

At The Crossroads

NEWSLETTER

This newsletter focuses on the theme of talents and passions. We're excited to share some of what inspires our clients, fulfills them, and keeps them optimistic about their future.

Coming from the Streets, Documenting the Truth

Seven years ago, ATC counselors would see Kevin Epps on Market Street, hand him a toothbrush and a PB&J sandwich, and he would tell us about making a film about Hunter's Point. Kevin was on the streets, hustling to survive and to fund his movie. Now a highly acclaimed documentary filmmaker, Kevin tells us about pursuing his dreams, and about watching others struggle to bring their talents to light.

Kevin Epps can't remember a time when he didn't have passion for making film.

"I just always had a fascination with watching films and documentaries. Since I was little," said Kevin, who can to this day recall the impact of the first time he saw a picture of Spike Lee. "He was sitting in a director's chair. And it was like, 'what's this little black dude doing?' What's he doing in the director's chair, and it says director, and it looks like he's somebody? That's what kept me going. But it never materialized, because of all the shit in life that you go through."

That life was centered around Hunter's Point, poverty, and struggle, "being a nigga from the Projects, mom's on crack, jail, real shit," said Kevin, who quickly found he had to give up on hopes of going to college to study film. "I was hustling, trying to survive. Like everybody else on the block."

With college no longer an immediate option, Kevin got his film education at the Film Arts Foundation in SOMA.

"Even when I was hustling, I would make time, go to the Film Arts library, read scripts by independent artists, talk to other directors, kept my juices flowing," said Kevin. "I fed that passion and that desire."

While he made his living on the streets, Kevin did what he could to pursue his film.

"I found the time to sit down and write every now and then," he remembers. "People always said, man, you been dreamin', get a real job, get your life together. But even when I was deep in the game, I had this on my mind: 'One day I'm going to do this.' I'm gonna make a movie about this."

And just six years later, he did. *Straight Outta Hunter's Point*, Kevin's first movie, debuted in the summer of 2001. It deals with the reality of – and the misperceptions about – the place he calls home.

I coulda been just another dude in prison for life. Making the film opened me up, like opening a window to a world.

"People who never go to Hunter's Point, I get emails from them," said Kevin, "from dudes who's like, 'I had a whole different view of Hunter's Point, but now you opened my eyes to the underlying issues.' It's like a window. It breaks barriers."

Kevin also got support from his mother that he now sees as vital for him believing in himself.

"She used to tell us we were smart," recalled Kevin. "When I was little, 9, 10, 11, playing basketball, mom was at the game, cheering, 'That's my boy!' That kind of support instilled me with values, even though there were overwhelming odds. I was like, I can do this, no matter how deeply someone took it to the hole."

Sometimes this belief was the only difference Kevin saw between the guys on the street who made it and the guys who died trying.

"You gotta have something you think is going to happen," said Kevin. "You just want the possibility. Everybody is talented in their own way, even on the streets. You got homies that's messed up, that's doped out. They keep their raps on napkins. That keeps them alive."

And Kevin also believes that his film is in many ways what kept him from succumbing to the streets.

"I really didn't have no way out," recalled Kevin. "I couldn't get no legitimate job because of my record. I sold drugs all

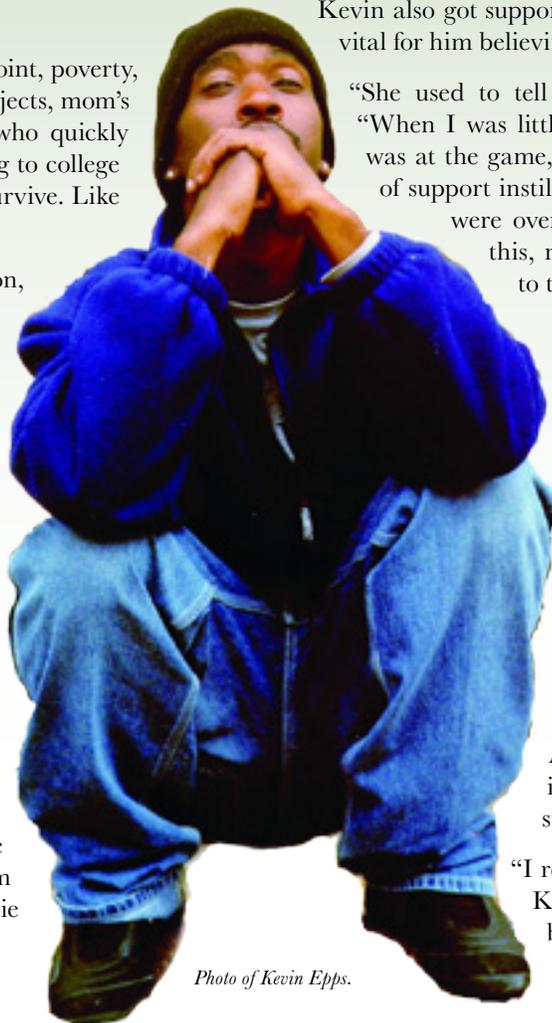


Photo of Kevin Epps.

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Letter from the Director

Rob Gitin



All too often, when people think about helping homeless people, they focus on certain concrete topics. Housing. Money. Jobs. Among service providers, these are the issues that always get discussed and prioritized. At most programs for homeless people, or very poor people, success is defined by these topics. Did you get into housing? Did you get a job? Are you able to pay your bills? If a client can answer yes to one of these questions, he is succeeding. If a client can answer yes to all three of these questions, he is doing incredibly well.

It is understandable that we focus on these issues. They are concrete, and relatively easy to evaluate. And they are important. It is a good thing when someone goes from being homeless to being housed, from unemployed to employed, from broke to financially stable. And everyone wants to see homeless people off of the streets and in stable living situations.

But what really determines whether or not you are feeling fulfilled, feeling good about life? For many people I know, two factors are often critical. The first is the relationships in their life. When people feel good about their community of friends and family, they often are happy overall. The other is whether or not they are able to pursue their talents and passions. Whether it is through work, hobbies, volunteering, or some other method, if people are able to cultivate their talents and invest in their passions, that has a significant impact on how they feel.

Perhaps even more importantly, the pursuit of talent can provide people with the fulfillment that everyone deserves in life. With At The Crossroads, we don't just want to see our clients survive; we want to see them thrive. We don't want them to just be functioning members of society. We want them to enjoy life. We want them to experience love. We want them to feel inspired, to have something that makes them feel good about themselves at the end of the day.

I've known clients who have gotten off of the streets, and then have experienced something of a letdown. The initial happiness about having a warm bed and a safe space starts to wear off, and they are left with the question, "What is my purpose?" It is the same question that so many people struggle with.

For many of our clients, their sense of purpose, and sometimes their sense of identity, comes from their talents. Some clients use their talents as a way to pass the time. Others use it to pay their bills. And for some, it is what keeps them going, what allows them to deal with the challenges of life on the streets. It is critical to recognize their talents and support them in developing those talents. At a time when arts and music budgets are being cut in schools across the country, and nonprofits that offer creative opportunities are sometimes looked at as frivolous, it is important to remember the value of giving people the chance to develop and experience their talents.

For most people, achieving basic stability is not a motivating goal, in and of itself. In order for them to want to move beyond the streets, having a sense of purpose can provide the motivation they need. Wanting to pursue a talent can give them a sense of future, and can provide the impetus to build more stable lives for themselves. A passion can save their lives, and give them meaning.

Rob Gitin
Director, At The Crossroads

PS - Good bye, Lori

ATC is saying goodbye to Lori Norcia, who for the past five years has been the heart and soul of our staff. When Taj and I interviewed Lori five years ago, I remember writing down in our post-interview notes that she was a "potential superstar." I am happy to say that we were right.

Lori has raised awareness of the issues that impact our kids, and has established a number of fantastic relationships with members of the community. Lori has been a mentor to our staff members, helping develop the next generation of leaders for ATC. More than anything, Lori has brought her heart and emotion to every aspect of her work, impacting the lives of hundreds of young people on the streets, and making an indelible mark on ATC. Lori was the glue that held together ATC during our early years. We are thrilled that Lori will continue on as a volunteer for ATC, and we are excited to see what our favorite, self-proclaimed "Queen of The World" accomplishes in the future.

At The Crossroads

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Outreach Volunteers: Becky Johnson, Victor Duron, Gregory Gooden, John Sorrenti, Joy Brown, Meredith Vigna, Tev Monin, Naomi Irvine **Organizational Volunteers:** Kristina Batiste, Ed Yaffa, Carol Zielke **Advisory Board Members:** Al Camarillo, Marykate Connor, Nadinne Cruz, Taj Mustapha, Steve Williams

ATC Mission Statement + Core Values

Mission Statement

At the Crossroads reaches out to homeless youth and young adults at their point of need, and works with them to build healthy and fulfilling lives.

Core Values

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

What We Do – The Basics

- ▶ ATC is on the streets four nights a week in two areas of San Francisco; Downtown and the Mission. We hand out basic necessities like food, condoms, socks, tampons, and hygiene items.
- ▶ We build trusting, non-judgmental counseling relationships, help clients identify goals, and support them in achieving these goals.
- ▶ We meet with some clients 1-to-1, in a public space of their choosing. We listen to them and provide tailored referrals to other services.
- ▶ We do not exit our clients if and when they leave the streets. We continue to work with clients through this transition, for as long as they want.
- ▶ We work closely 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 helpful documents.

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. **Checks should be made payable to: "At The Crossroads, a project of CIF"** Or make a credit card donation at www.atthecrossroads.org.

Volunteer your skills.

When people donate their time and skills, we are able to keep program costs down and put more of our funds into the direct work with clients. Could you donate tech. support, web design, legal, or accounting skills? Other ideas? Email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.

Volunteer to go on street outreach.

Volunteers accompany Counselors on the street – carrying supplies like drinks and socks. Find out about the process on our website. Email Kelly at kellyb@atthecrossroads.org

Join our volunteer email list.

Receive emails about our monthly supply prep nights, as well as other volunteer opportunities. Help us prepare supplies for outreach to our clients by making candy packs, bunching socks, and bagging soaps and Q-tips. Prep Nights are scheduled on every last Wednesday of the month. If you would like to join our volunteer email list, email Rob at rob@atthecrossroads.org.

Expand our network.

Please let others who might be interested in ATC know about our work! If you'd like, we'll provide you with a packet of information – or pass on our newsletter and/or direct people to our website: www.atthecrossroads.org.

Be creative.

We're open to hearing your ideas for supporting ATC. Any questions, please feel free to contact us through email (getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org) or phone (415-487-0691).

Find our Wish List on our website: www.atthecrossroads.org.

Things Going on in San Francisco-City Government shines spotlight on young adults

San Francisco, like so many other cities across the country, has realized that there is a lack of adequate support for “transition-age” youth. Transition-age youth is becoming a more common phrase in the nonprofit and philanthropic worlds; it usually means disconnected young people between the ages of 18 and 24, although it can start as early as 16 and end as late as 29, by different definitions. This is a critical developmental stage in people's lives, yet there are few services specifically designed to meet the needs of this age range.

The SF city government has convened its first **Transition Age Youth Task Force** to identify the needs of these young people and develop strategies to give them the proper support. At The Crossroads will be participating in this group, ensuring that the needs of underserved homeless youth are addressed. A wide variety of service providers, academics, policy makers, and young people are represented. We hope that this group is all about action, and that the end result is an effective continuum of support for young people at a crucial stage in their lives.

Not just Surviving, but Thriving through Talent

“If I don’t have music,” Jesh, an At The Crossroads client, described, “my sanity flies. That’s like, that’s the glue that holds me together.”

Several other clients feel the same way about what we’ve loosely categorized as their talents – making music, writing, singing, rapping, drawing, tattooing, designing clothes, bags, boats and planes.

“It’s a way for me to ground myself and get in touch with myself,” said Khristine, who paints when she’s not busy painting homes to make ends meet. “That sounds super hippie, but it’s true. There has to be a lust for life in me. Or I might as well be dead or in the gutter still.”

Said Noshius, who expresses himself through drawing and videography, “My talent is important to me because it’s something special that God gave me to share with other people.”

“It’s a way to channel my creativity through fashion,” said Deee-Gorgeous. “I just enjoy it. It’s fun. Deeeefun.”

“I don’t know if I can do anything else,” said Cuffy, who often finds herself staying up until all hours designing boats. “I mean, I’m not saying I would have jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge by now or anything, but I think I would die of boredom if I didn’t have something.”

For other clients, they see their talent as the best way to get by.

“It’s something I’m good at,” said Roe, a tattoo artist who took it up after body piercing because she knew she could be better than the boys who did it. “It’s something I can do that’s not selling crack, and that’ll keep me out of jail.”

For many of our clients, the pursuit of their passion began at an early age. Some, like Jesh, can remember it flowing out of them even before they knew what it was, “beatin’ out rhythms on the lunchroom tables.” Others, like Blacc-Smythe, fell into MCing and rapping when he found out he couldn’t sing.

“Some guys, you can sit them down and talk to them, and they won’t be able to relay what they’re thinking to you,” explained Blacc-Smythe. “But they can rap about it.”



*ATC clients Noshius and P.D. ham it up for the ATC camera downtown.
Photo by ATC staff.*

Indeed, several clients talked about how their talent was one of the main ways to express themselves. For Khristine, a painting she did when she was 16 of an American flag was her outlet for expressing the pain and anger she felt in her life.

“Instead of stripes there are dead bodies, and the stars are all dripping blood,” she described. “Yeah, I couldn’t believe I had painted that when I was 16. It’s pretty rad.”

There has to be a lust for life in me. Or I might as well be dead or in the gutter still.

— Khristine

The painting means so much to Khristine that she has found a way to hold on to it since then, no small feat for someone who, like a lot of our clients, is constantly losing supplies or having them stolen. Not having a space in which to create can also lead to frustration.

“I don’t have a super cheap space for a creative outlet,” said Deee-Gorgeous. “It’s undeeegorgeous. It’s a deeedrag.”

Yet clients also talked about how the biggest boundary to pursuing their talent often comes from themselves. Like anyone pursuing a talent while making life work, for our clients it requires a tremendous amount of time and discipline.

“I have a full plate with my life right now,” said Deee-Gorgeous. “I need to be more diligent in making it fit into my day. I need to make more time for myself to do it.”

“I was thinking about starting an arts group or something, so I can make sure I go to it every day and get stuff done,” said Khristine.

Another big block for several clients was their life on the streets, particularly their drug use.

“I wasn’t painting when I was on the street,” said Khristine. “The lie that people say that being on drugs connects you to your creativity and shit doesn’t do it for me at all. When I’m on drugs, I’m totally not connected to myself or my body at all.”

There are other clients, however, for whom their life on the streets is what feeds their talent.

“You see guys come into the rap game, ‘I’m like this, I’m like that, with all these metaphors, and it’s like, who are you really though?’” said Blacc-Smythe. “What you into? Tell me where you came from. Anybody can put rhymes together. But to express yourself, that’s a different thing. To me, being on the streets and being in the pen’ advanced my game more. My eyes started opening up. But if you ain’t never been through nothing, how can you tell me about the streets?”

Even for clients who saw the need to get away from street life to pursue their talents, there are still the struggle and the sacrifices needed to make it all work.

“My first album that I finished solo was all on borrowed equipment,” recalled Jesh, who now has a laptop he traded bits and pieces for that he can call his own. “So when the equipment had to be returned, I could take only the songs that were finished. That kinda hurt.”

Yet for clients who are able to find ways around the struggles and sacrifices, their talents become a way to define a goal for their future.

“I think tattooing is a job I would actually do,” said Jay, who is learning the art with Roe. “I’ve had other jobs, like I’ve welded, good paying jobs, but I despised going there. And if I’m doing a job I dislike, I’ll start using again. I already know that.”

Dee-Gorgeous wants to go back to school to get a degree in fashion visuals and merchandising. Even though she has had to put her education on hold for health reasons, Cuffy still thinks about going back to school for design as well.

For others who have tasted the professional world

of their talent, some of the bitterness has stuck.

“I’m not doing it, like, the way I used to do it, for the love of it,” said Blacc-Smythe, who, when he visions his future, thinks not about MCing but about teaching kids kung fu or becoming a personal trainer. “Anything else, but no more rapping. I’m tired. And it’s changed so much. It’s not about the artist no more.”

And there are ways to be truer to your talent, agreed Jesh.

“It’s all about making money, instead of making your art,” he said. “If people got a talent, they should do it, regardless of money.”

— Jay Because even without the money, for people like Jay, having a talent means holding on to a life that’s about more than just surviving.

“If I didn’t have some kind of hope or dream, I mean, what’s the use of being sober?” said Jay. “I got to think about some kind of life goal. If I don’t have that, it’s meaningless. I might as well be loaded.”

If I didn’t have some kind of hope or dream, I mean, what’s the use of being sober?

Creating new dreams

When clients come to us looking for an outlet for their talents, we often refer them to one of our collaborators that specialize in helping youth reach their creative potential. Clients get to take a break from the harsh realities of survival, and get to cultivate their talents and have fun. For this newsletter, we talked to three of these collaborators to find out about the work they do and how they see it affecting the lives of the youth they serve.

Music for Life

For DJ Project Youth Instructor Arsenio, his first time with the DJ Project came as a youth himself in the beginning of 2005, an event that he says “saved my life.”

“I was at a low point,” described Arsenio.

“I just wanted a release, to get away from it all. A lot of youth do, to find a place of security where it feels like home.”

The home that Arsenio found with the DJ Project was based around a mutual love of music – the making of it, the recording of it, the distributing of it throughout the community and the country. Every three months or so, the DJ Project takes on 10 youth in a 10-week workshop to teach them all aspects of the music industry. 80

to 90 percent of these youth – often even the ones who only saw music as a hobby when they started the workshop – go on to pursue music in their lives, whether on the production end or as aspiring artists themselves. Arsenio himself was so taken with the program that he found a way to become an instructor, where he has been working since the Fall of last year. The youth who come to the DJ Project do so from a variety of backgrounds: some of them are in or just out of school, some of them have been living or working on the streets. The thing that unites them, described Arsenio, is that almost all the youth “are at a point of transition in what they want to do with their life. Where do they want to go? The DJ Project gives them guidance and skills, and shows them, all isn’t limited to what’s in front of them.”

Unheard Voices

This sense of possibilities beyond the life they know is also central to The Beat Within, a weekly writing and conversation program co-founded by Director David Inocenio. What unites the youth in his program is that they’re



Every aspect of *The Beat Within*, from the articles to the art, comes from the youth in Bay Area juvenile halls who create it.

all incarcerated in juvenile hall. Once a week, anywhere from four to forty youth offenders gather together in one of 50 workshops held by The Beat Within, and spend the next hour talking, writing, and sharing about their lives. “A lot of kids in Juvenile Hall wear a lot of masks,” said David, who started the program in 1996, one of several creative projects under

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John Connor, as he refers to himself, also calls himself an orphan. His dad died in a car accident when John was young, and he can't remember a time when his mother wasn't addicted to crack cocaine. "I could be strung out right now," said John. "I could be depressed or want to feel sorry for myself. Please. I ain't got time for that." John Connor doesn't have time because he'd rather focus his talents – and his pain – on pursuing spoken word. He talked in March with At The Crossroads about what spoken word means to him, what drives and feeds him, where he's coming from and where he wants to go next.



How do you start a spoken word piece?

Oh, I just write and write. And I try to keep a clear and an open mind, to learn new things and a new truth.

What do you find yourself writing about?

Political things, always. I write about anything to do with the struggle of the people, all people. You show me where there's

a struggle, you show me how we get mistreated by the police, how the politicians lie to us, how we really don't have no freedom of speech, it's like we're really in the matrix.

Where do you see the matrix?

All the people in my community are all strung out on drugs. Like when my dad died and my mother was traumatized from that and started doing crack. If the crack wasn't there, she wouldn't have did it. People ain't going on something that's not there. But the pieces is set up for you to really get on it. Those drugs were pushed into my community. If those drugs hadn't been put there, I would have had a better schooling, better family, a lot of the situations I was given I wouldn't have been in. It was a set up. They tried to wipe out a whole generation. I'm just an aftermath from that generation. From crack. I'm the aftermath. From the people from my mother's generation – you can count on two hands the people who made it through. You don't even have to use two hands. That's terrible. If you got money, it don't matter, you can detox for real. But when you don't have the money to do nothing like that, you don't have a choice but to keep doing it. Where you gonna go? You gonna go to some program for six months and then go back to the same neighborhood, and deal with the same problems, the same situations? That's what the matrix is to me. So somebody gotta come out and talk about it. And I'm not just talking about talking about it. I'm talking about yelling. And I can do it. I'm gonna do it.

How do you get your message across?

By being true to myself. By realizing first that I'm not some street

cat. I had to stop doing the things I was doing – running the streets playing with guns, getting arrested for selling drugs, thinking I was a thug and I'm cool. And I wasn't cool, 'cause if you're cool, you're cool with the truth. I'm a black man, first of all. The cards I was given was real tough, I mean, it was a rigged hand. It was a recipe for failure. For real, right? But then that was great. Why? Because the greater my trials and tribulations, the greater my reward. I grew up a lot of times crying, asking God why. But now I know why. Because everything I felt, all the pain, all the hurt, that's gonna be my drive, my fuel. I don't want no silver spoon in my mouth. I refuse to have it. Because then I'm blind.

What do you mean by blind, blind how?

Once upon a time I thought things was fun. I was out there doing drugs, telling myself I'm not strung out. Yeah, maybe I wasn't full blown strung out, but I'm not really being a productive person. That's just sickness. The person with the terminal disease is doing better – for real! – than somebody who thinks they okay, walking around blinded. 'Cause at least the person with the disease is aware of their situation and dealing with it. But the person who's not aware, who's not trying to be aware and they think they're okay, that's sick. That's the sickness that we need to fight.

How do you fight it?

You gotta go to the puppet master, take the head of the beast. Let's get the power back to the people. If I'm the puppet master, the invisible man, and you're standing next to your sister, and you got your back to her, I can come up and slap you. When you turn around, who you gonna blame? Oh my goodness, you're going to blame your sister. If you don't believe we're in the matrix, that there's no other entity out here working against you, you can't fight it. You tell me until something bad happens in New York, until the dollar drops and there's riots in the streets and we really got it bad, then we're gonna wake up? We can't wake up then, we got to do it now.

And that's what you're writing and fighting now?

Right now? I'm not even activated, not even a little bit. I'm real calm, collected. Like a car that's in drive, but it's not driving, just coasting a little bit. But once you hit the gas, and it starts going hella quick, then you'll see what I'm talking about. When God wants me to be activated, He gives me that energy. I'm only in control of getting ready for the activation. I know I got to be aware that it's coming and it will come. When I start yelling, then you'll know.

What have you had to sacrifice to do your spoken word?

A lot of things. Now I can't be with the same friends. If they popping ecstasy pills, I can't really do that. If everyone is drinking and I'm the only sober person, I'm like a sore thumb, I stick out. It's like I'm a party pooper. It's okay though. When I stopped doing drugs, my friends didn't understand it. They said, "Come on. You was the main one – you was the man. Why you stop?" Obviously I got enlightened about something. I seen something, I don't care to talk about that too much. Whatever I seen, it scared me. People see me with a lot of tattoos, I got tattoos on my face, and a lot of people would misinterpret it. They say it means you've been in prison, it means murder. I'm gonna let people guess and they can keep guessing. I know this face will be used, you feel me, so others – I'm trying to stop others from going through my pain. I know I'm gonna die fighting the struggle. I know I'm not going to see the change. But I don't want to feel sorry for myself. That takes too much energy. That's energy I can be using to do something else.

Time waits for no man,

but what about the man who waits for time to let go of his hands?

Twenty-five to life is what they give us.

Twenty-five years later they tell us it was a mistake,

because now DNA is what they take.

All it takes is the truth,

but they're still lying to this day.

They put paint on Jesus' face

to hide the truth about their ways.

To make us feel like we were conquered,

from the beginning to this day.

I'm talking about our brothers of another shade.

Cain killed Able because they were different in a way...

Basically what I'm saying is we're still brothers of another mother,

that doesn't hide the fact that brothers come in different colors.

We all have to answer to our father,

and you don't want to have to answer to having killed your own brother.

-John Connor

Catching up with Nicholas Coley



Nicholas Coley is a talented young artist, whose art can be seen in galleries in San Francisco as well as the walls of ATC's office. We met Nic eight years ago, when he was struggling to balance his painting with his life on the streets. Some of the artwork and poetry that Nic produced while on the streets was featured in our newsletters five years ago. Though Nic has been off the streets for four years, he remembers the challenges he used to face.

"I once had a roll of canvas and I stashed it behind a gas station billboard — there was about six inches between two walls — and came back a few days later and it was gone. I could give you a million little stories like that. It was also hard because I wasn't a very good junkie. I was dope sick all the time. So it was hard to make time to paint."

Nic's time on the streets continues to inform his art. "To this day, I find myself more identifying with being a survivor of those five or six years, a survivor of that little trip to hell, than I do as an artist. Those are my two identities. One of the things I am grateful to having been a drug addict about is that I do have a sense of how to behave on the street. If you learn to become experienced to what the world is like, it's not the scary nightmare that suburban white America makes it out to be. It's an asset for me to have that, to not be afraid, so that I can go paint there or almost anywhere."

Focused and motivated, Nic is excited about what his future holds. "I'm pulling in all the energies and I'm going to focus entirely on becoming the next Matisse. I'm not kidding. I'm inspired, I really don't like fame but I do want to be great. All that new age stuff about "take it easy on yourself," I'm like, no, I need a driving force. I really want to push myself and I'm really willing to put everything into that. I'm excited about that. I'm up for the challenge."

You can see Nic's art, like the piece above, at www.nicholascoley.com

Changes in ATC



Lori Norcia will be leaving ATC as a full-time staff member after more than five years of dedicated service to young people (see the article below). Taking her place in this position will be **Shawn Garety**, who has spent the past two years working with ATC as an outreach counselor in the Mission District of San Francisco. Shawn will bring her incredible passion for our clients to this role, and will undoubtedly be a fantastic advocate for their needs. Her friendliness and open-minded nature will serve her well as she develops partnerships with other programs throughout the Bay Area.

We also want to welcome four new outreach volunteers: **Joy Brown, Meredith Vigna, Tev Monin, and Naomi Irvine**. Joy, who works for the San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team, started volunteering with ATC last fall. Meredith started interning with us in late January as part of a CCSF program. She goes on outreach once a week and helps us expand our community resources. Tev started volunteering with us in late January; he brings a variety of knowledge from past and current volunteer and advocacy work to our organization. Naomi started volunteering with us in late February and is currently attending SFSU. She hopes to involve community work in some way in her future career. They are all doing a fantastic job, and have taken to their roles quickly. They have helped stabilize our outreach, and have added four great new personalities to ATC. We are so grateful for their time and energy!

Five Years of ATC Wonder Woman!

In June of this year, after more than five years with At The Crossroads, **Lori Norcia** will be hanging up her outreach bag, handing in her jail badge, and leaving ATC.

As anyone who has had the privilege of working with Lori knows, the degree of passion she has for her work drives her to not only do the best she can but also to make the organization around her even better. When Lori joined ATC, there was only one office phonenumber and one computer. The small, windowless office was often a mess, as everyone was on outreach four nights a week and no one had the time to attend to the health of the organization. With her passion to make ATC the best it could be, Lori was crucial in the creation of the first-ever Program Manager position, and took on this role in May 2003.

“I think that is one of the things that I’m most proud of here,” said Lori. “the work that the counselors do is so hard, so time-consuming, that the person who supports them really needs to be connected in a way that not only supervises them but also appreciates them, rewards them, encourages them, empowers them.”

The creation of more structured support for counselors led to other important changes in the organization, such as the addition of two new staff positions, the Community Resource Coordinator (later Director), to help build relationships with other service organizations that can help our clients, and a Development Associate.

As the organization has expanded, Lori is proud that the core philosophy of ATC’s work has remained the same.

“Given the growth we have had, it’s surprising that the work we do with the clients really hasn’t changed,” said Lori. “And now that we’ve matched the organizational side with the philosophical side, it’s no surprise the quality of care that our clients get.”

It’s a quality of care that can sometimes be

bittersweet. Lori has experienced the loss of a handful of clients — some of whom had already started to make improvements in their lives — passing away.

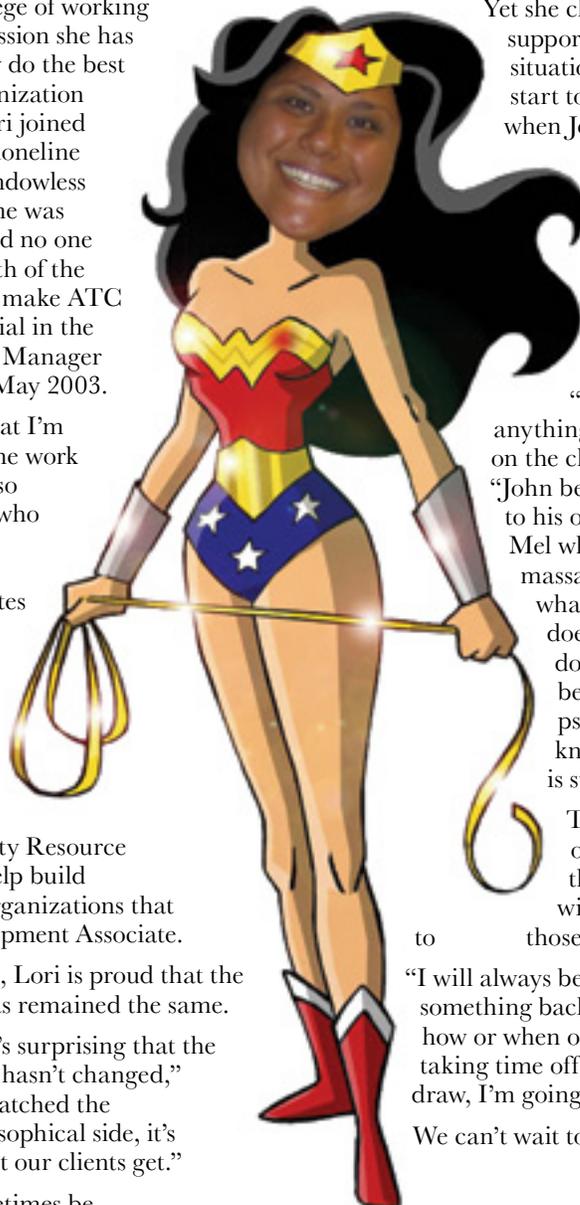
Yet she cherishes the privilege of being able to support clients who have faced life-threatening situations, helping them find ways to survive and start to make the life they want. Lori recalled when John gave her his 30-day chip for his first 30 days of being sober, telling her “I want you to know that in those first 30 days, had I not thought of you being there, I don’t know what I would have done.” And when she visited her client Shayana in jail, she remembers when Shayana introduced her to someone by saying, “This is Lori, she did my time [in jail] with me.”

“I put that back on them, ‘we didn’t do anything! It’s all your work,’” said Lori, reflecting on the clients she has worked with over the years. “John being sober right now is really a testament to his own willpower and drive. I’m not with Mel when she’s maintaining an A average at massage therapy school. It’s interesting to me, what knowing that somebody’s in your corner does. It’s surprising that what we do — which doesn’t seem to really have a definition, because it’s not labeled by social workers or psychologists — just being there, and them knowing that you’re there unconditionally is such a huge, huge deal to them.”

The realization of this impact she can have on other people has already convinced Lori that whatever she does in the future, she will always reach out to her community and to those who don’t have their basic needs met.

“I will always be the sort of person who gives something back,” said Lori. “I’m just not sure how or when or why. Right now, I’m going to be taking time off. I’m going to paint, I’m going to draw, I’m going to write. And then I’ll give back.”

We can’t wait to see how Lori gives next.



ATC Steps Back to Move Forward



ATC staff members and board member Nadinne Cruz (top row, third from left), enjoy the sunshine at the ATC retreat. Photo by Mort Landsberg.

It rained for forty days and forty nights, or so it seemed. Throughout March and April, San Francisco experienced the rainiest period in its history. The constant rain threatened to wash away ATC's first-ever staff retreat. But then, on April 17th and 18th, something amazing happened: sunshine! And our retreat was on. On the 17th and the 18th, ATC's staff took a step back and talked about where we are in the present and where we want to go in the future. We were able to celebrate the great work that is being done, while discussing what we need to do to improve and grow.

We also had time to play ATC Cranium (A Kelly Brandon creation), and take a dip in the pool and the hot tub of The Hills Swim and Tennis club in the Oakland Hills. We were so lucky to be able to spend our time basking in the sunshine, overlooking the Oakland Hills, using the facilities at this great club. Well, it wasn't really luck. It was **Mort Landsberg, Host Supreme**. As a dedication to his brother Stuart, who recently passed away, Mort decided to host our retreat at his club, pay for our meals, and invite us into his home. His gracious, giving ways ensured that we all felt comfortable and cared for. Mort is the man. We were also incredibly fortunate to benefit from the wisdom and knowledge of our two guest speakers, **Nadinne Cruz and Lateefah Simon**. Nadinne made sure that we all had our "visionary" thinking caps on, helping us place our work in the larger context of the change we want to see in the world. Lateefah provided her unique insight into the realities of young people of color on the streets of San Francisco, making connections that enlightened all of us. We are grateful that they gave us their time and insights. All things considered, the retreat was a smashing success, even though much of our staff suffered a mild case of sunstroke.

Continued from Page 5

Pacific News Services. "They have the fear of not wanting to show any softness. Over time, I see through the writing, the softness just comes out." Some of these creations are published in The Beat Within's weekly magazine, which has 3,000 to 5,000 copies distributed throughout the juvenile halls, as well as to lawyers, judges and schools. Roaddawgz street youth participants contribute creations to YO! Youth Outlook — both are projects of Pacific News Services. YO! has a circulation of 25,000 around the Bay Area. This circulation doesn't include Roaddawgz' well-trafficked website, roaddawgz.org, which is chock full of stories, reflections, poems and artwork from homeless youth across the Bay Area and the country.

Expression through Writing

At the Haight Ashbury Youth Outreach Team (HAYOT), their 'zine may not have a large circulation outside the kids who make it, but it has an impact on the lives of those who can see their thoughts given space on a page. "Youth need a creative outlet to express themselves," said Mary Howe, executive director of HAYOT, which offers two weekly creative workshops along with

the 'zine. "A lot of the kids I see are so much more articulate with writing than I've seen them with other services." This articulation of self, of their deeper thoughts and ideas, is also something David has witnessed. He has seen youth go from writing purely about the life they know — about "being on the

They might not want to talk to staff or other kids directly about what they've been through on the streets. But they can write about it.

— Mary Howe

block" — to broadening their mind and letting their imagination roam. "They go away from the block," said David. "Visiting far-off places in far-off lands." And even if they stay on the block, youth often use writing to express emotions they keep hidden on the streets in order to survive. "They might not want to talk to staff or other kids directly about what they've been through on the streets," said Mary, "but they can write about it. Having an

outlet in the workshops is a much easier way to process for some of them."

Opening Minds through Talent

It is also a way for youth to see the connection between their creativity and the rest of their lives. "They can see the pay off, how this ties into me," said Arsenio, noting that whereas for many youth school seems so disconnected from their reality, the DJ Project harnesses the connection and the love they have for the hip hop community. "They learn valuable things, career wise, and also for themselves, as human beings." Indeed, as one Roaddawgz writer Sickboy wrote about what he has learned from being a part of Roaddawgz' "venue for expression": "It's stopped me from being a skeptic. It stopped me from being skeptical of my own worth, talent and ability. Or anyone else's for that matter." It's a lesson David enjoys helping other youth to learn as well. "I see many kids shrugging their shoulders, like they don't know," he said, recalling many a youth telling him there's no point to speaking up because their opinions won't be heard. "They do know. I want to empower their voices. I want to help them make the choice

thank you! 2005



Martha Laurance and her husband Ed

On January 15, 2006, Martha Alice Laurance of Pacific Grove died at age 67 after a long battle against cancer. She was surrounded by family and friends who loved her, and were fortunate to have had her in their lives.

She will be remembered for her overwhelming generosity and hospitality, especially to those in need of support. Throughout her life, she would help various people by allowing them to stay for long periods of time; always the Good Samaritan. She was a successful teacher, writer, and homemaker. Her support for organizations such as ATC is a clear example of where her heart will always be. She was acquainted with ATC through her son John and her daughter-in-law Kim, who are involved as volunteers with ATC. We want to acknowledge the family and friends who donated to ATC in her memory:

Steven Baker & Robert Pucci
Sarah Diehl & Clay Moltz
Nada Kovalik
Cheryl & Mark Falb
Ed & Margaret Shehorn
Jack & DeeDee VandeNorth
Lois London
Sara Dwyer

Martha's warmth and generous spirit will live on for many years in all who knew her.

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³ Donors who gave in honor of the wedding of Megan Laurance and Bob O'Connor

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⁵ Donors who gave in honor of the wedding of Jenn Guitart & Kevin Boyd

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thank you! 2006 (so far!)

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One of Sarah's fabulous card creations

Card-Maker Extraordinaire!

This title is officially bestowed on **Sarah Weathers**. For the past year or so, when we need a special card made with the homemade touch, Sarah is our woman. She has made countless birthday cards for our clients, ensuring that no matter what else, they get a very cool card on their birthday that accompanies their gift from ATC. Our clients absolutely love her cards! She has also created some amazing thank you cards for our corporate donors.

Additionally, she is a volunteer Jill-of-all-trades who keeps our clothing room beautiful, prints up material for our clients who are in jail, and generally helps out in any way she can. Anything we've ever asked for, she has always said yes. She also keeps us all entertained with her great stories, and never seems to run out of energy. We wish there were many more like you, Sarah, but then again, you are one-of-a-kind.

Let's Hear It for Learn iT! and Whole Foods

For the past couple of years, **Katie Dougherty and Jamie Tadlock** have been outstanding volunteers. They have spent numerous hours preparing outreach supplies for our clients during our monthly volunteer prep nights. They also work for a local business named **Learn iT!**, a Bay Area training company. They let us know that there might be the possibility of getting some of Learn iT!'s graphic design courses donated for ATC staff members or volunteers. In the past 6 months, Learn iT! provided two free six-month passes to ATC, enabling Molly Rhodes and Kristina Batiste to take any course they wanted, free of charge. Since Kristina and Molly are responsible for designing our newsletter, business cards, brochure (in the works), and other promotional materials, Learn iT!'s courses in graphic design are incredibly helpful. We are grateful for their donation; it made a real impact on our ability to present ourselves to the community.



ATC was thrilled to be selected as one of the recipients of Whole Foods Market's Nickels for Non-Profits program at **Whole Foods Market SOMA**, on 4th and Harrison. For every bag that you bring in to Whole Foods SOMA to bag your groceries, you receive a 5-cent refund as a thank you for recycling. Now you can take that discount, and give it to a selected non-profit organization. Through March, ATC has received more than \$250 from the Nickels program. Whole Foods SOMA also let us display our newsletters at the collection boxes, enabling hundreds of new people to learn about

ATC. Whole Foods SOMA also donated hygiene items that our clients loved! Whole Foods Market is not just a place to purchase exotic organic produce and fill up on delicious cheese samples; it also makes an important contribution to the communities in which it operates.



my life. I've sold crack since I was 12 years old. 10 years old. That's all I ever did. I got my GED in prison. Nobody could have known Kevin Epps. I coulda been just another dude that's in

prison for life. The film opened me up, like opening a window to a world. To be able to travel, see different countries. It just gave me so much confidence after that, it reinforced that whole thing I learned when my momma said, 'you can do it.' Some people like, he's like a star 'cause I been in magazines or whatever — dudes on the block, that's nothing. But it's the very shit that I'm subjected to that came out of that film. So that keeps them going. They're like 'that nigga was on the block, hustling.' It's my story too."

It's a story of life lived with racism that, for Kevin, is far from over.

"I had my film at Red Vic," said Kevin, recalling one event where he was supposed to be the guest of honor for a screening of *Straight Outta Hunter's Point*. "Lots of people. We chilling in the car. Somebody called the police to say some black dude was in there, selling crack, with a Hunters Point shirt on. I had a Hunters Point shirt on. And the police came, arrested me, took me straight to

jail. The Red Vic had to bail me out."

Added Kevin, "I know that is bigger than me. There are levels that need to be challenged. But I deal with it everyday, so it's become part of who I am. It's all that stuff that I'm still battling."

It's a battle, however, that Kevin prefers to continue to fight through his films, such as his latest film, *Rap Dreams*.

"I just see so much passion and energy and talent," said Kevin, who followed the lives, the struggles and the hopes, of the young rappers he met on the streets. "How they do what they're doing, knowing what hand they've been dealt. They might have all deuces — no kings, no tens, no jack, but they still in the game. If your heart is still breathing, it still gives you hope. That's what rap is about. The media, how they play the rap thing, with all the images, the cars, that is fucked up. You got somebody who looks like me, but it's all props. All recreated. I try to create stuff about real life, real people. I talk to the young people over there, who no one else wants to talk to. I'm gonna tell the stories of these young rappers trying to make it."

And it's through telling these stories that Kevin learns the most about life.

"There's so much footage I didn't put in there, but just watching these stories and hearing what people have to say," said Kevin. "That's what this taught me more than anything — to listen. And look. It helps me connect to what I'm trying to tell. I just watch and listen. Relisten and relisten. I go in and try to find things that connect with me, but like connect to something that's greater than me. That's what I learned."

Client Voice

Looking for meaning in a crack in the wall,

No one can see me when I hide in its fall.

Spinning around in a treetop of lie

Drunk on the air of your tears that are dry

Blinking back anger in a can of sardines

I want to smell fresh, just like a disease.

The king of empty promise land, a martyr a whore

I look for pointing fingers to settle the score

I carry a question of differing vibes

"Carry differing questions," the doctor prescribes,

And when bottle leaves hand just a moment too soon

I'll think about nothing and swallow the moon.

— Mike Fisher

Timbuk2 Benefit Auction

June 15 | 506 Hayes Street | Benefiting At The Crossroads

Timbuk2 is holding an auction to benefit **At The Crossroads** on June 15 from 5-8 PM at its brand new store at 506 Hayes Street in San Francisco. On auction: 6-8 original artist bags — the ultimate in wearable art! Some fantastic local artists have created unique bags for the event. Every dollar raised will go to ATC. We hope that you will come by and make a bid.

It will be a silent auction, beginning at 5PM, with the last bid at 8PM. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres will be served. You can preview the bags at the store starting on June 12th. Mark Dwight, the CEO of Timbuk2, wanted to mention that "We're about supporting local artists and we hope that At the Crossroads artists will be involved in the future," so you might be able to buy original bags designed by our clients in the coming months!

This is merely the most recent example of Timbuk2 making a huge impact on ATC and our clients. Timbuk2 is the absolute coolest. Cooler than the Fonz.

At The Crossroads is a project of the Community Initiative Funds of The San Francisco Foundation. If you would like a copy of one of our previous newsletters, send us an email, and we'll send it to you as long as we have some left (we have a limited supply).