Inside this Report

The 2015 Bridging the Gap Fund Report serves as an account of the impact that investments to the Fund have made on the lives of young people over the last year and highlights the long term success of the Bridging the Gap program.

About Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap between Youth and Community Services® (Bridging the Gap) is a free life-skills program for at-risk and high-risk youth ages 12 to 17 years. Through three decades in Massachusetts, The Salvation Army, has served over 6,600 at-risk youth through the program. Currently the program is operating in 12 communities where there is an urgent need to provide safe alternatives to violent and risky behavior in youth and significantly reduce the potential for court-involved youth to become re-offenders.

About the Fund

The Bridging the Gap Fund was established to provide the financial resources needed to address the ongoing, significant need to provide youth with life-skills training and educational support and safe alternatives to violence and risky behavior.

GRADUATE PROFILE: Rocky Escobar traded in his saggy jeans and hoodies for suits.

“I used to fight kids who had fathers because I resented that,” says Steven Escobar. “One day, after I got into another fight, someone called me Rocky. Now everyone calls me that.”

“His path to the program was slightly different.

“Rocky is now 22 and smiles as he describes his first appearance at The Salvation Army in Attleboro. “I mirrored what I saw on the street. I mirrored the gangs. I had the saggy jeans, the hoodie, the dew rag, the whole thing.”

Not long after Rocky met Reverend Daniel Dore, Bridging the Gap Director, his life took a sudden turn. He got a job and a quick promotion to assistant manager. He turned in his gang wardrobe for suits, a practice he keeps today. He is enrolled at Bristol Community College and hopes to follow in Reverend Dan’s footsteps by pursuing a degree in psychology.

“I think Reverend Dan built Rocky,” says Manny Owusu, a current student. “They are on the same page.” Rocky regularly volunteers as a mentor at the program that influenced him.

“He invited me and I came. I’ve been here ever since.”

Bridging the Gap between Youth and Community Services® is a 12-week Salvation Army life-skills court-diversion program. Most program participants are referred by the courts, a school official or a probation department. Adolescents who have been arrested for the first time can have their offenses dismissed by successfully completing the program.

Rocky’s path to the program was slightly different.

“A friend of mine had been referred to the program when I was 16,” says Escobar.

(Continued on p. 2 ROCKY)
Bridging the Gap “helped me change my whole life around.”

When Dakota first came to The Salvation Army, he was 14 and by his own admission, “out of control.”

Dakota was referred to the program by his probation officer in order to provide structure to his life.

“Dakota was not happy to be here when he first came to us,” said Maggie Perez, program director. “But it didn’t take long for him to get it that we cared about him. After that, he became a new kid.”

Perez has up to a dozen youth enrolled at any one time in Bridging the Gap in Fitchburg and Gardner. She teaches from a carefully crafted curriculum and invites speakers from law enforcement and other professions.

Curriculum topics include: conflict resolution, communications skills, self esteem, goal-setting, education and employment among others.

This Christmas, Bridging the Gap students and graduates collected funds at the bucket drives as part of the Red Kettle campaign. “It was fun,” said Dakota. “To be able to give back to this program that’s done so much for me felt awesome.”

Bridging the Gap gets results. Of the students who complete the program, 87% do not reoffend within a year.

Dakota knows how important the lessons are that he learned at Bridging the Gap. “I need to stay this way for the rest of my life and I will go so far in life.”

“Over all, this program is the best thing I ever went to that helped me change my whole life around.”

Students give back: Ringing the bell at Red Kettles

In Fitchburg, Worcester and other communities, Bridging the Gap students and graduates participated in annual Christmas tradition. They rang bells at local Salvation Army Red Kettles.

All funds raised in the Red Kettles remain in the community in which they were raised. Bridging the Gap participated in groups, which added to the experience.

"Our primary objective with Bridging the Gap is to help these young people get integrated or re-integrated into the community," said Major Daniel P. Brunelle of our Worcester Citadel Corps Community Center. “I think they genuinely enjoyed ringing bells, not just for the experience, but because they knew the funds collected would help the program that had helped them.”

“I have seen a lot of better things in myself in the past year and I’m very proud of myself and my behavior.”

Dakota participated in Boot Drives to raise funds for the Red Kettle Campaign

(continued from p. 1 ROCKY)

the program. “I think we’re all better off if these young people can learn basic skills and find a path toward a positive future.”

Rocky is grateful for his mentor, Reverend Dan, especially now that he is a father. As he takes on the new challenge of parenthood, he said, “I was building without a blueprint. Things I’ve learned at Bridging the Gap help me to be a better father.”

A banner in the Bridging the Gap classroom proclaims “Nothing Changes if Nothing Changes.” Rocky is living proof that lives can change if intervention comes at just the right time.
In 2013, Bridging the Gap programs provided 76,919 hours of life-skills instruction, tutoring and mentoring. 552 at-risk adolescents participated. 2,537 in the last four years.

Average percent of first-time offending youth who do not reoffend within one year of completing the program: 87%.

1,216 graduates contacted by program staff & volunteers.

Program Locations:
- Attleboro
- Boston
- Cambridge
- Fitchburg
- Haverhill
- Holyoke
- Lawrence
- North Adams
- North Shore
- Pittsfield
- Springfield
- Worcester

2015 Statistics:
- 87% of students come from single parent homes
- 44% are referred by the district attorney
- 32% are referred by juvenile probation
- 14 More than 43% of Bridging the Gap students are between the ages of 14 and 15.
- 15

In their own words:

Daniel

“They are very understanding and really listen to our point of views even though we are labeled as ‘at-risk teens.’

My favorite thing about the program is how they make my peers and I feel welcome and accepted no matter how we look, act, the way we think about things, where we come from, and what we’re at the program for.

They help us get through what we’re dealing with and give the kids at the program comfort to open up.”

Sarah

“What I like about Bridging the Gap is that I can talk to them without feeling stressed and how they are so kind. They helped me in school and at home. I came back to volunteer because they are my second family.”

Keishla

“Bridging The Gap is a really good place that you can let everything out and talk to your peers. They will help you with anything you need.”
When donors give to the Fund, young lives get transformed. The Bridging the Gap program costs more than $1.18 million annually. Of this total, 37 percent (nearly $450,000) is needed each year from private and other sources.

The Fund goal is to raise $1 million to:
• Build capacity and sustainability,
• Enhance curriculum and Enrichment opportunities,
• Establish new programs in communities in need.

Since its inception in 2012, more than $397,000 has been raised through the Fund to support the programs.

2015 Disbursements
$50,000

Ensuring Sustainability:
$50,000
Maintaining and strengthening the currently operating Bridging the Gap programs are major priorities for The Salvation Army. Eleven grants were distributed in 2015 to help sustain Bridging the Gap programs statewide.

2016 Program Expansion
A major goal of The Bridging the Gap Fund is to expand the program into more communities in which there is a need going unmet. After careful study of the statewide needs and Salvation Army capacity, the footprint of the program expands to Lowell in 2016.

Continued support from individual donors, foundations and corporate sponsors allow us to meet the need and transform lives.

Call to action: Help reach more youth at-risk

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In this day and age, it can be so easy for a life to veer off track and never be recovered. By investing in the Bridging the Gap Fund, you are part of the safety net that can catch a young person at just the right time and set things right. Thank you for investing in the future of many bright and talented adolescents.

For more information, please visit salvationarmyma.org/bridgingthegap

To make a financial contribution, please contact André Gorgenyi at Andre.Gorgenyi@use.salvationarmy.org or 339.502.5862.

Bridging the Gap endorsed by the law enforcement community

“Bridging the Gap’s innovative approach to serving court-involved and at-risk youth has earned them this national recognition. Ensuring low recidivism is critically important to the future of our youth, and I want to commend Bridging the Gap for their commitment and success.”

Carmen Ortiz, United States Attorney

“Just because you commit a crime does not make you a criminal. Bridging the Gap is helping teens in trouble see a better future ahead.”

Adam Foss, Suffolk County Assistant District Attorney

“We know the importance of getting a hold of a young life before the courts gets a hold of them. Our dream is to put ourselves out of work. Bridging the Gap is helping to make that a reality.”

Judge Leslie Harris, Suffolk County Juvenile Court

The Springfield Bridging the Gap program was awarded Outstanding Juvenile Program for 2010 by Project Safe Neighborhoods and the United States Department of Justice.

Bridging the Gap Mission Statement:
To educate youth on the resources and tools needed for them to make better decisions for themselves and ultimately to attain a more promising future.