

Bridges To Life

Bridges To Life (BTL), a 501(c)(3) organization established in Houston, Texas, in 1998, 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.

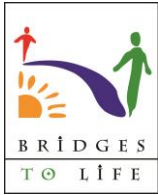
History. Bridges To Life was founded in 1998 by Houstonian John Sage after the brutal murder of his sister Marilyn in 1993. In the wake of this tragic event, John realized the terrible toll it had taken, not only on his family's lives, but also on those of Marilyn's friends, co-workers, and the community at large. Guided by his faith, John developed the Bridges To Life program to bring crime victims into the prison system to tell their stories and share with offenders the impact of crime on their lives.

Starting with 41 inmate graduates in one Texas prison in 1999, the Bridges To Life curriculum has now been used in prisons and alternative facilities throughout Texas, as well as in 16 other states and 7 countries, graduating a total of 79,632 offenders from its program. The work of BTL promotes the repair, restoration and reintegration of offenders, victims, their families, and the community, enhancing the human dignity of all involved.

2023: Our 25th Anniversary Year. As of 2023, Bridges To Life has been healing crime victims, rehabilitating offenders, and making our communities safer for 25 years! And this year, BTL completed more projects in more locations than in any other single year in our history. We also added 10 new facilities, including two in Kentucky, a state where we have not operated before.

Of the 100 prison units managed by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the BTL program was conducted in 94 of them; the only exceptions were medical and psychiatric units. While we continue to respond to requests for the program beyond our home state, in 2023 overall, 88% of BTL program activity took place in Texas, 10% in other states, and 2% in other countries.

In 2023, Bridges To Life completed 354 projects in 138 prisons and alternative facilities, graduating 8,435 participants from the BTL program.



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. By reducing recidivism, BTL also reduces the financial burden of crime on taxpayers and contributes to the safety and well-being of communities.

Offender Impact. The work of BTL has proven to help released offenders successfully reintegrate into society, as evidenced by recidivism studies conducted each year. With assistance from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Bridges To Life annually tracks a large sample of offenders after they are released to determine how many return to prison (recidivate) within 3 years. Of the over 14,000 Texas BTL graduates released from 2011 to 2019, the recidivism rate was just 13.7%, compared with the current national rate of 37% (*Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018*), and of these, only 2.4% returned to prison for a violent crime!

Additionally, a National Police Foundation study of parolees released in the Dallas area between September 2014 and August 2015, compared the recidivism rates of those who had taken the BTL program during their incarceration with those who had not. *"The results of this analysis support the proposition that the BTL program has positive effects on offender rehabilitation. Participation in the BTL program decreased the odds of recidivism by 30% over the course of the 3 to 3-1/2 year follow-up period."* Most significantly, only 1.4% of BTL parolees were reincarcerated for a violent crime, compared to 3.7% of the non-BTL group.

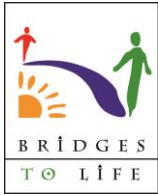
In 2023, the recidivism rate of BTL graduates remained low at 13.7%, compared to the national rate of 37%.

Volunteer Impact. In 2023, BTL volunteers contributed 7,000 more hours of service for the year than in 2022. This increased activity reflects the return of additional facilities to the volunteer-facilitated delivery method of our program as we continue to phase out the Self-Study format begun during the pandemic.

The role of the volunteer in BTL goes far beyond guiding participants through the weekly curriculum. Volunteers encourage, challenge, and support these men and women throughout the BTL process, helping them build a platform for real and lasting change. We consider the volunteer-facilitated method of program delivery to be the Gold Standard of Bridges To Life!

In 2023, 677 volunteers contributed 57,048 volunteer hours, worth \$1,814,126* in kind!

**Independent Sector Value*



Bridges To Life 2023 Annual Report

Juvenile Impact. In 2009, in response to interest from the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, work began on a 12-week version of BTL geared toward juveniles aged 13-17. The first BTL Juvenile Program was piloted with 20 youth and 4 volunteers at the Harris County Leadership Academy (HCLA) in Katy, Texas, and **we have now graduated 780 youth from 9 youth facilities since that time.**

While early intervention with juvenile offenders is a small portion of BTL's work, it is no less important than reaching adult offenders. In Texas, more than 100,000 youth are arrested annually or referred to the juvenile probation system. The Justice Policy Institute reports that youth confinement costs taxpayers hundreds of dollars per day and hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. Yet research shows that incarceration is less effective than evidence-based juvenile programs, such as that offered by Bridges To Life.

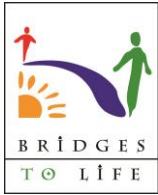
Though BTL program activity at most juvenile facilities has still not resumed since 2020, four juvenile projects were held in 2023: three at the Ellis Unit-Champions Youth Program in Huntsville, and one at the Montgomery County Youth Program in Conroe.

In 2023, BTL's juvenile program was utilized at two facilities, graduating a total of 36 youth from the program.

Alternative Populations Impact. 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 led us to successfully expand the BTL program into halfway houses, homeless facilities and rehabilitation centers in both Texas and other states. In 2023, the BTL program was conducted at Angela's House in Houston; Haven House in Amarillo; the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center (ARC) facilities in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio; and at Indiana Dream Team (*Indiana*) and Ciara's House (*Kentucky*). As the year ended, The Salvation Army ARC in Tampa, Florida, ordered inventory for their first BTL project, which will begin in 2024.

In 2023, 199 clients in residential treatment programs graduated from 14 BTL projects conducted at 8 alternative facilities.



Bridges To Life 2023 Annual Report

The Peer-Facilitated Model. BTL's peer-facilitated (PF) model allows the program to reach participants in units located in the most remote areas. Requiring only one BTL volunteer for oversight, PF projects in Texas are facilitated by TDCJ Field Ministers (inmates who have graduated from The College of Ministry located at the Memorial Unit), and the format has been well-received by prison system personnel and inmate participants. Two facilities in California continue to successfully use the PF format as well.

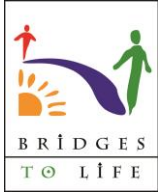
In 2023, BTL graduated 1,096 offender participants from peer-facilitated projects at 25 prisons in Texas and 2 in California.

Reaching Sex Offenders. While sex offenders in other states have participated in BTL projects since 2010, the Texas prison system did not allow sex offenders to participate in Bridges To Life until more recently. After persistent discussion with TDCJ management and completing a pilot BTL project at a Sex Offender Treatment Facility (SOTF) in 2018, the decision was made to offer the BTL program at SOTFs beginning in 2019.

With the addition of the Self-Study format of our program in 2020, BTL became available to all sex offenders, both in SOTFs and general population units. This is significant because there are no face-to-face meetings or interaction with other inmates in the Self-Study model, thus the inherent security risks of openly discussing their crimes (as required in the volunteer-led program) is avoided. We continue to notice a high level of gratitude from the sex offender inmates for the opportunity to take BTL, and a high level of participation exhibited by attendance and homework. While it is too early to have any recidivism statistics on sex offender graduates, the positive feedback from these participants seems to be consistent with general population inmates.

In 2023, over 1,000 sex offenders graduated from the BTL program.

Community Impact. The Bridges To Life program effects a transformation in the minds and hearts of offenders so that, once released, they will not return to their former life of crime. This reduction in recidivism has significant economic and societal impact. Less crime means not only fewer offenders to incarcerate at less cost to taxpayers, but fewer crime victims and safer communities as well. As a direct result of participation in the program, BTL graduates are more likely to demonstrate that they have been rehabilitated once they are back in mainstream society by holding jobs, paying taxes, supporting their families, and contributing to society rather than being a financial and emotional liability.



Organizational Capacity

BTL Board. Bridges To Life is led by Founder and Chief Executive Officer, John Sage, and a Board of Directors that provides fiscal and practical direction. The BTL Board is comprised of 9 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.

In addition to oversight duties, Board members contribute financially to BTL, assist with fundraising efforts, and provide in-prison volunteer service. In 2023, 100% of Board members contributed financially, and 89% donated time as volunteers.

2023 BTL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kirk Blackard

Author; Licensed Arbitrator

Edward G. Davis, Jr., CPA (Board Chairman)

Chief Financial Officer, Juniper Capital LP

Katherine Cabaniss Parsley

248th District Judge, *Retired*

Will Perry

Founder & CEO, Worldwide Power Products

Ershel Redd, Jr.

CEO, El Paso Electric, *Retired*

John Sage

Founder/Chief Executive Officer

Richard C. Seltzer

Attorney

George W. “Trey” Strake, III

Senior Director, Cushman & Wakefield

Gay Van Osdall

Community Volunteer

2023 BTL ADVISORY BOARD

Don Haley

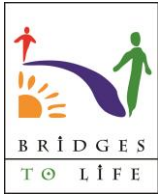
Houston; *Former Board Member*

Ellen Halbert

Austin; *Former Board Member*

Wade Upton

Houston; *Former Board Member*



Bridges To Life 2023 Annual Report

BTL Staff and Growth. In 2023, Founder and CEO John Sage led a staff of 19, consisting of: Chief Operating Officer, Development Director, Program Director, Communications Manager, Outreach Coordinator, and 13 Regional Coordinators.

While the majority of BTL’s program activity is conducted in Texas facilities, interest from locations outside the state increases each year. In 2023, BTL projects took place in prison facilities in the following states and countries beyond Texas: Arizona, California, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington; and Canada, Mexico, and Uganda.

Bridges To Life continues to grow and serve more victims of crime and offenders each year. Starting with one project in one Texas prison in 1999, Bridges To Life has now completed 2,494 projects in 231 prisons and alternative facilities since inception, and is always evaluating the potential for expansion.

2023 BRIDGES TO LIFE STAFF

MANAGEMENT TEAM

John Sage—Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Jim Buffington—Chief Operating Officer

Danielle Sims—Development Director

Joel Lightfoot—Program Director

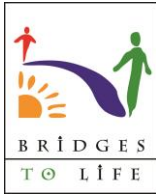
Val Padley—Communications Manager

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

Brandon Cochran, Northeast Texas—B. Moore Unit (*Overton*), Beto Unit (*Tennessee Colony*), Bradshaw Unit and East Texas Treatment Facility (*Henderson*), Hodge and Skyview Units (*Rusk*), Johnston Unit (*Winnsboro*), Powledge Unit (*Palestine*), Telford Unit (*New Boston*)

Charles Fisher, Dallas/Fort Worth #1—Allred Unit (*Iowa Park*), Bridgeport Correctional (*Bridgeport*), C. Moore Unit and Cole State Jail (*Bonham*), Lindsey State Jail (*Jacksboro*), Salvation Army ARC (*Fort Worth*)

Christine Hanks—Outreach Coordinator—19 Monitored Units in Texas, plus all Out-of-State and Out-of-Country locations (*see website for complete list*)



Bridges To Life 2023 Annual Report

Dina Verhaalen, Central Texas— Coleman Correctional (*Lockhart*), Halbert Unit (*Burnet*), Kyle Correctional (*Kyle*), Salvation Army ARC (*Austin*), Stevenson Unit (*Cuero*), Travis County State Jail (*Austin*)

Dolores Stoughton, Greater Houston #1—Angela House (*Houston*), Ramsey and Terrell Units (*Rosharon*), WHO Program-Atascocita (*Humble*)

James Prochazka, Southeast Texas—Bell Unit (*Cleveland*), Gist State Jail, LeBlanc and Stiles Units (*Beaumont*), Henley and Hightower Units and Plane State Jail (*Dayton*), Lewis Unit (*Woodville*)

Jeremy Lampier, Dallas/Fort Worth #2— Coffield and Michael Units (*Tennessee Colony*), Estes Unit (*Venus*), Hutchins State Jail (*Dallas*), Judge John C. Creuzot Judicial Treatment Center (Men and Women) (*Lancaster*), Salvation Army ARC (*Dallas*)

Lita Lopez, San Antonio Area—Briscoe Unit (*Dilley*), Connally Unit (*Kenedy*), Cotulla Unit (*Cotulla*), Dominguez State Jail and Salvation Army ARC (*San Antonio*), Garza West and McConnell Units (*Beeville*), Ney and Torres Units (*Hondo*)

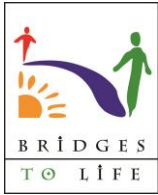
Margie Blazier, Bryan/Huntsville—Byrd, Huntsville and Wynne Units (*Huntsville*), Hamilton Unit (*Bryan*), Hobby Unit and Marlin Transfer Facility (*Marlin*), Luther and Pack Units (*Navasota*)

Mindy Red, Greater Houston #2— Clemens Unit (*Brazoria*), Jester III Unit (*Richmond*), Lychner Unit (*Humble*), Memorial and Stringfellow Units (*Rosharon*), Vance Unit (*Richmond*), Young Medical Facility (*Dickinson*)

Tac Buchanan, Amarillo/Lubbock—Clements Unit, Haven House, Randall County Jail and Youth Center of the High Plains (*Amarillo*), Dalhart Unit (*Dalhart*), Formby Unit and Wheeler State Jail (*Plainview*), Jordan Unit (*Pampa*), Mechler Transfer Unit (*Tulia*), Montford Unit (*Lubbock*), Roach Unit (*Childress*)

OPEN POSITION, Huntsville Area—Ellis, Estelle, Goree and Holliday Units (*Huntsville*), Ferguson Unit (*Midway*), Polunsky Unit (*Livingston*), Wainwright Unit (*Lovelady*)

OPEN POSITION, Waco Area—Boyd Unit (*Teague*), Crain, Hilltop, Hughes, Mountain View, and Murray Units and Woodman State Jail (*Gatesville*), Limestone Co. Detention Center (*Groesbeck*)



Bridges To Life 2023 Annual Report

Awards and Recognition. Bridges To Life is a nationally recognized program. The organization and many of its volunteers have received numerous awards, including:

At BTL's 2023 Houston Vision Luncheon, John Sage was presented with a Certificate of Recognition from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice honoring 25 years of service to the incarcerated. The award was presented by Timothy Jones, Director of Volunteer Services for TDCJ.

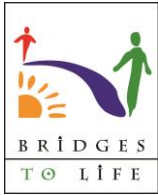


- BTL's Self-Study Program received the Texas Governor's Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Award for "Most Innovative Program of 2020"
- Texas Governor's Criminal Justice Award in 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2017, 2016, 2014, 2013, 2001-2010
- Jim Buffington, 2019 Texas Department of Criminal Justice Pathfinder Award
- John Sage, 2017 Texas Department of Criminal Justice Volunteer of the Year
- 2015 American Correctional Chaplains Association Offender Program of the Year for prison program deemed most creative, effective, and outcome-based in the US
- John Sage, 2011 American Leadership Forum Public Service Award
- 2009 Bert Thompson Pioneer Award for Community and Restorative Justice
- 2008 Samaritan Spirit Award
- Jim Buffington, 2007 Texas Department of Criminal Justice Volunteer of the Year
- 2004 Manhattan Institute Social Entrepreneur Award

The Bridges To Life program and its staff members have been profiled in both print and video by a variety of media sources, including:

Articles –*Canvas Rebel Magazine, Catholic Mobilizing Network, The Cinemaholic, The Cross Timbers Gazette, The Echo, Houston Chronicle, The Journal Gazette, National Police Foundation, Texas Catholic Herald, Texas Monthly, The Victim's Informer, Voyage Houston*

Interviews – *Crime Stoppers of Houston, Forgiven Felons, Hardie Party of Five, KBTX Bryan, KCBI Radio, Fox News San Antonio, People in the News In North Texas, Shalom World TV, Testimonies of Forgiveness, TBN TV, Watermark Church Seminar, WFAA TV*



Community Collaboration

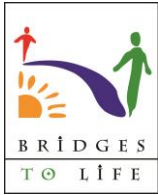
The Bridges To Life program continues to successfully carry out its mission with the cooperation and partnership of numerous community agencies, faith-based organizations, and government entities. Since its beginning, BTL has worked in close collaboration with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice 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 Arizona, California, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington to bring the BTL program to prisons in their states. Extending outside the United States, this year BTL has collaborated with prison management at locations in Canada, Mexico, South Africa and Uganda.

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. Additionally, BTL partners with Angela House in Houston, The Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Centers in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio; the John C. Creuzot Judicial Treatment Center in Lancaster; and Haven House Residential Treatment Center in Amarillo to serve residents seeking counseling and addiction-related services.

BTL's education collaboration includes **Southern Methodist University (SMU) Perkins School of Theology**, which offers a Restorative Justice course requiring 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, and restorative justice students in the SMU Dispute and Conflict Management Master's Program can participate as a volunteer for BTL as an approved internship. BTL has also partnered with the **University of Texas, Dallas Baptist University, Paul Quinn College** in Dallas, **Indiana Wesleyan University**, and **Penn State University** 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, Tarrant County Reentry Coalition, One CommunityUSA, One Man's Treasure, Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), Unlocking DOORS, and CrossWalk Center, among many others. These re-entry partnerships allow BTL to expand resources offered to offender participants, providing them with housing, clothing, education opportunities, job training, and employment-related services that will aid them in successfully reintegrating into their communities.

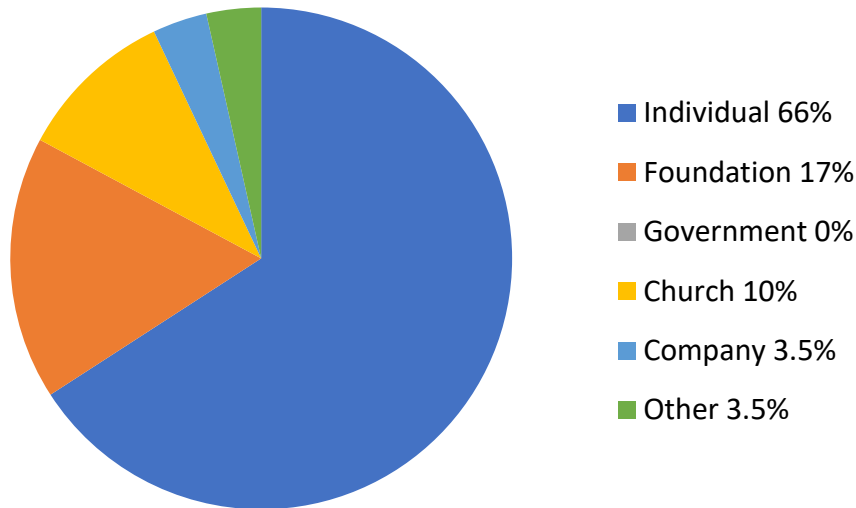


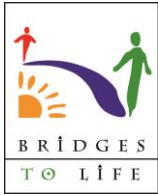
Program Value and Fiscal Responsibility

How Is BTL Funded?

For 25 years, Bridges To Life has relied on the generous support of individuals, foundations, churches and faith-based organizations, and corporations that see the value in our work. 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. **In 2023, Bridges To Life received \$1,588,562 in cash donations and other revenue.** This figure includes a record number for a single year in total donations, donations from individuals, and donations from churches/religious organizations!

2023 Revenue (Cash Basis)

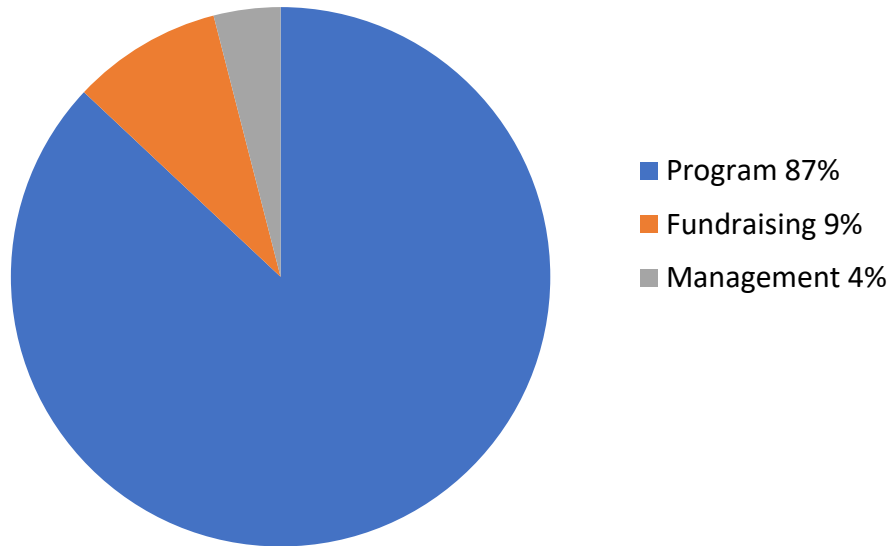


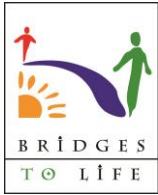


How Is Funding Used?

Bridges To Life is fiscally responsible. **Cash expenses in 2023 totaled \$1,566,075**, of which 87 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.

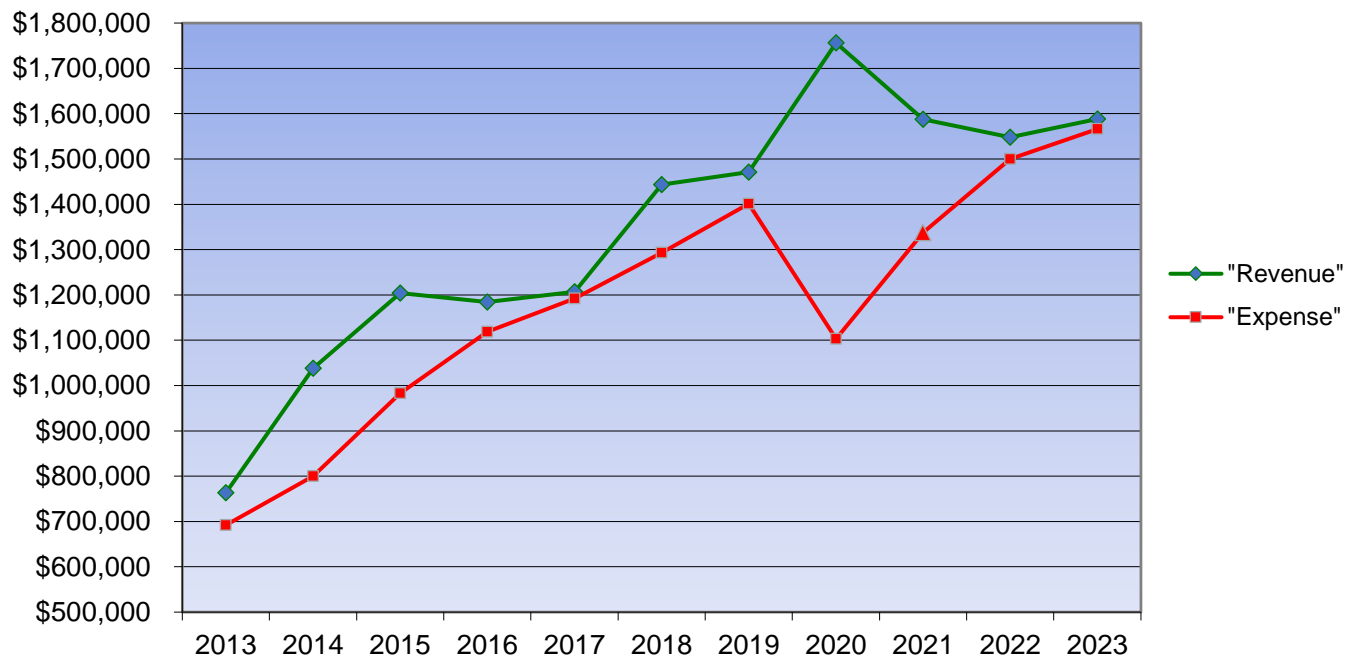
2023 Expenses (Cash Basis)

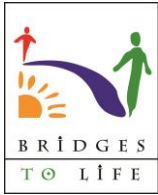




Annual Budget History

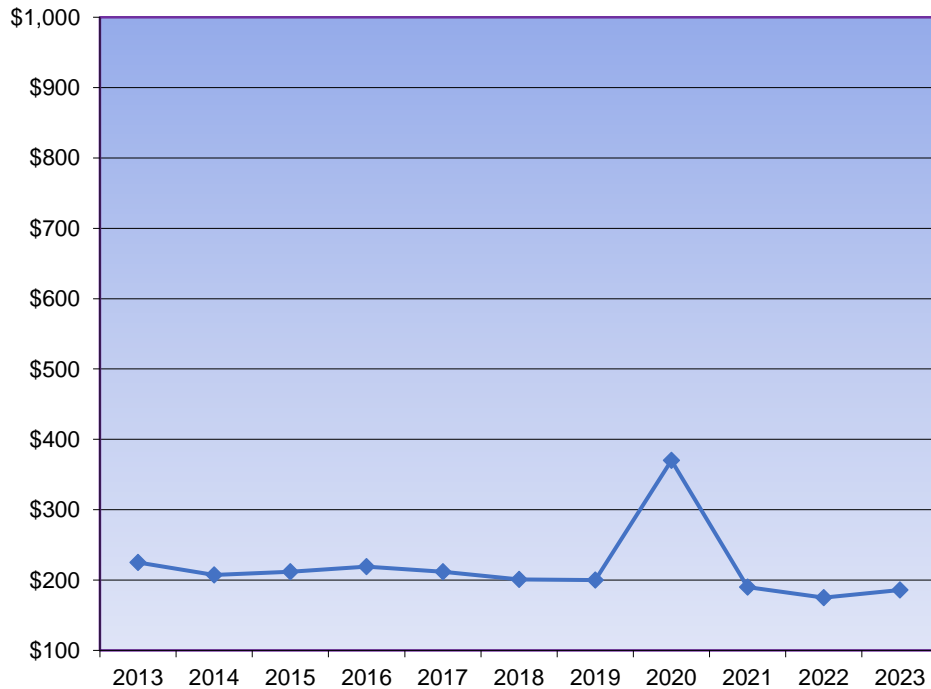
As shown in this chart, both expenses and revenue continued to trend at more normal levels in 2023, a reflection of healthy recovery from the impact of the pandemic, and consistent support from our faithful donor base.

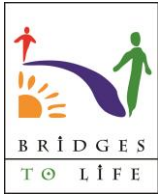




Cost Per Graduate

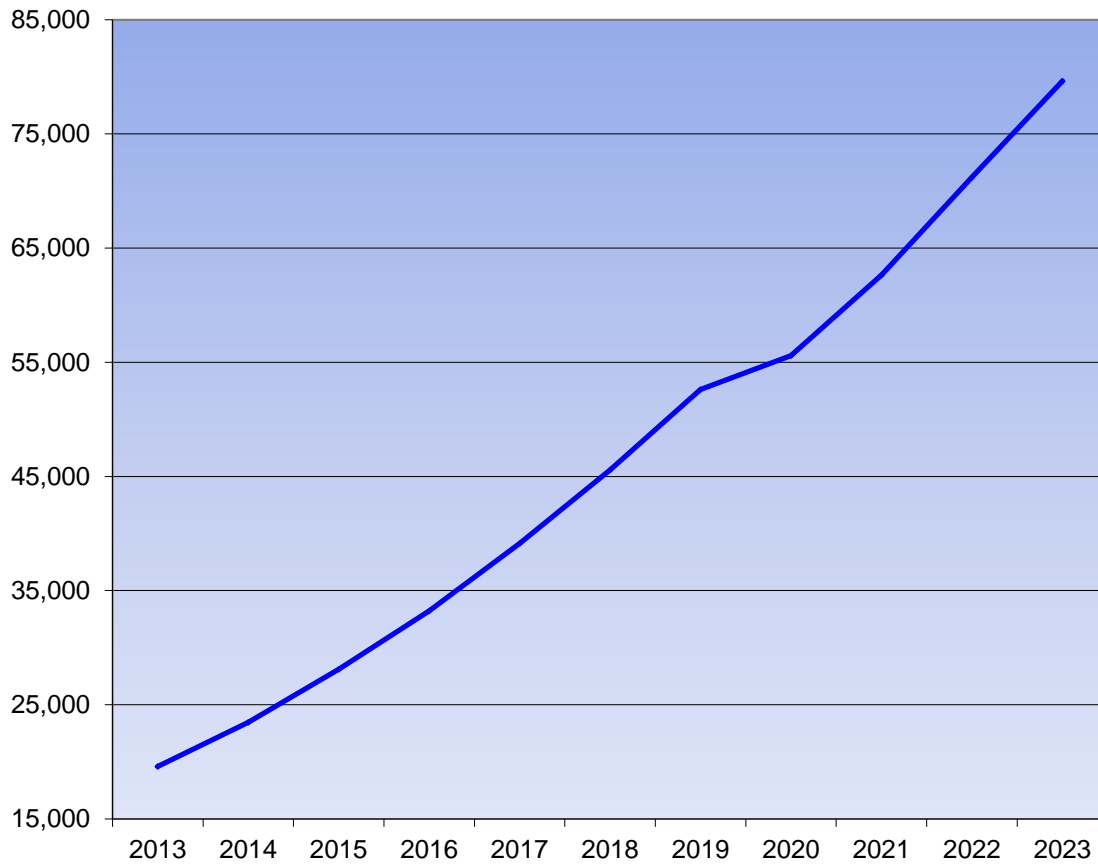
The chart below shows a significant increase in program cost in 2020 due to the limited number of BTL graduates during the COVID lockdown, followed by a sharp drop in cost as operations returned to normal. **With 8,435 graduates in 2023, the cost of the BTL program remained low at just \$186 per inmate graduate!** The cost to incarcerate a first-time or repeat offender in Texas is \$104,655 for the average length sentence. This means that if BTL is responsible for even 5% of those inmates not returning to prison, which is well substantiated, the benefit to Texas taxpayers would equate to a savings of over \$44,000,000 in incarceration costs, not to mention significant other short-term and long-term costs to society.

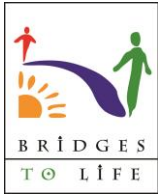




Cumulative Total of BTL Graduates

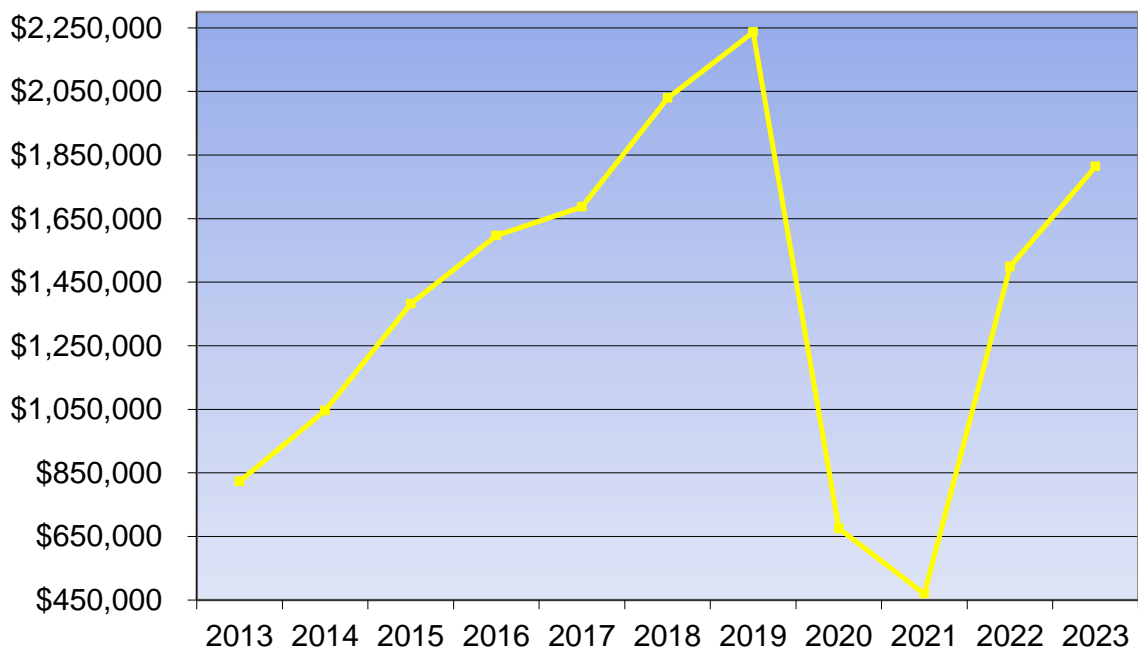
Since inception, 79,632 men and women have graduated from the BTL program in 138 prison and alternative facilities.





In-Kind Value of Volunteer Hours

While volunteer opportunities were severely limited by the pandemic, BTL volunteers have returned to service in greater and greater numbers, contributing **57,048 hours of service in 2023 valued at \$1,814,126 in kind***!



**The in-kind value of volunteer hours is determined by the Independent Sector organization each year (www.independentsector.org).*