

# Bridges To Life

Bridges To Life (BTL), a 20-year-old 501(c)(3) organization based in Houston, Texas, is a restorative justice program that rehabilitates offenders and brings healing to victims of crime.

**Mission.** The *mission* of Bridges To Life is to connect communities to prisons to reduce the recidivism rate (particularly that resulting from violent crimes), reduce the number of crime victims, and enhance public safety. The *spiritual mission* of Bridges To Life is to minister to victims and offenders in an effort to show them the transforming power of God's love and forgiveness.

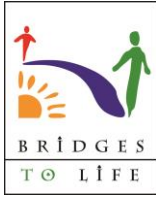
**History.** Bridges To Life was founded in 1998 by Houstonian John Sage after the brutal murder of his sister Marilyn in 1993. In the wake of this tragic event, John went through several years of trauma, rage, and grief, ultimately reaching a point of deep surrender and forgiveness. He then felt a calling to volunteer for a prison program in which crime victims met with inmates weekly and shared their personal stories. After experiencing the healing impact of this process for himself and wanting to expand it to others, John founded Bridges To Life. The work of Bridges To Life promotes the repair, restoration and reintegration of offenders, victims, their families, and the community.

**Recognition.** Bridges To Life is a nationally recognized program. The organization and many of its volunteers have received numerous awards, including the 2015 Judith Coleman Chaplaincy Offender Program of the Year Award by the American Correctional Chaplains Association, the Governor's Criminal Justice Award, the Manhattan Institute Social Entrepreneur Award, the Bert Thompson Pioneer Award for Community and Restorative Justice, and the Samaritan Spirit Award. In addition, John Sage received the inaugural American Leadership Forum Public Service Award, was named a Purpose Prize Fellow by Civic Ventures Encore Careers, and was chosen by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice from among over 20,000 volunteers as the 2017 Carol Vance Volunteer of the Year.

## 2018 Programs

With the assistance of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Chaplaincy Department and other partners (see p. 8), **Bridges To Life completed 191 projects in 105 prisons and alternative facilities in 2018.** The majority (151) of these projects took place in Texas, Indiana and Washington prisons; however, 40 projects were completed in additional states and countries including: California, Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Mexico, South Africa and Uganda. In fact, the BTL curriculum has now been used in a total of 13 states and 6 foreign countries.

*~ 6,439 inmate participants graduated from the BTL program in 2018 ~*



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## **Goals and Outcomes**

The Bridges To Life program has two main goals: (1) To reduce recidivism (re-offending) rates of program graduates; and (2) To facilitate the healing process for victims and offenders. To date, more than 45,000 offenders have completed the BTL program.

**Impact on Offenders.** The latest three-year recidivism study of BTL graduates consists of a large and diversified sample group from 35 different ID (Institutional Division) prisons. Among the 2,403 offender graduates released in 2012 and 2013, the recidivism rate measured three years after release is 14.5%. Of these, only 2.5% returned to prison for committing a violent crime. Nationwide, recidivism rates are reported to have remained “largely stable since the mid-1990s, varying between 38% and 40%” (*Pew Center State of Recidivism Study, 2011*).

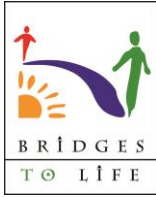
**Impact on the Community.** Statewide, the most recent Texas recidivism rate has reduced from 33% for inmates released in 1999 to 21.2% for inmates released in 2012 and 2013 (*Texas Legislative Board Report, 2016*). Bridges To Life is one of the programs that has contributed to an overall decrease in recidivism in Texas, and BTL graduates show a recidivism rate 32% below the Texas average.

Reducing recidivism has significant beneficial economic and societal impact. The cost to the taxpayer to incarcerate an offender in a Texas prison over the average sentence is approximately \$100,550 (*Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2016, Henrichson & Delaney, 2012*), and that is in addition to the significant costs incurred at the county level, such as arrest and jail prior to incarceration. In addition to tax savings, the benefit of savings in emotional trauma to potential victims is impossible to measure.

**In 2018, the Bridges To Life program provided services to over 6,400 offender participants at a cost of \$201 per graduate.**

**Impact on Volunteers.** The Bridges To Life program is a ministry of presence. Each BTL volunteer gives approximately 60 hours of his/her time per project, and many volunteers participate in multiple projects each year. Volunteers may be victims of crime or others who have been affected by crime, or may be lay facilitators giving of their time. Since its inception, more than 2,600 volunteers have participated in a BTL project. **Currently, 219 active volunteers have been with BTL for over 5 years, and 100 of these for more than 10 years.**

Facilitation of the healing process for victims is achieved through the dialogue between victim volunteers and offenders. Volunteers often comment that they receive more benefit from the Bridges To Life process than do the offenders, as expressed in this quote from a 2018 volunteer:



## **Bridges To Life 2018 Annual Report**

*“Sitting with these men and women for 14 weeks, you realize the immense healing power of simply listening to someone as they share their story. You don’t have to be a trained counselor or therapist to make an impact in this program. And somehow that same act of listening is as healing for us as it is for the inmates. Being a BTL facilitator has eased pain from my own past that I carried for years.”*

Perhaps the single best indicator that healing is taking place for victim volunteers is the fact that, since BTL’s first project in 1999, more than 750 victims of crime have volunteered for the Bridges To Life program. Approximately **260 victim volunteers participated in 2018.**

**In 2018, 864 volunteers contributed 80,692 volunteer hours, worth \$1,992,285\* in kind!**

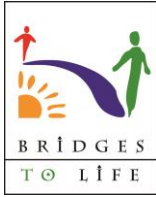
*\*Independent Sector Value*

**Impact on Juveniles.** In 2009, in response to interest from the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, work began on a study guide geared toward juveniles aged 13-17, and the first BTL Juvenile Program piloted with 20 youth and 4 volunteers at the Harris County Leadership Academy (HCLA) in Katy, Texas. **Since then, BTL has completed 36 projects in 8 youth facilities, and graduated 652 youth from our 12-week juvenile program.**

While early intervention with juvenile offenders is a small portion of BTL’s work, it is no less important than reaching adult offenders. “A 2007 University of Texas study found that each youth who is rehabilitated can save taxpayers between \$1.7 and \$2.3million in future criminal justice costs. In addition, the more youth who are successfully rehabilitated, the safer we’ll all be.” (*Houston Chronicle, 1/19/17*)

Through feedback from volunteers, juvenile probation staff, and professionals in the field of youth psychology, the BTL Youth Curriculum was developed into a professionally illustrated graphic novel entitled *Makin’ It: A Story of Hope*. This revised curriculum has been used since 2013 at HCLA, as well as in collaboration with mentors from the reVision program, a ministry for gang-affected youth and their families in Southwest Houston, and has been well received by both youth and adult volunteers.

**In 2018, 99 youth graduated from five BTL juvenile projects, two conducted at the Harris County Leadership Academy in Katy, Texas, one at Youth Center of the High Plains in Amarillo, Texas, and two at the Pendleton Juvenile Facility in Indiana.**



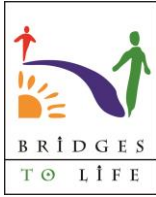
## ***Bridges To Life 2018 Annual Report***

**Impact on Alternative Populations.** Through our work with thousands of incarcerated offenders, we have encountered numerous program participants who have struggled with alcohol and drug addiction. Over the years, we have received frequent feedback that, in addition to helping offender participants deal with their criminal actions, the BTL program also has a substantial impact on helping them understand what role their addictions have played in their behaviors and choices. This feedback has led us to successfully expand the BTL program into halfway houses, homeless facilities and rehabilitation centers such as the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) facility in Houston, Judge John C. Creuzot Judicial Treatment Center in Lancaster, and The Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Centers (ARC) in Houston and Dallas, and in Bremerton, Washington.

**In 2018, 236 clients in residential treatment programs graduated from 11 BTL projects conducted at 6 alternative facilities.**

**The Peer-Facilitated Model.** BTL has also expanded into a new peer-facilitated format that allows the program to reach additional participants in units that are not located in close proximity to our volunteer base. Peer-facilitated projects were conducted in five Texas prison units this year, each requiring only one TDCJ-approved volunteer for oversight, and in two California prisons. In Texas, the program is facilitated by TDCJ Field Ministers (inmates who have graduated from the theological seminary college located at the Darrington Unit) rather than by BTL volunteers, and has been well-received by prison system personnel and inmate participants.

**In 2018, 23 peer-facilitated projects were conducted at 11 prison units, graduating a total of 882 offender participants from the BTL program.**

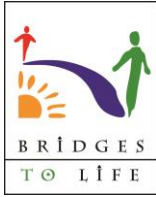


## Organizational Capacity

**BTL Board.** Bridges To Life is led by Chief Executive Officer and Founder, John Sage, and a Board of Directors that provides fiscal and practical direction. The BTL board is comprised of nine members with established interests in social services, philanthropy, law, accounting, and business. Several members provide legal and business-related advice and counsel, and all provide the social and spiritual support needed for BTL staff and volunteers to fulfill the mission of the organization. The term of office for board members is three years.

Every board member contributes financially to BTL, assists with fundraising efforts, and provides in-prison volunteer service. All members of the Board of Directors were donors and volunteers for Bridges To Life in 2018.

| <b>2018 BTL Board of Directors</b>   | <b>2018 BTL Advisory Board</b>                              |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Kirk Blackard</b><br/>Author; Licensed Arbitrator</p>  | <p><b>Salem Abraham</b><br/>Canadian, TX</p>                |
| <p><b>Edward G. Davis, Jr., CPA (Board Chairman)</b><br/>Chief Financial Officer, Juniper Capital LP</p> | <p><b>Ellen Halbert</b><br/>Austin; Former Board Member</p> |
| <p><b>Don H. Haley</b><br/>Real Estate Investor</p>  | <p><b>Wade Upton</b><br/>Houston; Former Board Member</p>   |
| <p><b>Katherine Cabaniss Parsley</b><br/>248<sup>th</sup> District Judge</p>                             |   |
| <p><b>Ershel Redd, Jr.</b><br/>Retired CEO, El Paso Electric</p>   |   |
| <p><b>John Sage</b><br/>Founder/Chief Executive Officer</p>  |   |
| <p><b>Richard C. Seltzer</b><br/>Attorney</p>  |   |
| <p><b>George W. “Trey” Strake, III</b><br/>Senior Director, Cushman &amp; Wakefield</p>                  |   |
| <p><b>Gay Van Osdall</b><br/>Community Volunteer</p>   |   |



## ***Bridges To Life 2018 Annual Report***

**BTL Staff.** In 2018, Mr. Sage led a staff consisting of: a Chief Operating Officer, Development Director, Communications Coordinator, 12 full-time Regional Coordinators (one who also serves as Program Director), and 3 part-time Regional Coordinators.

All Regional Coordinators were BTL volunteers before coming on board as BTL staff. They typically manage BTL programs in four prison units located within two hours of their home. This involves many tasks, including, but not limited to, recruiting and training volunteers and working with the prison staff to coordinate BTL projects inside the prisons. Because BTL staff members are located throughout the state of Texas, along with one staff member in Indiana and one in Washington, monthly staff meetings are held by teleconference, and an in-person annual three-day retreat meeting.

Bridges To Life continues to grow and serve more victims of crime and offenders. Starting with 41 inmate graduates in one Texas prison in 1999, Bridges To Life has now completed 1,347 projects in 163 prisons and alternative facilities, and is always evaluating the potential for expansion.

Program growth has meant staff and operations growth as well. In 2018, BTL added new staff member Joel Lightfoot as our second full-time Regional Coordinator for projects in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

### **2018 BRIDGES TO LIFE STAFF**

**John Sage**—Founder and Chief Executive Officer

**Jim Buffington**—Chief Operating Officer

**Connie Hilton**—Program Director and Northeast Texas Regional Coordinator

**Danielle Sims**—Development Director

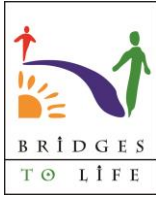
**Val Padley**—Communications Coordinator

#### ***REGIONAL COORDINATORS, Texas***

**Belinda Hester**, Waco Area #2—Boyd Unit (*Teague*), Crain and Murray Units (*Gatesville*), Hobby and Marlin Units (*Marlin*)

**Charles Fisher**, Dallas/Fort Worth #1—Bridgeport Unit (*Bridgeport*), Coffield Unit - Faith Based Dorm (*Tennessee Colony*), Estes Unit (*Venus*), Lindsey Unit (*Jacksboro*)

**Connie Hilton**, Northeast Texas— Allred Unit (*Wichita Falls*), Beto Unit (*Palestine*), Coffield Unit (*Tennessee Colony*), East Texas Treatment Facility (*Henderson*), Lewis Unit (*Woodville*), Polunsky Unit (*Livingston*), Robertson Unit (*Abilene*)



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**Deborah Hartman**, Central Texas— Halbert Unit (*Burnet*), Kyle Unit (*Kyle*), Lockhart Women's Unit (*Lockhart*), Travis Unit (*Austin*)

**Dolores Stoughton**, Greater Houston #1—Clemens Unit (*Brazoria*); Darrington, Ramsey, Stringfellow and Terrell Units (*Rosharon*); Scott Unit (*Angleton*)

**Eddie Mendoza**, Beaumont—LeBlanc Unit (*Beaumont*)

**Joel Lightfoot**, Dallas/Fort Worth #2—C. Moore and Cole Units (*Bonham*), Hutchins State Jail (Dallas), Judge John C. Creuzot Judicial Treatment Center (*Lancaster*), Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center (ARC) (*Dallas*)

**Larry James**, San Antonio— Connally Unit (*Kenedy*), Dominguez State Jail (*San Antonio*), Ney and Torres Units (*Hondo*)

**Linda Windham**, Greater Houston #2—Jester I and Jester III Units (*Richmond*), Plane State Jail (*Dayton*); Women Helping Ourselves (WHO) (*Atascocita*), Young Unit (*Dickinson*)

**Lucy Segars**, Waco Area #1—Hilltop, Hughes, Mountain View, Murray and Woodman Units (*Gatesville*)

**Margie Blazier**, Bryan Area— Byrd, Estelle, Goree and Walls Units (*Huntsville*); Eastham Unit (*Lovelady*); Ferguson Unit (*Midway*); Hamilton Unit (*Bryan*); Luther Unit (*Navasota*)

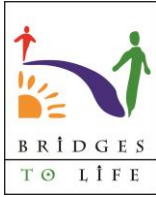
**Richard Lopez**, Huntsville—Holliday and Wynne Units (*Huntsville*)

**Tac Buchanan**, Amarillo/Panhandle—Clements and Neal Units (*Amarillo*), Jordan Unit (*Pampa*); Randall County Jail (*Amarillo*), Roach Unit (*Childress*), Tulia Transfer Unit (*Tulia*), Youth Center of the High Plains (*Amarillo*)

### ***REGIONAL COORDINATORS, Out of State***

**Judy Dutcher**, Seattle, Washington— Cedar Creek Corrections Center (*Littlerock*); Mission Creek Corrections Center (*Belfair*); Monroe Minimum Security, Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center (ARC) (*Bremerton*); Twin Rivers and Washington State Reformatory Units (*Monroe*); Washington Corrections Center (*Shelton*)

**Misty Wallace**, Indianapolis, Indiana—Indiana Women's Prison (*Indianapolis*), Miami Correctional Facility (*Bunker Hill*), Pendleton OSD and Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facilities (*Pendleton*), Plainfield Correctional Facility (*Plainfield*), Putnamville Correctional Facility (*Greencastle*)



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## Community Collaboration

The Bridges To Life program continues to successfully carry out its mission with the cooperation and partnership of numerous community agencies, faith-based organizations, and government entities. Since its beginning, BTL has worked in close collaboration with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to provide a grassroots solution for reducing recidivism and making communities safer.

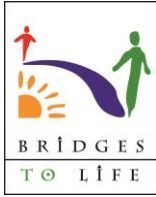
Based on the success of this relationship, BTL has multiplied its impact by expanding both in and out of state, currently working with the Departments of Correction in California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington to bring the BTL program to prisons in their states. Extending outside the United States, BTL has collaborated with Promoción de Paz in Mexico, Ukuphula Iketanga Foundation in South Africa, Bridges To Life-Uganda in Uganda, and Prachuap Khirikan Gospel Church in Thailand.

Bridges To Life works closely with the Harris County Community Supervision and Corrections Department to implement projects at the Santa Maria Hostel, a women’s residential treatment facility in Houston, and with the leadership of the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department to conduct our juvenile program. Additionally, BTL partners with The Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Centers in Houston and Dallas, and the John C. Creuzot Judicial Treatment Center in Lancaster, to serve residents seeking counseling and addiction-related services.

Our education collaboration includes **Southern Methodist University (SMU)**’s Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, which offers a Restorative Justice course that requires participation as a BTL volunteer at the Dallas Salvation Army ARC facility. Additionally, students in SMU’s Embrey Human Rights Program may volunteer for BTL to fulfill their community service requirement. BTL also has partnership agreements with the **University of Texas** in San Antonio, **Indiana Wesleyan University**, and **Penn State University** in their Criminal Justice Departments for their Criminal Justice program students to participate with BTL as volunteers.

BTL is a steady source of referrals for The WorkFaith Connection, SER–Jobs for Progress, CitySquare-WorkPaths, One Man’s Treasure, Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), Unlocking DOORS, and CrossWalk Center. These re-entry partnerships allow BTL to expand resources offered to offender participants, providing them with opportunities for education, training, and employment-related services that will aid them in successfully reintegrating into their communities.





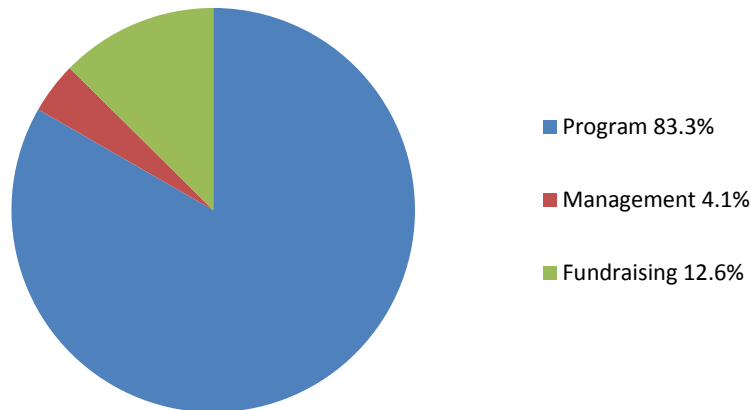
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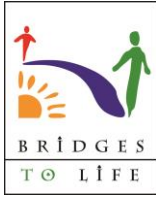
## Fiscal Responsibility and Program Value

Bridges To Life is fiscally responsible. **Cash expenses in 2018 totaled \$1,293,207** of which 83 cents of every dollar was spent on program services. BTL is a Better Business Bureau Accredited Charity and a GuideStar Exchange Gold Participant. The agency's IRS 990 and audited financials can be found on the GuideStar profile or by contacting our office. The BTL organizational profile can also be found on DonorHouston, an online database hosted by the Greater Houston Community Foundation that provides nonprofit information to potential donors.

### How Is Funding Used?

## 2018 Expenses (Cash Basis)



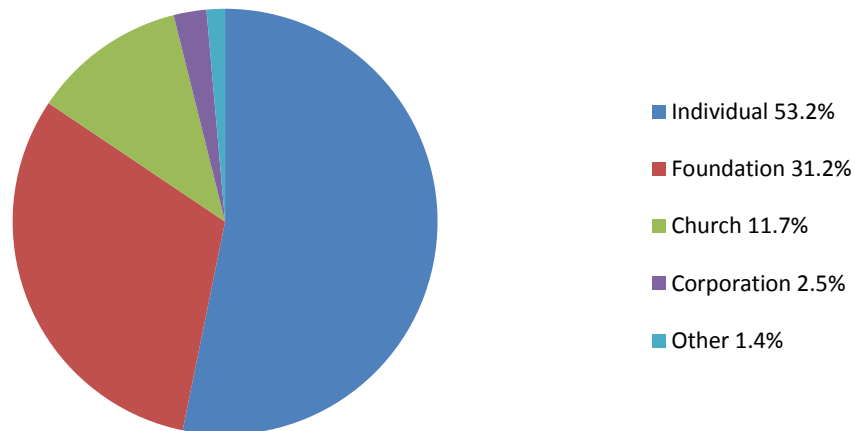


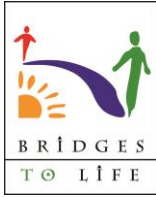
## ***Bridges To Life 2018 Annual Report***

BTL is a 20-year old grassroots nonprofit agency that has relied on the generous support of individuals, foundations, churches and faith-based organizations, and corporations that see the value in our work. In 2018, **Bridges To Life received \$1,443,238 in cash donations and other revenue.** Our fundraising objective is to continue to build a diverse funding structure, without relying on any one source for support. We are fortunate to have a broad base of donors (744 in 2018) who continue to support our mission. With frugal spending and careful planning, we have been able to build a reasonable cash reserve to sustain our program during the year, as more than 50 percent of our funds arrive in the last quarter of each year.

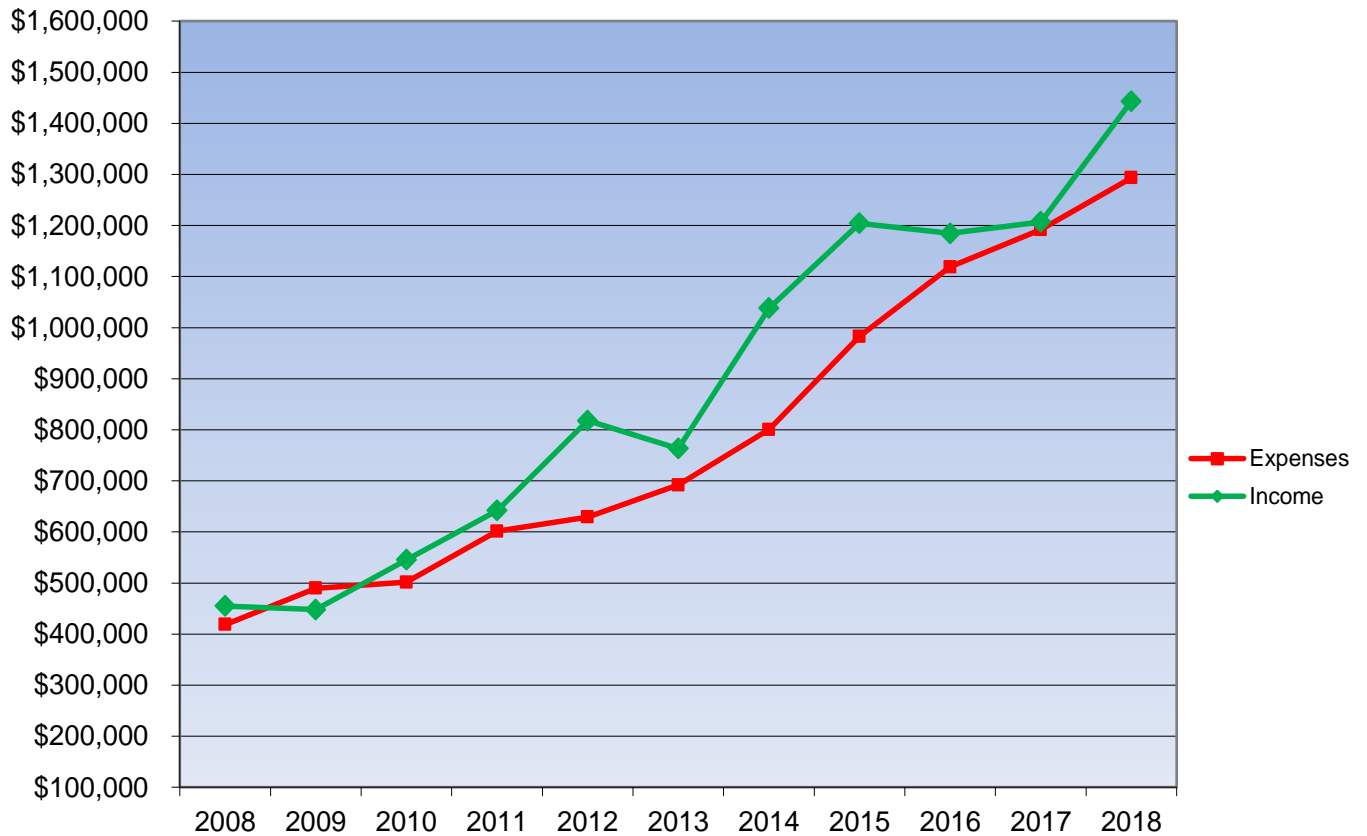
### **How Is BTL Funded?**

#### **2018 Revenue (Cash Basis)**

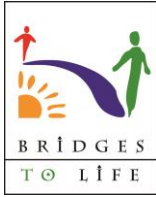




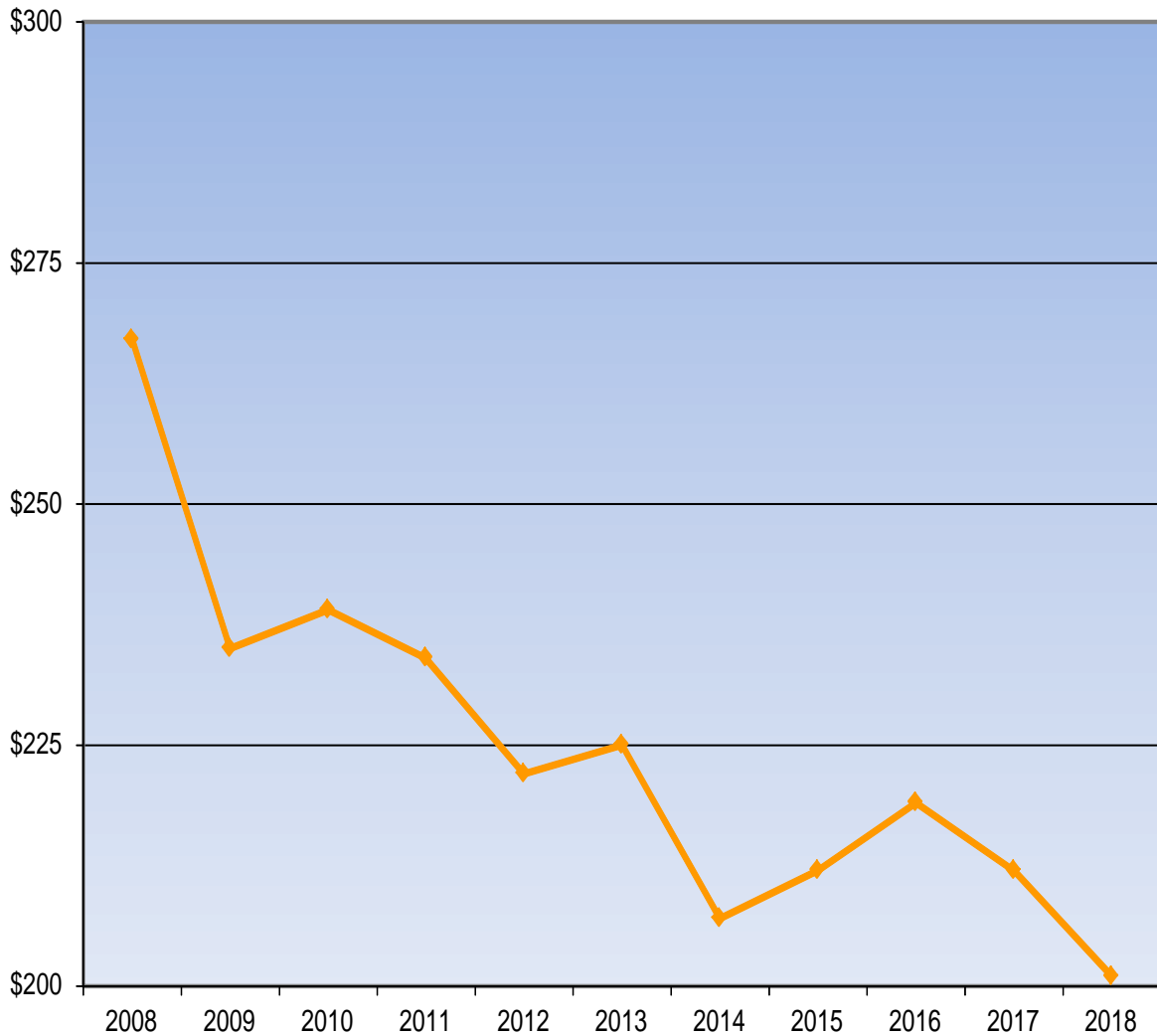
### Annual Budget History



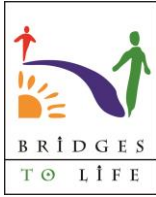
As indicated in the chart, BTL has had steady and significant growth in terms of revenue and expenses. These increases have been accompanied by significant growth in the size and number of projects and number of annual graduates from the program. **Cash expenses in 2018 were \$1,293,307; cash revenue was \$1,443,238.** A breakdown of expenses and revenue can be found earlier in this report.



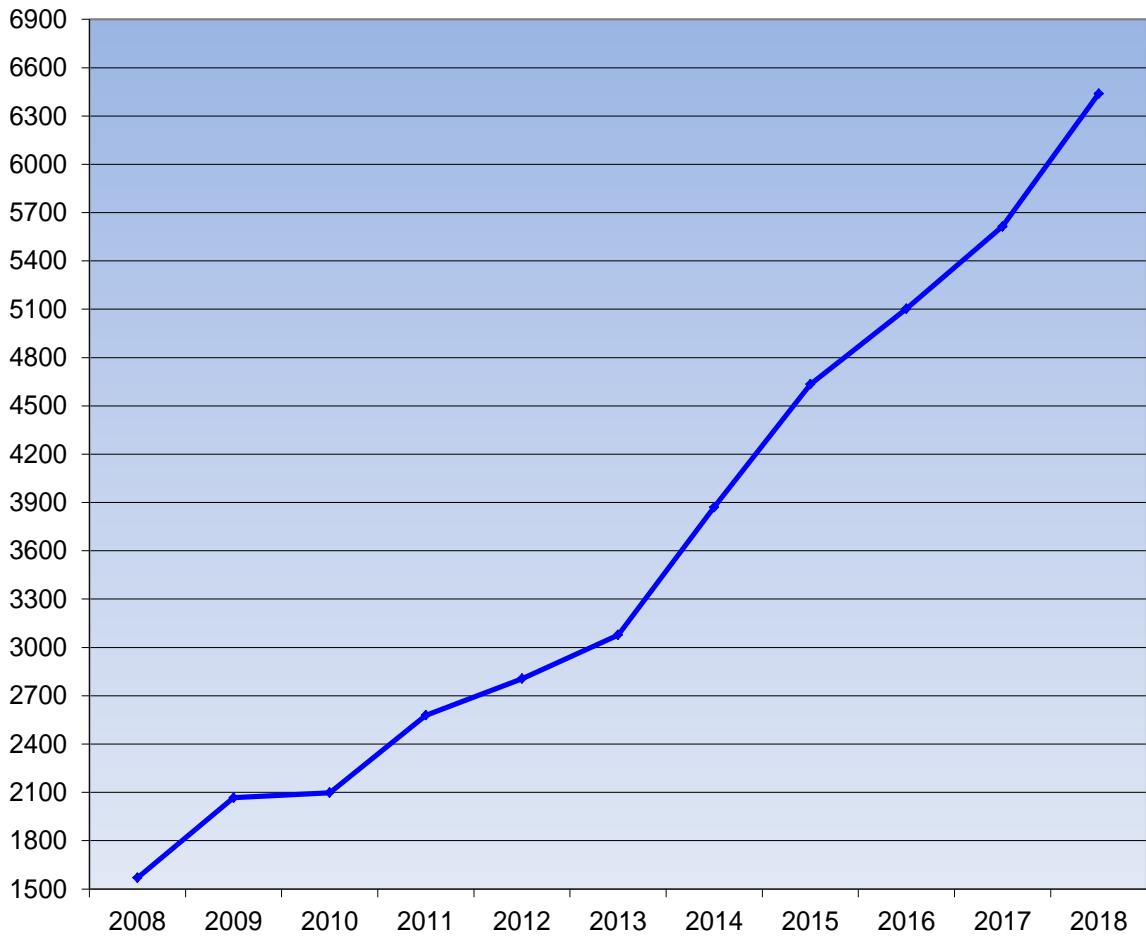
### Cost Per Graduate



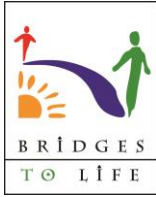
As illustrated above, our cost per graduate continues to remain extremely low. **The cost of the BTL program per inmate in 2018 was \$201 (based on the cash budget)**, a fraction of the cost to incarcerate a first-time or repeat offender. The average cost of incarcerating an offender in Texas for an average length incarceration is approximately \$100,550.



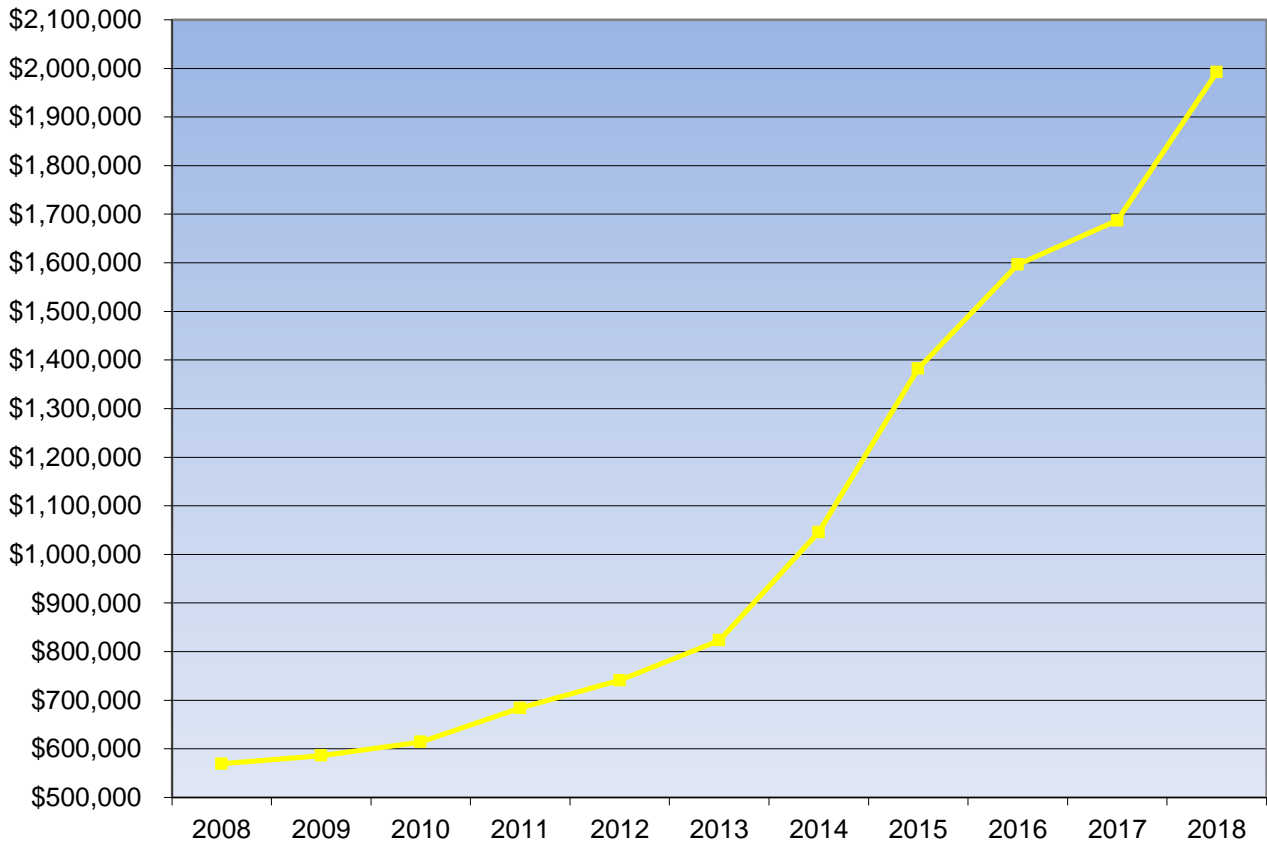
### BTL Graduates Per Year



**In 2018, there were 6,439 BTL graduates from 105 prison, juvenile, and alternative facilities.**



### Value of BTL Volunteers



Bridges To Life volunteers may or may not be victims of a crime. Volunteers commit to 14 weeks of service, which amounts to 60 hours of volunteer time per project, plus homework and travel time. Most volunteers complete two projects each year.

In 2018, BTL employed 3 part-time and 16 full-time staff members, who collectively managed 864 volunteers in Texas, Indiana and Washington. The chart above depicts the value of this volunteer time, as determined by the Independent Sector website. **Last year, our 864 active volunteers contributed over 80,600 hours of service valued at \$1,992,285 in kind!**