



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2013



CELEBRATING FIFTEEN YEARS OF AT THE CROSSROADS

In this special 15-Year Anniversary newsletter, we highlight 15 topics that are very much core to At The Crossroads, but haven't received a lot of attention in our previous newsletters. It is a pleasure to celebrate 15 years of helping homeless youth build outstanding lives, getting to watch our clients overcome obstacles and pursue their dreams. And yet we are only scratching the surface of our capacity to accomplish our mission. We hope that after reading this, you will feel compelled to get more involved with ATC so that in the next 15 years, all young people on the streets of San Francisco can receive the support they need and so richly deserve.

- Rob Gitin
Co-founder & Executive Director



For the past nine years, Shawn Garety has been the heart that beats inside of At The Crossroads. She started as an Outreach Counselor, but for the past six years has been the Program Manager, leading our direct work with youth.

Shawn is the master at juggling a million responsibilities at once, and doing them at an incredibly high level of quality. She guides the work of our counselors, providing them with the training and knowledge to excel at their jobs, supporting them with wisdom and consistency, and occasionally surprising them with ice cream sundaes.

Shawn is known for her endless well of compassion for all of ATC's clients, showing them that they have someone who will go to extraordinary lengths to help them both survive and thrive. She handles clients' worst crises and always seems to find a way to see them through their struggles. It is important for our whole community to know this incredible person.

What's it like to work with the same clients throughout your time with ATC?

When you work here long-term, you really get to see people do amazing things. I continue to be inspired by people's resilience and their strength, and seeing them meet goals that they have, but also getting to just be who they are.

I had a client call yesterday—I haven't talked to her in six months, but I've worked with her since I started—and she said she finished a program that she had been working in, she's taking pre-reqs for nursing, and she got into school. She was just calling to share with me how well she's doing right now. She's under no obligation to call and tell me that, but to know where she came from and how hard she

struggled, and that she has propelled herself to this place and is even looking beyond that, and just to hear her say how happy she is and how proud she is of herself—those are the moments that are priceless.

Have the demographics of the youth ATC works with changed over the years?

Definitely. The youth who were accessing services during the daytime when I first started were almost a completely different group of youth from who we see now. A lot of the more stereotypical homeless youth were accessing us: a lot of white youth. Now it's really flipped and that's kind of who we see the least. A lot of the youth we work with during the daytime now are African-American or Latino, but we still definitely see quite a variety of folks. On outreach, who we see is different now, too; we definitely see a lot more youth of color on the streets now.

Could you tell me a bit about the work culture at ATC?

There's an incredibly strong emphasis here on professionalism and on doing the best job you can do while still being casual and just being who you are. If that means you dress a certain way, or you have tattoos, or you like to listen to a certain kind of music, all those things are not looked down upon but encouraged.

"When you work here long-term, you really get to see people do amazing things. I continue to be inspired by people's resilience and their strength."

- Shawn Garety, Program Manager

We get to have staff lunch together every week as a group, and that creates a sense of support and getting to know each other that's unique. And just in sharing the same small office space, you get to know someone's artwork, or you get to know someone's dog, or you get to know my stuffed animal collection that I keep next to my desk. No one would bat an eyelash at any of those things here, whereas at another kind of workplace, people have to put so much emphasis on how they look and what they're desk space is like and all these things that are not at all about their work.

What do you think it is about ATC that's allowed it to provide services for 15 years?

I think it's a big collaboration. ATC has a

lot of moving parts. There's a community of volunteers and staff. I think there is great need for what we do and we could expand to try and meet that need, but at the same time, because quality is so much a part of ATC and what we do, I think that staying small and staying focused has allowed our clients to get the best services that we can provide. That's been true of how we fundraise, and how we spend our money, and who we bring on staff, and volunteers who donate their time. A big part of it is that everyone works really hard. And clients continue to give us feedback about what's relevant and what's supportive and what their needs are.

What are some of your hopes for the future, both personally and for ATC?

For ATC, that we're able to continue to do the work that we're doing and reach more people, but making sure to balance that with the quality that we're able to provide. I definitely think there's room for growth, but I also very much respect that ATC is very strategic and grows in a way that feels healthy. I would also love to see us become better recognized outside of the ATC community in terms of the work that we do, and to get to do more advocacy on a bigger level to give a voice to the youth we work with. I could go on forever about things that I'd love to see ATC do, but I think those are the big ones.

Personally, I want to continue to do this work and find ways to make it sustainable, both for myself and for other people. I think it's such needed work, so it's really important to me that I think about leadership and bringing people into ATC that will help build the organization and who will stick around for a long time.



Shawn (center) with ATC counselors (left to right) Irina Alexander, Joey Hess, Lauren Johnson, Anna Fai, and April Garcia

1

ATC's glue for the past nine years

Holding her head high — and loving it!

When you first meet Serina, her strength becomes obvious within minutes. She holds herself with conviction, maintaining eye contact even while speaking openly about the horrific things she has experienced, and her laugh is powerful enough to fill the room.

Fifteen years ago, this brutal strength was Serina's guard against life on the streets. But there has always been a tenderness there, and now there is room for it to see the light of day. The fiery spark is still lit in her eyes, but she is welcoming and personable. Her strength no longer seems like a shield protecting her from the world around her; instead, she is an empowered woman, open to life's experiences.

Serina first met ATC in 1998 when she was 16 years old. She had a quick wit and was jarringly honest. She was also heavily using speed, surviving through prostitution, and in an abusive relationship. After about 50 encounters on outreach over eight months, Serina started meeting individually with Rob. One day, she had a realization.

"I was being beat up by my ex-boyfriend," Serina says. "I was laying on the ground bleeding, and all of a sudden, I heard it, clear as day: 'Serina, love does not hurt.' And I would have never known the difference if I didn't meet Rob. I would've kept on going down the path of hatred to death. I was crazy. I didn't care. I'd beat your head in with a hammer, slice your throat. I was demented."

Today, Serina finds purpose in her relationship with God. ATC is not faith-based, but we support our clients in whatever path they choose. She prays and attends church regularly, but it wasn't always this way. Although she was raised in church from ages three through nine, Serina soon after went through a long period of tumult with her faith.

"In Sunday school you're taught to obey your elders," Serina says. "They always told me that. My grandpa started molesting me, and my mom turned me onto prostitution when I was about 10 or 11 years old. When I was 11, I ended up in Juvenile Hall, and the mental health worker explained to me that everything that had just happened to me was wrong. Because I was raised in church, I never knew those things were wrong. They don't teach about sexual abuse, but they teach you to obey your elders. I felt God had

completely betrayed me and he hated me. So after that, I hated God."

While Serina struggled with her faith, she never completely abandoned it, and would talk about it during meetings with ATC. Over time, she felt God intervene in her life in a number of ways. Serina started to pay attention to the signs, but it wasn't until six years ago that she truly turned to God.

"For me, living for God is real submission," Serina says. "People think it's easy living for God. Coming from a sexual background, living as a whore almost my entire life, is it really easy to not get men's attention? Is it really easy to not [turn to prostitution] when I'm broke? Is it easy not to have sex to feel wanted or loved? Is it easy not to dress like a whore so that way I can get the attention and affection that I think is all I deserve? These are all the things that I have to submit under God in order to live for God. When you're made weak, that's when you're strong. And that's what living for God looks like for me."

"I don't like to have shame. I like to be able to hold my head high and look people in the face. That's where I'm at right now, and I love that feeling."

- Serina, ATC Client

Something else happened six years ago that changed Serina's life: the birth of her daughter, Victorious. Serina says she gave her the name because "she is literally the cause of my victory." Serina and Victorious have a special bond that is clear when you see the two of them together. One unique aspect of their relationship is their openness.

"I tell her everything," Serina says. "Well, not everything, but within reason. She's smart, and I allow her to be smart. A lot of people shut their kids down with the quickness. 'You don't know what you're talking about, you're a child.



You don't need to know.' Oh, she knows. So I tell her the truth and allow her to know the consequences of that truth. I'm real with her."

Throughout all of Serina's ups and downs over the last 15 years, her relationship with ATC has been a constant. How she uses us changes, but the connection and trust do not.

"When I first started, I needed ATC all the time," Serina says. "They taught me a lot of things about healing, becoming a woman, and growing up. As I started to get back on my feet, I needed them for resources, to help me find food and things for my daughter. We needed them a lot then too, but I didn't have to go into the office. They didn't have to come rescue me from my madness. As I grew more, the less I've needed them."

Serina still calls ATC periodically, usually to share her best moments or to get support during crisis. Over the years, she has become her own best source of strength and positivity. "I don't like to be miserable," she says. "I don't like to have shame, and I don't like to be paranoid. I like to be able to hold my head high and look people in the face. That's where I'm at right now, and I love that feeling."



Left to right: Serina in 2007 with her newborn daughter; Serina moves into her new apartment in 2007; with Rob at the 2012 holiday party

“Our work is about getting to know people and their talents, and discovering what is unique and special about them.”

One night on outreach, we ran into a longtime client named Dwayne. He used to rap locally with his brother, but after his brother was killed, he stopped his music and got more caught up in the street life. Occasionally he would rap a short verse he had written or sing along with music playing out on the streets. We knew he was in a good space when he brought up music in any way. This night, we started talking with him, and, unprompted, he started to sing to us. He sang Stevie Wonder, he sang his own songs that he made up—and he has a great voice!

Then Brad, another longtime client, walked up while Dwayne was singing, and the look on his face was worth a million dollars. It was a look of shock, like, “Who are you?!” because he was unaware of Dwayne’s talent. Brad had been through ups and downs with his drug use and mental health issues since we first met him, but during the periods when he was clean, he loved to talk about life and joke around with us. He walked up to Dwayne and joined in with his rap. We spent 15 minutes out on the corner of 16th and Mission listening to them sing and spit rhymes. To see these two clients interacting, and to be serenaded by them, captures a key part of our work. It’s about getting to know people and their talents, and discovering what is unique and special about them. It was just a perfect outreach moment.

One of our long-time clients, Mikey, has wanted to be an artist since he was a kid, and has spent his life working towards that goal. He is an incredibly talented, hard-working individual whose comics are plastered around our office. For several years, he and a group of his friends have collaborated to create mini comics that focus on subversive, counterculture, and radical political issues.

Mikey works around the clock each day to create and distribute these comics, and to bring together other artists. He collaborates and produces about three to four mini comics a month, printing out hundreds of copies and diligently folding each of them to give to anyone who is interested. He puts in an average of 50 hours a week at no pay to do what he loves. He has talked about the importance of distribution, and how he values being able to get his artwork out there and to gain some recognition.

Last year, Mikey submitted one of his cartoons to Funny Times, a monthly magazine that has approximately 67,000 subscribers. The cartoon, titled “Breaking Up With Your Bank,” was chosen and published! A comic by Matt Groening, Simpsons’ creator and one of Mikey’s influences, was published in the same issue. Being published in Funny Times is considered a huge accomplishment for cartoon artists.

Breaking Up With Your Bank



Mikey's comic, printed in Funny Times

Every other Wednesday, counselors meet to discuss challenges, issues, and opportunities related to our direct work. There often has to be a focus on clients in crisis or clients with extremely complex needs, so the counselors always end the meetings by sharing happy stories about their work to conclude with a smile or a laugh. These stories can range from client accomplishments to ridiculous incidents to silly outreach moments. Here are two of our favorite recent happy stories.



Avner performs a song from Fiddler on the Roof

When he was 11 years old, Avner Lapovsky, who was a severely asthmatic child, left his family in Tel Aviv and moved to Colorado to heal at a special institute. If not for the kindness of a few adults who were there for him at important points in his life, Avner says that he could have ended up like one of the youth that At The Crossroads serves.

Because of this personal connection, ATC's mission resonated with Avner when he first heard about our organization 13 years ago, and it is why he has become one of the most cherished members of our community. His zeal and passion for sharing ATC with the people in his life is unmatched. (As is his love of the Giants and his resulting commitment to the color orange. But we digress.) His most recent display of ATC love was a doozy.

On April 18, Avner threw a fantastic celebration in honor of his 60th birthday: a special performance of San Francisco's most iconic musical revue, Beach Blanket Babylon, in which all the proceeds benefited ATC.

"I wanted to have a celebration with meaning," Avner says. "I've been to parties that were fantastic, but when they were over, you kind of came out of it with a feeling of, 'Well gosh, that was a great party, but what did it mean?' So I decided that I had to do something that had a purpose."

Avner first had the idea for this event for his 50th birthday. Ten years ago, 300 friends joined him at Beach Blanket Babylon, raising \$20,000 for ATC when we were a fledgling organization. Because it was such

a huge success, he decided to do it again for his 60th—or, as the forever-young, jovial Avner called it in his invitations, the 10th anniversary of his 50th birthday.

"We started working on it three years ago, telling people about it and getting them excited," Avner says. "The toughest thing was to find someone who would underwrite the event, meaning someone who would buy out the house so that 100% of the revenue would go to ATC. Once we found the angel who would do that for us, things began falling into place."

That angel was Clarelle Adams, a dear friend of Avner's. Avner first met Clarelle in 1973, and they have been close ever since. Currently, he visits her every Saturday and they spend the afternoon eating lunch and working on puzzles together.

By the night of the event, over 300 tickets had been sold, and people traveled from all over the country to celebrate Avner's birthday and to support ATC. The show was a blast, the turn-out was fantastic, and ATC raised over \$30,000 in revenue and was able to build lasting relationships with new members of the community.

"I'm just as excited about supporting ATC today as I was 13 years ago when I discovered them."

- Avner Lapovsky, ATC Board Member

This event was just the latest in a long string of things Avner has done to support ATC throughout his 13 years of involvement. Six years ago, when ATC first organized a Board of Directors, Avner joined, and has been a member ever since, gracing the team with his unique wisdom and wit. He is an endless source of optimism and hope, constantly reminding his colleagues of why they are all there.

He is a staple at our events, contributing his special brand of savoir faire. He is the ultimate ambassador, both to his community and to strangers. He radiates an enthusiasm for ATC and a love of our clients.

And he is the ultimate fundraiser. He has helped connect ATC with a variety of substantial funding opportunities, from making us the beneficiary of an event at the



Avner and Clarelle Adams at Avner's 60th birthday celebration

San Francisco Design Center to introducing us to key foundation supporters. He has helped raise more than \$350,000 for ATC by going to everyone in his life and making the case for supporting ATC. One of our favorite Avner moments is the time when he performed a mini-revival of songs from Fiddler on the Roof that he had sung in high school. He performed them at an open mic night for his I Think I Can Campaign, raising \$5,145 for ATC and creating priceless memories for everyone who was there.

"I'm just as excited about supporting ATC today as I was 13 years ago when I discovered them," Avner says. "It's my luck that ATC exists and that the board exists, so it's a mutual admiration."

Mutual admiration is right. We are honored that Avner chose to celebrate his birthday with us, and that he has showered ATC with his attention and love over the past 13 years. We can't wait to see what the next 13 bring!



Kenny Mazlow, Avner, and Clarelle at Avner's 50th birthday celebration

We'll go to the four corners of the earth for our clients

In order to make it as easy as possible for our clients to work with us, we go to them, rather than making them come to us. Common one-to-one counseling meetings can involve going to a restaurant for a bite to eat or to a store to buy shoes, but sometimes the location is a bit more random and interesting. Here's a list of some of the places we've met with our youth:



- Giants game at AT&T Park
- Overlooking the sea lions at Pier 39
- Golden Gate Park
- Basketball courts at Dolores Park
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
- Nail salon



- Metreon Movie Theater
- San Francisco City Hall
- Potrero del Sol Skate Park
- Meditation center
- Psych ward at San Francisco General Hospital
- DMV



- Zen Hospice Center
- Waterfront in Sausalito

The Walking Walgreens

There's a reason clients have been known to call us "the walking Walgreens." Four nights a week, ATC Outreach Counselors strap on monstrous backpacks and walk the streets of the Mission and the Tenderloin/Downtown areas of San Francisco in groups of two (sometimes three), meeting with youth on their own turf. There are two different types of backpacks, one for each counselor, and they each contain different items.



Hygiene Weight: 21.8 lbs

- 12 bars of soap
- 12 bottles of shampoo
- 12 bottles of conditioner
- 10 bottles of body wash
- 15 tubes of lotion
- 10 sticks of deodorant
- 400 condoms (8 varieties)
- 100 units of lubrication
- 20 bags of Q-Tips
- 25 lip balms
- 40 candy packs
- 40 pairs of socks
- 10 sewing kits
- 4 bottles of mouthwash

Harm Reduction Weight: 33.4 lbs

- 300 Band-Aids
- 60 units of antibiotic ointment
- 400 alcohol pads
- 40 hand wipes
- 30 travel and full-length toothbrushes
- 20 tubes of toothpaste
- 400 condoms (8 varieties)
- 8 safer injection kits
- 20 units of sterile water
- 6 bags of tampons and pads
- 35 granola bars
- 40 fruit snacks
- 20-30 Ike's sandwiches and 8 PB&Js (held in a side bag)



5&6

Oh, the places we'll go ...
and the things we bring!

Our most hectic two hours of the day

7

Monday through Thursday at 3 pm on the dot, the phones start to ring like crazy, and the Office Hours Dance begins. It is more of a frantic improvisational dance than a calm choreographed waltz. There are just two counselors working office hours each day, and to say that it can get hectic is an understatement.

“There’s a routine before office hours starts,” ATC counselor Joey Hess says. “I take five minutes before just to walk around and prepare myself.”



Awesome ATC volunteer Lyn Steinmetz packs food boxes for clients during office hours

During office hours, clients call to talk to counselors, to set up meetings with them, and to pick up supplies from our office. It’s a balancing act, and one that can be frustrating, overwhelming, and exhausting, depending on the day.

To start with, there are the phones. If clients call during this time, they can always reach somebody. No matter the volume of calls, not one goes to voicemail. Often, as soon as a counselor answers one phone, another starts to ring. Seeing staff run to and from desks to answer phones is a common sight.

Some clients call just to check in. Others ask for resource referrals, such as housing or job placement. Clients in crisis will call seeking support. Youth also use it as a time to share the good things going on in their lives. “We definitely have our share of crises, but we also get this very privileged window into people’s lives,” Program Manager Shawn Garety says. “Sometimes clients have a baby and call us from the hospital and say, ‘I want you to come visit me.’ Or they got a new job and they just want to go shopping and get some new shoes for the job. So it’s about trying to find time for those kinds of surprises, too.”

Many clients call to place orders for food, clothing, and hygiene items. They get to tell us exactly what they want and like, down to

which type of granola bar they prefer. On a busy day, up to 20 youth may call in two hours. We can only prepare food boxes for 10, and almost every day counselors have to tell clients that we are maxed out on orders. On a really busy day, we fill up on orders in the first five minutes. It stinks to have to say no to people calling in, especially when they are people you know personally and care about.

Then there’s the ever-ringing doorbell. Clients come by during this time to pick up their orders. For some, office hours are the middle step between meeting ATC on outreach and scheduling one-to-one counseling meetings. Coming by to pick up supplies gives them a chance to really check us out before taking the relationship to a deeper level. Clients chat for a few minutes while getting stuff, and feel us out. They see other clients checking in with us more extensively, and it plants a seed of what their relationship could look like. For some youth, this is the only time they check in with us, and it can take years before they want to meet with us one-to-one. Because of this, it’s especially important to take our time and not feel rushed.

“I try to slow things down and check in with clients, to come from a caring place and give them the time that we have, even when it’s crazy.”

- Anna Fai, ATC Counselor

“On a daily basis, I have to stop and remember that we’re not a restaurant, and we’re not just taking orders,” counselor Anna Fai says. “I’ll hear myself taking someone’s order and then asking them how they’re doing, and I really meant to do it the other way around. Some people just call to get their stuff, so I try to slow things down and check in over the phone or when people come to the door, to come from a caring place and give them the time that we have, even when it’s crazy. Being able to split that time between everyone can get challenging, but it’s really important and it shows. Clients will let you know if you’re not doing it!”

One of the the most frustrating moments is when a client that you haven’t seen in ages comes by, and you wish you had an hour to really check in, but three other clients show up for food boxes, and you are helping them, too. In those cases, we try to schedule follow-up time with youth who want to talk more.



Prepped packages of food and clothing, catered to the individual choices of each client, wait on the racks during office hours to be picked up

When office hours started 14 years ago, the intent was for clients who had missed us on outreach to be able to call in to schedule one-to-one appointments or check in over the phone. We didn’t have tons of food or new clothing to give out at first, but we began acquiring more fun items that our clients asked for. Gradually, clients who didn’t have the time to meet with us would come by just to pick up stuff.

As demand for our time rose, and as the declining economy and cuts to other social services created greater material needs among our clients, things got chaotic. These changes caused office hours to evolve into what they are today: a two-hour chunk of time where counselors try to meet as many youth and satisfy as many of their needs as possible. We have become a clothing bank, a food pantry, and a counseling center all in one. Although we don’t have the capacity to do any of it as in-depth as we would like during office hours, we do the best we can with the resources we have, and it is an incredibly important part of the work that we do and the relationships that we build.

And some relief is on the way. We recently added a fifth counselor to our team, and we are going to have three counselors in most, if not all office hours. We wanted to add a sixth counselor, but funding challenges got in the way (hint, hint, readers!). Having an additional person will allow us to place increased emphasis on counseling during office hours, making it a real stepping stone where we can build deeper relationships with our least trusting yet highest-need youth.



It started out as a relatively normal day at ATC. Counselors were answering phones and giving supplies to clients during office hours, and non-direct service staff were typing away on their computers. But then a young man named Brian (name changed to protect anonymity) called, and what happened next has stuck with the people involved ever since. He told us that he wanted to die, that he had taken a knife to his chest, and that he didn't want to be alone in what he thought could be his last minutes.

In our newsletters, we usually focus on clients we have long-term relationships with, because that is the core of our work. While we don't like to tell sanitized "success stories," we also stay away from some of the hardest moments, because we don't want to risk being exploitative or

Brian's background and not wanting to take chances, Rob advised Kris to call 911, and to talk with him more. When Kris went to look for him, he was gone. We didn't see him for a long time after, and wondered what had become of him.

A few months later, Brian called us, having held on to our card from that initial interaction. He was moving back home to Washington, and wanted some help before leaving. Kris met with him to get him food, shoes, and an ID at the DMV. Afterwards, Kris told him that he could keep in touch from Washington, but he said he wouldn't call. He was excited to go home and leave behind the troubles of San Francisco.

Brian said that he didn't like that Kris seemed to care about him. Lots of our clients try to push us away. They're often not used to someone caring about them, and this makes them uncomfortable. They don't trust that we will not hurt or disappoint them, as so many others have, so they keep us at arm's length. We respect that this is often a survival strategy for life on the streets, so without pushing too hard, we let them know we're not going

Although Brian began talking to Brenda, he continued to ask for Kris, and it became apparent that someone needed to get her. Kris was meeting with a client outside of the office, so Shawn Garety, ATC's Program Manager, alerted her to the crisis and took over the meeting, despite never having met the client before. Kris drove back to the office to talk to Brian.

"He said he was just done with it," Kris says. "He had cut himself up and was watching the blood, and he was ready to go. I thought about the first time I met him and how he wanted to die, and how much pain he must have been in, not just physically but on all levels. I just thought, 'I'm gonna do my best to keep him alive.' There were these series of moments where he was passing out and I'd say, 'Brian? Brian? Talk to me if you're here.' And then I would just kinda let it be silent. And then I would be like, 'There he goes. He's dead.' And it was constantly getting ready for that. And thinking, how would that feel? How would that be?"

Usually, when someone calls in a suicidal moment, it's because they want support and don't really want to die. But this call felt different. "There was a point during the call where I

8

A day we will never forget

sensationalistic, and we like to focus on the hope in our work. However, the moments of crisis are critical to our clients' lives and to our staff, and we wanted to share one that seemed to encapsulate many different aspects of who we are.

This crisis was different from most, because we barely knew Brian. Most clients who seek us out in crisis are people we've known for many years. The years of working with them help us navigate the difficult times, allowing us to draw on their experiences, challenges, and strengths to best support them. When Brian called us, this was only our third significant interaction with him, making an already challenging situation much scarier.

When Kris Chance, who had been a counselor at ATC for three years, first met Brian on the streets of Downtown San Francisco, he was in a really bad space. He told her that he wanted to die and had plans to overdose that night. Because Kris had never met Brian before, and had no context for what he was saying, she stepped into a nearby store and called Rob Gitin, ATC's Executive Director, for advice. Not knowing

anywhere, and that no matter what they do or say, we will be there for them. This is a big reason why people turn to us to help them make major life changes, and why they reach out to us when they are in crisis, which is what Brian did two months later.

"He said he was just done with it. He had cut himself up and he was ready to go. I just thought, 'I'm gonna do my best to keep him alive.'"

- Kris Chance, ATC Counselor

Brenda Covarrubias, who had been an ATC counselor for four years, answered the call. Brian asked for Kris, and Brenda could tell that something was seriously wrong. He was very high, and he was slurring his words. Brenda explained that Kris wasn't in the office but that she could help him, but he refused and kept asking for Kris; that is who he felt connected with. Eventually he began to open up, and told her that he had slashed his chest with a knife.

remember saying to Kris that it may be that all that he wants from you is to be there while he dies; to say goodbye and not die alone," Rob says. "And I said that if that's what he wants, of course that's not what we should aim for, but the fact that he wanted to have us there to be with him during his last moments is a very powerful thing, and something we all want."

ATC supports clients in many different capacities. Our clients dictate how we work with them. The only time we become directive with clients is when they are in severe crisis and want to hurt themselves or someone else. We do whatever we can to prevent this, trying to give them the chance to vent their pain and find other options. We let them know why they matter, and that their lives have meaning. Moments like with Brian test us like no others. Sometimes our youth are in so much pain that they see no reason to continue their lives, and we try to hold the hope and optimism for them. But what if we can't help them find that reason?

Kris was trying to find out Brian's exact location so she could send help his way. She knew he was in Washington, but he wouldn't divulge where

he was. He knew she would call for help, and he didn't want that. Kris kept repeating that she cared about him, didn't want to see him die, and wanted to help him. We couldn't tell if her words were making an impact.

Rob sat next to Kris, offering her support. He couldn't hear what Brian was saying, but he trusted Kris to handle the situation, so instead of worrying about the support that Brian was receiving, he was focused on being there for Kris.

"When you're in it, it's very hard to process it and think objectively," Rob says. "It's too much; your brain gets overloaded. If someone dies and you're at a funeral, the person who's closest to that person is just mourning, and the people who are closest to them support that person, and the people who are closest to that ring of people support them. These rings of support expand out and that's how you get through it. In that same way, I know Kris is supporting Brian and that needs to be her focus, and I'm supporting her."

ATC focuses a great deal of time and attention on staff retention. The greatest impact of that effort is that our clients don't experience a revolving door of counselors and get to work with the same staff for years.

to discuss them for fear that they will be misunderstood or that it will shock people, when that is not the goal, and then you will have to tend to the listener's emotions. Sometimes listeners put you on a pedestal, which just feels isolating. When we discuss things within our staff, we don't have to explain. We just decompress and try to let go.

"You never know how treating someone like a human being, caring for someone who has received so little love and humanity, will affect them."

- Rob Gitin, Executive Director

Just because there was a crisis, ATC's other clients didn't stop having needs. Office hours were as busy as ever, and all staff jumped in to help answer phones, prepare food boxes, and greet clients at the door, even non-counseling staff. In situations like this, it's important for all ATC staff members to be on the same page.

talking to them, alternating between anger and relief. The phone hung up as they were about to take him away to a hospital for evaluation.

We don't know what made Brian want to live. We don't know why he decided to call ATC. We don't always know when we are getting through to clients. "My old boss used to say that we plant seeds with kids and sometimes we get to be around to see them grow and sometimes we don't," Rob says. "You never know how treating someone like a human being, caring for someone who has received so little love and humanity, will affect them. This story is the ultimate example of that. Two interactions with us were literally life-changing for him."

For the following week, Kris repeatedly called Brian in the hospital, but he refused to take her calls, and when he finally did, he told her that he never wanted to talk to her again. He resumed resenting her unconditional support and trying to push her away. However, in a telling twist to this story, two years later, as we sat down to write this article, the phone rang. It was Brian. He sounded almost playful and upbeat in the call. He called to say he's back in

Shawn
joins ATC

Brenda
joins ATC

Kris
joins ATC

We meet Brian
on outreach

Kris has a one-to-one
meeting with Brian

Brian calls ATC from
Washington in crisis

Jun 04

Aug 07

Aug 08

Dec 10

Apr 11

Jun 11

All the while, counselors are becoming more skilled and knowledgeable at their craft. This continuity and expertise has a significant effect on our ability to help youth move forward in their lives. It also is essential during moments of crisis, which are so delicate and nuanced. This experience helps you be 100% focused on the client in these moments, putting aside how it is affecting you, knowing that you will have a chance to deal with your own emotions later.

"Knowing that crises will pass and that after the interaction is done, you will get as much support as you need to be okay makes it so that you don't freak out during the crisis and feel overwhelmed," Shawn says. "You don't worry about the interaction; you're just able to be present for the client and trust that you don't have to worry about how it's affecting you because you'll have the support you need after."

This support is essential, because counselors are not in the habit of sharing these experiences outside the walls of our office. These are incredibly intimate moments in our clients' lives, and it is uncomfortable

"There wasn't a single time where any of us had to stop and ask for anything," says Shawn. "It was really effortless the way that the whole thing happened. It was like, from the minute the call came in until the very end, everyone jumped in, did whatever needed to be done, and then were there for each other to kind of figure out the aftermath. There was no guide or training for that. That was just everyone working together."

Everyone who works at ATC is involved in direct services, even the non-counseling staff, who go out on outreach once every other week and are informed about important things that concern our clients. It creates a focus on and understanding of the mission that is essential to our work.

At some point in the conversation, Brian's outlook began to switch, and he became scared. Whether it was just having the time to think about it, because the period of acute suicidal thoughts is usually brief, or it was something Kris said to him, Brian decided that he did, in fact, want to live. He got off of the phone with Kris and called 911. Then he called Kris back and continued to talk with her until the police came. His phone was on, unbeknownst to him, after the cops arrived. We got to hear him

the city and wants to schedule a meeting.

"There are so many people who feel faceless, who feel unimportant, who feel like nobody knows who they are," Kris says. "But someone in the world knew who Brian was. I still even remember his middle name."



Former ATC counselor Kris Chance

After queuing a video on YouTube, ATC counselor Joey Hess puts the phone next to the speaker. The listener on the other end is Mike, an ATC client who has been in prison for several years. Mike has a deep love of Nine Inch Nails that is expressed in tattoos all over his body. He was excited to hear about the front-man's new project, but was unable to hear the song in prison, so he asked Joey to play it during one of their regular calls.



ATC client Yahya

We support people in jail by providing whatever we can," Joey says. "Playing the song for Mike is furthering that support in a way that's unique and meets his individual needs. It goes back to ATC's core value of meeting the needs of the clients first."

ATC works with approximately 75 incarcerated clients per year. Counselors meet individually with clients in SF County jails, write handwritten letters, and send things like artwork, poetry, or song lyrics, as well as paper and stamped envelopes so that clients can keep in contact with friends, family, and us. Clients can call us collect from prison to check in. We send them birthday cards and holiday cards, so that they don't feel alone on important days.



ATC client Arnisha

For many incarcerated clients, ATC is the only link they have to the world outside. Many people feel left for dead when they're in jail, as their friends and family either don't or can't

maintain contact. "I'm pretty much out of sight, out of mind," says Chocolate Chip, an ATC client. "I've spoken with my family and my daughter one time. They know I'm in jail, but they are very upset and disappointed."

Chocolate Chip met ATC on the streets nine years ago, but her relationship became stronger while she was in jail. Her passion for writing shined in letters she sent us, which included chapters in a book she is writing. "In the beginning, I never utilized their services," she says. "One time in jail, I ran into Shawn, and she told me to give them a call, and that I would receive a visit along with 15 stamped envelopes a month. Since then, I've been meeting with them weekly when I'm out. I receive an immense amount of support."

"ATC continues to build me up, allowing me to be strong and go back and fight for my life in this vicious world."

- Arnisha, ATC Client

Chocolate Chip's experience is not unique. When we meet with clients in jail, trust grows exponentially, because it's a time of great need when they are brimming with thoughts and reflections. While they are homeless, their lives are focused on survival. While they are locked up, clients have the space to think about other issues, and reflect on the ways they want to change and improve their lives. Clients are incredibly grateful for our support during this time, and it dramatically enhances our relationships with them, enabling us to help them even more when they get out.

"Being locked up in the beginning was very hard, dismal, and emotional for me," ATC client Barbie says. "Even being here all of this time is still disturbing, but I have become humble and find peace with myself." Barbie passes her time in jail by attending yoga classes, women's health and empowerment groups, and church, keeping her mind positive and "helping to create a new me."

Like Chocolate Chip, Barbie wasn't close with ATC before her incarceration. Now, she keeps in touch with ATC through letters and visits, and she says that ATC offers "great friendships and good advice" during incarceration.

ATC also helps clients with exit planning, setting up support that will be there for the moment they get out, like housing or drug treatment, and helping them prepare mentally



ATC client Chocolate Chip

for life on the outside. This is a challenging transition, and getting support is essential.

"ATC helped with my transition because they were in constant contact with my family," Yahya, an ATC client, says. "They kept me in the loop about what was going on with them, so I wasn't shocked when I got out. I knew what to expect, so it was definitely smooth."

Currently, Joey is working with Mike to create a plan for his release later this month. Joey has talked to Mike's parole officer, who Mike isn't able to talk to until he is released, and helped line up transitional housing for him. "This is what I do for a job," Joey says. "and it's still really, really hard for me to get all the information. I can't even imagine what it would be like for someone who didn't have the time or the resources to do this."



ATC counselor Joey Hess with ATC client Mike

Clients are deeply appreciative of the support while incarcerated, and it can reverberate in many ways. "The ATC family has always had my best interests at heart," Arnisha, an ATC client, says. "This is the family that has never turned their backs, judged me, or left my side in and out of my times of troubles. They don't criticize me. They continue to build me up, allowing me to be strong and go back and fight for my life in this vicious world."

Saving ATC's clients from the tyranny of PB&Js!

10

If you've ever tasted one of the 80 different types of sandwiches from Ike's Place, you know how delicious they are. You know why they have the reputation of being the best sandwich in the Bay Area, and why they are opening new stores at a rapid rate (12 and counting!). You appreciate why people wait in line for over an hour just to buy one. In fact, you're probably starting to salivate right now just thinking about them.

Imagine that rather than having to wait in a line, you had someone walk up to you and offer you an option of two different Ike's sandwiches. And they handed it to you free of charge. And that it was the first thing you'd eaten all day. Now you are starting to get the picture of what happens 100 times a week for ATC's clients. Thanks to owner Ike Shehadeh, ATC counselors get to bring out Ike's awesome sandwiches on the streets four nights a week on outreach.

For 14 years, ATC staff made simple peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to hand out to youth during street outreach. To be blunt, some of our clients were a tad sick of them. But since June 2012, Ike has donated 50 sandwiches a week (25 barbeque chicken and 25 barbeque roast beef), cut in halves and individually wrapped, ready to be handed out to our clients.



A painting for Ike's to show our appreciation, made by incredibly talented ATC volunteer Michael Nguyen

"No one says, 'I hate Ike's sandwiches because that's all I ate in jail,' which is what half of our clients say about PB&Js," says Program Manager Shawn Garety. "While we put a lot of love into our PB&Js, they are not what people come screaming with excitement and running down the street for. Our clients send so much extra love and appreciation our way when we have Ike's. It is a reason for folks to smile and feel special."

Ike's generosity stems in part from his personal experience with homelessness. For nine months in 2004, Ike didn't have a stable place to stay, first squatting in a warehouse in the Mission without electricity and then in a friend's van. For a variety of reasons, he did not reach out for support.



Ike Shehadeh, founder of Ike's Place

"I would have been one of your clients that didn't want to accept help and wanted to do it all myself," Ike says. "I didn't tell anybody. My friends didn't know; my family didn't know. I just made up excuses. I was by myself as much as possible and a lot of people didn't even know that that was going on with me, like my friends. I was embarrassed. Because I was successful before, I felt like a failure. I thought people would make fun of me or not like me anymore."

Through his own determination and refusal to give up, Ike managed to find a minimum-wage job and a cheap apartment that he split with a friend. He slowly worked his way up, and is now one of San Francisco's leading entrepreneurs.

"I learned that the times when I was defeated were only because I gave up," Ike says. "I got to where I am because the moments when I did give up were really only for a day or two. I learned that life really is what you make of it."

Nine years later, Ike looks back on this experience and smiles at how far he has come. But he hasn't forgotten how it felt to go without food.

"I remember all the time, when my friends were eating dinner, I'd say, 'If you guys aren't gonna eat that, I will,'" Ike says. "I was really hungry. A lot of times I'd go to their houses and eat whatever they had in their fridges that they didn't want."

Ike would have had mixed feelings if he had been in the shoes of one of our current clients. "I don't know how I would have felt if someone offered me food. Hopefully I would have taken it," he says. As mentioned earlier, Ike had a hard time accepting help. However, when thinking about it later, he remarked, "if someone did come up to me and said, 'Hey, I have this sandwich,' and they were as good as Ike's are back then, I would have been so excited. I would have been like, 'Wow, you're an angel!'"

Ike was first connected to ATC by our advisory board member Kevin McCracken. After meeting with Rob Gitin, our Executive Director, Ike decided to donate sandwiches to our 2011 Summer SunDay Hike, where they were a big hit.

After the hike, Ike wanted to contribute to ATC in a bigger way and draw awareness to the issue of youth homelessness in San Francisco. After brainstorming some different ideas, the Like Ike's Campaign was born.

The Like Ike's Campaign turned Facebook "likes" into sandwiches for youth. Ike vowed that if Ike's Place received 20,000 likes, he would donate sandwiches for ATC's youth for three months. That was nearly a year ago, and he has kept this amazing gift going.

"I remember all the time, when my friends were eating dinner, I'd say, 'If you guys aren't gonna eat that, I will.' I was really hungry."

- Ike Shehadeh, Ike's Place

"I can get anything I want to eat now," Ike says. "When I go out to eat, it's comped or 50% off or whatever. For me, back when I needed it was when I didn't get it. Now that I can afford to buy myself something to eat, that's when I get it for free. I understand why people do that, but I don't like it, so I want to make sure that these youth are getting that experience now and that it gives them hope."



Robyne, who now lives in Arkansas, at one of ATC's holiday parties. Robyne has maintained steady contact with ATC despite moving out of San Francisco two years ago. We look forward to her calls and hearing her life updates.



Marcus, who now lives in Stockton, at the ATC offices with a new Timbuk2 bag. Marcus and his girlfriend Courtney moved a year and a half ago, but they still call us and visit when they're in the San Francisco. Marcus hopes to one day start a nonprofit of his own.

Like so many other people in life, sometimes our clients feel like they need a fresh start in a new place. Most of them have some pretty bad associations with San Francisco, and are eager to create some distance from their time on the streets here. However, often they land in a new place with no community and little financial cushion, where everything feels foreign. Even though ATC can't be there physically for our clients, that doesn't mean we can't still be a presence in their lives and help them make a positive transition.

"Just the smallest thing sent from ATC, like a tube of toothpaste or a bag of rice, puts something in my home and makes me feel very blessed."

- Courtney, ATC Client

ATC clients Marcus and Courtney moved to Stockton a year and a half ago so that they would have a better chance of finding work. Marcus has long been focused on building a strong foundation for his family, and felt like it wasn't going to happen in San Francisco. When they first moved, they had no money and no supplies, so they turned to ATC, and we sent two boxes of food and a \$40 gift card.

"Just the smallest thing sent from ATC, like a tube of toothpaste or a bag of rice, puts something in my home and makes me feel very blessed," Courtney says. "I'm grateful that I can turn to ATC if I need anything."

When clients tell us they are leaving, we make sure to remind them that we would be thrilled to hear from them and we can send them care packages. We take great pride in our care packages, and load them with all of the client's favorite food, clothing, and knick-knacks.

We also tell them that if they need help accessing supportive services in their new location, we'll be happy to do research and make phone calls. And most importantly, we let them know we will be there to talk with them about whatever they want. Some clients maintain consistent counseling appointments over the phone. Others just like to say hi and tell us how life is going.

Marcus and Courtney call ATC fairly regularly to check in and catch up. Occasionally,

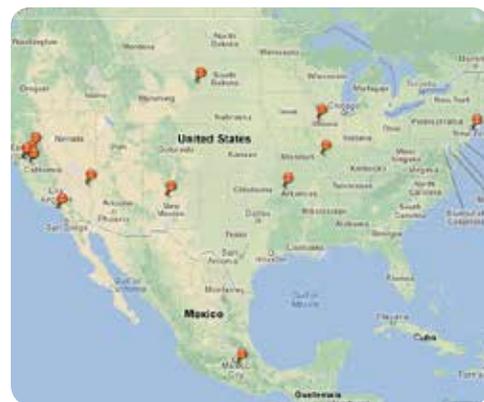
they visit San Francisco and meet with us in person. It is extremely gratifying when clients prioritize us when they come to town, even when they are in a significantly different material situation. Marcus has long been interested in starting his own program to help youth, and sees a void in Stockton.

"They really don't have places like ATC out here, and I think a lot of people could benefit from them," Marcus says. "ATC is real. ATC gives a sense of happiness. Just being able to still be connected and still get services to a certain degree even if you're not living in San Francisco means a lot to a lot of people."

Robyne, who currently lives in Arkansas, also calls ATC counselors regularly. We miss her deep dedication to leaving no item unturned in search of the perfect outfit in our clothing room, and the fact that she had us collect Box Tops For Education points on hundreds of fruit snack boxes at ATC.

Robyne receives care packages of clothing and food, and a couple years ago, ATC counselors worked to get her the necessary documentation from San Francisco to help her legally change her name. While she greatly appreciates the material help, she values the relationship most of all.

"It feels really good to know I can still call ATC and check in about where I'm at and what my life is like," she says. "I've lost touch with a lot of people, so it's good to know I can call them...I think it's the social aspect of ATC that makes them special. You can talk to the counselors about anything."



A map of some of the locations where current ATC clients now live. Not pictured: a client in Manila, Philippines!

You are never too young to make a difference

12



Nine-year-old Kyle Sieben is our youngest I Think I Can Campaign participant yet! In just one month, Kyle rode 82 miles on his bike (his original goal was 75 miles) and raised \$535 for ATC! Kyle says his campaign was a good excuse to ride his bike all over town, and he enjoyed being able to raise awareness of ATC among his classmates, friends and family.



Five-year-old Sofia Farias generously donated her Halloween candy to ATC. After Halloween each year, Sofia and her brother keep the candy they've collected for a week, and then the Halloween Fairy comes to pick up the rest and deliver it to kids who didn't get any. "They don't have a home or food or money and they are sad," Sofia says. "I knew the candy could make them happy."



Nina Brown, who is five years old, saved \$21.89 and 2 Euros for ATC in her tzedakah box, a Jewish tradition which she says is like "a wallet that holds your giving away money." She's also volunteered for ATC in many different ways, most memorably high-fiving fundraising hikers crossing the finish line. "I just feel really sad that homeless youth don't have many things," she says.



Luke Knapp's mom, Holly Warren, participated in the I Think I Can Campaign. Her goal was to practice qigong regularly. Luke, who is nine years old, generously donated \$25 to her campaign, because he wanted to "help her reach her goals. I also wanted to help kids who are homeless or don't have enough to eat."

Imagine a little one-room boutique, approximately 10 feet by 15 feet, filled with brand new clothes, bags, books, and accessories. To the right is a shelf with women's pants, shorts, shirts, scarves, belts, and hoodies; to the left, a shelf with the same for men. In front hang dresses, skirts, dress shirts, and coats, and behind, there is a shelf filled with children's clothing. Hanging on hooks in every space available are messenger bags and backpacks in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors.



Maxine tries on some colorful accessories

Thanks to generous donations by Old Navy, Banana Republic, and Timbuk2, among others, this is the clothing room at ATC – a constantly stocked, constantly changing room of new clothing that clients can visit once a week to pick out a new outfit. It has become a happy place for many of our youth.

"I'm here every week," says Maxine, an ATC client for six years. "Whatever's going on outside, when I'm in this clothing room, I'm in my own zone, trying to partner up what's good with what shoes, and what I have at home that I picked last week that would look good with this new outfit. It's therapeutic."

Maxine is an expert at picking through the clothing at ATC and putting together fun, vibrant outfits. Every week, as she carefully looks through the clothing racks, her counselor, Ivan Alomar, sits with her and talks with her about her life. "There are times he just lets me vent, and sometimes he'll give me some pointers," she says. "And at the same time, I'm figuring out the clothes. It's my clothing therapy." Checking in can be a lot less intimidating when you are doing it while picking out outfits, rather than sitting across from someone, face-to-face.

We give our clients 1,000 brand new clothing items every week. We give out nearly \$500,000 worth of clothing a year, spending less than \$20,000 on it, relying heavily on donations from the aforementioned companies, as well as Urban Outfitters, Exact-Science, Booksmith, and DCL Productions. Our clients deserve the best, so the clothes we distribute are brand new. For some, this is the first time in years they've gotten clothing that isn't a hand-me-down or found on the streets.

"Since I would wear the same clothes every day, they looked really bad," says Petunia, an ATC client for 14 years. "When you come here and get different clothes, you feel good. You feel normal."

Our clients' kids get the hook-up, too. Old Navy gives us tons of children's clothes. Petunia has a five-year-old son, and she often finds T-shirts for him in the ATC clothing room. Maxine sometimes brings her five-year-old daughter to pick out her own clothes.

"I bring my daughter over and she'll say, 'Oh, I like this skirt with this skirt and this skirt,'" Maxine says. "Right now, she's into this little tutu-looking skirt with hearts on it and it's pink. She can wear whatever color tights and whatever shirt, just as long as that pink skirt is on her. It's like her ballerina princess skirt."

"When you come here and get different clothes, you feel good. You feel normal."

- Petunia, ATC Client

Because of the diversity of clothing ATC receives, clients can pick out things in their own unique style. Jay, an ATC client for one year, "especially likes vintage style," he says. "Like T-shirts with fun slogans, like 'my attitude doesn't need your approval,' with an old-school radio boom box from the '80s." However, his favorite ATC item is a Banana Republic sweater.

A huge benefit of all of the great clothing is that it helps strengthen relationships with our clients. It gives some people an incentive to start working with us. They come for the clothes, but they stay for the relationship.

Petunia, now 30, first met ATC counselors on the street when she was 16. "I used to get stuff on outreach, but I would never come to the office," she says. "My sister is the one who came here first, and she would say, 'You

should go over there. They give you clothes and they're really cool people.' Now, I come once a week just to talk about how I'm feeling in my program, or what I'm going through. I could tell them anything and I know they won't judge me. They were there for me when I was in jail, and they were there when I was out. If I ever need somebody to really talk to and to comfort me, they're there."

Sometimes, our counselors become personal shoppers. "They know how you dress, or what you like, and they save it for you," Petunia says. Surprising clients with clothing that we think they'll like makes them feel known, understood, and special.

It's no easy feat to keep the clothing room organized, but we do our best. Twice a month, volunteers come in to clean up the room, and stock it full of new clothing. A few times a year, we get massive donations of Old Navy clothing and accessories, and volunteers receive it and put it away. It takes a village to keep our clothing room in top shape.



Petunia and her son in the clothing room

And it is so worth it. Our clients deserve to feel great about themselves. While this transformation has to occur on the inside, it certainly helps if they like how they look on the outside. When we give them brand new clothing from cool places, it gives us a way to say that we care about them, we think they deserve good things in life, and that they should be able to have the same things as those around them, or better. It's not just an outfit they get; it is a boost to their self-esteem and their confidence.

ATC collaborates with over 100 different agencies in the Bay Area to provide the best possible continuum of support for our clients, but our relationship with Homeless Youth Alliance goes deeper than the rest. ATC started partnering with HYA in our earliest days, and have remained closely linked ever since, influencing each other's outlook and supporting each other through highs and lows. Here, Mary Howe, HYA's Executive Director, reflects on 14 years of partnership with ATC.

Can you tell me a bit about HYA?

We're pretty awesome. We're more peer-based than ATC, since most of our staff come from the population we serve. We have a drop-in center and kids can just come as they are. They don't have to sign in or even talk to us. They can get clothes and food and watch movies and use the phone, and then if they want, they can meet with the staff. We have therapists and psychiatrists. We do needle exchange and medical care and pet care. We try to just bring everything to the [youth in the] Haight.

I think what's hard for us is to work really in depth with people as much as ATC does because we see up to 120 kids a day. There's not enough time to really sit down with the kids and to talk about what they want to do and help them do it.

How did you first learn about ATC?

When I started doing outreach in the Haight in 1999, Rob and Taj [Mustapha, ATC's co-founder] had a good reputation with both my colleagues and the youth, which is no small feat, so I decided to get to know them better.

During that first year, I did several outreach shifts with them in the Tenderloin. I found their approach both refreshing and realistic. They truly met people where they were at, without judgment or their own agenda.

How have you seen ATC change or evolve?

More than anything, I have seen them stay true to their original mission but also grow with their clients over time. They have expanded their team to better support both their clients and staff. It is strange to think about the early years when ATC was just two people. So much has changed. Many of the staff have been with ATC for many years, which speaks to the strength of the agency. Many nonprofits have a high turnover.

What are ATC's biggest strengths?

The staff and their understanding and respect for the individual process of the youth

they work with. Their heart. They spend a significant amount of time with their clients one-on-one; this is actually pretty unique. The kids would also say shoes, food boxes, backpacks, and bags! Those items are so important, yet ATC is the only agency I know that provides all these things.

Can you tell me about HYA's relationship with ATC?

ATC has always been down for HYA. When HYA was gaining its independence or when we've had staff shortages, ATC staff have come and worked at our center. There is no other agency I would trust to come in and do that. It speaks volumes.

"We both respect the voices, the aspirations, and the constantly changing needs of each and every youth we interact with. There is no cookie cutter approach."

- Mary Howe, HYA Executive Director

During the new staff orientation, we both have staff visit each other's programs. Also, I do trainings for ATC's new staff on safe injection and common infections that affect our youth.

Our approach and mission is similar, but over the years our populations have changed and we do not have as much overlap. I think ATC and HYA care deeply about what positive change and meaningful relations mean to youth we work with. We both respect the voices, the aspirations, and the constantly changing needs of each and every youth we interact with. There is no cookie cutter approach; it remains different for the individual staff and youth themselves.

We both know that youth need support after they turn 24, which is the usual age most youth providers stop working with people. Through our mutual experiences of bearing witness to people's process, we know that many times people make significant changes over time, and many times in their later 20's.

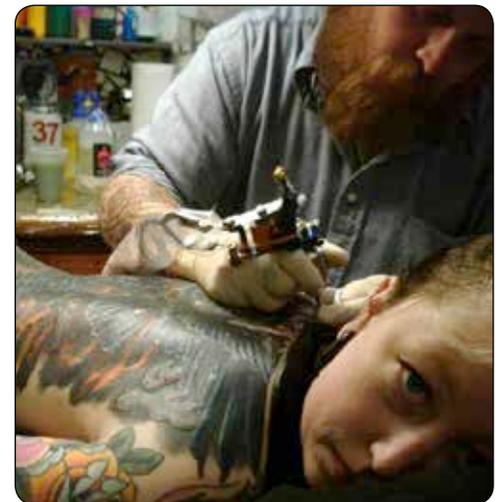
I think both agencies are deeply rooted in best working with and empowering the youth we serve and respecting people's individual decisions. I think that if both programs remain this way the collaboration will always be there.

What would you say are the best parts about your partnership with ATC?

I truly respect ATC and Rob as an Executive Director. Although we do not always agree on how to get things done, our endpoint is usually the same. I have relied on Rob more than any other provider in the city as my confidant and sounding board. I deeply respect his opinion and point of view. We very much have some of the same goals. I think we really get to learn from each other, and I think both programs really respect each other and their place in the bigger picture.

What kind of things have you turned to ATC for support with?

When stepping in to run HYA, I came from a place without any formal education. I had no real idea what I was doing; I just knew that I wanted to do it. ATC helped us by introducing us to funders and looking over grant proposals. Rob was really good at forcing me to look at the bigger, long-term picture, whereas, in the same way as I lived when was on the streets, I was very immediate, like, 'I just wanna do this now.' Rob helped me to see how to make an agency successful over a period of years. We've been independent of our old agency for seven years, and I think ATC played a big part in that.



In 2008, Mary Howe showed her insane dedication to ATC by participating in the I Think I Can Campaign. Her goal was to get 40 hours of tattoo work covering her entire back, and she raised over \$1,200!

The holidays can be a lonely time when you are disconnected from your family and when there is no one to buy you presents and give you hugs. We make sure that all of our clients get to celebrate the holidays with people who care about them. Every year, ATC hosts two holiday parties, which have drastically changed over the last 15 years. Our long-term clients use them as milestones, talking with us about where they were in life at the parties a few years ago, and how far they have come, giving all of us an additional reason to celebrate!



15 Years Ago:

1 party

15 people

Coffee and small snacks

1 small gift per client,
each item the same



Now:

2 parties

160 clients and 60 kids

Full meals plus 3,000
baked goods made by volunteers

320 personalized gifts, movie tickets,
and hats, gloves, and scarves donated
by Old Navy and Banana Republic



“It’s like a big reunion. We’re so busy and our lives have taken different routes now, so we don’t see our old friends as much. We’re more family-oriented now. But it’s great to see everybody and catch up.”

- Eric (right)



“We try to make the best of [the holidays] for the kids, but it’s not our best time of the year. One of the things we like about the party is the free movie tickets. It’s part of our holiday tradition now to go to the movies with our kids together right after Christmas.”

- Lydia (left)



“Coming to the parties feels good because you don’t feel like you’re the only one that’s struggling. It feels good that there’s that support.”

- Mireya (below)



“You sit down and talk, and they have all these great snacks like cupcakes, and they have all these great prizes and gifts that they give out...I just love the people at ATC. I was so excited to see all the people there. They bring a lot of joy to me.”

- Dawn (below)

