

## Fall 2013: Mental and Emotional Health

Helping our clients with their mental and emotional health needs is at the core of the work of At The Crossroads. We provide a safe space where youth can be who they are and let everything out. We help our youth build tools that can provide them with a greater sense of happiness, peace, and stability. We bear witness to their emotions, helping them feel understood and listened to, rather than judged and feared. In this newsletter, we explore how our clients' emotional well-being affects their lives, how our staff support our clients during difficult moments, and how the landscape for mental health is changing.

### Working Through the Past and Building a Healthier Future

Think about what you do when you have a bad day and you just aren't feeling great about life. You may go home, eat your favorite comfort food, watch a movie or TV show, and curl up cozy in bed. As you fall asleep, it is comforting to know that you will wake to a new day with new experiences.



Apple, ATC client for 1 year

Now imagine that you have no home. You have to search for a place to lie down, and if you're really lucky, you may find an overhang to keep you dry. You might not have had a decent meal all day. As you try to fall asleep, you just hope to get enough rest and not to be roused by the police, and you know that you will face these same circumstances the next day. How would this make you feel?

Homelessness has a significant impact on mental health and emotional wellbeing. Studies show that homeless youth are up to six times more likely to experience mental or emotional

health challenges than youth who come from more stable, supportive backgrounds. For some, these challenges arose at a very young age and contributed to their homelessness; for others, life on the streets was the catalyst. But for all homeless youth, the very nature of being without a home or having unstable housing exacerbates their mental health issues and makes it hard to seek support that could make their lives—and their emotions—more stable.

#### Impact of Homelessness and Housing

"When I was in a more severe stage of homelessness, living on the street, it was work basically to keep up with your emotions," says Steven, an ATC client for two years. "Knowing you don't have a place to live, a place to wash your hands, no one you can call who will understand what you're going through. When you put someone in a certain environment, they start to have certain effects from that environment. So really, my job, my living situation, it all ties into how healthy I feel in my current situation. The fact that I'm working now helps me with my emotions and helps me steer myself to what I feel is most important and focus on that."

***"I don't want to see things and I don't want to be depressed. At the same time, I'm kinda scared, because what if my depression and my schizophrenia help me with my creativity, like Van Gogh?"***  
- Matty, ATC Client

Steven, now 23, first became homeless at 17. He spent nights sleeping wherever he could before transitioning into an adult shelter. "Having to sleep in porta-potties and on benches, waking up and it's raining or waking up and it's wet, that definitely molds your perception of things," he says. Today, Steven lives in supportive housing

in the Tenderloin and works as a front desk receptionist for a local supportive housing organization. He enjoys his job, and loves getting to meet a lot of interesting people.

DeDe, now 19, was in the foster system until she moved in with her dad when she was 15. "But as soon as the system said, 'okay, she's with her father,' he kicked me out," she says. "So I've been on my own since I was 16."

DeDe has moved around ever since, sometimes staying with her dad and sometimes with a friend. Now she is living in a shelter, which gives her a feeling of stability for the first time.

"I was afraid every time I lived with my dad, because I didn't know what he was going to do or when," she says. "Then at the house that I was staying at with my friend, I was just unhappy. It was like an elephant on my shoulders. I felt unwanted. And now where I'm at, in a shelter, to tell you the truth, I'm happy. I'm not in the best place, I'm not where I really want to be, but I feel free. I'm not in nobody else's house. I don't have to worry about nobody else coming at me. I'm not worried if I'm going to get kicked out."

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DeDe, ATC client for 5 months



# Letter from the Director

Rob Gitin

Fourteen years ago, I was in my first one-to-one meeting with a client named Serina, who I still have the privilege of working with. We'd been working with her for a year on outreach, and I was thrilled that she trusted us enough to want to sit down and talk. We met at a café in the Tenderloin, and she told me all about her life. She talked about her past, discussing some pretty horrible things that had happened in her childhood that involved her mom. She spoke with a piercing intensity and rapid pace; her words were like machine gun fire.

She abruptly stopped herself, and said that she needed to stop talking about her mom. I asked her why, and she said, "Because if I really talk about everything that happened, I will go crazy." She then paused for a few seconds, and said, "Maybe that's what I need one day, to let myself go crazy. To let the crazy out." She was a wise soul at the age of 17.

I walked away from that meeting thinking about my mom, and feeling grateful. My mom is an amazing, strong, brilliant, compassionate person who radiates love and integrity. She went through a really hard period while I was in high school, when a major life event triggered her memories of early childhood trauma, and during that time, she found it difficult to leave her bed, let alone the house. She had a nice warm bed and a beautiful house and a kitchen full of food. She had professional support. She had the freedom to collapse, and I'm so glad she had it, because it is exactly what she needed.

One of the hardest things about being homeless is that you have no safety net, and you don't have the luxury of letting yourself go emotionally without having to be functional. You have to survive, make money, avoid danger and arrest, and find a place to sleep every day. You don't have the ability to take a break from day-to-day life to deal with deeper mental health or emotional issues. But if you don't find a way to let out your hurt sometimes, it may overwhelm you.

Nine years ago, I was meeting with Serina at our office. By this time, she had found a comfort zone with us. As she had so presciently said five years earlier, she needed to let out the crazy, and felt like she could do so around us. Sometimes this meant crying with a passion that hinted at the depth of her hurt. This day, it meant screaming at the top of her lungs and releasing her anger. Shawn Garety, our awesome current Program Manager, had just started as a counselor. Shawn came rushing into the room where Serina and I were meeting to make sure everything was okay, as she should have. I assured her it was. Serina then remarked, "Yes, Shawn, everything is okay. You can go." She laughed, and then went back to some good cathartic screaming.

Our job was to help her find ways to let out the crazy in pieces that were big enough to provide release, but not so big that they would overwhelm her. One of the many hard things about experiencing a lot of trauma is that it makes your emotions like water in a fire hydrant. Either they are gushing, or they are completely blocked off. What we try to do with our clients is to help them build a faucet for their emotions, so they can control how much comes out based on their mood. Some days they may only be able to deal with a drip of emotion, whereas other days they want to let out a strong flow.

We don't have any magic tricks. We can't undo what has been done to our clients. We can't wipe away the trauma. We can't make their lives perfect. But it is not our job to make our clients feel good; it is our job to make them feel okay with however they are feeling. We bear witness to their pain. We share in their joy. Sometimes, the best we can give them is a hug and a safe place to have a good cry. Fortunately, a lot of the time, that is a good start.

*Electronic copies of previous newsletters are available to view at [www.atthecrossroads.org/newsletters](http://www.atthecrossroads.org/newsletters)*



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## 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

Four nights a week, ATC counselors walk the streets of the Downtown/ Tenderloin and Mission neighborhoods of San Francisco, handing out basic necessities like food, condoms, and socks, and slowly building counseling relationships with homeless youth.

We work with young people whom others have given up on, who would not get help without us.

We meet with clients one-to-one. 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.

*“ATC is like an arm over your shoulder, like ‘I got you.’”*

*- DeDe, ATC Client*

## Get Involved with At The Crossroads

### Make a donation to ATC

You'll experience a 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, we need you to show it. Make a credit card donation at [www.atthecrossroads.org](http://www.atthecrossroads.org) or make checks payable to "At The Crossroads."



### Email list

Sign up to receive emails twice a month about volunteer opportunities, organizational updates, and ways to get involved. Send an email to [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org), with the subject heading "Join the ATC email list."

### Volunteer individually

Do you have free time in the afternoon or evening? Come by our office and sort donated clothing, put away food, help with admin needs, or pitch in on a number of other tasks that keep us going. Interested? Email [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto: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 it at [www.atthecrossroads.org](http://www.atthecrossroads.org). After you watch it, if you like it, invite your friends over for lunch, cocktails, or dinner to check it out. An ATC staff member can join you to discuss our work. It's a great way to introduce people to ATC. Email [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org) and let us know.

### Collect unused gift cards

Everyone has a gift certificate (or 20) that is sitting around the house, collecting dust. ATC can put them to good use by giving them to our clients or buying items we need. In case you didn't know, most gift certificates in California don't expire. One of our volunteers has already collected thousands of dollars in gift certificates for ATC! And to make it easy, we have an email template you can use to ask friends if they also have gift certificates to donate. Interested? Email [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org).

### Share our newsletter

Please let others who might be interested in ATC know about our work! If you want us to send people our newsletter, email us their names and addresses, and we'll send them copies. Email [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org).

### Be creative

We're open to hearing your ideas for supporting ATC. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us through email at [getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org) or phone at 415-487-0691 x101.

## Welcome to Our New Staff!



### April Garcia

April Garcia joined the ATC team as our newest counselor in, yes, April, after being our awesome Development Intern for six months. While in school at San Jose State University, which she graduated from in December 2012, she spent two years working at a homeless youth drop-in center in San Jose. Her specialty was facilitating sexual health groups with young women in Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall twice each month. April is ATC's resident artist, crafting masterpieces to celebrate staff birthdays or anniversaries. She loves trying new vegetarian recipes, traveling, punk shows, and craft beer and coffee. It is a rare week where she doesn't say or do something that causes uncontrollable convulsive laughter among her coworkers.



### Jaclyn Grant

Jaclyn Grant is the newest member of the ATC team, starting as the Events and Donor Relations Coordinator in September. She brings nearly a decade of experience working with homeless youth in many different capacities, including everything from volunteering at a shelter to being Associate Director for another Bay Area organization. She received a BA in Sociology from Westmont College, and graduated from UC Berkeley with a Masters in Social Welfare in the management and planning concentration. Jaclyn is originally a SoCal girl, so naturally she has a sunny demeanor and brings smiles and laughter to our office. When she's not at work, she can be found spending time with her family and friends, hanging out at beaches or lakes, reading nonfiction books about social issues, making exquisite homemade cards, or keeping up with her high-energy, highly curious cat Ambrose.



### Lauren Johnson

Originally from the Midwest, Lauren Johnson has been in the Bay Area for a little over two years. Before joining ATC as a counselor last January, she had a myriad of counseling-based jobs. Here's the rundown: crisis lining for a domestic violence organization, interviewing IV drug users for a National HIV Behavioral Health Survey, running young women's empowerment and harm reduction groups, leading kids' groups on health at the Tom Waddell Health Center Clinic at Hamilton Family Shelter, and being an active member at the Berkeley Needle Exchange Emergency Distribution. Lauren loves vegan cooking, and has been known to share her mouth-watering vegan mac and cheese (we know, it sounds contradictory) with the staff; even the meat-eaters went for seconds! She can commonly be found chasing her rambunctious pitbull pup around the dog park.



## Our Weekly Saviors

For the past year, Terry Rillera has been slipping into our office every Wednesday at about 5:30, usually wearing some kind of SF Giants gear. Although she's very friendly and exchanges a few words with the staff, she spends most of her two hours every week quietly working on incredibly important tasks, like tracking donations and writing thank you notes. She does this work with great attention to detail and efficiency.

Terry is just one of the 23 individuals who come by our office every week for at least a couple of hours to pack food boxes, take out our cardboard and recycling, send envelopes to incarcerated clients, put away our food bank delivery, or make birthday cards. These amazing people keep our office functioning, and by taking care of essential duties, they free up about 70 hours a week of staff time, enabling us to meet with hundreds of additional young people every year. They also keep our office chock full o' interesting, fun, and extremely quirky people. We are so grateful to all of you for giving ATC the gift of your time.

*From left to right, top to bottom: Dan Baum; Jill Gordon; John Wessenberg; Kassie Pearson; Kook Yin; Thomas Benton; Paul Vousden; Sony Rocha; Terry Rillera; Lynn Steinmetz; Jessica Stepman; Lauren Sir. Not pictured: Libby Aron; Jackie Banouvong; Marco Eugenio; Ling Lao; Mary Lotti; Christina Luah; Lynn Luu; Michael Nguyen; Gary Olsen; Dominic Tomasini; Karen Wessenberg.*

# The Mental Health Services Act

## What is the MHSA?

The Mental Health Services Act was a ballot initiative passed in 2004. It takes 1% from all personal income over a million dollars in California, and distributes it to counties to improve and expand mental health services. Programs funded by the MHSA focus on people as whole beings, and support them in all areas impacting mental health, not just psychiatric services.

“The core goal is to focus on wellness and recovery for people with mental health challenges,” Marlo Simmons, Director of the San Francisco Mental Health Services Act, says. “The people who crafted the law understood wellness and recovery, and that you have to help someone build their life, and then you can provide the traditional mental health support. There’s been a movement within the mental health world around the idea of people recovering from mental health illness, that it’s not just about medicating and stabilizing symptoms. You help people get a job, a place to live, a date on Saturday night, and their mental illness amazingly is a lot easier to manage. It’s a different model than kind of traditional, clinic-based mental health services.”

## How Are MHSA Funds Used?

All programs are developed through a community planning process. While there are some aspects that the law dictates, such as developing programs specifically for transitional aged youth (TAY) and incorporating full-service partnerships, most of it is based on community input. The 2012 Advisory Committee consisted of 13 service providers, 12 consumers, and 7 family members. Once important areas have been identified, the MHSA determines where to spend the money through Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from relevant organizations.

According to Michael Baxter, Director of Primary Care Youth Programs and Director of Family Planning for the San Francisco Department of Public Health, MHSA has helped “really increase collaboration between programs. We have gotten to know each other, so that there really does feel like there’s a greater continuum of services in San Francisco, and it’s a whole lot easier to get what you need now. This funding has really transformed our system.”

## Does it Impact ATC’s Clients? Absolutely.

Because TAY are identified as a priority population in San Francisco, there are numerous ways that MHSA funds have affected homeless youth. Here are just a few:

**Prevention and Recovery in Early Psychosis Program:** MHSA’s PREP program identifies early psychosis and helps create treatment plans before mental health challenges become completely debilitating. It is designed to serve 16- to 30-year-olds, as that is when most signs of early psychosis appear. A study by the National Institute of Mental Health found that 3/4 of mental illnesses begin by age 24.

**Housing:** The MHSA has helped fund 50 units of housing specifically for TAY, with 6 more that will become available next year. This is housing that provides special support for homeless youth with mental health needs.

**TAYSF:** MHSA funds the TAYSF website, an online directory of resources and services for youth.

**Program Growth:** Many organizations have been able to develop a more robust mental health side to their programs with money from MHSA. Programs that didn’t have a strong mental health component are now able to provide services specifically for youth with mental health challenges, and train their staff accordingly.

## Money Directed to TAY-Related Programs in San Francisco



## MHSA Fast Facts

- ◆ Ballot initiative passed in 2004
- ◆ Enacted into law in 2005
- ◆ SF budget: approx. \$30 million

## MHSA Principles:

- ◆ Cultural Competence
- ◆ Community Collaboration
- ◆ Integrated Service Delivery
- ◆ Client, Consumer, & Family Involvement
- ◆ Wellness and Recovery

## Seven Service Categories:

- ◆ Recovery-Oriented Treatment Services
- ◆ Mental Health Promotion & Early Intervention Services
- ◆ Peer-to-Peer Support Services
- ◆ Vocational Services
- ◆ MHSA Housing Program
- ◆ Behavioral Health Workforce Development
- ◆ Capital Facilities/Information Technology



**Michael Baxter, MSW**  
Director of Primary Care Youth Programs & Director of Family Planning  
S.F. Department of Public Health



**Marlo Simmons, MPH**  
Director  
San Francisco Mental Health Services Act  
S.F. Department of Public Health

## Building a Healthier Future: Continued

Apple, 20, has been in San Francisco for five years now, and is currently in a housing program for homeless youth with mental health needs. When she was younger, she struggled with being in foster care.



Matty, ATC client for a little over a year

“Being in the foster care system was really difficult, because I felt like I was forced to be there and I was trapped, and there was nobody that I could be close to,” she says. “They have curfews and they require you to do things that I just wasn’t ready to do. That kinda made me withdraw from people emotionally, and physically. I think that definitely negatively impacted me, the way the system was set up and how removed they are from the feelings of the people who have to go through it.”

Those experiences led Apple to crave the freedom of the road. For many youth who have a difficult home life, going to the streets, despite its hardships, can be liberating and can help them feel in control. Apple traveled around the country, never referring to herself as homeless, but instead “home-free,” she says. “I was doing it by choice. I wanted to travel. Obviously, it’s really difficult sometimes to be outside, having nowhere to lay your head, but I felt like it was a way for me to be truly free.”

While she enjoyed the opportunity to go wherever she wanted, Apple says that she appreciates the stability she has now in her current program.

“It’s really nice,” she says. “Although the neighborhood we’re in, the Tenderloin, negatively impacts me in some ways. It’s really stressful to go outside and smell crack smoke and have people harass you and try to sell you drugs. It’s just something that really gets to me every day. But I know that I can look beyond that. Even though that’s the neighborhood I come home to, I can still seek solitude and make it a whole other world in my room. It’s nice to have a home base, especially a place where I can keep my things, like the stuff I appreciate and want to hold on to, and my art

supplies, and not having to carry it on me and risk it getting stolen.”

### Moving Beyond Day-to-Day Survival

When you live on the streets, day-to-day survival becomes paramount, and it’s hard to focus on emotional or mental health needs. When basic needs get met, there is more space to deal with other issues that can affect how you are feeling.

For Apple, learning more about healthy nutrition made a major difference in how she felt, both physically and mentally. She became so passionate about proper nutrition and natural remedies that she is preparing to go to college to study biology, laying the groundwork for a career in naturopathic medicine.

“I have a drug history and I really wasn’t able to take care of myself,” she says. “I had history with eating disorders. When I found out that you can be your ideal picture of health, you could feel good and you could be beautiful just from being healthy, just nutrition and taking care of your body can be all you need, I was like ‘wow, I can do this.’ Everybody deserves to feel healthy and not feel like they need pills and things like that.”

**“Everybody deserves to feel healthy and not feel like they need pills and things like that.”**  
- Apple, ATC Client

Matty, 23, is in tune with his emotional health, and is able to reflect on his life and recognize how to make positive changes. When he was 19, he was diagnosed with psychogenic non-epileptic seizures, which are caused by stress. He used to have seizures about once a week, but he has recently been able to identify his triggers and, in turn, manage and reduce their frequency.

“Basically, I don’t look it, and I don’t portray it all the time, but I’m mentally and emotionally unhealthy,” he says. “I tend to give myself to a lot of people all the time and go without a lot of things, such as food, money, clothes, and stuff. It’s just part of my character. It’s kind of a fault. But I’m learning to tell people no, and I’m learning not to let everything stress me out anymore. I have realized what my triggers are and it’s mostly people. I’m a really big people-person, and the certain people that have a huge influence on my life, I kind of put them on a pedestal. I realized that was stressing me out, so now I’m just like, ‘you’re back down here, and I’m up here.’ This is how it should be.”

In addition to learning to set boundaries to keep himself emotionally healthy, Matty turns to his creative side as an outlet, and especially loves singing and painting. Recently, he has been considering taking medication for his

schizophrenia, but as an artist, he’s concerned that it could interfere with his creativity.

“I don’t want to see things and I don’t want to be depressed,” Matty says about his decision to potentially start medication. “At the same time, I’m kinda scared, because what if my depression and my schizophrenia help me with my creativity, like Van Gogh? He was depressed most of his life. And Edgar Allen Poe. These are the people I emulate and aspire to be. In the sick twisted humor in my head, I think, who am I to better myself, because look what all their depression did for them? Yeah, they were never appreciated while they were alive, but afterward they’re like masterpieces, like the beautiful artists of our generation, of our world, our history.”

### Seeking Support From Service Providers

DeDe is powerfully self-motivated. Despite being homeless, she worked multiple jobs, graduated high school, and went to her prom.

“It hurts to feel what I’m feeling everyday, ‘cause I really don’t deserve that,” she says. “But I feel like it just makes me want to do better. If you work hard and you believe in yourself more than anybody else believes in you, then it’s going to happen.”

When faced with challenges, DeDe gets perspective by taking a step back and talking herself through things; she also used to write letters to herself. However, because she is fiercely independent, DeDe struggles with opening up to services that may be of support to her, like therapy.



Apple holds up her new shoes, bought by ATC

“I used to see a therapist when I was little, but I’m not a real open person,” she says. “You can’t just be like, ‘hey, what’s your name?’ and start talking to me and then think I’m going to start telling you my business. I don’t do that.”

About six months ago, DeDe decided to try therapy again, because she was going through

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# Getting Creative to Help Our Clients

There is a gap in mental health services for homeless youth in San Francisco. There are structured programs where they can receive support, but these require a fairly high level of functionality: being able to make appointments, explain feelings and experiences, and actively seek out help. There are crisis outreach teams that help youth through acute crises, like psychotic breaks or suicidal plans. But what of young people whose everyday existences are ones of ongoing crisis, who have a hard time articulating their mental health issues, and whose challenges make it difficult to seek support?

***“We don’t get to know problems; we get to know people.”***  
***- Shawn Garety***

A significant amount of ATC’s clients fall in this often-overlooked category. They have pretty severe emotional struggles, and getting through each day can be a challenge. Dealing with people can feel overwhelming, and often interactions are dominated by anger or anxiety. We knew we wouldn’t be able to directly capture the voices of these clients for this newsletter because of their discomfort being interviewed, but we also knew talking about them was important. They are near and dear to ATC’s heart, they are exactly who ATC was created to reach, and they deserve a ton of support.

In order to best capture their experience, we asked our counselors to weigh in on the unique ways in which they work with these harder-to-reach youth. Our counselors agreed that severe mental health issues don’t have to present an insurmountable obstacle in helping clients take significant steps forward in life.

“You have to be willing to be creative in how you work,” ATC Counselor Joey Hess says, “You have to really focus on the immediacy of the moment, but also seek out the opportunities where they kind of open up to provide them with longer-term support.”

For some clients, coming into our office can feel suffocating and heighten their frustrations, so we meet with them outside in a location of their choosing. Sometimes clients like to sit on park benches and relax, and other times they feel anxious and want to keep moving throughout their meeting. ATC Program Manager Shawn Garety recalls one time in particular when she repeatedly walked up and down a flight of stairs while filling out a 40-page housing application with a client who struggled with anxiety.

“First we had to find him, and then we had to warn him that this would be a long process,” she says. “He couldn’t stand still and he was getting impatient, so we paced up and down the stairs. He answered questions and I filled everything in as we were walking. And that’s how we helped him get permanently housed.”

A catch-22 for some of our youth is that the same mental health challenges that make it so important to get support and talk about their lives also make it extremely difficult for them to do so. A lot of the time, communication about feelings comes out in the form of frustration and anger. A big part of working with our most disconnected clients is dealing with a lot of anger. Anger often gets young people kicked out of programs, and alienates them from peers. However, given their tumultuous pasts and all of the difficulties that come with being broke and homeless, they have every right to be angry, and letting it out is important.

Rather than punishing youth for letting out their anger, we need to find a safe way for them to get it out. ATC counselors help our clients find ways to let out their aggression safely, rather than options that end up with them in jail or the hospital. Here again, creativity comes in handy.



*From left to right: ATC Counselors Anna Fai, Joey Hess, Lauren Johnson, Program Manager Shawn Garety, Counselors Irina Alexander and April Garcia.*

“I remember a time when Rob [ATC’s Executive Director] was working with a client, and what was going on with her was so stressful that talking about it wasn’t helpful, but she clearly needed to release her emotions,” Shawn says. “So he went through the alphabet with her, and for each letter he told her to yell out a swear word that made her vent. By the time they got to G, they were just cracking up at the ridiculous things she was saying. I think that’s a good example of the things we do.”

ATC’s model helps the counselors develop these approaches by prioritizing long-term, trusting relationships with our youth. It is so much easier to support people when you have gotten to know them really well as individuals. Clients get to dictate the pace of the relationship and the content of the conversations, making them feel comfortable and open. They also know that there is nothing that they can say or do that will result in them being kicked out, further encouraging their openness. Because of this, counselors are able to see youth for all of who they are, and help them figure out how to use their strengths to accomplish their goals. “We don’t get to know problems; we get to know

people,” Shawn says. “And we get to know more about them than just who they are in that moment.”

Through our long-term relationships, clients eventually begin to feel secure enough to let their guard down. That can often include getting mad at us, which is okay. “There was this one day when a client called, and she was really mad at us because there were a couple of things we couldn’t do,” ATC Counselor Lauren Johnson says. “It was really hard to communicate on the phone, so she cursed us out and was like, ‘I’m coming down there.’ It was basically just like, ‘okay, here it comes,’ but when she got here, she was in the sweetest, nicest space and said, ‘I’m really sorry, I lose myself sometimes.’ We don’t need that second part. If she wanted to curse us out for years that would be okay, but I think it spoke to the relationship, and how, when you’re in relationships long-term with people, they can get mad at you and know that that’s okay, and that you’ll still be there no matter what.”

Joey says he works with one client who has periods of lucidity and other times when he’s almost trapped in his own mind. Sometimes Joey will speak with him about what he’s going through; other times he just sits next to him on the street, sharing space in silence. Showing support without any expectations allows clients to open up when they feel capable, without any pressure to act or speak a certain way. Joey mentions, “No matter where he’s at with his paranoia or the struggles he’s dealing with, he knows that he can talk to us.”

As the relationships develop, clients let counselors into their lives and share with them the things they are most passionate about. Some clients share their artwork, or perform spoken word pieces. One client is an amazing horticulturist, and sends pictures of the plants he has grown. Counselors are excited to learn about clients’ passions, and they are able to have conversations about these personal interests and experiences to help ground clients when they are feeling shaky.

***“When you’re in relationships long-term with clients, they can get mad at you and know that that’s okay, and that you’ll still be there no matter what.”***  
***- Lauren Johnson***

ATC Counselor Irina Alexander recalls a birthday card that she made for a client that included pictures of all of the things he loves: his favorite band, his favorite book, his favorite author, his favorite artist—all of the different things that had come up in previous meetings.

*continued on page 8*

## Building a Healthier Future: Continued

some major transitions in her life. While she did find it helpful, unfortunately she couldn't continue because she couldn't afford it. She finds support in her regular meetings with ATC instead. "ATC is like an arm over your shoulder, like 'I got you,'" she says. "It's really helpful and it's all I need."

***"Pity is the worst feeling that I've experienced since I've been diagnosed with what I have. I'm tired of it."***  
**- Matty, ATC Client**

The cost of a good therapist is a common challenge for homeless youth who want that support. Another challenge is the revolving door of service workers and therapists. There is a high rate of staff burnout at many organizations, and for youth who want focused mental health support, the options for free therapy usually consist of graduate students who are inexperienced and in 6-12 month placements. Therefore, youth who have experienced frequent, abrupt, and painful transitions throughout their childhood continue to experience instability when they seek support.

Matty says that most of the providers he had gotten to know either moved or were offered better-paying jobs. "That's why I don't reach out too much," he says, "because every time I connect with somebody, they always leave. With every good relationship in my life, it always happens. So I'm just going to keep everyone this far away from me [motions with hands] so I won't get hurt."

Matty meets with ATC counselors regularly, and has a good relationship with all of the counselors. He says that working with ATC helped him feel comfortable opening up.

## Getting Creative: Continued

"He mentioned to me that when he was in a really bad space recently, he thought back to that card and that kind of helped him to pull himself out of it," Irina says. "It reminded him that ATC sees him as a human being, not just a number."

By learning more about each individual client, counselors are also able to recognize and celebrate important achievements with them. ATC Counselor Anna Fai says that for one client, picking up the phone and talking to her mother can be just as important as graduating from school is for another. Success begets success, and celebrating each accomplishment is an important part of helping clients develop bigger goals.

"We have one client with mental health challenges who would come by here without

"Before ATC, I was having a really hard time in therapy," he says. "I never really liked therapy, but because they're not therapists, I was okay with talking to the counselors. ATC helped me realize that it's okay to talk, and if I feel like I'm not being heard, even if I don't want confrontation, to just bring it up."

## Seeking Support From Family and Peers

Some youth, like Steven, prefer other options for support. Although he enjoys working with ATC, Steven says a "lack of faith" prevented him from following through with appointments with other service providers. He found what he was looking for in his personal network.

"I did question my mental and emotional health recently," he says. "But it wasn't anything where I was like, 'I feel suicidal,' or 'I can't control my emotions.' I just needed to vent about things. I found my outlet in my sister, so I've been receiving support that way." Steven reaches out to his older sister with "everything," he says. "It's good to have somebody who you know for a fact cares about what you're saying. So having someone that I've grown up with and is near and dear to me who can listen to me means a lot."

Matty, like Apple, is also in a housing program with a mental health focus. He says that the program requires them to talk about mental health "to the point where its kind of annoying," and while he finds that the sharing of mutual experiences with his friends can be comforting, he doesn't like telling people that he is schizophrenic.

"When people find out [about your diagnosis], you can always tell a change," he says. "It really hurts. Pity is the worst feeling that I've experienced since I've been diagnosed with what I have. I'm tired of it. And then it's annoying when people want to help you, so they look up [your diagnosis], but they don't

calling, and he didn't understand why we couldn't always do everything he wanted to do," Shawn says. "Over time, we built a relationship, and by communicating boundaries in a supportive way, we were able to help him understand that if he calls us, he's going to be able to get what he needs and have more options and be better supported, because we'll know that he's coming. Last week, he called us. For him to be able to get to a phone and call us during our office hours is incredible, and being able to celebrate that with him is a really big deal. That's just a simple example, but it was literally like years in the making to get to that moment."

There are many people on the streets who get judged as being beyond help, as being too crazy. This keeps them isolated, as no one takes the time to try to help them. But

even bother asking you what you're personally going through. They just generalize you with everyone that has the same thing you have."

Recently, however, he met someone else with schizophrenia for the first time since receiving his own diagnosis, and he says that having a peer that is going through the same thing has given him tremendous support.

"Until not even four months ago, I didn't know anyone with schizophrenia," he says. "I thought I was the only crazy person in the world. Apparently not, which makes me happy, but it's upsetting that someone else has to go through it, too. He sees me when I'm going through it and he knows how I'm feeling and vice versa. But it helps so much to know that you're not alone and you're not the only one going through this."

One of the most important things that our youth can do is build healthy, supportive communities. Having a strong network of caring people helps you through tough periods and allows you to celebrate the good times. For our clients, it can be particularly hard to build these relationships; they usually didn't have good models growing up and often feel a sense of loneliness while on the streets. We feel very lucky to be a part of our clients' lives, to be there to support them in their times of need, and to cheer them on during their moments of success and happiness.

"Before I settled down in San Francisco, I never had a lot of lasting relationships," Apple says. "People would leave me, and I would leave them, because we were all traveler kids. Now that I've been here a while, I know people are gonna be there. That's really helpful in getting my goals straight and not just rebelling against everything, but actually seeing a path that is feasible. Now I have more hope for the future, and I feel like that's a big factor in good mental health."

they can make positive changes, and they can build better lives. Supporting them takes time, patience, consistency, understanding, and a little creativity. And just about everyone appreciates and responds to that.



ATC Counselors April, Joey, and Lauren prepare sandwiches for outreach.

## In Memory of Lynn Taslitz

In July of 2008, Lynn Taslitz volunteered at ATC for the first of 34 times. She was a regular at our monthly prep nights, and was someone we could depend on at our most important events. Lynn was incredibly organized and detail-oriented, highly personable, and completely reliable. One of the many awesome things about Lynn was her passion for doing a great job; she made sure that those around her shared her passion, or faced her gentle admonishments. Her least favorite activity was to organize our clothing room, but when she was assigned the task, she did it with gusto, and one time got into a heated debate with a fellow volunteer who lacked her dedication and wouldn't do things the ATC way.

In 2010, she helped raise money for ATC by joining our Summer SunDay Hike with friend and fellow volunteer Kat Cullen. As they neared the peak of Mt. Tam, our Executive Director, Rob Gitin, had the pleasure of joining them for a while. He noticed that either Kat or Lynn always seemed to be a couple of steps ahead of the other. He realized that they had engaged in an unspoken competition to see who would reach the peak first, despite the completely uncompetitive nature of the hike. But don't be confused by her fire. Lynn was also a big

softie with a huge heart who loved to laugh and smile and collected friends wherever she went. She was a cherished member of our community.

In late 2011, Lynn was diagnosed with cancer. She battled it with the same strength that she always displayed. She never wanted to know her prognosis, because as she would put it, she was either 100% or 0%, and until she died, she was 100%. She passed away in December 2012, surrounded by a family who loved her dearly.

Lynn's parents Florence and Jerry and her sister Nancy wanted to honor Lynn's memory by celebrating the huge role she played in our organization. They asked that donations be made in memory of Lynn to ATC. They organized a team of friends, family and coworkers to hike in her honor at this year's Summer SunDay Hike. And they got together a group of people who loved her to volunteer this August, which seemed like the most fitting way of all to honor her. The silver lining in Lynn's passing is that it has introduced us to the countless people who knew her and loved her, and brought us all together. We miss you Lynn, and as you can tell, you will never be forgotten.



Top: Lynn Taslitz; Bottom: Kat Cullen (left) and Lynn (right) with another hiker at the 2010 Summer SunDay Hike



Team Lynn hikers at the 2013 Summer SunDay Hike

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Lynn with her nieces, Alyssa and Sophia

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- Joseph Ansaneli & Kathryn Corro
- Camille Dungey
- Sandy Grant
- Mary Gregory
- Joey Hess
- Erin Hult & Laura Hyde
- Andrew McClelland, Janet Yu, & Zora McClelland-Yu
- Bonnie Puckett
- Wendy Todd

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May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, \$30,000  
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Our donors are extremely important to us. If you notice omissions or errors, please email [robjg@atthecrossroads.org](mailto:robjg@atthecrossroads.org)

## I Think I Can Campaign, Summer SunDay Hike, and Spinning Spokes for Homeless Folks Cycling Event Donors - We Love You, Too!

We wish there were enough space to acknowledge everyone who donated to the 2012 and 2013 I Think I Can Campaigns, Summer SunDay Hike, or Spinning Spokes for Homeless Folks, but there are too many to list - 1,241 from 2012 and 1,481 from 2013. A good problem to have! Find their names immortalized at:

[www.atthecrossroads.org/contributors](http://www.atthecrossroads.org/contributors)

# THANK YOU!

### I Think I Can Campaign Participants

Irina Alexander	Rachel Jacobson
Dan Baum	Matt Krizan
Branwyn Bigglestone	Yael Kropsky
Rosa Theresa Booker	Jeff Lakusta
Luis Campos	Jessica Lewis
Anne Cassia	Kathryn Logronio
Yev Chityan	Rachel McLean
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Jocelyn Everroad	Danielle Pappas
Reid Feldman	Kristyn Poechner
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Jonina Friedman	A.J. Seliga
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Ilana Golin	Kyle Sieben
Doug Grant	Lauren Sir
Andrea Griffin	Aerin Sizelove
Beth Hampson	Violet Votin
Sarah Harper	Carol Wai
Ons Harrabi	Holly Warren

### Summer SunDay Hike Participants

Anne Adams	Leigh Davenport	Grace Lawrence	Brooke Rawdin
Chanel Alexander	Amy Davidson	Morgan Lesko	Pat Read
Liz Ambrosia	James deBoer	Will Luo	Jacquelyn Reyes
Ian Anderson	Mansi Deshpande	Rishi Malhotra	Chris Rico
Chiara Angelicola	Alisa DeWys	Lisa Manss	Erika Rigger
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Angela Bandlow	Camille Dungey & Ray Black	Anne & Dan McCadden	Marc Roth
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Nancy Daniel	Jennifer Kincaid	Crystal Pham	Jeff Wishner
Martine Darwish	Evelyn Kuo	Sarah Puls	Tiffany Zhang

# I Think I Can Campaign

In 2013 ...



Adam Miller swam under the Golden Gate Bridge while his wife and one-year-old daughter walked above and raised \$4,484!



Beth Hampson and Pearl Monaghan planned an open mic night, bravely performing in public for the first time and raising \$561!



Greg Nerpouni gave blood for each donation level reached. He raised \$1,225 and gave blood four times - and counting!



Jessica Lewis dressed like Snow White in different embarrassing locations for each donation level reached and raised \$1,655!

... 46 people raised \$58,255!

**What will you accomplish in 2014?**

**Sign up now at [atthecrossroads.org/campaign](http://atthecrossroads.org/campaign)**



1 Day  
1 Mountain  
165 Hikers  
**\$55,846 Raised**

If you weren't there, be sure to join us next year for our 5th Annual Summer SunDay Hike on Mt. Tam! Trust us, you don't want to miss it.

For more information, visit [atthecrossroads.org/summersunday](http://atthecrossroads.org/summersunday)