



AT THE CROSSROADS

Fall 2016: Self-Care

How do you make the space to take care of yourself when you constantly have to prioritize food and shelter? How do you start to think about your long-term care when you are only able to focus on the next 24 hours? In this newsletter, we explore how our youth develop self-care tools amidst the pressures of survival, and how those tools evolve as they move forward in life.

Finding Space to Practice Self-Care

Practicing self-care seems like a simple concept, but it's not as easy and straightforward as it sounds. The term "self-care" is used broadly, and can apply to actions both big and small. It starts with tending to our basic needs, but beyond that, self-care can take many forms. For one person, it could mean reducing stress by taking a break to watch a movie. For another, it could mean making time to go to the gym. For someone else, it could mean indulging in something special, like a gourmet meal. Self-care can be defined as anything that we do to care for our physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It's clearly important, yet it can be hard to prioritize.

Finding the time and the space for self-care is a challenge, and even more so if your life feels unstable or you're struggling to meet your basic needs. It can be extremely difficult to think beyond day-to-day survival and focus on finding happiness or cultivating long-term well-being. Self-care activities that many people take for granted, such as eating enough food or buying toothpaste to brush your teeth, are sometimes out of reach for ATC's clients. They have a unique perspective on self-care, because it's often viewed through a lens of struggle and survival. Despite these obstacles, all of our youth strive to care for themselves in ways that feel right to them.

Survival and self-sufficiency

Like many of ATC's clients, Terrell has a vision of self-care that is less about luxury and more about survival. He's not focused on treating himself to nice things – he's focused on stability. Terrell prides himself on being resourceful. He has many skills, and uses his entrepreneurial instincts to support himself. "If you ask anybody about me, they're going to tell you that I keep a million and one things going.



"I'm doing everything I can to take care of myself. I'm doing everything I can to make sure I stay afloat."

-Terrell, ATC client for 12 years

That lets me know that I'm perceived in the best light possible," he explains. "When I say 'hustle,' people can take that and turn it into a negative, but going to work is a hustle. Going to school is a hustle. Anything that you do on this earth to support yourself and the ones around you is a hustle. I've done everything under the sun besides robbing and killing people to get some money ... If you can apply some type of business to whatever you're doing, it can be considered a hustle."

ATC has known Terrell for years, and we regularly see him when we're doing street

outreach. Terrell will get some supplies and talk with us about whatever is going on in his life, but he doesn't ask for much more than that. "I consider myself to be pretty self-sufficient, so I only get the things I feel like I need. No need for me to be greedy, if I don't need it, somebody else could use it." This not only speaks to Terrell's consideration for others, but is also connected to his personal definition of self-care.

"Self-care for me is self-sufficiency," he says. "I'm not a lazy person, I'm about working and taking care of myself. I've had many times when I didn't have work, so I had to resort to my talents, and the things I've been taught, in order to survive." When Terrell can't find a job, he creates one for himself. For a while, he walked around with a suitcase full of sandwiches, chips, water, and candy to sell. He has also made custom jewelry, used his artistic talent to make banners and signs, and sold barbeque on the street. "I know what it means to not have anything, and I feel like if I have all these skills under my belt that I could use to better myself, why not do it? That's self-sufficiency to me."

Terrell has experienced what it's like to fight for food, clothing, and shelter, and describes being 19 and homeless. "I would look at people and wonder about their lives, and I would visualize myself doing as they're doing. You know, going about my day shopping and running errands – things that people who are self-sufficient and stable are doing." Unlike others who take self-care for granted, or who regard it as a means to find happiness and self-actualization, Terrell uses a different framework. For him, self-care revolves around meeting his basic needs. "I just want comfortability. I don't want to have to worry about how I'm going to pay for this, or how I'm going to put food on the table."

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Letter from the Director

Rob Gitin

Back in 2000, I was on outreach in the Mission with ATC's cofounder, Taj Mustapha, when we ran into a client named Darrell. We had only met him once before, and just in passing. This night, he was alone and not in a hurry, so we got to take the time to run through all of the supplies in our backpacks. We started with some of the basics: sandwiches, snacks, Band-Aids. He seemed happy with these, but he didn't give a strong reaction. He wasn't very chatty, and it felt as if it would be a pretty uneventful interaction.

Then, we offered him lip balm, socks, shampoo, and Q-tips. A look of surprise came over his face. "You really have all of those things?" When we told him we did, he responded, "Wow, you must really care about us." While taking these items, he opened up. He talked with us for half an hour, telling us all about how he had recently become a dad and was scared but excited, how he was sleeping in a different place every night, and how he was starting to get stressed out over his instability. We helped him think through his top priorities: getting some food in his stomach and going to see his daughter the next day.

The link between getting nice supplies that address wants – not just needs – and feeling cared about and valued, is rarely so clear. It usually occurs on a much more subconscious level. Clients come to our office, and are surprised when they get to pick out brand new clothing and browse our food pantry shelves for exactly what they want. We listen to them with respect and importance, making it clear that we care about everything they have to say. All of these things communicate the same message: we value you, and we think that you deserve good things and deserve to feel good.

This does two things: it shapes their perception of ATC, and it begins to affect their sense of self-worth. Many of our clients grew up without feeling special, without people making sure that they were well cared for and that their needs and wants were prioritized. Later on in life, when they are on the streets, they don't have the luxury of thinking about what will help them feel fulfilled or self-actualized. Self-care becomes about survival, about getting through each day alive, and causing as little harm to yourself in the process as possible.

You can't develop a strong sense of self-worth overnight. Trying to imbue our youth with the idea that they are valued and have a lot to offer themselves and others takes time and persistence. We don't cultivate it through hokey messages, Pollyanna statements about their lives, or generic aphorisms. It comes when they feel like they are known, understood, accepted, and appreciated for who they are.

Self-care is motivated by self-worth. When you think that you deserve to feel good, you are much more likely to engage in actions that help you feel that way. One of the true joys in being able to work with the same clients for nearly 20 years is getting to see them grow to value themselves, and to change the way they care for themselves. They start to focus on their mental and physical health after years of neglecting both. They discover the things in life that they like, and now have the space and the means to prioritize them. They get to do things such as take walks by the ocean, go dancing, read a book, or cook their favorite meal. And they let us know how good it feels, and we get to celebrate with them.

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

Mission Statement

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.

Our Core Values

- ❖ Prioritizing meeting the needs of our clients first
- ❖ Making services as accessible as possible
- ❖ Supporting empowerment
- ❖ Respecting individuality

What We Do: The Basics

- ❖ **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 slowly 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 support other programs** in their efforts to work with homeless youth through dialogue, trainings, and technical assistance.
 - ❖ **We work with the government at the city and state levels** to improve the continuum of support for all disconnected young people.
- "I would like to say thank you to At The Crossroads because each step of the way that has gotten me closer to stability and where I want to be, you guys have always been there."*
- Ashley, ATC client

Get Involved with At The Crossroads

Make a donation to ATC

You'll experience a sense of happiness and fulfillment that you've never known. You'll want to do it again and again! In all seriousness, the future of At The Crossroads depends on the generosity of individuals who believe in our work. If you value what we do, please support us! **Make a credit card donation at www.atthecrossroads.org, or make checks payable to "At The Crossroads."**

Join our email list

Sign up to receive emails twice a month about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, organizational updates, and ways to get involved. **Email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org with the subject heading "Join the ATC email list."**

Volunteer

Do you have free time in the morning or afternoon? Come by our office to sort clothing, put away food, prepare supplies, help with administrative needs, or pitch in on a number of tasks that help keep us going. **If you are interested in learning more, please email volunteer@atthecrossroads.org.**

Get your company involved

When companies and their employees engage in our work, it can have a huge impact. The opportunities are endless: team participation in our fundraising hike, grants, sponsorship of events, group volunteering, in-kind donations, individual and matching donations, or pro bono services. **To get your company involved, email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**



Marie, Jeff, and Julianna are three of ATC's hardworking volunteers!

Help with new clothing donations

ATC is always looking to build relationships with stores and businesses that are able to donate new clothing for our clients. In particular, we are in need of jeans, hoodies, T-shirts, and warm items. **If you can help connect us with a store or clothing manufacturer who may be able to donate these items, please email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**

Watch and share our documentary

Monica Lam's 15-minute documentary takes you onto the streets and into the world of our clients and our work. **You can find the documentary at www.atthecrossroads.org.** After you watch, share it with your community as a great way to introduce new people to ATC!

Share our newsletter

Please spread the word about ATC to people you know who might be interested in our work! If you want to send anyone our newsletter, give us their name and address and we will mail them a copy. **Email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**

How Do ATC Counselors Support Self-Care?

ATC works with a wide range of young people, and there's a broad spectrum of what self-care can look like for them. For some clients, self-care is limited to survival. For others, they are starting to figure out how to address their health and well-being. We also have clients who are self-care experts, and have developed the self-awareness that enables them to care for themselves both physically and emotionally. Wherever our clients fall within this spectrum, we tailor our services around each individual's wants and needs. Through our consistent support, we aim to empower our youth to determine what self-care means to them, and to act on it. These pieces, written by our program staff, detail how ATC's work relates to self-care in three stages: Street Outreach, Building Relationships, and Long-Term Relationships.



ATC Counselors Onyinye Alheri and Olivia Horan

Street Outreach: ATC brings our services directly to the streets, and this gives our clients an opportunity to take care of themselves that they otherwise might not have. For youth who don't have the time or the resources to tend to their own well-being, having an ATC counselor walk up to them on outreach and offer support can make a very real difference in their lives.

Eliminating the need for them

to go out of their way in order to practice self-care can have both an immediate and long-term impact on their overall wellness.

When we first begin engaging with folks on outreach, we get to know them while simultaneously providing supplies and food to meet their basic needs. These interactions support self-care in a few different ways. On one level, the supplies we provide quite literally enable our clients to address their health and well-being. When young people on the streets are forced to prioritize money, food, and shelter, having toothpaste, lip balm, or clean socks is actually a luxury. Basic self-care practices that most people take for granted are often beyond reach for youth who are living in survival mode. We make sure that our clients can do the simple things to take care of themselves that help all of us feel human.

On another level, the simple act of giving out high-quality supplies signals to our clients that we believe they deserve nice things. Offering a variety of options enables our clients to make choices, illustrating that we truly value them and want to know their opinions. Encouraging someone to be selective about getting one snack versus another may seem small, but this helps our clients develop a sense of agency, which is something that everyone deserves in life. When you give people nice things, it can help build their sense of value. This can motivate people to take the best care of themselves possible.

Going on outreach also gives us the opportunity to create space for our clients to tell us about their lives. The supplies we hand out often elicit responses that clue us in on where youth are at in terms of taking care of themselves. Something as straightforward as a person needing a Band-Aid for a cut or needing a sandwich because they're hungry can lead to more in-depth questions about how they are doing mentally, physically, and emotionally. This becomes a vehicle through which clients can safely start conversations with us about what's going on in their lives. Conversations like this are often the foundation of the trusting relationships we build with our youth.

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This initial contact marks the beginning of what will hopefully become a lasting, supportive, and consistent counseling relationship. In these moments of getting to know our clients, handing out supplies, checking in, and connecting, we aim to support youth in caring for themselves in many different ways. Simply put, when our clients have agency in their lives and a sense of self-worth, they start reflecting about wellness and the ways that they are, or would like to be, taking care of themselves. They feel empowered to think about self-care, try new things, and figure out what works for them.



ATC Program Director Shawn Garety and Counselor Demaree Miller

Building Relationships: As ATC counselors, having the privilege and the opportunity to spend time with our clients on a one-to-one basis is one of the best parts of our job. We get to set aside time in our day that is solely focused on an individual client, which allows us to give that person our undivided attention as well as highly personalized support. These one-to-one meetings are often the next step beyond our connections

on outreach, and are a critical tool for empowering youth to make time to care for themselves. Each and every client meeting is its own unique interaction.

Meeting with youth individually allows us to key in on each one of our clients, and help them bring their own needs and interests to the forefront. It's a time for them to truly focus on themselves, take a

break from their day-to-day pressures, and really reflect on their own goals. So often, our clients have to prioritize their immediate needs. Safety, food, and shelter trump any other interests or goals they may have. This daily stress builds up, and can lead to overall mental and physical fatigue. ATC strives to be a respite from the daily grind.

In the early stages of our work with clients, our individual counseling meetings serve as a break from the realities of the streets – a time for youth to just be. Unfortunately, it's often the only time in the day our clients are asked how they're doing, and the only time that they are encouraged to talk about themselves and their own well-being. For youth who are constantly living in the moment, giving them the space to process the past, take a step back from the present, and look toward the future is invaluable.

Our job is to enable our clients to think about, talk about, and vent about whatever they want. Sometimes, this results in long conversations about complicated relationships and personal goals. Other times, it can be an opportunity for a client to be reflective, to laugh, to scream, to cry, or to simply indulge in a quiet moment. Acts of self-care can be physical, mental, spiritual, material, resource-based, and more. Phone

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calls to loved ones, going to a concert, taking a trip, and making art are just a few examples of things our clients do to de-stress and to care for themselves. Abstaining from or minimizing activities that are harmful or unhealthy can also be self-care. In our one-to-one meetings, we support our clients in doing any and all of these things.

Having the option to think about your own needs and wants, and how to actualize your own dreams, is not an opportunity that is often afforded to our youth. It's our role as counselors to bear witness to the incredible strength and resilience that exist within our clients, and to empower them to create the lives they envision.



ATC Counselors Anna Fai and Irina Alexander

Long-Term Relationships: Our long-term counseling relationships last for many years, and meetings with long-term clients get really gritty and honest. The shared history we have with each other allows us to empower, encourage, and remind our clients about the ways in which they have – or have not – been able to take care of themselves.

Meeting with someone consistently lets you establish a different type of rapport. At the beginning of a relationship, it's about being heard and getting supplies. A few years down the road, things tend to shift, and clients start to reflect on past experiences, changes in their goals, and patterns in their behavior. They develop a better sense of who they are and where they want their lives to go. Building a stronger sense of self can lead to more ease, creativity, and consistency in clients' self-care practices, enabling them to learn what works best for them. One of our long-term clients knows that when things get too overwhelming, he needs to spend the day alone in

his room, blasting music, hiding away from the world. Twenty-four hours later, he's back on his feet. With experience and perspective, he has identified what his process looks like, how to communicate about it, and what he needs to do to feel better. Self-awareness is a crucial step to self-care.

Working with someone for many years also builds a lot of trust. This gives us an opportunity to ask thought-provoking questions. For instance, if we've been meeting with a client for years who is frequently in and out of jail and who says they want to break that cycle, we're able to have very real and straightforward conversations with that person. We help them identify how their goal has or has not changed, reflect on what they have shared with us over the years, and talk openly about what keeps getting in the way. This non-judgmental, unconditional support gives our clients a space to be challenged while knowing that no matter what, ATC will be there and will care about what they're going through.

For many of our clients, we serve as the only stable, healthy relationship in their lives. One of the most rewarding parts of this job is getting to watch clients take what they learn from the healthy relationship they have with ATC and apply it elsewhere – setting boundaries with family members, developing healthy friendships, and learning how to be more supportive of themselves in general. Our clients don't always have a strong sense of self-worth, so we hope that after years of working with ATC, they internalize the care we provide and learn to give themselves attention first.

We get to see our clients grow and evolve in many different ways, and this long-term perspective is truly special. ATC is a safe space where our clients can figure out how they want to build their lives, knowing that someone else believes in them. As an organization, we get to be there for the ups, the downs, and everything in between. We get to see how being heard and respected every week can help you realize that you are worthy of being cared about, and that you deserve to prioritize yourself.

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“Somebody told me, if you don’t take care of yourself first, how can you take care of others? ... So I did. I turned it onto myself and started focusing on me, and making sure I did all the things that made me happy. Because somewhere in the midst of having a lot of children, I kind of lost myself and I just didn’t matter.”

-Chazz, ATC client for 12 years

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One skill that Terrell learned when he was younger, and still does today, is to find 20 minutes a day for silence and solitude. He uses this time to process what he’s going through, and it can help him keep his focus. “Just go somewhere where it’s completely silent and you can just clear your mind. Don’t play music, just sit there. Solitude helps me clear my mind of a lot of things that are bothering me.” For Terrell, this is an important way that he practices self-care.

Building on accomplishments

For Ashley, practicing self-care is what keeps her moving forward. There’s trauma and pain in her past, and now that she has her 11-month-old son, she is determined to build a better future for the both of them. Ashley is resilient and determined, and has made some major changes over the last year or so. “When I found out I was pregnant, I was in jail. I was released from jail on September 25th, 2015 – and this is the first year as an adult that I have not gotten in trouble. I’ve made it a whole year, doing what I need to do instead of destroying my life. I’ve become so proud of what I’ve accomplished that I refuse to go back.”

Thinking about when her life was most chaotic, Ashley reveals that she went through some dark times. “When I couldn’t take care of myself, I wanted to die almost every day ... The more I accomplish the easier it gets to take care of myself, but there were hard days. I was drinking, I was getting high, I was wasting away and letting myself die over my addiction,” she recounts. “If I could go back I would change so much, but I can’t. So now, I have to change the future.”

Ashley knows that she needs to “lean on the right people for support” in order to care for herself and her son, and she gets this support from a few different places. She currently has a private room in a six-

month emergency housing program at the Compass Family Shelter, and is working on finding an apartment. She goes to another Compass program to see a therapist, and stays connected with her mom and friends back East for additional emotional support.

Ashley also credits ATC as an important source of stability and care. “Once a week we meet up with [ATC counselor] Onyinye and do our one-to-one and get our food for the week,” she explains. “All I have to do is reach out ... I can always depend on her to be there to talk to, and I need that more than the clothes and food. Without you guys and my therapist, I’d feel completely alone. And I wouldn’t wish that feeling on anyone.” For Ashley, having supportive people in her life gives her the motivation and the mental space she needs to focus on her health and well-being.

Even with support, there are times Ashley struggles to practice self-care. She has noticed a sharp contrast when this happens. “When I’m not taking care of myself, I see myself as dirty, wearing baggy clothes, not giving any care to my appearance. Whereas when I am taking care of myself, I take a shower every night. I wear clean clothes. I brush my hair instead of leaving it knotted ... There’s a very big difference. It’s like night and day.”

In addition, Ashley has mental health issues that can cause her to have days where she doesn’t “feel sane.” On those days, there are things she does to make herself feel better, such as crochet or stay at home and watch Netflix all day. “No matter what I’m feeling, I have to push through that, to at least be able to take care of my son. I’m still taking care of myself if I’m taking care of him, because he is the best part of me and that will never change.”

Learning to prioritize self-care

When we first met Chazz on the streets downtown, she was 19, pregnant, and homeless. Her life has changed a lot over the many years that ATC has known her, and she is now a mother of six. Chazz is naturally thoughtful, and shows an incredible amount of patience and positivity in the face of challenges. Taking care of her family is her number one priority, but she’s also learning what it means to take care of herself.

Self-care means “finding time to better yourself – your mental health, emotional, physical, and spiritual,” says Chazz. “It’s hard to be dedicated to finding time for myself, but when I can, I find inner peace.” With six children, there are times when Chazz’s own needs get lost in the shuffle. Finding the right balance between being a mom who is always

“I’m still taking care of myself if I’m taking care of him, because he is the best part of me and that will never change.”

-Ashley, ATC client for 8 months



paying attention to others and being a person who has her own needs is difficult, and it takes work.

“There was a time when I didn’t care for myself at all. My children were the only thing that mattered to me,” she explains. “But somebody told me, if you don’t take care of yourself first, how can you take care of others? If you’re in an airplane and the airplane is broken down, they say to put the mask on yourself first and then others, because unless you can help yourself, you can’t help everybody else. So I did. I turned it onto myself and started focusing on me, and making sure I did all the things that made me happy. Because somewhere in the midst of having a lot of children, I kind of lost myself and I just didn’t matter. But a lot of suggestions, a lot of help, a lot of people reaching out to me to let me know they cared about me was helpful,” Chazz emphasizes. “It’s a process, and I’m not quite there yet, but I’m heading in the right direction.”

Learning to prioritize herself has helped Chazz incorporate self-care into her life. Getting support when she’s stressed or overwhelmed is important. “When I need help, I call At The Crossroads. If I need someone to talk to or seek guidance from, I call,” she says. “Talking does relieve a lot of stress. It could be anger, it could be

disappointment, it could be a bad feeling – by the end of the phone call it changes my perspective on a situation.” She also builds time for self-care into her busy schedule. After her children go to bed, she tries to spend an hour or two doing things that allow her to connect with and reflect on herself. “I really like writing. It helps me express myself,” she says. “I write poetry, I write short stories, and I journal.”

In addition to her alone time, Chazz makes a point of practicing self-care as a family. “First of all, our fun is important, because it lifts our spirits and it helps with the physical and mental. We spend time going to the beach, we go to the park, and we play around,” she says. “I think that multitasking has become one of my biggest friends! Everybody gets self-care at once. Let’s go play!” Chazz appreciates that chasing after her kids helps to improve her physical health, all while teaching them the value of being active and having fun together.

Looking to the future

For Chazz, making sure to instill self-care in her children is something she strives to do every day. “I’m showing them so much about life, letting them experience things, telling them right from wrong, and trying to lead by example and lead them in the right direction.

It means so much to me to better myself and get my life fully together so that they can see it. They can then practice self-care and understand that Mommy did all of this for a reason. It will make sense to them later.”

Terrell is in school to become a barber, which is a longtime goal of his. But it’s more than just a paycheck – Terrell genuinely enjoys helping others express themselves. Being a barber will allow him to empower others to experience self-care. “You never know what their haircut may be doing for them. It’s truly art. You can change somebody’s image of themselves, and that’s the joy I take in it.” Pursuing his passion is integral to who Terrell is. “I haven’t lost sight of myself, I haven’t succumbed to my surroundings. As long as I’ve got breath in my body I can still pursue anything I want to do ... I’ve been after it for this long, I can’t give up now. That’s my motivation every day.”

For Ashley, her next big step is to find an apartment, and building a happy life for herself and her son is the top priority and the ultimate goal. According to her, self-care is “making sure that you’re healthy, you’re fit, and that all of your needs are covered. You don’t need or want anything, to where you’re happy. Happiness is the end goal. If you’re not happy, then you still have some work to do.”

How Does Incarceration Affect Self-Care?



Nobody wants to go to jail. It’s a demoralizing experience. For people living in survival mode, however, going to jail can in some ways provide respite from the chaos of the streets. When it comes to self-care, incarceration makes things complicated. While people are able to fulfill their basic needs

of food and shelter, the fact that they are deprived of everything else severely limits their self-care options.

Antoine has been working with ATC for four years, and writes to us from San Francisco County Jail. “I feel it is very important,” he writes. “When I think about self-care, I think about reducing stress, keeping sane, creating a positive out of a negative situation, finding ways to help others, staying goal-focused, utilizing my talents, and trying not to grow more gray hairs.” Antoine has a huge heart and cares deeply for others. He can make just about anyone laugh to the point of tears. He’s got an outgoing personality, but he can also be very thoughtful and introspective.

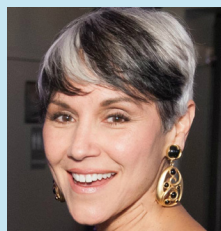
“I believe that being incarcerated improved my self-care awareness, because now I have the time to reflect on me.” Antoine has more

mental space to process his thoughts and feelings than he did when he was on the streets, but he has to be vigilant not to lose the “never-ending battle” to stay positive while locked up. “My priority is maintaining good spirits and high hopes.”

One of the primary things that Antoine does to care for his well-being is draw. He’s a talented artist and will often send us his drawings; his artwork can be found hanging on our office walls. “Drawing is a method I use to keep my mind preoccupied from the negativity in this facility. Drawing makes me feel alive and invisible at the same time. It has always been my way to escape from the harsh reality of life.” Antoine has developed a few other self-care strategies that help him escape, including yoga, meditating, writing, exercising, and “as strange as it sounds, cleaning.”

When it comes to staying focused on his goals, Antoine has enrolled in the Five Keys program to work toward getting his high school diploma. “Taking these courses in jail can be tough, yet I feel accomplished when I complete them, with a certificate attached. My education is important to me, because it will help me reach another stage in my life as a mature adult.” It’s extremely challenging to practice self-care when you’re cut off from the people, places, and activities that bring you happiness, but Antoine is determined to make working on himself a priority.

Taking Showers and Self-Care to the Streets



“One thing that is really, intensely apparent to me is that if you’re struggling to get clean, you lose that connection with your sense of self. Your sense of dignity and humanity starts to erode.”

—Doniece Sandoval, CEO of Lava Mae

“Imagine if you couldn’t shower when you needed or wanted to. What if it was even weeks between the times that you could? What would that feel like? Just think about it. Really think about it.” Doniece Sandoval, founder and CEO of the San Francisco nonprofit Lava Mae, has spent a lot of time thinking about showers. Taking a shower is one of the most basic things that people do to take care of themselves – but it’s about more than just getting clean. A shower can be rejuvenating, can create a sense of comfort, and can make you feel good about yourself. So what happens when you don’t have access to a shower? What happens when hygiene is beyond reach?

Connecting hygiene, dignity, and opportunity

“Self-care is something that’s really hard for most of us,” Doniece says. “It’s really about taking that time to do what you need to do to keep your resilience up and to refresh yourself, so that you can face life with a little bit more grit.” When people don’t have the means to care for themselves on a basic level, however, the consequences can be devastating. “One thing that is really, intensely apparent to me is that if you’re struggling to get clean, you lose that connection with your sense of self. Your sense of dignity and humanity starts to erode,” she explains. “What does that mean for you, and how you feel about yourself? What does that mean for how other people perceive you and treat you? ... I started Lava Mae because of this belief that hygiene could rekindle dignity, and with dignity you could tap into opportunity, and overcome obstacles.”

Inspired by the mobile food truck movement and driven by the desire to do something meaningful around the issue of homelessness, Doniece created Lava Mae to bring showers and toilets directly to the people who need them. “It’s about taking care of people where they are, which is on the streets. When I read about MUNI decommissioning old buses, all the bells just went off in my head.” By transforming these buses into mobile bathrooms (Lava Mae now operates two buses and a commercial shower trailer), Lava Mae has provided 14,000 showers to 2,400 people since beginning services in 2014.

While critics might say that showers aren’t that important – that they are simply a bandage on a big problem – Doniece passionately disagrees. Struggling with hygiene can take a serious toll on a person’s well-being, making it hard for them to feel motivated and worthy of



..... Learn more about Lava Mae’s mobile bathrooms at www.lavamae.org.

pursuing their goals. “If you don’t have your sense of dignity, if you don’t feel like yourself, how do you mount what’s necessary to get yourself out of homelessness? ... To people who say it’s just a Band-Aid, I say it’s a critical building block. It’s one of the things you have to start with before you can continue to move forward,” she emphasizes. “Does it end homelessness by itself? No ... It’s more about rebuilding and reconnecting with your sense of self-worth and dignity.”

Delivering clean and well-stocked bathrooms to people who don’t normally have that access creates space for self-care on the streets. From what Lava Mae has seen, it’s a powerful thing. “One person goes on the bus and showers, and a completely different person comes out. It’s like whatever they were carrying with them, the shower washed it away and they come out so much lighter, so much more connected with who they are. It’s a beautiful thing to witness.” For Doniece, the most humbling aspect of this work is how deeply grateful people are for Lava Mae’s services. There’s an enormous need for these services, but there shouldn’t be – access to personal hygiene, showers, and toilets “should just be a basic human right.”

Going beyond the basics, Lava Mae strives to make the entire experience as positive as possible. In order to empower others to take care of themselves, they need to be treated with the care and the respect they deserve. “While the service is really important, the way we deliver it is even more important. It’s the idea of really seeing people as human beings, and creating that human-to-human connection. Knowing and calling them by name. If we see someone more than once, understanding their story and being part of a community for them.” Lava Mae’s goal is to create a sense of true welcoming. “Our new mission is taking ‘radical hospitality’ to the streets, and defining radical hospitality as an unexpected level of care.”

Self-care as a guiding philosophy

Doniece is well aware that the issue of self-care also affects her and her colleagues. “The perception of people in the nonprofit world is that we’re so driven by passion that we’ll take less money, take less time off. That we’ll need less of everything,” she says. “There’s this perception that you’re doing social good, so you should really sacrifice yourself for the cause.” It can be challenging to resist the urge to work 60 hours a week, because there’s always more work to do. Staff burnout is a real problem, however, and Doniece feels that it’s important to fight this by implementing more vacation time and encouraging her colleagues to take good care of themselves.

With plans to grow in the coming years, Lava Mae is poised to bring their self-care ideas to many more. They are preparing to expand to new cities, as well as help others replicate their services around the world. They are also developing their Pop-Up Care Village concept, partnering with other organizations to offer a range of services all in one place. Through this innovative program, Lava Mae is excited to bring more options for self-care to the streets of San Francisco.

Summer SunDay Hike for Homeless Youth 2016



The sun was out in full force this year, but that didn't stop us from having a wonderful event!

Thank you to all of our volunteers, donors, and fearless hikers for raising over \$125,000 to support ATC's work with homeless youth and young adults!



We'd like to say a special thank you to our DukeEngage intern, **Claire Chen**! Her hard work, coordination skills, and dedication to the job were

absolutely critical to the Hike's success. Claire is fantastic, and we were truly lucky to have her!

The Summer SunDay Hike would not have been possible without our amazing and generous sponsors!

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Welcome to ATC's New Staff Member!



Tara Hickey, Administrative Assistant

Tara was born and raised in foggy San Francisco, and went to school in Portland, OR to study International Affairs and Political Economy. When she stumbled across the opportunity to work for ATC, she took it as a sign that it was time to move back to the Bay. Tara joined our staff in June, and was quickly thrown into the craziness of ATC's first-ever office move. She not only helped everyone make it over in one piece – she also handled the chaos like a pro. For that, we are forever grateful! In her free time, Tara likes to experiment with new recipes (she makes a mean brownie) and wants to learn another (yes, another) dialect of Arabic. She's pretty great, and we're excited to welcome her!

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Farewell 333 Valencia Street!



After spending 18 years at 333 Valencia Street, At The Crossroads has moved. It's a bittersweet time for our organization – ATC is growing, and moving offices feels like a big step toward a bright new future. 333 Valencia was cluttered and cramped. The furniture never matched, the walls were peeling and scuffed, and our staff outgrew the space years ago. The office was undoubtedly flawed – but it was our home. It was a safe and welcoming place for clients, staff, and volunteers alike. It was a source of stability and comfort for young people who were constantly surrounded by chaos. A lot of good work with over a thousand homeless youth happened within those walls. It's a history that we're proud of, and will never forget. Here are a few memories of 333 Valencia from current and former ATC staff members.

Ivan Alomar, 2005-2016

Back in 2006, it was my second year as an Outreach Counselor, and I was still learning about how our method of working with clients had an impact on their lives. I met a young woman on outreach, and she stood out to me because she looked so young. She dressed well and spoke articulately, and I remember thinking that she seemed sweet, innocent, and full of life.

About six months later, this young woman was homeless, dressed in rags, strung out on drugs, and assaulted almost daily. I felt like I was watching the streets steal the life out of someone right before my eyes. It's hard to say this, but every night that I saw her, I thought it might be the last time I would see her alive.

One Wednesday (a non-outreach night for us), I was getting ready to go home when the doorbell rang. It was this client, and she was dazed, confused, and in desperate need of immediate support. In that instant, I knew my day was about to get longer, and that this was why ATC existed. We went into the clothing room and talked for over an hour. That room, stuffed to the brim with shelves of clothing, became a safe space. A space where she could talk and truly be heard. From then on, for well over a year, that's how it worked. She would show up at the office unexpectedly, and we would meet.

That first meeting was the start to a relationship that lasted for years. It was a privilege to be her long-term counselor, and it became one of the defining client relationships of my tenure at ATC. I'll end with this. This client slowly changed her life around. She got off the streets, off drugs, and became a wonderful mother to a beautiful baby girl. By the end of my time with ATC, this woman was a community advocate, and I was so proud to call her a colleague. For me, it all started on a random Wednesday with a meeting in the clothing room. It ended as a special relationship and a profound lesson on the power of unconditional support in helping to transform lives.

Rob Gitin, 1997-Present

I will never forget the day that longtime staff member Ivan was meeting with a client and her three sons. They were in our prep room, surrounded by cabinets and cardboard boxes of food. Ivan started pounding a beat on the table, and the three kids, ranging in age from ten to four, began freestyling lyrics about ATC. They rapped about getting fruit snacks and knapsacks. When it was the youngest's turn, he yelled the sounds, "Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah!" His brothers joined in, chanting, "Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, At The Crossroads!" There was a lot of joy in that room.

Kristina Shimokawa, 2008-2012

I'll always remember two very distinct sounds: the doorbell and the phones. When the doorbell and the phones rang, I would emotionally prepare myself to be there for whoever was on the other end; to receive them with unconditional regard to their experiences. Those sounds were cues that reminded me to show up for others and be a part of their life transitions.

Lori Norcia, 2001-2006

333 Valencia wasn't just an office. It was a place where our clients felt safe. Sure, they felt physically safe off of the streets, but it was more than that. Our office offered a place where clients weren't judged. They were just individuals, trying to overcome challenges. In particular, I remember a time when a client came to our office, and almost immediately her demeanor changed. She went from being confident to soft-spoken and tearful. We talked for a while, and ended up going outside. The second we stepped outside the building, her whole stature changed. She threw her shoulders back, her tears dried, and she took on her old persona. It was a drastic change, and it reminded me that our office was a haven where clients could let their guard down, even for a brief moment, to remember who they really are and who they want to be.

18 YEARS OF AT THE CROSSROADS AT 333 VALENCIA

1997: Rob Gitin and Taj Mustapha receive Echoing Green fellowships to start a program for underserved homeless youth, and At The Crossroads is born. They start walking the streets of different neighborhoods in SF, talking with youth about the kinds of services they wanted and needed.



1998-2001: Rob and Taj begin doing street outreach and meeting with clients one-to-one. ATC moves into its first office, a small room at 333 Valencia! We hire our first staff, increase outreach, and expand into two rooms.



2001-2004: We begin to regularly see significant changes in the lives of our long-term clients. ATC moves into a larger space with separate meeting, clothing, and food rooms. This new office becomes a safe, stable meeting space for our youth.

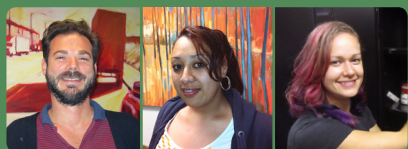
2008-2012: The economy crashes and ATC loses funding. We make the hard decision to cut staff, hours, and salaries. These challenges are met with flexibility and perseverance, and we never compromise the quality of our work. In 2010, ATC receives our 501(c)(3) status. In 2012, we fully restore these cuts.



2006-2008: Demand for our services steadily increases, and we hire more counselors who stay for many years. We see more and more Black youth on the streets, and do a lot of learning around how to best meet their needs.



2004-2006: ATC continues growing, and hires a few people who become core, long-term staff. It's a period of stability, and the quality and consistency of our work gets stronger.



2012-2014: ATC has its next generation of core, long-term counselors, and we're meeting with more clients than ever before. Even with a solid combination of program and administrative staff, we don't have enough capacity.



2014-2016: We launch two new initiatives to better serve our most disconnected clients. ATC enters a growth phase to expand our capacity and meet the soaring demand for our support.



2016: After 18 crazy, inspiring, wonderful years, ATC leaves 333 Valencia and moves to our interim space at 38 Mason Street. We start building our future office at 167 Jessie Street, which will be a home for our clients, staff, and community for decades to come!