



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2014: Food

San Francisco is the home of “foodie” culture, where food is a source of creativity, delight, and even obsession. It is elevated from a basic need to an art form. Food plays an equally prevalent role in our clients’ lives, but for different reasons. Our clients have very complicated relationships with food – sometimes they take extreme measures just to get it, while other times they forsake it to prioritize other needs. Food can feel like a comfort, a luxury, or a burden. In this newsletter, At The Crossroads explores our clients’ complex relationships with food, and the role that food plays in our work.

ATC’s Clients Reflect on Their Relationships with Food

At the most basic level, food keeps us alive. Our minds and bodies need the fuel that food provides in order to function properly. And while this will always be true, food has become much more than simple sustenance. It’s a source of comfort, a way for us to try new and exciting things, and a vehicle for keeping connected with friends and family.

In San Francisco, food is everywhere. For most of At The Crossroads’ clients, however, they are on the outside of this culture looking in. Their relationship with food is much more complicated than deciding which restaurant to go to for dinner – they may not know when their next meal is coming. Their living situation can affect access to food, ability to cook, food storage options, nutrition, and more. Limited opportunities can make it difficult to get enough to eat, let alone maintain a healthy and balanced diet. This can create a complex and challenging relationship with food.

Everybody’s got to eat

Tony has been working with ATC for about two years. He is a passionate, resourceful, and self-sufficient person, and when you ask him how he is doing, he usually responds with a friendly “I can’t complain!” Right now, Tony and a few friends camp in Golden Gate Park. Living outdoors creates its own set of obstacles when it comes to food. Without a refrigerator or a safe place to keep belongings, it can be hard to store extra food. Without a kitchen, it’s a challenge to prepare and cook meals. But, as he says, “Food is food, you know? We all need to eat somewhere, somehow.”

For Tony, staying outdoors means that his access to food can change from day to day. Sometimes he’ll have more food than he can



“Is it a luxury that I don’t want plain steamed white rice every day? Or I don’t want to feed my daughter Top Ramen every day?”

-Julia, ATC client for 10 years

eat, and will share with his friends. Other times, he’ll struggle to find a meal. “There have been times where I haven’t had enough food, so I either had to go boost it from the stores, or go to some of the places where they give out free food – Larkin Street, At The Crossroads, St. Anthony’s, you know. But when you guys are closed and there ain’t nothing to eat, my only other choice is to go boost it from stores, which I really don’t like doing.”

Even when there is plenty of food to go around, Tony’s living situation will often prevent him from eating nutritious meals. Because he doesn’t always have a way to cook, he ends up eating a lot of packaged food. “It’s either just junk food or food with a lot of preservatives in it, for the present moment.” Tony wishes he could eat healthy food, but knows that eating junk food is better than nothing at all. “Eating healthier would be better. But you know, like I said before, food is food. Another meal in the stomach.”

Julia, who first met ATC about ten years ago, currently lives in her own apartment. We have worked with Julia through different phases in her life, and have seen her persevere through challenges with amazing strength and focus. She reflects on how her relationship with food has changed throughout her life, explaining, “Food hasn’t always been important. I was a very timid eater as a kid, and we didn’t have a lot of money ... so I was never a real comfortable eater.” When she was on the streets, Julia says that she didn’t eat much at all. “I remember I was really underweight. When you’re looking for housing and places to sleep, those are usually the first things on your mind.” These days, Julia spends a lot more time thinking about food, focusing on making meals that address all the food groups. “I have a child now, so it’s become a lot more important.”

Although she has transitioned off of the streets, having an apartment presents different challenges for her when it comes to feeding herself and her daughter. In the past few months, Julia started paying her own rent without assistance for the first time. While it is certainly an accomplishment for her to have

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Letter from the Director

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For the past 14 years, I've been volunteering at a fruit stand for a farm called K&J Orchards at the Ferry Building Farmers Market, aka Foodie Ground Zero. I give out samples of the best peaches, Asian pears, and cherries that anyone could ever ask for. People come from all around the world to visit this market; it has become one of San Francisco's biggest tourist destinations. And for the locals who come every week, they bring a love of food that is palpable. At the market, food is a source of unabashed joy.

And then there is the world of ATC. I remember the first time I saw someone I cared about digging through trash for food. I'd been working with a client named Javier for a couple of years, and he was someone I was very close to. I was meeting with Javier on a street corner in the Tenderloin, and I got there a couple of minutes early. Javier was rummaging through a trash can, and I figured he was probably collecting cans to make a little money.

I called Javier's name, and he turned around with a relieved look on his face. He asked, "Can we go eat right away?" He then said that he was glad he could stop looking for food. I asked him why he was looking through the trash for food when he knew I was coming to buy him lunch, and he told me that he hadn't eaten in more than 24 hours, and couldn't wait any longer. He'd been holding out all morning, excited to have me buy him a bowl of pozole, his favorite dish, but his hunger had started to get the best of him.

I see our clients do a lot of difficult things, but when I glimpse them sifting through trash in hopes of finding a bite to eat, it always breaks my heart a little bit. It's of some solace that if we happen to see them on outreach or before a 1-to-1 meeting while they are "dumpster diving," as clients call it, they know they can stop, because we always have food to give them or buy for them. I'm glad we can make things better. But it doesn't change the fact that it's reprehensible that anyone in our country has to dig through trash to eat.

Buying a meal for our youth is a treat for our staff. Clients are generally incredibly appreciative, and do not take their food for granted. I think of watching Rebecca at the salad bar, carefully deliberating over which vegetables to include, deciding whether to get a sixth olive or a couple more croutons, thinking about how to maximize the food budget we could spend on her. I think of Will, who would take about an hour to eat a slice of mushroom pizza, savoring every bite, always pausing his story-telling when it came time to take another bite so he could fully enjoy it. They savor their meals with us, uncertain of when the next one will come.

Back at the market, I see literally tons of food thrown out every Saturday. People fill up on free samples, and by the time they are halfway done with the meal they finally purchase, they are too full to eat another bite and toss their food. **I want to ask something of every reader.** The next time you are at a restaurant and you have a third of a steak left or more than a couple of leftover fries, get it wrapped up. Hand it to someone on the street who looks hungry, or set it on top of a nearby newsstand. Don't worry that you will insult someone by giving him or her something that is half eaten. Let them know that it is half eaten, and they can decide whether or not they want it. You may save them from having to dig through trash. You may even bring them a little joy.

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.

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 four nights a week in two neighborhoods of San Francisco: Downtown/Tenderloin and the Mission. We hand out basic necessities like food, socks, and hygiene supplies, and slowly build counseling relationships.
 - ❖ We work with young people whom others have given up on, who would not get help 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 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 services 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 city government to improve the continuum of support for all disconnected youth in San Francisco.
- "At The Crossroads lets me know that I am not alone, that I don't have to be by myself; I don't have to feel like I can't do anything."*
- Marlon, 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 afternoon or evening? Come by our office to sort clothing, put away food, help with administrative needs, or pitch in on a number of tasks that keep us going. **If you're interested in learning more, let us know and send us an email at getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**

Collect unused gift cards

Everyone has a gift card (or 20) that is sitting around the house, and ATC can put it to good use by giving it to our clients or buying items we need. In case you didn't know, most gift cards in California don't expire. To make it easy, we have an email template you can use to ask friends if they also have gift cards to donate. **Email us at getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**



Libby, Maggie, and Bruce are three of our wonderful weekly volunteers

Help with in-kind donations

ATC is always looking for new connections for getting donations of new clothing or supplies that we distribute to our clients. We are especially in need of all jeans, men's clothing of all sizes, and plus size women's clothing. **If you think you can help connect us with a store or clothing manufacturer who may be able to donate these items, please email inkinds@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, email us their name and address and we'll mail them a copy. **Email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**

Staff Perspectives: the Culture of Food at ATC

“Food is just one of the most powerful things. Whether it’s taking them from being hungry to being full, from being cold to being warm, or from feeling tired to feeling more energetic – food has the power to do those things.”

-Ivan Alomar, ATC Community Resource Coordinator

Giving our clients the respect, the attention, and the care that they deserve is essential to what we do. ATC places a high value on recognizing the individuality of our youth; we strive to get to know all of our clients for the unique people that they are. This philosophy is expressed in all aspects of our organization’s work, including the ways in which we provide our youth with food. “I think that food plays a part in everything that we do here,” says Shawn Garety, ATC’s Program Manager. “Food is a huge part of us being able to support someone,” and often serves as “a starting point for us in building a relationship.”

Building relationships through food

ATC gets food into the hands of our clients every day. When we do street outreach, our backpacks are bulging with granola bars, snacks, donated Ike’s sandwiches, and candy packs to give to youth on the streets. Through our 1-to-1 meetings and afternoon Office Hours, we distribute about 100 food boxes per week. When clients meet with us, a counselor can take them out for a meal or buy them groceries. Helping our youth meet this basic need is undoubtedly important, but we know that our services around food can mean much more to them than just some food in the stomach.

ATC meets all of our clients through street outreach. Most of the time, that means that a person’s first interaction with us involves food. Regardless of whether or not they accept a candy pack or eat one of our sandwiches, youth on the streets come to know us as the people who pass out supplies four nights a week. Ivan Alomar, ATC’s Community Resource Coordinator, explains that having food on outreach “satisfies an immediate need for people.” Once that need is taken care of, it opens up the possibility of being able to think about other things. “Food allows hunger not to be a barrier to what we’re trying to accomplish on outreach,” and makes it easier to engage young people in conversation, to build trust, and to start providing the support they need to move forward.

In addition to helping us make initial connections with youth on the streets, food becomes an invaluable tool for us in strengthening our relationships with clients. When our youth come to the office to pick up a food box, we don’t simply hand them a generic bag of food – we offer them a variety of options, and ask them to tell us what they want. “There’s this notion that ‘beggars can’t be choosers,’” explains Joey Hess, ATC Counselor. “Our clients sometimes will come into our office and will be like, ‘Whatever you guys want to give me.’ But



Ivan meets with his longtime client Maxine and her kids in ATC’s food room

we’re able to say, ‘No, you get to pick. Be picky! You absolutely get to have that right, and you get to choose.’” For us, giving our clients choices not only communicates care, but also lets them know that their opinions matter. As ATC Counselor Irina Alexander says, it’s “a really good chance for them to feel empowered.”

Deepening connections

When it comes to food, paying attention to each individual person’s needs and preferences helps us get to know our clients on a deeper level. According to Anna Fai, an ATC Counselor, “You get to know them through food. This person hates macaroni and cheese, this person is allergic to peanuts, this person is a vegetarian, and that’s part of who they are. An important part of your relationship is getting to know those little details about them.” This thoughtfulness isn’t just for the benefit of our counselors and their ability to build relationships – it has an impact on our clients, as well. “It just makes them feel known,” says Joey, “and I think there’s power in that.” Irina agrees, emphasizing, “People really realize we’re looking out for them as individual human beings, and not just another number on a list.”

Sitting down at a restaurant and buying a client a bite to eat takes this idea even further, and sets a different tone from a typical meeting with a service provider. “It levels the playing field,” says Shawn. “You’re at the same table, you’re on the same level, and the focus is on the moment. That’s very different than sitting across a desk from somebody, or somebody standing in line for something. I think that allows for there to be a kind of trust built.”

April Garcia, an ATC Counselor, finds that the act of simply walking to a restaurant with a client can be a great opportunity to check in. “The second we hit the street and start walking, it’s like all of a sudden all these things start coming out. Because it’s not really direct. We’re walking somewhere and it’s this casual way of having a conversation, which makes it more comfortable for some people.” Ivan adds that going to a public place creates a more relaxed dynamic; an office environment may feel too formal for some clients, and meeting on “neutral turf” can help our counselors and youth “communicate and talk on a real human level.”

Recently, ATC Counselor Lauren Johnson celebrated a client’s birthday, and they were able to share a special meal to celebrate the occasion. “We went to a diner and she was able to order all of this food – a steak, all of these sides, and coffee and dessert.” Because this wasn’t a typical 1-to-1 meeting, “it totally changed the counseling

dynamic,” says Lauren. Before, they would only exchange a few words during their meetings. Once they were sitting down over a meal, however, “it opened up all of this space to talk about really important things in a super relaxed way. It just felt so normal, and it felt really special to be able to share that with someone.”

The role food plays in counseling clients

For the staff at ATC, thinking about the relationship that a client has with food is often a critical piece of being an effective counselor. Ivan knows that how long it has been since someone has eaten, as well as the kinds of food that someone eats, can play a huge role in that person’s state of being. “When you know that we work with a population of people who aren’t able to eat really good quality food on a consistent basis, we have to be conscious of how that plays out in their behavior. How that plays out in their mental health. How that plays out in the space that they’re in when they’re in front of us.”



“We’re able to say, ‘No, you get to pick. Be picky! You absolutely get to have that right, and you get to choose.’”

-Joey Hess, ATC Counselor

Anna meets with some of her clients on a weekly basis. For these clients, knowing that they will always be able to get food from her adds some stability to their lives. “They know if they don’t get any food from anyplace else this week, if they come see me at this time on this day, they’re going to get hot food and a food box.” Anna believes that this type of support is really important, considering that

“everything is so inconsistent from day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute.” Lauren adds that the consistency that ATC provides can sometimes be the key to making a breakthrough in a relationship with a client. “It really does make a difference, and people do open up. It takes years and years sometimes, but they do. And it’s amazing.”

Changing the way we think about food

Shawn says that the way she thinks about food has definitely changed over her years with ATC. “Your experiences really shape your relationship with food, whether you have access to food regularly or not.” Working with our clients can put things in a different perspective. “I feel very grateful ... I feel like I will never complain about my access to food. Being hungry on the level that I might feel is nothing in comparison to what other people go through.” Ivan has also become much more aware of his privilege around food, especially when it comes to feeding his family. “The fact that I get to give healthy food to my kids on a regular basis has made me more conscious ... working here, I know there are people that can’t do that.”

Joey says that being a counselor has helped him recognize what he has, and appreciate his own access to food. “That’s not why I’m doing this work, but it’s just a byproduct of this, you know? Realizing how important food is for people and just appreciating that and taking that in.” In addition, ATC counselors explain that this work has helped them understand how important food can be – it can mean emotional comfort, can create individuality, can empower someone, and can help someone feel connected to the people around them.

Because life on the streets is often characterized by chaos and instability, many of our youth think about food in terms of survival. “For some of our clients,” says Ivan, “food is a luxury. You have to learn to survive without food, and take advantage of the opportunities when you can get food.” ATC understands that providing groceries and hot meals can play a huge role in our clients’ ability to feed themselves – but it goes beyond just that. “It’s more than just staying alive,” says Irina. Food becomes a vehicle for building trust, for providing a sense of comfort, and for making our clients feel special.

What’s in an ATC Food Box?



Every week, 100 clients get a full food box which has more than \$60 worth of food. A typical food box may include:

- ♦ 4 drinks
- ♦ 2 cans of meat soup
- ♦ 2 cans of veggie soup
- ♦ 2 cans of tuna/meat
- ♦ 1 can of chili
- ♦ 1 can of pasta/ravioli
- ♦ 1 can of fruit
- ♦ 1 can of veggies
- ♦ 1 box of cereal
- ♦ 4 packets of oatmeal
- ♦ 1 rice & 1 dry pasta & sauce
- ♦ 1 box of mac & cheese
- ♦ 2 packets of ramen
- ♦ 4 bags of sweet snacks
- ♦ 1 big sweet snack item
- ♦ 4 bags of salty snacks
- ♦ 1 big salty snack item
- ♦ Breads & baked goods
- ♦ Donated prepared food from Food Runners

The Seven Dollar Stretch



ATC counselors can spend seven dollars plus tax on food for a client. Some youth get the same thing every time, while others try new things or satisfy cravings. For our client Ron, the way he chooses to spend those dollars reflects the amazing progress he has made. Eight years ago he was living in survival mode, struggled to make ends meet, and relied heavily on ATC’s food. Now, he works full time and has built a happier and more stable life. These days when he meets with us, he uses it as an opportunity to splurge, spending some of his own money along with ATC’s to treat himself to a nice meal.



“Food is food, you know? We all need to eat somewhere, somehow.”

-Tony, ATC client for 2 years

worked towards independence, it's not easy to afford to eat well when she's juggling work, taking care of her adorable two-year old daughter, and paying the bills. “I don't want to be negative, [but] is it a luxury that I don't want plain steamed white rice every day? Or I don't want to feed my daughter Top Ramen every day? I try not to be too negative about it, but it is tough.”

Recently, the loss of her public benefits has had a frustrating impact on Julia's access to food. She works seven days a week at a minimum wage job so that she can afford rent, but her job pays her just enough so that she doesn't qualify for public assistance. She used to get help from food stamps and WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), but now, she's on her own. For Julia, this transition was abrupt – shortly after she secured a full-time job, the government shut down. She was supposed to get six months of transitional food stamps, but they cut off at three months due to lack of funding. At the same time, WIC was experiencing similar cutbacks. “That's when I came to ATC and I said, ‘Hey, I'm about to feel this. This is about to be a shift in my income, and I'm scared because I don't know how I'm gonna feed my kid.’”

Learning to cook

John learned how to take care of himself at a young age. When he was 16, an older cousin told him something that has stuck with him ever since: “If you don't work, you don't eat.” John started working in food service when he was a teen, getting a job at a small deli. His work ethic came in handy a few years later when he was kicked out of the house the day after high school. For John, who has been an ATC client for about a year, working in food service hasn't just been a job – it's been a source of food for himself and his family. In his words, “I could work at a sneaker store and get discounts on sneakers, and that's all gravy, but that's not feeding my stomach.”

When John moved to San Francisco, he started to think more seriously about getting trained in cooking so that he could support himself. He entered the CHEFS Program (Conquering Homelessness through Employment in Food Services) to get the education and experience he needed. The program not only helped him land work in restaurants and in food service, but also gave him a passion for cooking. “That's how I feel about the kitchen. It's like it's not a job to me no more ... you know what I mean? You find what's fulfilling out of that.”

John lives in supportive housing, so he has a kitchen to cook in. “Before I even buy food sometimes, or if I'm in a grocery store, I'll get the seasonings before I get the food. Because it's like, the seasoning makes the food – especially the meat. When I make it at home, I make it for real.” He enjoys using his culinary skills, and figuring out what he can put together to make a meal. He especially likes baking, and says, “Anything that you can name, I'll bake it.”

Alicia, who has been an ATC client for the past year, lost her housing in November. Because she is pregnant, she and her boyfriend were able to get into a family shelter until she reaches eight months and can qualify for new housing. Being pregnant and staying at a shelter has definitely had an impact on how Alicia thinks about food. Her shelter provides two meals a day, but that's not always enough. “You'll be really hungry if that's all you eat ... it's not inedible or nothing ... [but] it always tastes like it came from a stew, you know what I mean?” She misses cooking her own food, and can't wait until she gets her own place and can eat “real food” again.

Like John, Alicia is trained in cooking; she got into culinary school soon after moving to the Bay Area. Working in food service has not only provided her with an income, but has also taught her the skills to keep

herself well fed. Even when she was living in an SRO without a kitchen, she found a way to cook. “I went to Walgreens and got one of those stoves, those little green ones, and I would be cooking in my room every day. Like hella fresh stuff. I had pots and pans ... I had fun cooking.” When Alicia starts to talk about food, her face lights up. She'll talk about experimenting with recipes, learning how to use spices, and encouraging her boyfriend to try different cuisines instead of eating junk food. She truly appreciates food, and it shows.

In addition to the two meals a day she gets from her shelter, Alicia will try to find food from other programs or places. Food stamps give her the opportunity to buy extra food, but that money – \$189 – doesn't last the whole month. Alicia can't really use WIC's services right now, because she has no access to a refrigerator – WIC offers a lot of perishable items like milk, eggs, and cheese. “I'd love to keep getting WIC because it would be great, but I have nowhere to put that stuff and it's just going to go bad. I'm not going to be able to use it, so what's the point?”

Dealing with hunger

For many people, “hunger” is what they feel when it's been a few hours since their last meal. It's a signal that it's time to eat again; time to stand in front of the fridge and figure out what to make for dinner. Time to grab a snack from the pantry. Time to pick up the phone and call the nearest pizza place.

In sharp contrast, for youth on the streets, “hunger” can have an entirely different meaning. The instability that comes with being homeless throws everything into question, including a person's ability to obtain food. For some of ATC's clients, this reality is compounded by the fact that they may need to prioritize other things over finding enough to eat.



John supports himself by working with food

"Sometimes in life you do have to put things over food to get back on your own two feet," explains Tony. Whether he's spending his day applying for housing, going to school, or looking for employment, Tony will sometimes sacrifice finding food in favor of taking steps to build a better future. "Anything to where I can actually, ultimately, end up buying my own food." Experiencing hunger, however, makes it difficult to focus on anything else. "When you're hungry, your mind starts to give out on you ... you'll be thinking one thing, but doing something else."

There have been times when Alicia hasn't had enough food. She knows what it feels like to have a stomach that's been empty for days. "It's awful ... you'll be really hungry, and then really, really hungry, and then get to the point where you feel like you're going to be sick, then all of a sudden you're just not hungry anymore." For ATC's clients, being in unstable living situations forces them to find resourceful ways to take care of themselves. "Honestly, I wasn't about to let myself starve. Even before I found places that do free food ... I wasn't going to starve. I'd get food to me."

When Julia was homeless, she couldn't always use the food she had to feed herself. Like many youth on the streets, she would trade her food for necessities like clothing or a place to sleep. "I would come to ATC and I would get food, and I would use it as rent to stay inside somewhere." When the food she brought ran out, however, Julia would be back out on the street. Although she now lives in her own apartment, Julia's challenges with food are not over. Food is expensive, and for those without a lot of money, that cost can be overwhelming.

Finding food

Hunger is a powerful force, and it's exhausting. It takes its toll on the body and the mind, making it even harder for people who are already struggling to meet their basic needs. On the other hand, hunger can be a strong motivator. Even during the toughest of times, our youth will figure out a way to find the food they need to survive.

In San Francisco, there are a number of organizations and programs that are addressing hunger. Some of these places do this by serving hot meals, and others aim to increase access by providing free or discounted food. Alicia has eaten hot meals at a couple of different organizations, but doesn't really like the food or the atmosphere.

She doesn't always feel safe in those environments, but will go if she is "really down and out." John has also used some free food programs, but says that they can make him feel like he is just "a number in a line."



"You'll be really hungry, then really, really hungry, and then get to the point where you feel like you're going to be sick, then all of a sudden you're just not hungry anymore."

-Alicia, ATC client for 1 year

According to John, one of the reasons why he likes At The Crossroads is the way that he is treated here. He appreciates that we get to know our clients as individuals. "You're taking heed to everybody's personality. What they really like. What their interests are." Julia also likes how this idea translates into the food she receives from ATC. When she comes to the office for groceries, she gets to choose which items she wants to take home. "Just because I'm poor, it doesn't mean that I just get what's left on the table. I do have a choice, and it helps me keep a little bit of my dignity." Alicia enjoys visiting ATC's food room. "It's fun, because it feels like you're grocery shopping. All the choices and options ... for some reason, it makes you feel like a kid in a candy store. It's like, 'Really? I get to choose stuff?'"

Getting a couple of bags filled to the brim with food is a major reason why Tony comes to ATC. He also really values having options. Since he often shares food with his friends, he avoids foods that any of his friends are allergic to or don't like. For him, being able to take groceries back to his camp is really important. "You guys are the only place where I can actually pick up a food box and bring it back." John agrees, and says, "[ATC] let[s] you go out and have a week's worth of food, which is like – I don't know anybody else who does that. For real."

In addition to accessing ATC for groceries, many of our youth schedule 1-to-1 meetings with a counselor. During these meetings, a counselor can take a client to get food from a restaurant of their choice. Julia has been grabbing a bite to eat with ATC counselors for years, and recalls how meaningful the "real human contact" was for her – especially when she was transitioning off of the streets. Taking care of that basic need would help alleviate some of her anxiety and stress. For her, it was so much more than just food. It was comfort, and it was care.

John remembers the first time he got a meal with a counselor. They went shopping for shoes, and afterwards, the counselor explained that he could spend up to seven dollars on any food he wanted. "It was a real good help, because I think my stomach was growling. I had ten dollars in my pocket, and I didn't want to spend my last ten dollars." When the counselor offered to buy him a meal, John says, "I wanted to jump up! I was like, 'Okay, that works for me.'" At ATC, food plays a big role in building relationships. Moments like these help strengthen the connection between our youth and our organization.

Of course, food is only one piece of the puzzle. Being well fed doesn't mean that your life is happy and whole. In the same way, not having enough to eat doesn't necessarily mean that your life is unfulfilling. There are plenty of factors that can influence a person's relationship with food, and for many of ATC's clients, a major factor is uncertainty. Often, being hungry isn't the hardest thing – it's not knowing when that condition will change. For youth on the streets, learning how to survive when food isn't always readily available is crucial. As they experience transition or growth, however, the way they think about food will change to reflect where they are in their lives.

“The Food Bank feeds organizations that feed people.”

-Henry Randolph, SF-Marin Food Bank Distribution Supervisor

For the past 16 years, an ATC staff member or volunteer has stopped by the SF-Marin Food Bank twice a week. For us, going to the Food Bank has become somewhat of a treasure hunt – we start to get excited as we walk through the doors, wondering what they will have in stock that day. We scan the aisles and dig through giant bins of cans to find the foods that will make our clients happy. The Food Bank is one of ATC’s most important partner organizations, providing us with more than 35 tons of food every year.

What is the Food Bank?

The mission of the SF-Marin Food Bank is to end hunger in San Francisco and Marin, and this is no small task. Blain Johnson, Media Relations Manager, describes the Food Bank as “the hub of the food assistance network in San Francisco and Marin.” They distribute food to over 240 pantries, work with over 450 partner agencies, and deliver about 46 million pounds of food a year into the hands of those who need it most. Their impact is huge, serving about 147,000 people each week. “If you come upon a food pantry, or if you come upon a hot meal site, the chances are very good that the food was sourced or donated from the Food Bank.”

If you ever visit the Food Bank, you’ll get a sense of just how much food they handle. Their giant warehouse is stacked to the ceiling, and there’s a constant bustle: volunteers stock the shelves, employees drive forklifts to rearrange pallets of food, and there’s a steady stream of trucks that are making deliveries to organizations around the city. The Food Bank gets all this food from four main sources: the Farm to Family program, donations from manufacturers, community food drives, and purchasing staple items in bulk.

The Food Bank’s services go beyond just distributing food – they are “combating hunger from all angles” by working on advocacy, school snack programs, nutrition education and outreach, and more. “We really try to tailor our services to the specific populations we’re serving,” says Blain. “We’re meeting people’s daily needs for food, and working on the policy issues that increase access at a higher level.”

Hunger in San Francisco

One in four people in San Francisco and Marin is at risk of hunger. “It’s really difficult to be a low-income person in a very high cost area like San Francisco,” explains Blain, and recent cuts to government assistance programs are making that struggle even harder for many of the city’s residents. “Whenever there is a cut to public services like food stamps, that increases the demand on private nonprofits to make up the difference.”

Distribution Supervisor Henry Randolph, who has been with the organization for 18 years, works closely with the agencies that rely on the Food Bank to stock their pantries. Henry oversees the Food Bank’s shopping floor, where 300 partner agencies with shopping accounts can buy food at a heavily discounted rate. As he says, “the Food Bank feeds organizations that feed people.” Henry gets a first-hand look at how much food is coming in and going out each day, and has definitely noticed an increase in demand. He recently heard from one partner agency that the number of people using their pantry has nearly doubled.



*Blain Johnson,
Media Relations Manager*



*Henry Randolph,
Distribution Supervisor*



*Corey Brown, ATC Administrative
Assistant, shops at the Food Bank*



*Every week, pallets of food get
delivered to ATC's office*



*ATC's shelves are stocked with the food
we get from the Food Bank*

The Food Bank and ATC

ATC gets about 95% of our food from the Food Bank, and we can't imagine what we would do without them – each year, we spend only \$15,000 for about \$400,000 worth of food. Lucky for us, Henry has been a friend to ATC since the beginning. He always greets us with a smile, and has gotten to know us so well that he'll always point out the food that he knows ATC's clients will love. Working with partner organizations is one of the things that Henry likes about his job – he tries to make sure that they are getting the food that they want and will use. We are so grateful for his personal touch, and although he may just be flattering us, Henry says that ATC is one of his favorite customers. For organizations like us, Henry *is* the Food Bank.

Doing their part to fight hunger

Both Blain and Henry believe that the SF-Marin Food Bank is a great organization – and not just because they work there! With all of the programs the Food Bank offers, Blain says that they “are striking a pretty good balance.” Henry thinks that “the Food Bank does an exceptionally good job.” He enjoys going to work every day, knowing that he is “improving the quality of the community” and helping feed people who are at risk of hunger.

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program



Commonly referred to as food stamps, SNAP is the largest food assistance program in the United States, and is run by the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service agency. Each

month, SNAP participants are allotted a certain amount of money (the maximum for one person is \$189) that they can spend on designated foods at grocery stores and farmers markets. SNAP benefits are used by over 46 million people, playing a vital role in fighting hunger among low-income individuals and families.

In order to be eligible for SNAP, individuals and households must meet a number of requirements. The basic requirement is that a household's gross income must not exceed 130% of the federal poverty level – for a household of four, the poverty level is currently set at \$1,963 a month. Data published recently by the Food and Nutrition Service agency shows that the average SNAP household income is less than 60% of the poverty line.

SNAP's numbers have grown over the past several years due to the economic recession, rising unemployment, and the increasing cost of living. In 2009, the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act provided an estimated \$45.2 billion to boost SNAP benefits as part of the stimulus package. Those funds expired on October 31, 2013, which caused a decrease in benefits of about \$10 per person a month. In addition, the Agricultural Act of 2014 will impose an \$8 billion cut to SNAP over the next decade, shrinking or cutting off benefits for hundreds of thousands of recipients across the nation.

WIC: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, & Children



WIC is a federal grant program through the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service agency. WIC's mission is to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age

five who are at nutrition risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care. Their services are administered by thousands of state and local agencies, which include state health departments, hospitals, clinics, and community centers. Currently, over 8 million women, infants, and children benefit from WIC.

WIC's program has a very specific focus. Women who are pregnant, postpartum up to six months, or breastfeeding can qualify for their services, as well as infants and children up to five years old. Individuals must also be low-income, and determined to be at "nutrition risk" by a health professional. In addition to nutrition education and health screenings and referrals, WIC participants receive checks or vouchers each month that allow them to purchase specific foods like infant cereal, baby food, eggs, milk, cheese, fruits, and vegetables.

Funding for WIC is determined each year by Congress, and is currently set at \$6.522 billion; this number has been declining since 2011. According to the Food and Nutrition Service agency, however, WIC is one of the nation's most successful and cost-effective nutrition programs, and improves the health of at-risk women, infants, and children.

Bloomingdale's and Anolon Cook Up Change for ATC

On March 20th, **Bloomingdale's** hosted "Cook Up A Better Tomorrow," a benefit event sponsored by **Anolon** that raised thousands of dollars for ATC. **Dave Bazirgan**, the Chef/GM of Dirty Habit, showcased his world-class culinary skills with a delicious cooking demo (his scallops were epic). Bloomingdale's donated 10% of all Home Store sales that day to ATC, and treated the event-goers to luxurious goodie bags including very cool Anolon kitchen tools. We love partnering with Bloomingdale's, because we walk by their store every night we do outreach Downtown. This is the second time they've held an event for ATC, and we couldn't be more thrilled!



Chef Dave Bazirgan in action!

Three Tasty Ways to Support ATC!

(Well, two of them are actually delicious. The third is metaphorically "tasty.")



Commonwealth



Two of our favorite neighbors, **Mission Bowling Club** (MBC) and **Commonwealth**, have chosen ATC for their monthly philanthropic programs. In June, MBC will be donating \$1 from select menu items, including their famous burger. In September, Commonwealth will donate \$10 from each of their renowned tasting menus (make your reservations early!). MBC is the coolest bowling alley/restaurant in the city, and Commonwealth's fine dining has garnered rave reviews since it opened in 2010. We are so grateful to be the recipient of their amazing generosity!

Shop at Amazon, and raise money for ATC! Use **AmazonSmile** by going to smile.amazon.com and logging in. When it asks you to select a charity, type in "At The Crossroads, San Francisco." Find us, select us, and presto! Every time you want to shop, go to smile.amazon.com, and .5% of eligible purchases will be donated to ATC at no extra cost to you. Seriously, supporting ATC has never been easier, so go indulge in some guilt-free shopping!

Welcome to ATC's Newest Staff & Board Members!



Alison Dagenais, Development Coordinator

Alison Dagenais can't get rid of ATC. She first joined ATC in 2010 as an AmeriCorps VISTA, came back as a consultant in 2013 to help us with our events, and is now our Development Coordinator. We are putting her obsessive attention to detail to good use in her new role, where her dedication to good grammar and avoiding typos comes in handy! She hails from Kansas City and graduated from Grinnell College, majoring in Anthropology and French (two of the most practical majors you can find). She likes free food, pop culture, and most of all, her adorable nephew. We like her, and we're glad she's back!



Whitney Winerth, Board of Directors

Whitney Winerth joined our Board of Directors a year ago, and it is awesome to have her on our team! Born and raised in the Bay Area, she practices yoga, loves sushi, and understands the frustration of Friday afternoon traffic in the city. She is a business analyst at Artisan Partners with more than nine years of experience in the asset management industry, and holds a BBA in Finance and a BA in Philosophy from Southern Methodist University. Despite her hectic work travel schedule and her upcoming wedding in September, Whitney has been amazing at helping with our events and introducing friends to ATC.



Lateefah Simon, Advisory Board

Lateefah Simon and ATC have been bestest buddies for 15 years, dating back to when she was the Executive Director of the Center for Young Women's Development. She's been a trusted colleague, joined our Board of Directors, donated money, and dropped serious knowledge on our staff. She's an amazing mom to two daughters, all while being the Director of the Rosenberg Foundation's California's Future initiative. Google her. Things will pop up like MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship and Oprah's Power List. We're thrilled to welcome her on in this new role on our Advisory Board!

Shout Out to Our Fantastic I Think I Can Campaign In-Kind Donors!

Our 2014 I Think I Can Campaign event was a huge success, thanks in large part to the generous businesses that donated food, silent auction items, and treats for goodie bags. We are so grateful for all of their support – the philanthropic nature of the Bay Area business community is amazing!

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Our donors are extremely important to us! If you notice omissions or errors, please email alisond@atthecrossroads.org

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We wish there were enough space to acknowledge all who donated to the I Think I Can Campaign and Summer SunDay Hike, but there are too many generous people to list! Find more of our awesome donors at www.atthecrossroads.org/contributors.

The 2014 I Think I Can Campaign



On February 27th, we celebrated the amazing I Think I Can Campaign participants who have raised over \$465,000 for ATC!



Campaign superstar Mark Dwight with his Little Engine for Good Award



Past participants gather on stage for the recognition they deserve

Some ran, some swam, and some sang. Others dressed up in embarrassing costumes, learned new instruments, or pursued their passions. They thought they could – and they did!

Mark Dwight was honored with the first-ever Little Engine for Good Award. His annual bicycle ride from SF to LA has raised \$48,000 in four years, making him a true Campaign champion!

Now, it's your turn to accomplish long-held goals while helping homeless youth. We think you can!

Do YOU think you can? Sign up today: atthecrossroads.org/campaign



Join ATC for our fifth annual hike up Mt. Tam on August 3rd!

Summer SunDay 2014

Hike for Homeless Youth



You're invited to take a hike up Mt. Tam with ATC! Enjoy breathtaking views, a gourmet picnic, and some of the best hiking in the Bay – all while raising support for San Francisco's homeless youth.

What are you waiting for? Sign up today: atthecrossroads.org/summersunday