



BRIDGING THE GAP

BETWEEN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

2013 Fund Report

Inside this Report

The 2013 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. Founded in 1996 by The Salvation Army, the program has served over 6,000 youth throughout Massachusetts to date. Currently the program is operating in 13 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.

Anthony: Reaching new heights

Anthony did not come to Bridging the Gap through the traditional route. The majority of students are referred by a district attorney or juvenile probation.

Anthony came with a friend. When his friend was referred to Bridging the Gap, he asked Anthony to come along with him. He had never been to The Salvation Army and wasn't excited to be going to the program after his first offense.

Anthony never left. He enjoyed the classes and realized that he needed the skills the program provided. Although he could have walked out at any time, he committed to finish the program.

class regularly has an opportunity to take on the largest indoor rock wall in Boston.

When Anthony first saw the wall and understood that climbing it was the day's activity, he was taken aback. As he continued to consider the challenge and watched as other students attempted to climb it with varying degrees of success, he thought to himself "If I can get to the top of this wall, I can prove that I can finish something."

And he did. By the time Anthony graduated, he had formed deep relationships with the staff of the program. At his graduation ceremony, he even referred to one instructor, Fred Gomes, as a second father to him.

He also encouraged those in attendance, "If you know you need to make a change in your life, make it."

Anthony now attends Fitchburg State College on a track scholarship and is studying criminal justice.

"Bridging the Gap set me on the right course. Now I just have to follow it."

He is pictured above in one of his favorite locations--the rock wall at our Kroc Corps Community Center in Dorchester, where he attended the program. Many of the students in Bridging the Gap do not fare well in traditional classroom settings, so staff members make the most of learning opportunities in other environments. The

Taylor's Story

In her own words...

I was a very smart and talented child. I got straight A's in elementary school and I loved to act. Bullying at school had a negative impact on my self-image. By seventh grade, I was a heavy drinker and smoker (weed and cigarettes). My life at home wasn't the best--my older brother beat me horribly every day and nobody did anything to stop him. I partied all the time and snuck out of my house. I was almost never in school.

I was 13 years old and had 19 year old friends. I wanted to hang out with them all day. They didn't stop me from getting in trouble because they didn't care. My grades went from perfect to poor; not because I am stupid, but because I didn't try and I never went to class. I'm surprised I graduated seventh grade.

When I was in eighth grade, I got taken away from my mother. I was put into foster care with a family friend. She called me names and blamed me for her problems. As for school, I got expelled in November for two threats to commit a crime, assault and battery, indecent assault and battery, and intimidating three witnesses. That's when I got sent to Bridging the Gap at The Salvation Army.

At first, I hated going, and I thought I was wasting my time at some church for three hours twice a week. But after a while, I loved going there, it was my little get away from my problems.

Taylor's life continued to spiral downward. When her foster mother kicked her out, the Department of Children and Families placed her in a



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homeless shelter in another community with her mother. She ran away again.

"I cared more for alcohol than for living with my mom." Taylor confesses. "I look back now and cry every time I remember the day she begged me to come back and I didn't."

Taylor learned the hard way that the "friends" she had chosen didn't have her best interests in mind. She was facing eight charges and five felonies. Her next

arrest landed her in a juvenile lockup in Springfield. "We were locked in our rooms for most of the day so I read books and prayed to God. I was facing 45 days in lockup and I prayed for a second chance."

With the prospect of the remainder of her teen years in juvenile detention, Taylor was assigned to an alternative education program and then an intensive foster home. She says, "I had no freedom and had to do chores all of the time. I wanted to go home so much I didn't care what they made me do. I was not throwing my second chance away."

Taylor's outlook has changed dramatically through her journey. "Getting into trouble and losing my family over drugs wasn't worth the tears and consequences." She continues, "There will always be authority and rules no matter where you go."

Update from Carole Hildebrand, Bridging the Gap North Adams:

Taylor came back and successfully completed the Bridging the Gap program in March 2013. She now volunteers as a mentor and is a role model for teens that are going through similar life experiences.

She was recently awarded the **Say it Proud Award** from **Berkshire United Way** (pictured above left).

Taylor is now out of the court system, is an honors student and is continuing to grow personally in an effort to meet her goal of graduating high school and fulfilling her aspiration of attending the prestigious Williams College in Williamstown, MA.

What I learned at Bridging the Gap...student perspectives

"If it wasn't for this program, I would have gotten into a lot more fights. When I get mad, I just think about this program and walk away."

"Bridging the Gap taught me, if you want to see change you've got to be willing to change yourself."

"I learned to communicate with people a lot better and to talk more about my feelings, and that there really are people who care. I also learned about anger and how to control it in a better way than I usually would."

"I learned that thinking before you do can really be helpful, drugs and alcohol aren't the answer and I learned how to manage a relationship better with my friends and family."

2013 Statistics

Bridging the Gap programs provided **74,884 hours** of life-skills instruction, tutoring and mentoring



696 at-risk adolescents participated. 351 graduated the program

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

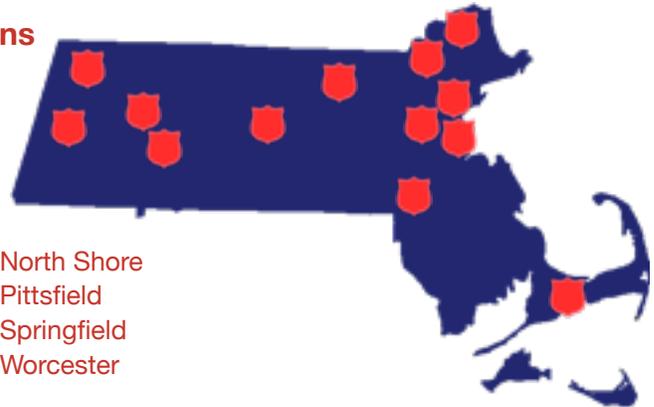
282

graduates attended post-graduate activities

Program Locations

Attleboro
Boston
Cambridge
Fitchburg
Haverhill
Holyoke
Hyannis
Lawrence
North Adams

North Shore
Pittsfield
Springfield
Worcester



14 More than **42%** of Bridging the Gap students are between the ages of 14 and 15.

15

63% of students come from single parent homes

39% are referred by the district attorney

33% are referred by juvenile probation

Julio: from Latin King to classroom leader

Julio was a seventeen-year-old juvenile from Springfield, MA. His story is similar to many of our program participants from Bridging the Gap. Julio's older brother is an active member of the Latin Kings gang in Springfield. Julio seemed groomed to enter the Kings. For him, there was no other way of life. Many of the youths in his neighborhood were active members. Julio came to the program for a disruption of lawful assembly charge in school due to fighting.

When Julio first entered the program, he was quiet and watchful. He was not overly willing to participate or share his story. As time went on however, Julio became more willing to open up. The key was the relationships he began building with other participants and staff members. Halfway through his 12 weeks, Julio seemed like a different person. He came early, was the last to leave, and became a major participant in class discussions. Bridging the Gap gave Julio a different perspective

on life. He was removed from a cycle of violence, poverty and failure. The relaxed setting was different from the public school setting. He did not feel academic or social pressure. Bridging the Gap was the first step in a journey of turning his life around.

By the time Julio graduated, he had goals and a tentative plan for his future: a future that did not involve gang violence. Julio talked about going to college and even a possible career in law enforcement. Julio even began asking questions about The Salvation Army and its spiritual mission. He was interested in the forgiveness and acceptance that the Church offered. Bridging the Gap created a safe environment that fostered a positive and real change.

Julio is now attending Springfield Technical Community College. He is enrolled in the Criminal Justice program.

2013 Financial Report for the 12 months ending September 30, 2013

Contributions:

\$237,240

Donations to the Bridging the Gap Fund provide the financial resources needed to build capacity and sustainability, enhance curriculum and enrichment opportunities, and establish new programs in communities of need.



Total Grants Disbursed:
\$147,000

Ensuring Sustainability:
\$137,000

Maintaining and strengthening the currently operating Bridging the Gap programs are major priorities for The Salvation Army. Thirteen grants were distributed in 2013 to help sustain Bridging the Gap programs statewide.

Enhancing Curriculum:
\$10,000

The Bridging the Gap Fund provides resources needed to develop new program components that strengthen course curriculum and enhance or provide new enrichment opportunities for youth. Two grants were distributed in 2013 for a statewide curriculum standardization project and to offer an arts therapy component called Liberating Creativity to youth attending the program at the Kroc Corps Community Center in Dorchester.



The law enforcement community endorses Bridging the Gap

“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

Call to action: reaching more youth at-risk

Bridging the Gap program costs total more than \$1.18 million annually. Of this total, 37 percent (nearly \$450,000) is needed each year from private and other sources.

The goal of the Fund is to raise \$1 million over two years to build capacity and sustainability, enhance curriculum and enrichment opportunities, and establish new programs in communities in need.

Since its inception in 2012, more than \$237,000 has been through the Fund for Bridging the Gap programs.

When donors give to the Fund, young lives get transformed. 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 or to make a contribution, please visit www.salvationarmyma.org/bridgingthegap

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.