



AT THE CROSSROADS

Spring 2015: Long-Term Relationships

Long-term relationships represent the core of At The Crossroads, and everything about our work revolves around these relationships. We believe that unconditional support transforms lives, but we know it is not a quick or linear process. It took many years for our youth to end up on the streets, and it will take many years for them to build the lives they want. Change can be messy, and requires a great deal of patience and persistence.

To build happy and fulfilling lives, our clients need to create sustainable communities and build strong, healthy relationships with a diverse range of people. It is an honor and a privilege for ATC to be part of this community for our youth. This newsletter spotlights three amazing long-term clients – Bubbles, Mark, and Steven – to explore their relationships with ATC and others.

Talking Relationships with ATC's Long-Term Clients

Bubbles

ATC client for 16 years

At The Crossroads has been working with homeless youth and young adults for 17 years, and we've known Bubbles for almost all of them. We have been blessed with 16 years of her sharp wit (and sharper jokes), no-nonsense charm, and penchant for brutal honesty. She is also an exceptionally smart and perceptive person. Bubbles can talk your ear off – and when she talks, people listen. She has the kind of charisma that draws you in, paired with the tendency to drop these little gems of wisdom when she gets on a roll.

When Bubbles first met us on the streets of the Mission in 1999, she was skeptical, and rightfully made us earn her trust. She remembers seeing Rob Gitin, ATC Co-Founder and Executive Director, on street outreach. "I really gave him the hard shoulder, but in a joking way. Kinda rude, but you know, is this cat for real? Is he really hanging out here doing this?" After she realized that ATC was consistent, and truly cared about folks on the streets, she started to accept us. "You remembered our names, and you said 'hi' to us!" Bubbles recalls. "You guys were welcome because you came correct. You came with respect. It was straight from the heart, and you guys wanted to help."

For many years, Bubbles mostly interacted with us on outreach, or would stop by our office to pick up some food and supplies. It took a long



time for trust to fully develop, but after a while, it clicked. "You guys actually saw me," she says. "You looked in me and saw that there obviously was a problem, and I needed to talk. I needed to be communicated with, cared about, listened to – and not judged." Bubbles values that feeling of acceptance, and thinks of ATC as a safe space to talk, vent, and express what she's going through. "I've always been welcome to come here and do that. And that's why I come here."

Three years ago, Bubbles started having weekly one-to-one meetings with ATC Program Manager Shawn Garety, and has let us into her life in a deeper way than ever before. We've learned a lot about her, including the fact that she has a knack for making Shawn laugh so hard that the entire office can hear. "If you're helpless, homeless, and fearful of what's next,

"The majority of the relationships I have right now, I'm okay with. I'm okay with the mistakes that I made in the past with my relationships, short-term, long-term, the losses and the gains. Because it's all a lesson learned. It's the experience that counts."

ATC is a place where you can go to get just a little bit of clarity. A little bit of hope," Bubbles explains. "It just feels like when you come here, you still know that you're human, if you forgot."

When talking about relationships, Bubbles says, "If you want it, you're going to fight for it. It's as simple as that." She knows that relationships take work. It's not always easy to maintain your connections with others, especially through hard times. "All the relationships that I've had that are long-term are a blessing," she emphasizes. For Bubbles, the past decade brought challenges, setbacks, and pain. She deeply appreciates the people who have stayed with her through it all. "Some unlikely candidates have stuck by me no matter what I did. Whatever they heard, they accepted me."

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1998: long and brown

2015: short and gray

Letter from the Director

Rob Gitin

In 2004, I had a lunch meeting with a client named Raendi that sticks with me to this day. During ATC's early years, when I was working way too many hours and was pretty anti-social, Raendi was among a handful of clients whom I spent more time with than I did with my family and closest friends. These clients are especially near and dear to my heart. Raendi and I had already been meeting regularly for six years. She had recently made some dramatic life changes: she was on methadone to help with her heroin use, and was going to Drug Court, which is an alternative to incarceration for drug-related arrests.

That afternoon, she relayed a conversation she had with her counselor at Drug Court. She complained to her counselor about how annoyed she was to be mandated to discuss her life with so many people. The counselor, sensibly, asked her why she chose to meet with At The Crossroads if she was sick of talking.

"Let's say I go and get high today," Raendi replied. "If I tell you, I go back to jail. If I tell my methadone counselor, I get kicked off methadone. If I tell Rob, he takes me out to lunch and asks me how I'm doing."

Raendi captured the essence of what ATC hopes to accomplish in the long-term relationships that we build. We want our youth to know that no matter what decisions they make – be they positive, harmful, or a little bit of both – they will get the same type of care and support from us. Fostering this trust with Raendi, as with all clients, was a slow and careful process that revolved around discussing whatever was most important to her.

In earlier meetings with Raendi, I would sometimes walk away frustrated. She'd often spend our time talking about her relationships with her partner and friends. At the end of these meetings, part of me felt like I hadn't done my job. Here was a young woman who had huge, capital letter struggles like doing 2-3 grams of heroin a day, drinking heavily, sleeping on the streets, and engaging in a violent lifestyle – and she was talking about a friend who had pissed her off.

It took me 10 years of doing this work before I realized there was no better topic to discuss than relationships. Knowing how to build and sustain healthy relationships, and how to navigate difficult ones, is the single most important tool our youth can develop that will empower them to build the lives they want. It can have a greater impact on their long-term stability than getting into housing, going back to school, or finding work.

Our clients can get a job, but if they don't know how to deal with a harsh boss, they will quit or get fired. They can find a room in an apartment or in subsidized housing, but if they can't navigate roommate conflicts or deal with a case manager they don't like, they will lose their housing. Furthermore, if they don't have a strong, supportive community, losing a job or housing will send them right back to the streets.

Stable, long-term relationships are the building blocks upon which our youth create healthy and fulfilling lives. They also feed the heart and the soul. Care without condition nurtures hope, which is often in short supply for our youth. For many, we are the first people to reflect back what is special about them, and who actually see them for all that they are. Hope is a prerequisite for change, and it is wonderful to get to instill it.

Because most of our youth have never experienced healthy relationships, it's not easy for them to figure out how to cultivate them. I didn't realize it at the time, but when Raendi would vent to me about her friend, and then discuss how she would like that friendship to look and what kind of friends she hoped to make, we were laying a foundation for her future.

Seventeen years after meeting her on the streets of downtown San Francisco, I still chat with Raendi (who now goes by Rebecca) every couple of months. She now lives in South Dakota with her two daughters. When she calls, we usually talk about the people in her life. Because that's what matters.

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 three 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 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 city government to improve the continuum of support for all disconnected youth in San Francisco.
- "If you're helpless, homeless, and fearful of what's next, ATC is a place where you can go to get just a little bit of clarity. A little bit of hope."*
- Bubbles, 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.**



Lynn, Michael, and Shruti are three of ATC's fantastic weekly volunteers!

Help with in-kind donations

ATC recently lost our biggest clothing donor, so we are in desperate need of stores and businesses to donate new clothing. In particular, we are looking for 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 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.**

Bubbles recognizes that communication plays a huge role in her relationships. When she was younger, she didn't care as much about the consequences. She said and did whatever she wanted, and "got comfortable writing people off." Now, Bubbles brings more insight and self-awareness to her relationships. "It's my responsibility," she explains. "If I'm looking at you, I'm paying attention to what I'm saying and how you're reacting to it." Bubbles knows that there are parts of her personality that some may not like, but she has learned to handle it with maturity. "I am a little harsh, and I'm aware of it. I'm a person that can acknowledge if I was wrong or disrespectful, and I can come apologize and own that."

Bubbles has put a lot of work into coming to terms with how some of her relationships have played out. "The majority of the relationships I have right now, I'm okay with," she reflects. "If we're not talking, I'm okay with that. If we are talking, I'm okay with that ... I'm okay with the mistakes that I made in the past with my relationships, short-term, long-term, the losses and the gains. Because it's all a lesson learned. It's the experience that counts. It's the feeling I get that reminds me that I'm alive."

Family ties are especially significant for Bubbles. Her mom and brothers are currently in her life, but much of her childhood was spent apart from them in foster care. As a result, her relationship with her mom is nuanced and layered. "I respect her, because she's my mom and gave birth to me. I respect her as a woman. As an addict. As a human being. But at the same time, she understands that I'm still her child, and I've still got a lot of healing to do."

"At night when I pray, I'm not praying for my kids to come home. I'm praying for my kids to be safe and protected. I pray for the families that have put their arms around my child."

Motherhood is a powerful thing, and can be defined in many different ways. When Bubbles speaks about motherhood, her words carry so much meaning. It's a concept that she has grappled with for a long time, and it has a profound impact on the way that she looks at herself and her relationships. In addition to having a complicated relationship with her mom, she also has complex relationships with her own children.

Bubbles has five children who were placed with adoptive families during particularly hard times in her life. "I feel like everything was stripped from me when I lost my kids. My whole world revolved around my kids," she says. "Sometimes I feel like I was stripped of my motherhood."

Open adoptions have allowed Bubbles to keep relationships of varying degrees with her kids. One of the ways she expresses her love for her children is by honoring the reality of her relationships with them. She makes it clear she doesn't want to take anything away from the adoptive families, and strives to balance what is in



• ATC Perspective: Working with Bubbles

• "Bubbles is a force to be reckoned with. She embodies
• the ability to keep it real, to have heart, to persevere, to
• never forget where you come from and who you are, and
• the endless possibilities of who you can become," says
• ATC Program Manager Shawn Garey. "Bubbles' profound
• wisdom, sharp wit, and tenacity have kept me and ATC on
• our toes, laughing through and through. Over the years,
• we have always been able to find humor in the darkest and
• the brightest of our times together. It is an honor to know
• her, and she reminds me to always strive to be my best."

everyone's best interest with her desire to be a part of her children's lives. She cares deeply for her kids, and it is truly inspiring to watch her conduct herself with such grace and humility.

"There are some relationships that I wish were closer and stronger ... but I'm okay with them being where they're at. Because I know they're good, I know they're okay," Bubbles explains. "At night when I pray, I'm not praying for my kids to come home. I'm praying for my kids to be safe and protected. I pray for the families that have put their arms around my child."

Figuring out how to define and accept her relationships with her children has been, and will continue to be, a lifelong process. Bubbles finds her maternal instincts showing up in other areas of her life. "It's so easy for me to help everybody else and fix everybody else's problems. It makes me feel that motherly feeling that has been submerged so much," she explains. "It makes me feel like, even though you don't have your kids physically with you, you still are a mother."

Bubbles has learned that she can't dwell on what might have been. Sometimes, she says, "I think about what if. But the what ifs – I have to check them real fast. Because the what ifs send me to some places I don't want to be." For Bubbles, acknowledging and accepting her relationships with her kids for what they are is key to being able to work on herself. "Where my kids are, they're in a good place. They are taken care of. Now, it's time for me to take care of me."

In 16 years, we have seen Bubbles transform how she cares for herself, and she has used ATC as a tool in that process. She describes ATC as a place where she can come to be heard and get support without being judged. We treasure our relationship with Bubbles, which continues to grow and change to this day. "You guys remind people who are in dark places, lonely places, and sometimes just unfortunate – you show us that where we're at, we're okay. This is not the end of the world. And you deserve the same respect and the same treatment as anybody else."

Mark

ATC client for 8 years

Mark is extraordinarily thoughtful when it comes to his relationships, the roles they play in his life, and the ways they affect his happiness and well-being. Over the eight years that we have known him, he has been constantly striving to cultivate healthier relationships with family, partners, friends, and service providers. Above all, Mark has long been clear that the most important relationship for him to work on is the one he has with himself.

When ATC first started working with Mark, he went by the name Havoc. He was living on the streets, using drugs, and felt a sense of belonging with the homeless community. Back then, the name Havoc was a pretty accurate description of what was going on in his life. "It was not only telling people my name, it was telling them this part about me," he remembers. "What was going on around me was always chaotic. It was almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy."

About five years ago, all of that began to shift. Mark got into housing, started to address his drug issues, and decided to build a new life. "I didn't identify with being on the streets anymore," he explains. Mark felt backlash from some members of his community and lost many friends. It was an extremely tough transition, but he persevered. He recalls coming to ATC for support, saying, "It wasn't easy, but it was simple. All I had to do was say, 'I don't want to go by this anymore. I want this identity changed.'" He worked with us to figure out how to redefine himself, and how to reconnect with his passion for music, art, writing, and film. Now, he feels like a different person. "Ultimately, I wanted to be Mark more than I wanted to be Havoc ... people called me Havoc for good reason, and I'm really proud not to be there today."

"At The Crossroads has been the most consistent relationship I've had in my life in the past decade, without a doubt. Other organizations and providers have an agenda. ATC's agenda is me. All they want to see is me healthy and happy, on my terms."

For Mark, improving his relationships with others started with working on himself. His separation from his ex-wife was a major catalyst. "When we really finally separated, I didn't know where to go. I didn't know how to stand. I didn't know anything ... I was really scared of being alone." Mark had to learn how to take care of himself and be comfortable with himself "one little step at a time."

When it felt like his life was in upheaval, the support he received from ATC Counselor Irina Alexander was really meaningful. "She knows how to reach me, and meet me where I'm at." Mark explains that Irina often sends him links to videos that cheer him up, and help him with what he's going through. When he was struggling to feel okay being alone, Irina sent him a video that showed a woman doing different activities, like eating at a restaurant, on her own. Mark watched the video many times, and it helped him realize that he could do things by himself, too.

Mark started to have weekly meetings with ATC about six years ago, with former Counselor Kris Chance. Kris was the first person at ATC that Mark developed a really close counseling relationship with, and during the four years they worked together, he formed a deep and trusting bond with ATC. When Kris left, he began to meet with Irina, and his relationship with us continued to grow. "ATC's agenda is me," he explains. "All they want to see is me healthy and happy, on my terms." Mark appreciates the little things we do to express how much we care about him. He loves getting personalized birthday cards that are decorated with his



favorite things, like bands or TV shows, because it shows how well we really know him. "At The Crossroads has been the most consistent relationship I've had in my life in the past decade, without a doubt ... there has always been somebody at ATC for me."

In addition to ATC, Mark works closely with other service providers, such as his therapist, support groups, and doctors. "They taught me how to be okay with myself, how to be alone. What activities I can do, instead of drawing myself out on drugs and escaping from myself. How to enjoy something!" Over the past few years, Mark has made a great deal of progress in building up his self-esteem. "Things started changing. That desperation that caused me to seek such unhealthy relationships just started to fade."

Building and maintaining healthier relationships with others is very important to Mark. He has worked hard to learn how to communicate more effectively, and how to

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Mark worked with Kris Chance, former ATC Counselor, for four years.



Currently, Mark talks with ATC Counselor Irina Alexander every week.

ATC Perspective: Working with Mark

Mark is a remarkable human being whose ability to look inside himself and explore his own identity encourages us to do the same. "Mark is one of the most incredible people I know, and I've grown so much as a counselor and a person from being able to work with him. After three years, I've really gotten to know him," says ATC Counselor Irina Alexander. "Over the past few years, Mark has transformed in so many ways, and has really found a home in himself. He is one of the most growth-oriented and self-reflective people I've come across, and is constantly soaking up knowledge and perspective in order to be the best person he can be."

Continued from previous page

keep boundaries. Friends who have known him through many ups and downs have responded to his growth. “Today, I’m not as invasive. I’m not needing them to house me. They allow me to be close to them in their lives, and to me, that’s a compliment they’re giving me – that they want me close in their lives, instead of ‘I love you, but you gotta stay this far away from me.’”

Mark’s relationships with his mom and his brother have also been going through some significant changes. In the past, he explains, “We had relationships, but they were hurtful. We all hurt each other, the three of us, and they were invasive relationships without boundaries.” At this point, Mark’s relationship with his family is the most positive it has been in a long time. He is planning on visiting his family soon, which will be the first time they have seen each other in several years. He’s hopeful that this will be a big step in healing those relationships. “It looks like this year is gonna be the first time the three of us are gonna really be able to reunite without other people, you know? We need that.”

For Mark, learning how to set boundaries was key to repairing his relationship with

his mom. “We have the most working relationship we’ve ever had in our lifetime,” he explains. “It took until the last couple years, and a lot of hard work, that I was able to tell her things, like ... ‘You can’t bring your drama into my life.’ And the drama that goes on in my life, I don’t bring into hers anymore.” They keep in touch through regular texts and phone calls, and Mark says that finally, “I get to be a part of her life in the way that I want to be.”

“Things started changing. That desperation that caused me to seek such unhealthy relationships just started to fade.”

Mark’s relationship with his brother has fluctuated dramatically. “We were really close growing up,” he says. “Even when I was using hard, on and off the streets, and travelling the country, he was always really supportive of me.” A few years ago, however, his brother completely stopped communicating with him. “I was broken about my brother for years. It was something I talked about [with ATC] probably every week, either my anger or my sadness. But I always loved him still.”

After a while, Mark let go of that anger and sadness. He got support from ATC and his therapist to figure out how to handle the situation in a healthy way, and turned his focus to taking care of himself. Just within the past few months, he and his brother began talking again. “We talk once a week, checking in on each other and taking care of my mom.” The process has been long and difficult, but he is really happy to be reconnecting with his family in a positive way.

“I took care of myself, and I got them back. With the help of ATC and my therapist, I have my mother and my brother in my life.”

It’s a powerful thing to witness Mark build a stronger community, and in the process, redefine his sense of himself and his future. Working with Mark shows us what is possible when people find the courage to look at who they are, who they have been, and who they want to be.

“I had to figure out what I wanted to do for myself. I’m not gonna say I was thrown into the ocean with no life jacket, but I had to fend for myself.”

Steven

ATC client for 10 years



Working with Steven has been an inspiring experience. Over the 10 years that ATC has known him, he has made some remarkable changes. We’ve gotten to watch as he moved from life on the streets to life as a father with a full-time job. We’ve gotten to listen as he talked about his goals, his belief in self-motivation, and his unwavering desire to always keep improving. When we say that it has been amazing to see Steven become the person he is today, we sincerely mean it. “I grew a lot,” he says. “When I came to ATC, I was a young man. Now, I’m an adult.”

ATC first met Steven on the streets of the Mission in 2004. Thinking back to what his life was like 10 years ago, he remembers, “When I was young, I was a little reckless. I was a little wild.” At the time, Steven was caught up with life on the streets, and wasn’t looking for any type of programs or resources. “In my head, I was okay. I didn’t see nothing wrong with what I was doing. So of course if you don’t see that you’re having issues with certain things in your life, you’re not gonna

seek help.” Steven had close friends who were getting services from ATC, and he would often see us on outreach. He started coming to the office just to get food. He wasn’t expecting anything more, but as he got to know us, he began to open up. “I just stumbled across you guys,” he explains, “and it just so happened that we talked. It just so happened that I expressed a lot of stuff about me, and who I am, and what I’m going through.”

Steven’s first one-to-one meetings were with a former ATC Counselor named Max Del Rio. When Max left ATC in 2005, Steven transitioned to working with Ivan Alomar, and started having meetings on a more regular basis. Over the years, Steven developed close relationships with several staff members – but his connection with Ivan is core to his relationship with ATC. “It felt good to be able to talk to somebody, with nobody judging you for what you’re doing and how you’re going about doing it,” Steven recalls. “Meeting with you guys kind of put my life in perspective.”

When it comes to long-term relationships, Steven hasn't really had strong role models in his life. Many people learn from the examples set by their parents, older family members, or mentors. When Steven was growing up, he didn't get much of that type of guidance. He had older siblings, but they were focused on their own lives and responsibilities. "I didn't have none of that to look up to," he explains. "I'm not gonna say I was thrown into the ocean with no life jacket, but I had to fend for myself." Steven also grew up without a father, which has had a huge impact on his life. For him, that relationship is "one of the major things that is missing in my life."

The most positive long-term relationship Steven has is with a childhood friend named Darrell, because they are "on the same page, trying to improve." When he describes their friendship, he emphasizes, "Darrell don't want nothing from me, you know what I'm saying? It's just real ... I can't deal with people who always want something from me. I like genuine, real, organic relationships ... the only thing we do is motivate each other." ATC has also been a significant long-term presence in Steven's life. "You guys have always been somewhere that never turns your back," he says. "I get positive feedback. It's real, it's not fake – what I mean by not fake is it's genuine. So I keep coming if it's genuine."

Because Steven has been relying on himself for so long, he understands the importance of self-motivation. While he often turns to ATC to talk about challenges and receive some support, he puts a lot on his own shoulders, and ultimately does the hard work himself. "I have to want to change for myself, because nobody can make you change. You gotta make yourself change. You gotta look in the mirror every day and want to improve yourself." For Steven, the birth of his daughter eight years ago inspired him to focus on getting a good job. "I think she's the reason I am this way, always motivated, always striving to do better," he reflects. "I want to improve for my daughter."

Ever since Steven decided to prioritize employment, we have seen him continue to reach for his goals, accomplish those goals, and then move on to the next. When his daughter was born, he went to school for custodial training, and had a few different jobs over the next few years. Things really changed when he got a job at the Youth Guidance Center at Juvenile Hall and realized that, "this is what I needed to be doing, working and being in a good city and county position." After that job ended, Steven took



ATC Perspective: Working with Steven

Steven could probably make a living as a motivational speaker. He talks about his goals and achievements with confidence and optimism, and we admire his passion for self-improvement. "Steven is very open about what is going on in his life, so it makes our meetings interesting, engaging, focused, and often deeply meaningful for him and for me," says ATC Community Resource Coordinator Ivan Alomar. "I want to have a positive impact on young people from my community. Steven gives me hope for all our clients and the communities we come from. He provides a reflection to me of who I am, who our clients are and can be, and what ATC stands for."

the custodial training again, and secured a job at a high school with the San Francisco Unified School District.

"I got a permanent job, and I started off with 20 hours a week. I busted my butt, and I got full-time within six months," he explains. "I've had this job for almost four years. Four years, city and county." When Steven talks about his job and his journey to get there, he speaks with pride. Here at ATC, we love celebrating accomplishments like this with our clients – especially since we have witnessed the time and the effort that went into making them happen, and the myriad obstacles they had to overcome.

"I can't deal with people who always want something from me. I like genuine, real, organic relationships."

Even though Steven worked extremely hard to leave life on the streets behind, he experienced a setback last year when he was robbed at gunpoint. "That really messed me up, you know? You're working, doing positive stuff, and somebody pulls a gun on you." For a few months, Steven struggled with how to handle it. "I thought about going to find out who robbed me, but what would that have caused? Another black-on-black crime? Me

throwing my life away? Me not seeing my daughter again?" He says that during that time, his bond with ATC made a significant difference. "I'm just glad it played out the way it did. Me talking to you guys versus going to do something foolish," he reflects. "That was a huge step in my life right there."

We talk with Steven on a regular basis, and he is still finding ways he can improve. He's been focusing on getting healthier by exercising, cutting back on drinking, and changing his diet. "I give myself weekly evaluations," he explains. "What I can improve on, what I can do better, what I need to step up." On top of that, Steven talks about encouraging kids at his high school. While he doesn't call himself a role model, he does tell them things he wishes someone had told him when he was younger, like the importance of working, saving money, and graduating on time.

Steven is constantly looking to the future, but he is happy with where his life is at right now. "I'm just glad that I'm not caught up in the streets," he says. "I used to have an attitude, I used to be mad at the world. And that's not how you succeed at life, you know, with a chip on your shoulder. I'm just glad I improved a lot." We remember how many times we saw Steven angry and unhappy, when his struggles weighed heavily on him. It's heartening to see him in such a good place, and we can't wait to watch and see what he will do with the next 10 years.

How Long-Term Relationships Drive the Work of ATC



The wonderful ATC Counselors! From left to right: Irina Alexander, Joey Hess, Anna Fai, April Garcia, and Lauren Johnson.

"I will never be the same because of everyone I get to work with and have gotten to know in the past 10 years. I'm given more respect and love from the people that I work with than anybody else in my life, and I aspire to give that back every day. I don't even know how to put it into words. It is so special, and I don't ever take it for granted."

-Shawn Garety, ATC Program Manager

At The Crossroads has always embraced the idea that our youth deserve long-term, unconditional support. We don't force an agenda or a timeline on our work – in fact, there are clients who have been with ATC for all 17 years of our operation. We believe that letting relationships grow over time is the best way for us to truly understand our clients, provide them with stability and support, and help them through the process of building healthier lives. ATC Community Resource Coordinator Ivan Alomar emphasizes, "A big part of my job has been to work with other organizations and get to know them. I would say 98% of them don't even talk about long-term relationships, much less focus on it. So it puts ATC in a very unique position."

Fostering trust takes time

Allowing our clients to dictate the pace and the nature of their relationships with us is a cornerstone of our program. "It allows something to happen organically that is often times forced in other situations," explains ATC Program Manager Shawn Garety. "If somebody wants to work with us, they can take their time feeling us out, and what we do, and how they want to access us." Taking it slow helps us earn trust over time. Each interaction builds off of the last, and lays the groundwork for a deeper relationship down the line.

"I think that most clients are used to conditional relationships, and so it takes a while for us to gain trust," explains ATC Counselor April Garcia. "People assume that there has to be a catch. It takes time for people to realize that we're just here – and there is no catch." Rather than trying to funnel everyone through a pre-determined structure, we ask each client how we can tailor our services to best meet their needs. ATC Counselor Lauren Johnson describes this approach by saying, "When you empower people to interact with the organization at their own pace, it switches the dynamic in a really positive way."

Most of our youth don't have strong support systems, and don't know how to accept unconditional care. It can be challenging to cultivate those connections, but patience and consistency allow us to build meaningful relationships with people who often feel alone. ATC Counselor Irina Alexander says, "We show them that they do deserve to feel that kind of support and care." ATC Counselor Joey Hess further explains, "If someone has never had a consistent, long-term relationship before, they are more likely to be hesitant about trusting us or confiding in us. It's on us to do whatever we can to make them feel comfortable, and to let them know that no matter what, we are here for them."

Building real and meaningful bonds

Giving relationships the chance to deepen over time and getting to know our clients as individuals go hand in hand. "You're doing a lot of listening at the beginning of the relationship," Irina explains. "Eventually, after a year or two, you have a very strong relationship and a lot of information to ground that in." The longer you know someone, the more you learn about them, the better you understand them, and the stronger the bond.

We provide the same services to all of our clients, no matter how long we have known them – but something special happens once we have reached a certain level of trust, comfort, and respect. At that point, we can help our clients think about their lives, highlight progress they have made, or remind them of their goals. Irina explains that as a longtime counselor, "You can start saying, 'Well hey, you were saying this a year ago, and now you're doing that. What do you think?'" We hold history for our clients, and reflecting that history back to them helps them examine the decisions they make, and use their life experiences to inform their choices.

Shawn has worked at ATC for 11 years, and there are many clients that she has known for that entire time. She knows firsthand how powerful it can be to work with people for most – if not all – of their adult lives so far. "You get to see so much of a person's life and strengths and challenges long-term. Having real, honest conversations about those things is just impossible if you don't know each other and respect each other," she says. "When you've met with someone hundreds of times, what that looks like on day one and what that looks like 10 years down the road is so different. You just can't explain how much that allows for real conversations and opportunities."

For Ivan, one of the biggest opportunities that comes from long-term relationships is his ability as a counselor to challenge his clients on the things they have identified as their personal goals. "It's being able to push people on the things that they want to be pushed on. Being able to challenge our clients, after years of knowing them, in a way that is caring and loving," Ivan explains. "In a long-term relationship, I can call you out. I can question what you say to me. And it comes from having honest, safe, and trusting relationships." ATC never imposes an agenda on our youth, but that doesn't mean that we are complacent. We strive to help our clients become their best selves. We want them to create the lives they envision, and a little motivation can help them get there.

In addition to encouraging our clients to look within, we also spend time talking about their connections with other people. The healthy, trusting, and stable relationships we cultivate with our youth become a model that they can draw from when interacting with family, friends, coworkers, and partners. “A big thing that comes up in my meetings is boundaries,” says Irina. “People learning what boundaries are, how to set boundaries, and how to incorporate them in a healthy way into their relationships.” This helps our clients build supportive communities, which are essential to moving forward with their lives.

Maintaining relationships as they transition

Because ATC will often work with people for 10 years or more, most clients switch to a new primary counselor at least once during their time with us. This transition is incredibly important. It’s challenging, but it can serve to further strengthen a client’s bond with ATC as a whole. Ivan, who has been at ATC for 10 years, has seen this process many times. “ATC has a standard, and I’m not going to send a client to someone else if I don’t believe in their ability to build relationships, to really, truly care, and to listen. Caring, openness, non-judgment – regardless of what staff you’re working with, you’ll get treated in the same way.”

On the other end, Lauren describes what it’s like to start meeting with a client who has already worked with ATC for years. “It creates these interesting openings as a counselor. Sometimes you’ll walk into a meeting, and suddenly, they’re unloading their whole life on you, because you inherit that trust. Other times it’s actually the opposite. People can really put you through your paces, because they want to see if you’re up to the standard that other counselors have set. It’s an amazing opportunity to not have to start from scratch, but it’s also an amazing responsibility.”

Maintaining these long-term relationships isn’t always easy. Even though we are very strict about keeping professional boundaries, we become close with our youth. “When you genuinely care about someone, you want them to be healthy and you want them to be safe,” explains ATC Counselor Anna Fai. “It can be hard to leave your personal feelings out of it.” Watching our clients experience pain and

hardship is extremely difficult. In those moments, it’s not our job to fix problems or have all the answers. All we can do is be there to hold space for them, and offer our unconditional support.

Giving us some perspective

“ATC means so much to our clients, and to be affiliated with this organization gives me a lot of pride,” says April. Our close, long-term clients often call us their family, illustrating the intensity of their relationship with our organization. “That’s a really powerful bond, and it’s not something to take lightly,” Lauren emphasizes. “For a lot of people, for better or worse, we are their family. That’s a big deal, and it speaks to the power of long-term relationships.” Anna adds that clients might say that they’ve known her for 10 years, even though she has only worked here for three. “To them, it’s a sign of knowing you long-term, feeling comfortable, and giving you those props. They feel the acceptance and the love on the street from ATC when they’re not getting that anywhere else.”

Ivan talks about how inspiring it is to bear witness to someone’s progress and accomplishments, especially since he was there for their most difficult moments. Recently, he met with a couple of his former clients who have now become leaders at other community organizations. “That’s what we get to see – a transformation over the long-term. These were the highest-risk clients. Death was knocking at their door, and every time I saw them I thought it could be the last time. Now, after many years, I’m calling them colleagues in this work! That’s something we only get to experience because of long-term relationships.”

It may sound trite, but it is a privilege to be a part of our clients’ lives, and to be a stable source of positive, compassionate care that can make a difference. “I’m not expecting anything in return. The only thing that I want is what you want for yourself,” says Shawn. “It’s supporting people in realizing what’s in themselves, and that takes everyone a lifetime. To be on that journey with somebody is a really unique experience. Going through that process, I learn just as much about myself and who I want to be and where I want to go from these relationships. It’s hard to put into words. It’s just a gift that people share with us.”

Taking a Closer Look at ATC’s Long-Term Clients

These statistics help to illustrate ATC’s commitment to long-term relationships. Each one of these relationships represents an individual who has made an indelible impression on us. Every year of working together includes laughter, tears, celebrating steps forward, and a bond that will have a lasting impact on staff and clients alike.

Total Counseling Clients: 518



- 1+ Years: 203
- 5+ Years: 157
- 10+ Years: 109
- 15+ Years: 49



Nicholas at age 26



Nicholas now, with his wife and kids

In ATC’s very first newsletter, we featured a poem written by Nicholas Coley. We met Nicholas when we first started street outreach in the Mission in 1998, and he began to meet with Rob regularly. Over the next decade, he and Rob built a special and close relationship. Nicholas hasn’t needed ATC’s services in years. He supports himself and his “most beautiful wife and two angelic children” with his stunning landscape paintings, which can be found at www.nickcoley.com.

“As they say, complex problems need complex solutions. I found in Rob not just an incredible listener, but someone who could grasp the multifaceted dynamic of where I was coming from. I wasn’t the most hardcore case, but I still believe that ancient pit of sadness could have swallowed me up. I feel very grateful to Rob for being there,” Nicholas remembers. “I think some of us have the answers we’re looking for inside of us, but if no one is there to hear us, to dispel the paranoia or self-criticism and affirm our own internal compass, then it is like a sailor getting scurvy when the boat still works and the sails still hold the wind. Just simply dying of malnourishment.”

Welcome to ATC's New Staff and Board Members!

Nora Brereton, Associate Director



Nora joined ATC in October as our new Associate Director, and came to us with over 10 years of experience in the field of youth development. Previously, she worked as the Director of Programs at CommunityGrows, an environmental education nonprofit based in the Western Addition that

focuses on serving youth living in public housing. Nora quickly charmed her way into our hearts with her enviable tiramisu baking skills and her impressive thrift store sweater collection. We knew she would fit right in when she debuted a particularly festive sweater, complete with a bounty of knitted fruits perched on top of her shoulders (she's especially proud of that one). In addition to her wardrobe, Nora brightens our office with her enthusiasm, easygoing nature, and her commitment to making sure that ATC runs as smoothly as possible. She has already done a lot to whip us into shape, and we are thrilled to welcome her!

Beth Koenekke, Board of Directors



Originally from West Chester, PA, Beth moved to San Francisco in 1986 after falling in love with the city while on vacation. She came here with no job, no place to live, and no connections in the city – and she has never looked back. Beth first got involved with ATC in April of last year, when she came aboard for

a few months as our 2014 Summer SunDay Hike Coordinator. She had previously worked in nonprofit events for over 20 years, so planning our hike was a piece of cake. Although she was only on our staff for a short time, Beth made a big impact! Her positive energy is infectious, and her hard work and serious coordination skills led to our most successful hike ever (raising \$115,000!). She now works for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, but has stayed connected to our organization as a member of our Board. Beth is passionate about our work with homeless youth, and we couldn't be happier to have her as a part of the ATC family.

Special Thanks to These Amazing People!



The Center for Harm Reduction Therapy

ATC is honored to be partnering with The Center for Harm Reduction Therapy to strengthen our work! Since August, **Maurice Byrd** and **Dr. Patt Denning** have been meeting monthly with ATC's direct service staff. They provide us with advanced trainings on understanding different diagnoses, techniques and tools for supporting people with major mental health challenges, and consultation on cases involving clients with complicated drug and mental health issues. In addition, we refer some of our clients to the Center for therapy services.

We are grateful for their insights and expertise: Maurice has worked as a harm reduction therapist for over 10 years, and Patt is a leader in the field with over 30 years of experience – she literally wrote the book on harm reduction practices for managing drugs and alcohol. Maurice and Patt are helping ATC provide the highest level of care to our youth, and we thank them for expanding our knowledge, building our confidence, and contributing to the depth of our work. They're the best!

Angelo Santiago: A True ATC All-Star

When it comes to volunteers with long-term relationships with ATC, Angelo has almost everyone beat. This March marked his seventh anniversary as an ATC volunteer! Over the years, Angelo has done so many amazing things to support our organization that it's hard to keep track. As an Outreach Volunteer, Angelo has joined us on the streets more than 200 times to give out supplies and talk with our youth. He's such a pro that he has helped us train new staff members (true story). Angelo has also done three I Think I Can Campaigns to raise money for ATC, and raked in over \$5,800. To top it all off, he has brought tons of smiles and holiday cheer to our clients and their children by delivering truckloads of toys from the San Mateo Firefighters' Toys for Tots program (yup, he's also a firefighter). We feel extraordinarily lucky to have this all-around awesome guy stick around for so long – here's to the next seven years, Angelo!



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We wish there were enough space to acknowledge all of our Annual Fund donors, as well as our generous I Think I Can Campaign and Summer SunDay Hike supporters! Find more of our awesome donors at: www.atthecrossroads.org/contributors.

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Summer SunDay 2015

Hike for Homeless Youth

Who:

You! Plus family, friends, and coworkers.

What:

A gorgeous hike with a gourmet picnic
that raises money for a great cause.

Where:

To the top of Mt. Tam.

When:

Sunday, July 19th.

How:

Sign up as an individual or start a team at
atthecrossroads.org/summersunday.

Last year, 125 hikers raised \$115,000.

This year, our goal is for 175 hikers to raise \$150,000!

Sign up now: atthecrossroads.org/summersunday

