

FALL 2017: BUILDING RESILIENCE

What does it mean to be resilient for yourself and others in the face of tremendous obstacles? In this newsletter, we look beyond the common definitions of “resilience” at the different ways that it manifests in our clients’ lives. Here at ATC, working with clients to recognize their strengths is critical to supporting them in overcoming challenges and building the lives they want.

ATC’s Clients Develop Their Own Unique Forms of Resilience



“Everything I thought was going to break me; all of the decisions that I made that I didn’t think I was going to get myself out of—I made it through all that. ‘Resilient’ is always one of the words I use to describe myself, and I think my daughter has it too.”

—Sara, ATC client for 14 years

Resilience by Another Name

Resilience has become a widely discussed topic in the field of youth development. There have been many studies on the importance of resilience for a young person’s long-term survival and success. Researchers agree that resilient people often share several characteristics: a caring relationship with a supportive adult figure, participation in meaningful activities, and the feeling that they—and not their circumstances—are in control of their own lives.

These characteristics are not the norm for many of ATC’s clients. Most of the young people we work with do not have reliable adult figures in their lives. Being homeless or unstably housed usually means that their main focus is on day-to-day survival, forcing them to put the projects they’re passionate about on the back burner. They often have little control over important aspects of their lives, including where and when they will sleep or get their next hot meal.

However, our clients regularly illustrate that resilience in the face of stressful situations can take many different forms. Many of our

youth find strength in their connection to their community. Some clients are even the source of this strength for their friends and families. What many would see as “resilience” is simply a fact of life for our clients—they find their way and get what they need, however they can. No matter what shape it takes or what it is called, we regularly see our clients working hard to build themselves up and create the lives they want.

Mattie, ATC client for six years, experiences resilience in his own life quite differently from the common definitions. Soft-spoken and sardonically funny, he speaks with the same calm clarity to discuss his favorite music as he does to critique society and describe the difficult situations he’s experienced. He often makes bold claims that are in direct opposition to each other, but insists that both hold true for him; in his own words, he describes himself as “a very contradictory person.” Mattie thinks a lot about life’s complexities and he is not afraid to dive deep into hard subjects.

When asked whether he feels in control of his life, Mattie shakes his head no. “I have no control over anything in my life. The only thing I have control over is how I react to things. Everything else is completely out of my hands ... You may feel differently but the truth is in my little universe, nobody has any control over anything

except for how we move forward.”

Mattie’s firm belief that he does not have control over what happens in his life is rooted in the fact that for him, being resilient has never been a choice. Being born with identities that put him in the minority means that Mattie has always had to be strong to survive. “Being black, being gay, being anything out of the norm. It’s not about if you’re resilient. It’s just about you being you and if you want to continue to be you or not.” For these reasons, Mattie doesn’t see himself as an example of “resilience;” he’s just continually having to find the strength to push through. “I got given obstacles at birth that I have to get over—no ifs, ands, or buts. For me, there is no being resilient. It’s just part of being.”

The Harder Path

Sara’s resilience manifests in her remarkable ability to be a strong advocate for herself and her family, even when it makes her life more challenging in the short term. Sara first met ATC when she was a teenager, and has been a client for 14 years. She is very open about sharing her story and she’s quick to smile, even when describing some of the toughest moments of her life. Sara came to our interview with her three-year-old daughter, and from their laughter and shared energy, it’s clear how much joy they experience together.

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Rob Gitin

I grew up with many blessings, but the biggest was the love of my mother, and the way she raised me. She was such a caring, fun, supportive mom who always had my back, no matter how badly I screwed up. She helped cultivate a sense of safety, a comfort with myself, and a confidence in my abilities that have been with me ever since. The security that she instilled in me has made it easier to deal with challenges when they come up, not to take them personally, and not to dwell for too long on the mistakes that I make.

It never occurred to me what a privilege my relationship with my mom was until I was 19, and started working with young people on the streets, most of whom had never known what it was like to have a safe, caring relationship with a parent. This absence seemed to narrow their sense of what they had to offer the world, and what the world had to offer them.

There was a contradiction in the experiences of the youth I was meeting. On the one hand, they were able to survive horrific events and keep going in a way that showed stunning, almost unfathomable resilience. On the other hand, as they would begin to try to move forward in life, I would watch how seemingly small obstacles would knock some of them off track and send them spiraling. I've continued to see this play out with many of ATC's clients over the years.

Our clients are incredible survivors. Their lives afford them little choice in this matter. They have to keep getting up no matter what kind of trauma they face, because they lack the space in their lives to be able to collapse. When you have been through as many painful experiences as they have been, you learn that you will survive them, and that there will be another day. They pick themselves up when the weight of the world is trying to keep them down. They summon a strength that many people will never know.

As they start to build the lives that they want, it can be a precarious process. A bad interaction with a coworker can overwhelm them, and make them walk away from a job that they can't afford to lose. A perceived slight from a near-stranger can linger with them, keeping them up at night, creating a rage that they can't move on from. Trauma and injustice seem to make some muscles incredibly strong, and weaken others.

When thinking about the role that we can play to help bolster our clients' resilience, I find myself reflecting on the words of an amazing former client of ours, Arnisha, who passed away last year: *"ATC continues to build me up, allowing me to be strong and go back and fight for my life in this vicious world."*

Arnisha's powerful sentiment is among the many gifts that she left with ATC. Her words are complicated. They are at once hopeful and bleak. We can't change the reality that our clients grew up in. We don't try to convince them that the world is a fair and just place. But we can help them build more hope, a stronger sense of self, and a belief that there are people in the world who will see them and accept them for who they are. Hopefully, this helps ground them, and makes life's challenges feel a bit more manageable.

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 to view 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, 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 SHOUT-OUT



The “Monday Night Crew” is a super-dedicated group of office volunteers, including Chris (left) and Melissa (right), who come in every Monday evening. They help with a little bit of everything—from sorting donations to packing up meals for clients. Melissa’s favorite thing to help ATC with is making PB&J sandwiches for outreach. Chris likes picking up gift cards for clients’ birthdays. We make sure to thank them regularly for all the amazing things they do!

GET INVOLVED WITH AT THE CROSSROADS

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/annual.

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 volunteer@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.**

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.**

Learn more about ATC

- **Check out our brand new video** featuring our clients, in their own words, produced by Criminal: bit.ly/ATCclientvideo.
- **Watch Monica Lam’s 15-minute documentary** about our clients and our work: bit.ly/ATCdocumentary.
- **Sign up for our email list** to learn about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, organizational updates, and ways to get involved: www.atthecrossroads.org.

Building Systems of Support With ATC's Counselors



Program staff laughs together before starting their weekly meeting.

“Clients at ATC have taught me that resilience is much more complex. It is not only about the individual, but also about them supporting their community.”

-Olivia, Outreach Counselor for two years

Systems of Support

When asked about their work, ATC's staff members sometimes field questions like, “How do you do this work?” Or “How do you handle the stress of your job?” While there is some truth in these questions, we experience the work that we do differently. The work that we do can be hard, but it can also be really light, fun, and full of laughter. Ask any of our staff members and they'll tell you they feel extremely lucky that our clients allow us into their lives.

ATC invests a lot of time and energy in creating strong systems of support for program staff so that they can manage the day-to-day stressors of the job. These systems are critical to sustaining the quality of the work that we do with clients. Staff supporting each other can look like sharing memes and laughing in the office, having one-to-one meetings with their supervisors, and participating in regular training and professional development. Open communication and spaces to debrief are also important elements to supporting staff members in their work.

The staff's support system is built with the same care and thought that goes into supporting our clients. Most of the support comes in the form of check-ins and sit-downs. Counselors are great at following up with each other after they've seen a client; it can be helpful to decompress before going into another client meeting. We also have regular meetings with our supervisor to get support around things that we identify as obstacles.

-Briana, Outreach Counselor for one year

I support my colleagues in much the same way we support our clients: by asking them what is going on in their day and actively listening without offering unsolicited advice. I also like to help

people take care of their bodies and spirits so that they can bring their best selves to this work and to the people we serve.

-Onyinye, Outreach Counselor for two years

De-Stressing to Return Refreshed

It is important that our staff take time for themselves to learn what they need to recharge on a daily basis. Everyone has their own way of decompressing and preparing to come to work refreshed each day.

I like to make music, write, and play basketball when I'm not working. All of these outlets, in some way or another, allow me to express my feelings and empty my head of everyday pressures. I think it's important to make time for yourself, especially in our line of work. There is so much to process, and sometimes you don't realize how stressed you are until you step back and allow yourself to feel it.

-Demaree, Outreach Counselor for two years

I recharge for work by making time to sit in silence each morning. Not for very long; usually between 8-15 minutes is enough. This practice has proven itself to be very helpful in keeping my moods and responses calm throughout the ever-fluctuating work day.

-Onyinye

Being able to jump in the pool and swim laps is incredibly helpful for me to recharge for work. I keep moving and just count. Our work can often feel unclear—not knowing exactly how to support someone, and understanding how relentless the obstacles can be for them. So, after a day of working with clients in this unsettled space, it is really refreshing to be able to get in the pool, know what to do, swim, and be done.

-Olivia, Outreach Counselor for two years

Learning From Our Clients

Many staff members find that working with clients is just as much about learning from them as it is about helping them. Program staff all agree that our clients are some of the most resilient people we have ever met. Every counselor has many stories of resilience they've witnessed on the job; here are a few of their reflections:

One client really stands out to me as resilient. He has been thrown challenge after challenge in life, yet he grounds himself in knowing that change is a long-term game. He makes decisions everyday that are based on creating lasting, positive change, rather than falling back into old ways or into old drama. Because of this, he has become someone others come to for advice and stability. Even with all of the blows life has thrown his way, he still has the energy to stay strong in times when it would probably be easier to give up.

-Abby, Outreach Counselor for one year

There is a client who we've known for over a decade. She has been arrested and jailed more times than I even want to believe, yet she continues to create long-term visions and see them to fruition, in spite of every voice and institution that tells her that she is bad, or that she is not enough. She is so used to persevering that she doesn't even recognize her accomplishments and strengths, so it feels important that we encourage her to see and assert her worth.

-Demaree

The narrative of resilience in supportive services can so often be the story of an individual searching within themselves, overcoming adversity, and meeting their goals. Clients at ATC, however, have taught me that resilience is much more complex. It is not only about the individual, but also about them supporting their community. So many of our clients are the reason their immediate communities can even be resilient in the first place. It is incredible to see how much our clients support their families and communities, especially when they often have such limited support systems for themselves.

-Olivia

What Keeps Us Coming Back

When asked why they return to ATC day in and day out, staff members had a very similar set of answers—it's about connection. Connection with our clients, our coworkers, and our community.

A lot of people might see our clients as a set of labels, bad decisions, and inexplicable actions. Every day at work, I get an opportunity to break through that facade and actually see our clients as the

three-dimensional people they are. I think most people would be surprised to know how much love people who have been hurt so much still have to give. Our clients have some of the biggest hearts, creative brains, and most hilarious senses of humor. I show up to work daily looking forward to doing anything I can to make their days just a little bit easier, even if that just means letting them know someone sees them for the incredible human they truly are.

-Irina, Program Coordinator, ATC staff for six years

Many of the reasons that I keep coming back vary from day, to week, to month, to year. But there are a few constants...The ATC community (clients, staff, board, volunteers, donors) keep me coming back to work each day. It is such a genuine and unique privilege to share space with such incredible people. The individual and bigger-picture ways that our work connects to larger social justice issues are other consistent reasons that I come back to work each day. And the snacks, I love the office snacks.

-Shawn, Program Director, ATC staff for 13 years ♦

Welcome to Our New Board Member

Bianca Escalante, Board of Directors



Bianca is the proud daughter of Central American immigrants and the first and so far only member of her family to graduate from college. She is currently a Senior Manager on GitHub's Social Impact team, overseeing the company's local community engagement initiatives and advocating for accessibility, inclusion, and diversity across multiple sectors of the company. Prior to joining GitHub, Bianca spent 18 years working in the non-profit sector, mostly with organizations that provided educational opportunities for Black and Latino youth in STEM-related fields. She's excited to be a part of ATC's board and earnestly looks forward to every board meeting and ATC event.

Big Thanks to Our Community Members

Lighthouse Public Affairs

In August 2016, things were looking somewhat bleak for ATC. We were getting kicked out of our office at the end of September and we needed to find an affordable interim space until our new home was built. More importantly, we needed an office where our youth would be welcomed. Just as we were beginning to think we would not find a suitable space to temporarily call our own, in stepped Lighthouse Public Affairs! Not only did they sub-lease their amazing office to us, **but they made it affordable for ATC by paying 7K of the rent each month for 13 months!** This exceptional act of generosity made it possible for us to continue to offer the same high-quality support to homeless youth while we build out our new office space at 167 Jessie Street. Boe, Alex, and Rich, you are the best!



Local Production Company, Criminal

We were thrilled when Criminal, a local, award-winning, full-service production company, approached us about creating a new video for ATC—pro bono. Little did they know what they were getting into. They wanted to produce a piece that would bring to light the stories of the homeless youth we work with, in their own words. They bent over backwards to make their vision come to life. In early 2016, they hosted a film shoot, and treated our clients first class, even giving them rides to and from the interviews. Then the video went into production, and our perfectionist tendencies made us very difficult to work with. Several rounds of feedback and a year and a half later, we finally released their talented team from our never-ending nitpicking, and are so amazed with the video they created! **We can't wait to share it with you: bit.ly/ATCclientvideo.** Big thanks to Ynze, George, Chris and the Criminal team—we're very grateful for your endless patience and for amplifying the voices of our clients.



BUILDING HOME

Take a look inside At The Crossroads' new long-term home at 167 Jessie Street.



The build-out of our new office at 167 Jessie Street is slated to be complete in January 2018.

A Conversation With ATC's Program Director, Shawn Garety, About Our New Office

What excites you about the new building?

"Our new space is specifically designed for ATC. We've always had to make do with everything in the past. This time around, we get to set everything up ourselves and learn from it. It'll be completely within our control. No matter how we set up our new building, we'll be able to take in feedback and have the opportunity to make adjustments—even after we've moved in. The layout of the rooms and planning will be a collaborative process with input from staff and clients!"

"In the past, there was a comfort to our old space being thrown together. The mismatched furniture, the broken tables, the rugs that really needed to be replaced, and the walls that were falling apart.

However, in the same way that we strive to have nice supplies and quality services for clients, it makes sense to have a space that really reflects those values."

What do you think this new building will mean for our clients?

"When I think about places that are consistent and stable in my life, it is a comfort to me. ATC's new space will be something solid, that people know will always be there. My hope is that our clients feel that sense of comfort. Most places aren't inviting, warm, and welcoming to folks. I hope people will have the opposite experience when they come into our new building.

"I hope that this new building will make people feel proud and feel a sense of belonging. A lot of clients have known us since we were a tiny organization with Rob and Taj on outreach. A lot of folks in the ATC community, clients especially, feel proud of being part of ATC's history and

longevity—especially seeing where we are now and knowing that this building means that more people can access our services."

What do you think this new building means for ATC as an organization?

"We are very fortunate that this is happening. Many nonprofits were at the same point as ATC when we lost our lease, and had to close because there was nowhere for them to go. This building ensures that ATC is able to continue our work in the same focused and client-centered ways.

"I think people get concerned when there's a lot of transition, and it can [perpetuate] the idea that ATC isn't okay and will cease to exist. Being able to tell people that this new building is our permanent space hopefully eases that worry.

"I feel very grateful and excited about being able to continue our work in new and different ways and in a new space." ♦

Building Home Campaign Progress

\$3.65 million

We're raising \$4 million to build out our new building and expand our services—we're nearly there! [Learn more and donate at: AtTheCrossroads.org/BuildingHome.](#)

Thank you to everyone who has already contributed to our Campaign.

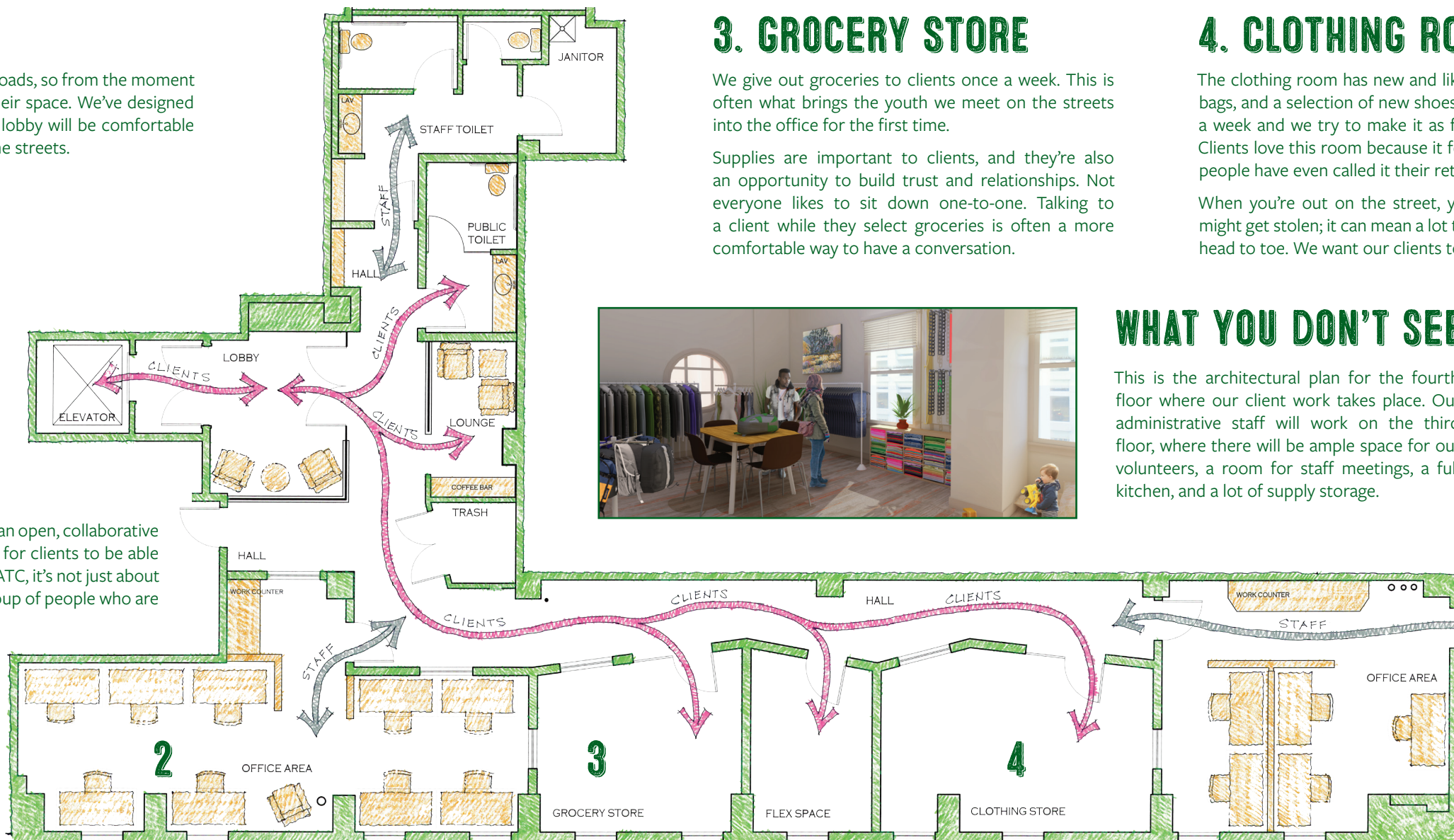
1. LOBBY

In our new office, we will have a lobby just for At The Crossroads, so from the moment clients walk through the door, they will know that this is their space. We've designed the lobby to meet a wide variety of client needs. Our new lobby will be comfortable and provide folks with the opportunity to get space from the streets.



2. OPEN LAYOUT OFFICE

All of our counselors can work with our clients, which makes an open, collaborative environment integral to our client work. It's also important for clients to be able to say hi to program staff when they walk into the office. At ATC, it's not just about you and your counselor, it's about knowing that there's a group of people who are on your side and care about how you're doing.



3. GROCERY STORE

We give out groceries to clients once a week. This is often what brings the youth we meet on the streets into the office for the first time.

Supplies are important to clients, and they're also an opportunity to build trust and relationships. Not everyone likes to sit down one-to-one. Talking to a client while they select groceries is often a more comfortable way to have a conversation.



4. CLOTHING ROOM

The clothing room has new and like-new clothes, backpacks and messenger bags, and a selection of new shoes. Clients are able to choose one full outfit a week and we try to make it as fun as possible by having a lot of options. Clients love this room because it feels like they're shopping at a store; some people have even called it their retail therapy.

When you're out on the street, you might lose your possessions, or they might get stolen; it can mean a lot to a person to get a brand-new outfit from head to toe. We want our clients to feel good about how they look.

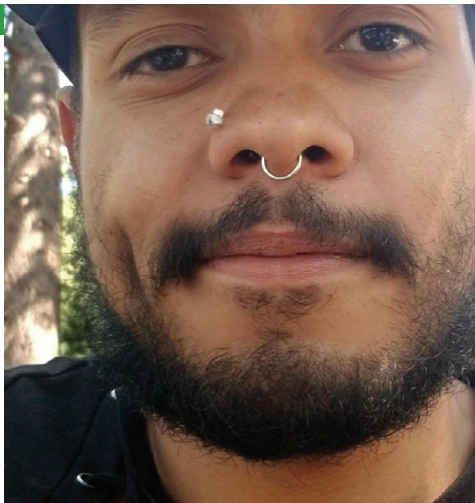
WHAT YOU DON'T SEE HERE...

This is the architectural plan for the fourth floor where our client work takes place. Our administrative staff will work on the third floor, where there will be ample space for our volunteers, a room for staff meetings, a full kitchen, and a lot of supply storage.



As a young child, Sara ran away from home, and for many years lived on and off the streets. Around 2010, Sara was incarcerated and enrolled in probation alternative court, which matched her with a probation officer named Amarita. At first Sara was very adamant that she did not want to participate in a “program” of any kind, but she began to develop a meaningful relationship with Amarita. She became a kind of mentor for Sara, regularly recognizing Sara’s strengths and voicing her belief in Sara’s abilities. Even though the source was unexpected, Sara’s strong connection with Amarita is one that she cites as being important for her ability to work through difficult situations.

Amarita and Sara discussed ways that Sara could get housed, by applying to drug treatment programs that provide transitional housing. But



“Being black, being gay, being anything out of the norm. It’s not about if you’re resilient. It’s just about you being you and if you want to continue to be you or not.”

-Mattie, ATC client for 6 years

Sara had had many negative experiences with different housing situations like those before. Some programs imposed unrealistic expectations on Sara that she did not feel she could fulfill; others did not put her safety first. Sara describes how at one house, she encountered someone who had abused her in the past. When she requested that he leave so she could stay there, she said they kicked her out instead on a technicality.

In order to get housing and support, Sara felt as if she was constantly having to compromise her needs and wellbeing, which she was unwilling to do. When Sara became pregnant with her daughter, she decided that she would try again to find housing that might meet her needs. But this was no easy feat and took a few years. After she was kicked out of another house for voicing a concern about her baby’s safety, she remembers saying to herself, “I’m not going to let this run me over; there are more choices. I’m not just going to go back and do that same shit again. The streets have nothing for me.”

She did not give up. With the help of Amarita, Sara was able to secure a spot at a transitional

drug treatment program that provides temporary housing. In her current situation, Sara is able to be vocal about what she and her daughter need. She feels like an active participant in her housing, and doesn’t fear that she’ll be kicked out for voicing her feedback and concerns. She is glad that she pushed through and feels that for now, she is in exactly the right place, with her daughter and another baby on the way. “I feel in control of my life now. I know what’s going to happen the next day and I know that we’re safe.”

Change and Growth

For Sara, achieving the changes that she wanted came after years of sheer perseverance. For Mattie, change and growth emerge when you get “that difficult feeling that life gives you.” He recently watched a video about lobsters, which resonated for him. “When lobsters are in the ocean, how do

they know that they need to change their shells and that they need to grow? Because their body’s growing; it’s just discomfort, it’s pain ... Based on that, it’s the same with us.”

This cycle of discomfort and growth is precisely what makes us human and is key to building resilience, according to Nick, ATC client for two years. Nick goes everywhere—even to our interview—with his lively eight-year-old dog, Ziggy. He talks in a gentle, sometimes very quiet voice, with quotable phrases rolling out of his mouth like a motivational speaker. Occasionally, he stands up in the middle of a sentence to let out some energy.

Just hearing the word “resilience” immediately launches Nick into thought. A big part of it for him is growth. It’s about going into the hard parts of yourself and figuring out what needs to change. “The bad tends to show itself or be more brightly colored than the good. It seems to be more prominent but it’s not, it’s just easier to see ... just being open to accept that certain parts of you might be flawed, that’s a big part of resilience, you know. Being able to accept that

you are flawed by nature, you are constantly a work in progress, you will never be finished.”

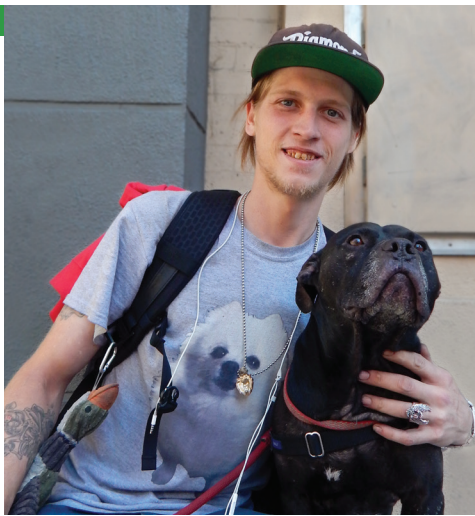
When Nick was just barely a teenager, he was kicked out of his home and was homeless for many years after that. Growing up on the streets, Nick describes needing instant ways to ease the pain he felt from his parents forcing him to leave. “I found comfort in heroin, I found comfort in sex, I found comfort in drinking three pots of coffee a day, you know.” Getting to a place where Nick wanted to make a change was really difficult. Because of his experiences as a young person, asking for help did not feel like an option. Additionally, he didn’t feel like he had anyone to ask for help. Nick says that he went through a lot of painful situations before he decided that his coping mechanisms were causing more harm to himself and others than they were helping.

From where Nick sits now, he feels he has more ways to work through traumatic experiences. He thinks part of it has to do with the passage of time. “Time is really the only cure for traumatic situations.” Part of it is his very conscious effort to build practices that work long-term for him. “Instead of that instant gratification thing—yes, I do do certain things each and every day to make myself feel better in that moment—but I’m not sacrificing anything to do that now. I have found either a coping mechanism or an activity or a way of thinking that is not sacrificing any level of health. It’s gotta be sustainable.”

One of the ways Nick is hoping to grow is by building more trusting relationships. He takes relationship building very seriously, whether with counselors, friends, or partners. When Nick was younger, he didn’t want to open up to therapists or counselors. Now, he takes time to find people who are genuine, who really listen to him. Nick has known one of his At The Crossroads counselors, Olivia, for almost eight years. They first met at the drop-in center where she used to work, and now meet one-to-one regularly at ATC. She is one of the first people that Nick turns to when he is looking for someone with whom to process the things that come up in his life. “Olivia has seen me when I was struggling a lot more, and I think that she also knows that she played a part in my growth.”

Being Resilient for Others

Part of Nick’s growth has been catalyzed by needing to be a source of strength for others—in his case, his dog, Ziggy came to Nick having experienced a lot of trauma. When Nick first adopted him, Ziggy could not even be near other dogs without defending himself. “Ziggy was a bait dog. He was fought and for two years of his life every dog that he met bit him, so when I took him out of that situation he still thought that every dog was going to bite him. I had to hold him and let the dogs smell him until he’d be like,



“I now dive into difficult situations hoping that I can change myself so that the next time I face that same situation it’s no longer difficult because, you know, I grew.”

-Nick, ATC client for 2 years

“Wait, I’m not getting bit!” So maybe after four to six months he could hang out with smaller dogs and maybe after a year and a half, bigger dogs—and now, all dogs. It’s awesome.”

Working to build Ziggy’s resilience has helped Nick to build his own. When meeting new people, Nick feels very shy and struggles to open up. Ziggy loves all people, so he effectively breaks the ice for Nick. “If I didn’t have my dog when I walked in here and you guys didn’t say hi to him first, I would have had a really hard time opening up. It’s like an icebreaker, you know ... I don’t talk to people if I don’t have my dog. I’m really anxious; I’m a nervous person. I don’t know—when I go into situations with new people and they say hi to my dog first, it’s like, ‘Okay, this is a normal person, this is somebody that I can relate with.’”

Currently, Nick is in school to become a community mental health worker or a drug and alcohol counselor for youth. He volunteers many hours at a needle exchange and finds it to be “one

of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had in my life.” Before he started he didn’t think he would enjoy it, but he thought he should try it because of his career goals. He feels like he gets so much out of giving back, by talking to people and listening to their stories. Most of all, Nick feels like this experience gives him perspective.

Perspective

When asked what his definition of “resilience” is, Nick exclaimed, “Perspective! Being able to put yourself in a different situation, or being able to look at it from another perspective ... I now dive into difficult situations hoping that I can change myself so that the next time I face that same situation it’s no longer difficult because, you know, I grew. Being able to recognize any situation regardless of its outcome as an opportunity to grow is, I think, big on resilience.”

Sara’s immediate response to the word “resilience” is that it is “like a rubber band—pretty much just being able to rise up from whatever you go

through.” While we are talking, Sara’s daughter is climbing all over her and Sara just keeps hugging her and smiling, even though she shares that she’s very tired. It’s been a long path to get to where she is today, often made harder because Sara is a staunch advocate for herself and her kids. Her ability to speak up for herself is one of her many strengths and Sara feels that it is worth the added difficulty. “They always say the path that looks the hardest is always the way to go. Easy come, easy go—the things you get easy, you lose easily. It’s definitely been a hard journey, but I see it finally working out.”

Sara now has several people she can call on when she wants to vent, be heard, or just get a little perspective. Her former probation officer, Amarita, is one of them. Counselors at ATC are another group of people Sara feels comfortable calling on. She’s known ATC for over 14 years, and in that time she has worked with many different counselors. “I’ve worked with everybody at ATC. It’s like a supportive network.” Sometimes she calls ATC for a boost. “If I feel less confident sometimes, I get those compliments and people notice what I’m doing and it’s a reminder that I’m doing really good.”

Sara is one of the more resilient people you will meet—and she knows it. “Everything I thought was going to break me; all of the decisions that I made that I didn’t think I was going to get myself out of—I made it through all that. ‘Resilient’ is always one of the words I use to describe myself, and I think my daughter has it too.” For our clients, being able to reflect on what they are going through and recognize their own strengths can be a building block of resilience. ATC works individually with our clients to help them find their own unique ways of creating a solid foundation for themselves. ♦

Daniel’s Take on Creativity and Resilience



Four of Daniel’s renewed and intricately painted skateboards.

Daniel, ATC client for four years, is an artist who makes one of a kind paintings on “renewed” skateboards. Using a combination of acrylic paints, paint pens, and permanent markers, he paints and draws colorful and intricate designs on the boards, which he says people can ride or keep as art.

A creative person, Daniel always liked to draw, but he never expected how important it would be for his life. After his mom died, he became depressed. Daniel described how he started drawing to calm his stress. “Every day, if I got stressed out, I would just go draw something and then I’d feel like I went to an amusement park or something. I just got addicted to it, because I liked that feeling.”

Creating art helps Daniel forge meaningful connections with people, including other artists and folks he meets when he draws outside. He says that making his artwork has made him a more confident person. It’s brought him opportunities he might not otherwise have had. Not only does his art help ease his stress, but he feels it can make the world a more connected place. “I really believe in community—people being part of a big family. You’ve got to bring goodness to people so it spreads.”

Street Soccer USA Plays Hard, Works Hard, Builds Resilience

SSUSA Gives Young People Tools to Build Community



SSUSA partners with local service agencies to run their homeless youth and adult program.

“Our practices are a learning ground for real-life situations. If you get heated or angry at a coach or a teammate at practice, it’s okay. The field is an okay place to fail.”

-Rob Cann, Chief Operating Officer, Street Soccer USA

Street Soccer USA (SSUSA), colloquially known as “Street Soccer,” is a national organization that works to bring soccer to people of all ages and backgrounds. SSUSA’s Bay Area chapter began in 2010, and the majority of their programs in San Francisco work with low-income and homeless young adults. When SSUSA was first founded, they began working with homeless adults in the shelter system. They would send coaches to MSC South, Glide, Sanctuary, and other shelters in the city and invite people to join the team.

“Our pilot program showed us the transformation and the joy that soccer could bring [to homeless youth],” says Rob Cann, Chief Operating Officer of Street Soccer USA. “Initially, it was enough to give people a little break from their struggles and provide more structure in their lives. But when we saw people supporting one another and reaching their personal goals, we thought that soccer could be used as a tool to bring communities together to realize their promise.” Seven years later, SSUSA Bay Area has expanded their programming and serves over 1,600 youth and young adults locally, through after-school programs, community clubs, and teams.

“Anyone can come to one of our trainings,” Rob describes. “After you join in on a few practices, we invite you to officially join the team. That means sitting down with one of our coaches and participating in a goal-setting session. Our coaches talk to you about where you want to go and how we can support you in that. Players can share their goals with the team, and we figure out what we can do as a team to support you in [reaching] your goals.”

Every SSUSA program has a curriculum that is specifically developed to connect soccer skills to life and job skills. The goal of the homeless youth and adult program curriculum is to promote “personal empowerment” and encourage players to become “self-determined problem solvers.” Players learn to build resilience not only through receiving support from others, but by giving support as well.

“Our practices are a learning ground for real-life situations. If you get heated or angry at a coach or a teammate at practice, it’s okay. The field is an okay place to fail. We want people to be able to fail and then still come back,” says Rob. “The skills you learn through the curriculum become a little toolbox that you have in your back pocket. So, when things do go wrong or sideways, or you’re experiencing anger or frustration, you have tools to fall back on.”

At SSUSA, program managers oversee coaches, and coaches are supported by volunteers. Volunteers are an integral part of the SSUSA community for players. “When volunteers show up to practice, it can help to shift the mental context for our players. Players see that there are people out there that support them and want to see them do well, and [someone] really cares about whether or not they reach their goals.”

Players test their soccer skills against other SSUSA teams and adult leagues in San Francisco. Street Soccer Park, nestled right outside of AT&T Park, is the first SSUSA park in the Bay Area. Each field is well-lit, is covered in high-quality turf, and serves as a hub for adult drop-in tournaments, practice space, and pick-up games. These tournaments and games are an important “testing ground to put all the things you’ve learned in practice into action,” but they’re also, frankly, fun.

People come to Street Soccer for a variety of reasons. Whether players join for the love of the game or for the fresh air, Rob describes the powerful community that people often find in their teammates. “We have a young woman who’s been in our program for four years. We met her in the shelter. We worked with her and played a small role in getting her into an SRO. Recently, she fell on hard times and had to move out. She said that it was amazing to see [her teammates] in their closed Facebook group reaching out to her, telling her that they were there for her, to keep her head up, and to keep going strong.”

The Bay Area chapter of SSUSA is growing, and their next step is to build a strong foundation of locally-based soccer clubs to provide an alternative to the pay-to-play model of youth sports. Their goal is to reach 10,000 players and to build 20 additional SSUSA parks in neighborhoods where young people currently don’t have access to fields or a safe place to play soccer.

“We want to make sure that kids from a young age are provided the opportunity to build resilience and determination, so when life gets challenging, they have a support group and the skills to deal with those situations.” ♦



Players set goals with SSUSA coaches and bring them to their teammates for support.

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Summer SunDay Hike for Homeless Youth 2017

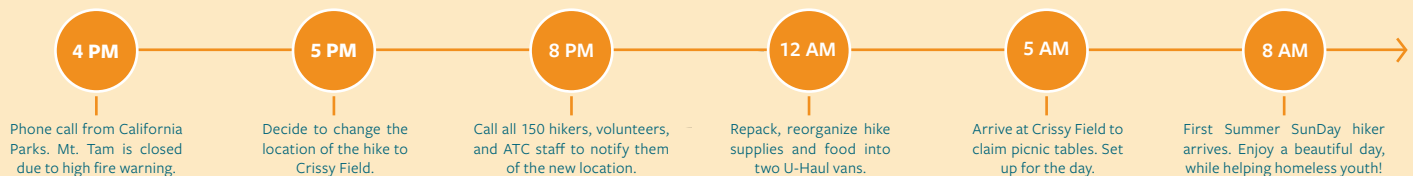
We are so grateful to all of our volunteers, donors, and fearless hikers for **raising over \$115,000** to support ATC's work with San Francisco's most disconnected homeless youth and young adults!

High fire danger closed Mount Tam the day before the Summer SunDay hike. Despite a last-minute location change to Crissy Field, the ATC community showed up in full force.

Our plans may have changed, but the goal was the same: to help homeless youth get the support they need.



Here's the full timeline of the hours leading up to our most epic Summer SunDay yet:



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