system that all providers could access.

LeBron is an active member of the Youth Policy and Advisory Committee, or YPAC, which is a government committee led by youth currently and formerly experiencing homelessness founded in 2016. His hope is that service providers center the needs of the youth they are serving: “Half the times you ask for help and you try to receive it, you’re just going to get a whole bunch of bullshit ... And it gets stressful and it can piss people off, because it may feel like you’re not going anywhere or you’re not actually getting what you need to get done. So, then you have that plus irritation, anxiety, depending on what kind of person you are.” In LeBron’s eyes,

**It was like a wild goose chase for some of the things that they said they would mail, like my phone.**

**-Dustin, ATC client for 5 years**

if getting services is overly stressful, people may decide not to continue.

### Conclusion

We share these stories in the hopes that we might come together to better serve our community. There is a misconception that getting your needs met is as simple as showing up to a service provider and filling out an application and that if something doesn’t work out the onus is on the person accessing the service. At The Crossroads acknowledges that we all have a long way to go before we are providing the caring, accessible, and transformational support that our city’s most vulnerable residents need.

As providers, we all must examine the impact of barriers to access, staff turnover, program design, and larger systemic issues like racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and inequality. We also must recognize the immense challenges, including but not limited to past trauma, mental health differences, and substance use, that participants face before they ever walk through our doors and the effects that waiting for services, negative encounters, and rejection can have on the people we are aiming to support.

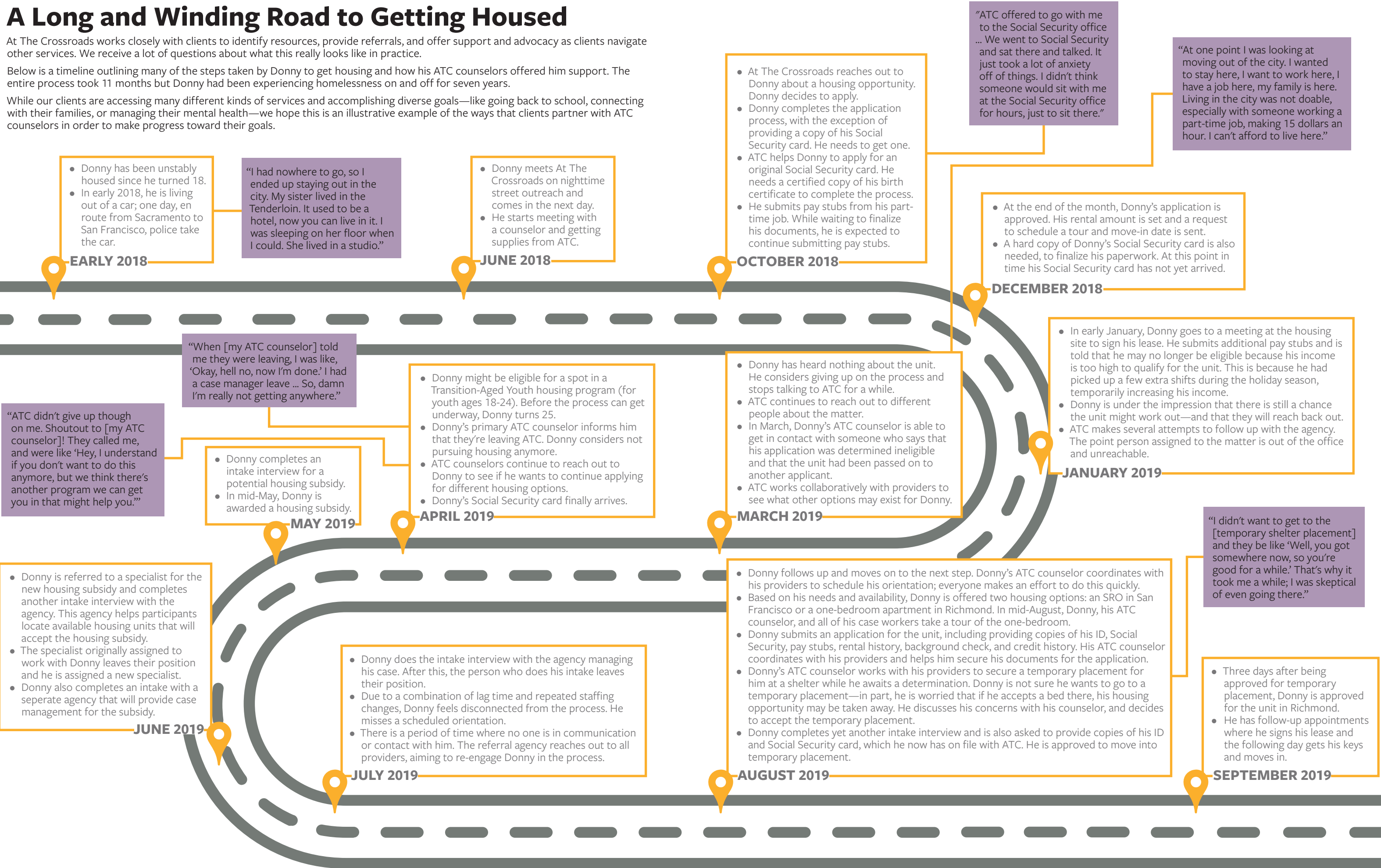
In the coming year, ATC’s goal is to focus on its relationships with city service providers and other agencies and to identify gaps in the system that can be addressed through better collaboration. Improving our services should be guided by our clients’ experiences and input. We challenge ourselves to do our part to improve the social service landscape and to deconstruct the complex maze. ♦

# A Long and Winding Road to Getting Housed

At The Crossroads works closely with clients to identify resources, provide referrals, and offer support and advocacy as clients navigate other services. We receive a lot of questions about what this really looks like in practice.

Below is a timeline outlining many of the steps taken by Donny to get housing and how his ATC counselors offered him support. The entire process took 11 months but Donny had been experiencing homelessness on and off for seven years.

While our clients are accessing many different kinds of services and accomplishing diverse goals—like going back to school, connecting with their families, or managing their mental health—we hope this is an illustrative example of the ways that clients partner with ATC counselors in order to make progress toward their goals.



# Simulation: Solve the Maze to Meet Your Basic Needs

Below is a maze to simulate what someone might go through while experiencing homelessness and trying to meet their day-to-day needs. Everything in the maze is based on the lived experiences of our clients, or people in similar circumstances.

To start, flip a coin five times and calculate your initial Morale Point count. Every heads = +3. Every tails = -2. Mark your starting value at the top of the Morale Point Counter. Your initial count represents the impact of your life experiences before entering the maze.

Start the maze. Each event you come across will either add or subtract Morale Points. Track this in the Counter. Your point total may dip below zero, but you can continue. If you hit a dead end, turn around and find a different path. Resist the urge to look ahead, go where your pen takes you, and notice what reflections come up for you as you move through the maze.

START →

Morale Point Counter

Total:

When you turn 18, you age out of foster care and have nowhere to go. (-10)

While sleeping outside, you get robbed. You lose your ID, all of your cash, and your backpack of clothing. (-8)

At an intake interview for a housing program, your housing need is not prioritized. You have to wait 6 months to do the assessment again. (-8)

You finish your Associate's Degree at City College. (+5)

Your Social Security card and ID were stolen and you need to get a replacement Social Security card. But to get this you need ID. (-6)

While waiting at the SSA Office you miss work and can't afford to buy dinner. (-3)

You run into an outreach team and they offer you a 30-day bed at a shelter. (+7)

You meet with your ATC counselor, who goes with you to the DMV and provides a voucher so that your ID application is free. (+3)

In order to get to work on time, you take BART, but don't have enough money for the fare. You get a ticket for \$75. (-7)

You lose your BART pass. (-4)

After applying to five places, you're offered a part-time job in Downtown San Francisco. (+7)

Your replacement ID is lost in the mail. (-5)

Because you can't provide a government-issued ID in time, you lose your job offer. (-7)

You catch a cold and have to miss work. (-3)

Because of a disagreement with another resident, you are kicked out of the shelter before your 30-day stay is over. (-9)

You experience a medical crisis and end up in the hospital for a week. As a result, you lose your job. (-10)

Your phone is stolen. (-5)

Because of the income from your part-time job, you are \$100 over the income limit to qualify for a rental subsidy. But you don't make enough to afford market-rate housing. (-8)

You get a food box from ATC for the week (+2)

A friend lets you crash on their couch for a month (+7)

You and your friend have a disagreement and they no longer let you stay with them. (-6)

A caseworker who you worked well with and who advocated for you leaves their job (-6)

You are stopped for jaywalking and arrested for an outstanding warrant that you did not know about. (-12)

You spend quality time with a loved one. (+3)

At your second housing program intake, you are given priority status and provided a temporary shelter to stay in until you're able to move into an apartment. (+10)

END →

PG. 8 ATC NEWSLETTER

# At The Crossroads 2019 Client Survey

This past winter, we completed a client satisfaction survey. The goal of the survey was to gather feedback from our clients on the different parts of our program. Counselors proactively reached out to clients who access ATC in different ways and tried to get a representative sample from each program. The survey also provided us with additional information about our clients and their lives. One-sixth of ATC's clients completed the survey. Below are some of the highlights from our findings.

## OUR CLIENTS

— They are disconnected —  
from social services.

**55%** of our clients report that they are not currently accessing other services outside of ATC.

— They are former —  
foster youth.

**44%** were in foster care at some point in their young lives.

— They are caretakers. —

**46%** care for minor children.

## OUR PROGRAM

— Our clients feel respected —  
by our program staff.

**100%** of clients always or often feel they are treated with respect.

— Our clients' needs are —  
being met by ATC.

**95%** of clients report that ATC always or often has services that meet their needs.

— We foster long-term —  
relationships with clients.

**74%** have worked with ATC for over three years.

**90%** shared that ATC helped them achieve one or more of their goals in the following areas:



**14%**

Employment  
and financial  
stability



**12%**

Family and  
relationships



**27%**

Housing



**9%**

Education



**37%**

"Other," including  
mental health, life  
skills, and legal  
matters

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*Marsha & Bob Mayer*

Jason Menayan

Bruce Osterweil & Patricia

Furlong

Diana Pang & Jeremiah Jeffries

Joe Proctor\*

*Pablo Villavicencio*

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## FRIEND - \$100+

Anonymous (multiple)

*Suzanne Abel\**

**Jaemie & Joey Altman**

*Tom Athanasiou*

Andy Bales

Alex Beir

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# At The Crossroads Key Initiatives

## 2019-2020

Over the next year, ATC will be embarking on creating a bold vision for the future of our organization. Our goal is to increase our impact and to become a more visible leader in addressing youth homelessness and housing instability in San Francisco. We hope you will join us!

### Reach Our City's Most Vulnerable Young People Through Outreach and Counseling Services

*Time Period:* 7/19 - 6/20

*Goal:* Connect with over 600 individual youth and young adults through day- and nighttime street outreach. Provide intensive counseling services to at least 250 of these young people.

### Set a Bold 20/20 Vision for At The Crossroads

*Time Period:* 1/20 - 5/20

*Goal:* A bold vision for the future of ATC that will result in increased impact and becoming a more visible leader in addressing issues impacting people experiencing homelessness and housing instability and gaps that exist in Bay Area homelessness services.

### Develop a More Robust Evaluation Program

*Time Period:* 9/19 - 6/20

*Goal:* Create a new data collection system that enables ATC to evaluate its efficacy on an ongoing basis, allowing for the organization to evolve its program model and communicate with its investors on progress in accomplishing its mission.

### Create a Compelling and Galvanizing Marketing and Public Relations Campaign

*Time Period:* 9/19 - 8/20

*Goal:* A campaign that evokes conversation and action through highly visible touchpoints with the public and results in updated marketing materials and website for ATC.

### Increase Access to Food and Essential Supplies for Youth on the Streets of San Francisco

*Time Period:* 7/19 - 6/20

*Goal:* 5,400 meals over 12 months. As part of its outreach and counseling services, ATC provides sandwiches, food boxes, hot meals, essential clothing, and hygiene materials.