



# 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 13 other states and 6 foreign countries, graduating more than 55,000 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 participants.

**2020: A Year of Challenges and Opportunities.** When 2020 began, BTL was on track to complete a record-breaking 230 of our 14-week projects in over 110 prisons and alternative facilities with over 4,000 participants enrolled. However, almost all BTL projects were suspended on March 13th due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19. For that reason, the decision was made to temporarily pivot the delivery method of our program to a Self-Study version which launched in August.

## 2020 Programs

With the assistance of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's Chaplaincy Dept. and other partners, Bridges To Life completed 82 projects in 105 prisons and alternative facilities.

Of those, 1,842 participants graduated from 50 Self-Study projects, in addition to 1,136 graduates from the volunteer-led program.

*~ 2,978 participants graduated from the BTL program in 2020 ~*



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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. 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.** Recidivism studies conducted with the assistance of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) reveal that over 84% of BTL graduates do not return to prison within three years after release. Each year, Bridges To Life tracks a large and diversified sample group of BTL graduates after they are released from TDCJ prisons. In the most recent study of 6,346 BTL graduates released from 2011 to 2015, the recidivism rate is 15.6%, in contrast to the statewide rate of 21.2% for the same time period. Additionally, only 3% of released offenders in the BTL group returned to prison for committing a violent crime. Current national recidivism rates are estimated to be 37% (*Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018*).

A 2020 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. **This equates to a 62% reduction in those returning to prison for a violent crime.**

**In 2020, the recidivism rate of BTL graduates remained low at 15.6%, compared to the national rate of 37%.**

**Volunteer Impact.** After being restricted from prisons for most of 2020 due to COVID-19, BTL volunteers have found new ways to serve as they wait to return to their usual role of facilitating the in-prison program. Many answered the call to help with the delivery of donated hygiene kits, bottled water, and Bibles to meet inmate needs during the pandemic. Additionally, volunteers assisted BTL Regional Coordinators in the review of the thousands of completed study guides submitted by Self-Study participants, to determine whether graduation requirements were met. Assistance from BTL volunteers with this high-volume task has been essential to the Self-Study Program's efficient operation and success.

**In 2020, 694 volunteers contributed 24,835 volunteer hours, worth \$675,512\* in kind!**

*\*Independent Sector Value*



## ***Bridges To Life 2020 Annual Report***

**Juvenile Impact.** 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 41 projects in 8 youth facilities, and graduated 744 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 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions, BTL was unable to conduct its juvenile program in any youth facilities.**

**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 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 Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio. While COVID-19 restrictions prevented access to the BTL program in some cases, BTL volunteer facilitators were able to conduct projects at the Salvation Army ARC facilities in Austin and San Antonio.

**In 2020, 34 clients in residential treatment programs graduated from 4 BTL projects conducted at 2 alternative facilities.**



## ***Bridges To Life 2020 Annual Report***

**The Peer-Facilitated Model.** BTL has also expanded into a 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 are now conducted in 14 Texas prison units, 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 2020, peer-facilitated projects were completed at 3 prison units, graduating a total of 98 offender participants from the BTL program.**

**Reaching Sex Offenders.** While sex offenders in other states have participated in BTL projects since 2010, until recently, the Texas prison system did not allow sex offenders to participate in Bridges To Life. However, after persistent discussion with TDCJ management, we are now able to offer our program to offenders in the following Sex Offender Treatment Facilities (SOTF): Goree SOTF (*Huntsville*), Hightower SOTF (*Dayton*), Neal SOTF (*Amarillo*), and Stringfellow SOTF (*Rosharon*). Utilizing the Self-Study version of the program in 2020, sex offenders in non-SOTF units also participated in BTL.

**In 2020, BTL projects were completed at 2 SOTF units, graduating a total of 90 offender participants from the 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 beneficial economic and societal impact. The cost to the taxpayer to incarcerate an offender in a Texas prison over the average sentence is approximately \$105,000, 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. Fewer crimes mean fewer crime victims and the enhancement of public safety.

As Bridges To Life grows, it impacts the lives of offenders, their families and the communities to which they return after release. 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 paying taxes, supporting their families, and contributing to society rather than being a financial and emotional liability.

**In 2020, Bridges To Life provided its program to over 8,000 offender participants at a cost of \$370 per graduate.**



## 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. All members of the Board of Directors donated financially in 2020, and seven members donated time as volunteers.

2020 BTL Board of Directors	2020 BTL Advisory Board
<p><b>Kirk Blackard</b> Author; Licensed Arbitrator</p>	<p><b>Salem Abraham</b> Canadian, TX</p>
<p><b>Edward G. Davis, Jr., CPA</b> (<i>Board Chairman</i>) Chief Financial Officer, Juniper Capital LP</p>	<p><b>Don Haley</b> Houston; <i>Former Board Member</i></p>
<p><b>Katherine Cabaniss Parsley</b> 248<sup>th</sup> District Judge, <i>Retired</i></p>	<p><b>Ellen Halbert</b> Austin; <i>Former Board Member</i></p>
<p><b>Will Perry</b> Founder &amp; CEO, Worldwide Power Products</p>	<p><b>Wade Upton</b> Houston; <i>Former Board Member</i></p>
<p><b>Ershel Redd, Jr.</b> CEO, El Paso Electric, <i>Retired</i></p>	
<p><b>John Sage</b> Founder/Chief Executive Officer</p>	
<p><b>Richard C. Seltzer</b> Attorney</p>	
<p><b>George W. “Trey” Strake, III</b> Senior Director, Cushman &amp; Wakefield</p>	
<p><b>Gay Van Osdall</b> Community Volunteer</p>	



## ***Bridges To Life 2020 Annual Report***

**BTL Staff.** In 2020, Founder and CEO John Sage led a staff of 15, consisting of: Chief Operating Officer, Development Director, Communications Manager, Outreach Manager, and 11 full-time Regional Coordinators. The Outreach Manager is a newly created position to manage the expansion of the BTL program in other states and countries.

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, monthly staff meetings are held by teleconference, and all staff members gather in person for a 3-day Staff Retreat each spring.

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 1,643 projects in 183 prisons and alternative facilities, and is always evaluating the potential for expansion. With the addition of the Self-Study version of the program, BTL can now be more readily offered in prisons that are located too far from local populations for volunteer participation.

### **2020 BRIDGES TO LIFE STAFF**

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

**Jim Buffington**—Chief Operating Officer

**Danielle Sims**—Development Director

**Val Padley**—Communications Manager

**Joel Lightfoot**—Outreach Manager

#### ***REGIONAL COORDINATORS***

**Belinda Hester, Waco Area #2**—Boyd Unit (*Teague*), Crain Unit (*Gatesville*), Hobby Unit (*Marlin*), Marlin Transfer Facility (*Marlin*)

**Charles Fisher, Dallas/Fort Worth #1**—Allred Unit (*Iowa Park*), Bridgeport Correctional (*Bridgeport*), Estes Unit (*Venus*), Hutchins State Jail (*Dallas*), Lindsey State Jail (*Jacksboro*), Salvation Army ARC (*Dallas and Fort Worth*)

**Connie Hilton, Northeast Texas**—Beto Unit (*Palestine*), Coffield Unit (*Tennessee Colony*), East Texas Treatment Facility (*Henderson*), Powledge Unit (*Palestine*)

**Deborah Hartman, Central Texas**—Halbert Unit (*Burnet*), Kyle Correctional (*Kyle*), Lockhart Correctional (*Lockhart*), Salvation Army ARC (*Austin*), Travis County State Jail (*Austin*)



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**Dolores Stoughton, Greater Houston**—Clemens Unit (*Brazoria*); Darrington, Jester III Unit (*Richmond*), Ramsey, Stringfellow and Terrell Units (*Rosharon*), Scott Unit (*Angleton*), WHO Program-Atascocita (*Humble*), Young Medical Facility (*Dickinson*)

**James Prochazka, Southeast Texas**—Hightower Unit (*Dayton*), LeBlanc Unit (*Beaumont*), Lewis Unit (*Woodville*), Plane State Jail (*Dayton*), Polunsky Unit (*Livingston*), Stiles Unit (*Beaumont*)

**Joel Lightfoot, Dallas/Fort Worth #2**—C. Moore and Cole Units (*Bonham*)

**Judy Dutcher, Lubbock**—Formby Unit (*Plainview*), Lubbock County Detention Center (*Lubbock*), Montford Unit (*Lubbock*), Rudd Transfer Facility (*Brownfield*), Wheeler State Jail (*Plainview*)

**Larry James, San Antonio Area**—Connally Unit (*Kenedy*), Dominguez State Jail (*San Antonio*), McConnell Unit (*Beeville*), Ney Unit (*Hondo*), Salvation Army ARC (*San Antonio*), Torres Unit (*Hondo*)

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

**Margie Blazier, Bryan/College Station**—Byrd, Eillis, Estelle, Goree, Walls and Wynne Units (*Huntsville*), Eastham Unit (*Lovelady*), Ferguson Unit (*Midway*), Hamilton Unit (*Bryan*), Luther and Pack Units (*Navasota*)

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

**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 from 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 as TDCJ’s Carol Vance Volunteer of the Year in 2017. Most recently, BTL’s Chief Operating Officer Jim Buffington received the 2019 Texas Governor’s Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Pathfinder Award for his contributions to the welfare of crime victims.



## 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, Oklahoma, 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 Khirikhan 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 Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio, and with the John C. Creuzot Judicial Treatment Center in Lancaster, 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, 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 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.

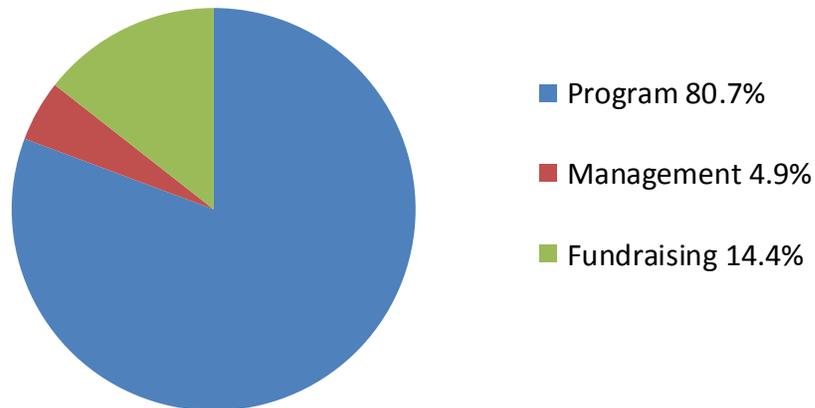


## Fiscal Responsibility and Program Value

Bridges To Life is fiscally responsible. **Cash expenses in 2020 totaled \$1,103,117**, of which 80.7 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?

#### 2020 Expenses (Cash Basis)



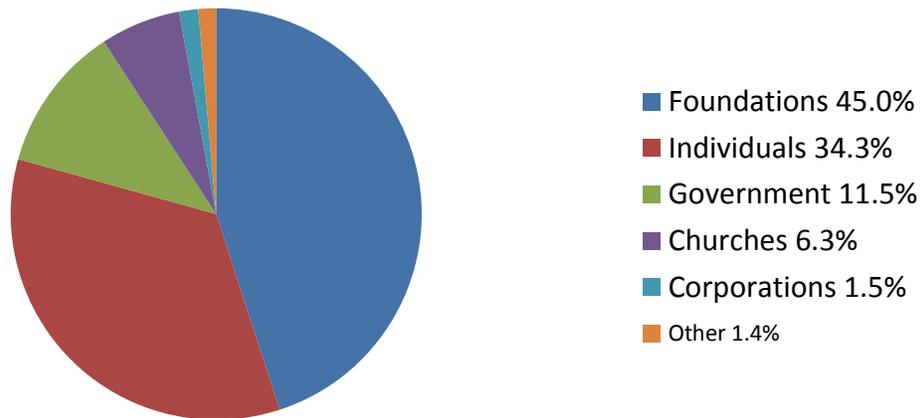


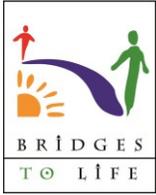
## *Bridges To Life 2020 Annual Report*

BTL is a 22-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 2020, **Bridges To Life received \$1,756,197 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 (546 in 2020) 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.

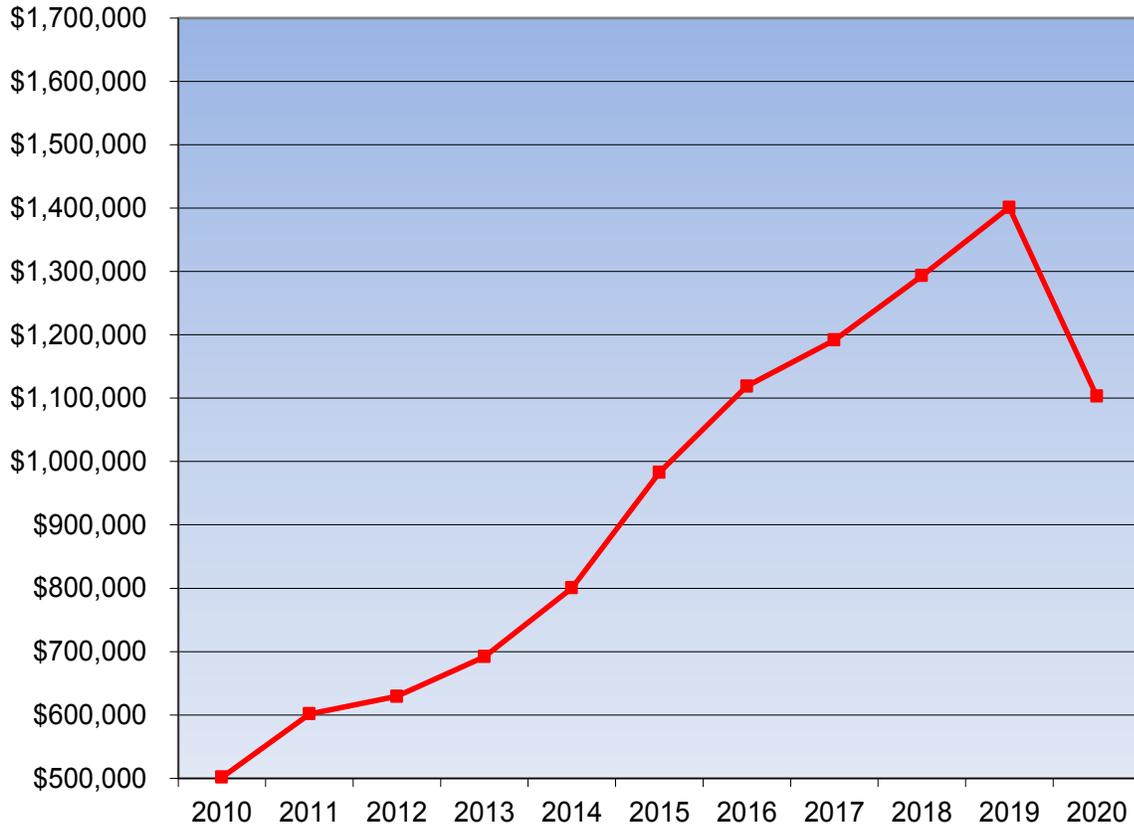
### How Is BTL Funded?

#### 2020 Revenue (Cash Basis)





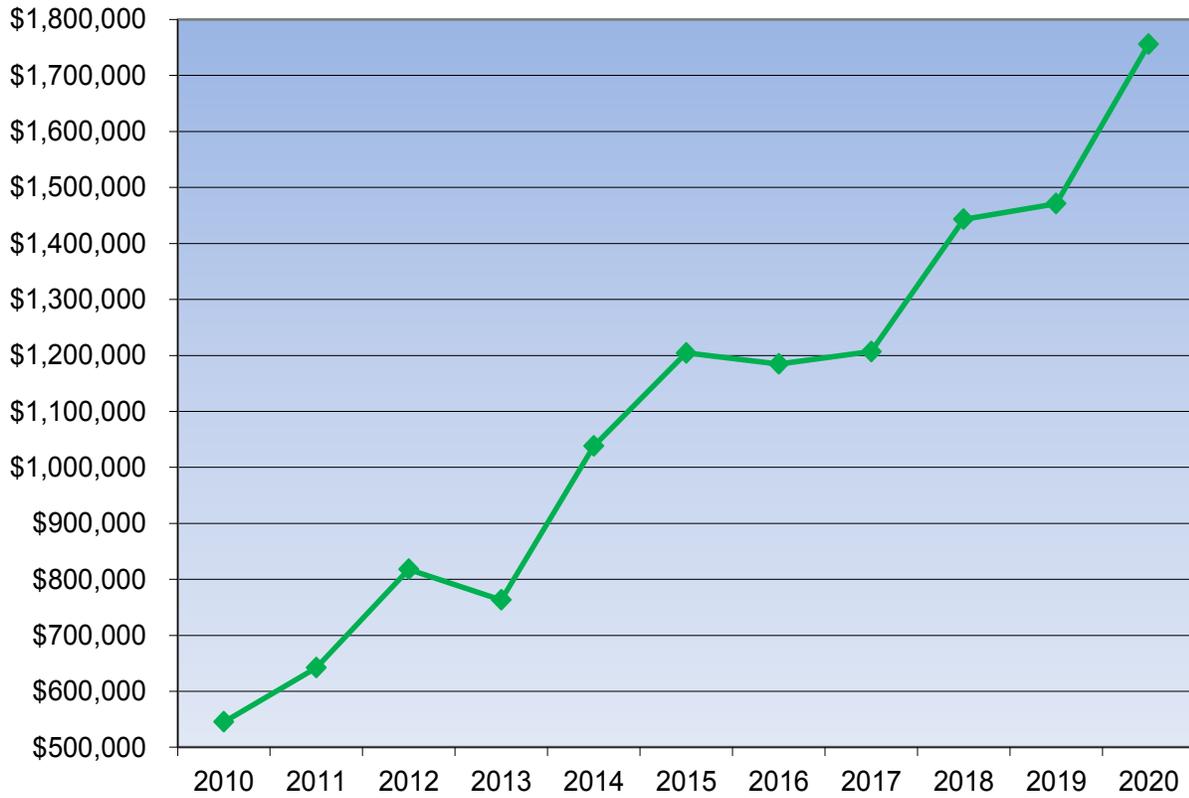
### Annual Budget History - Expenses



**As indicated above, BTL significantly reduced its operating expenses in 2020 to adapt to conditions brought about by COVID-19.**



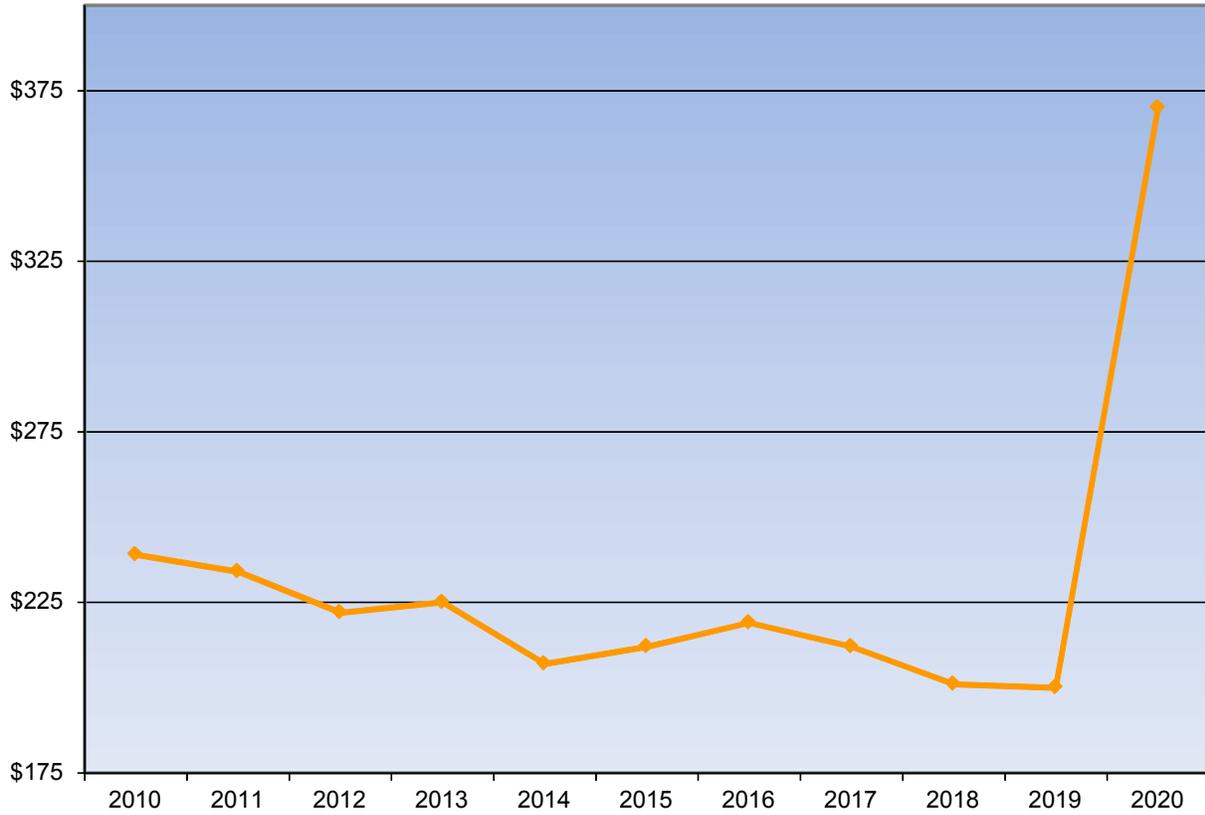
### Annual Budget History - Revenue



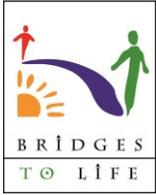
**Even in a year that proved challenging for all, BTL donors and supporters gave generously in 2020.**



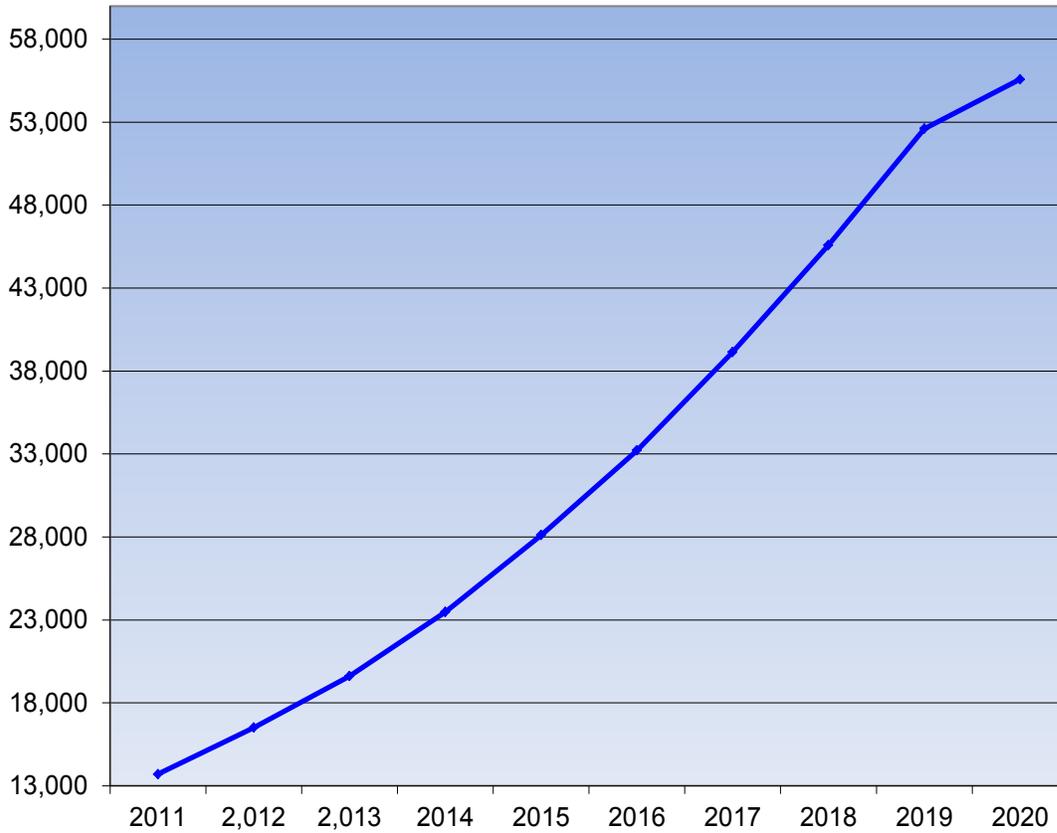
### Cost Per Graduate



Though higher than in previous years due to the impact of COVID-19, the cost of the BTL program per graduate is still a fraction of the cost to incarcerate a first-time or repeat offender in Texas (\$105,000 for an average length sentence). **The cost of the BTL program per inmate graduate in 2020 was \$370 (based on the cash budget).**



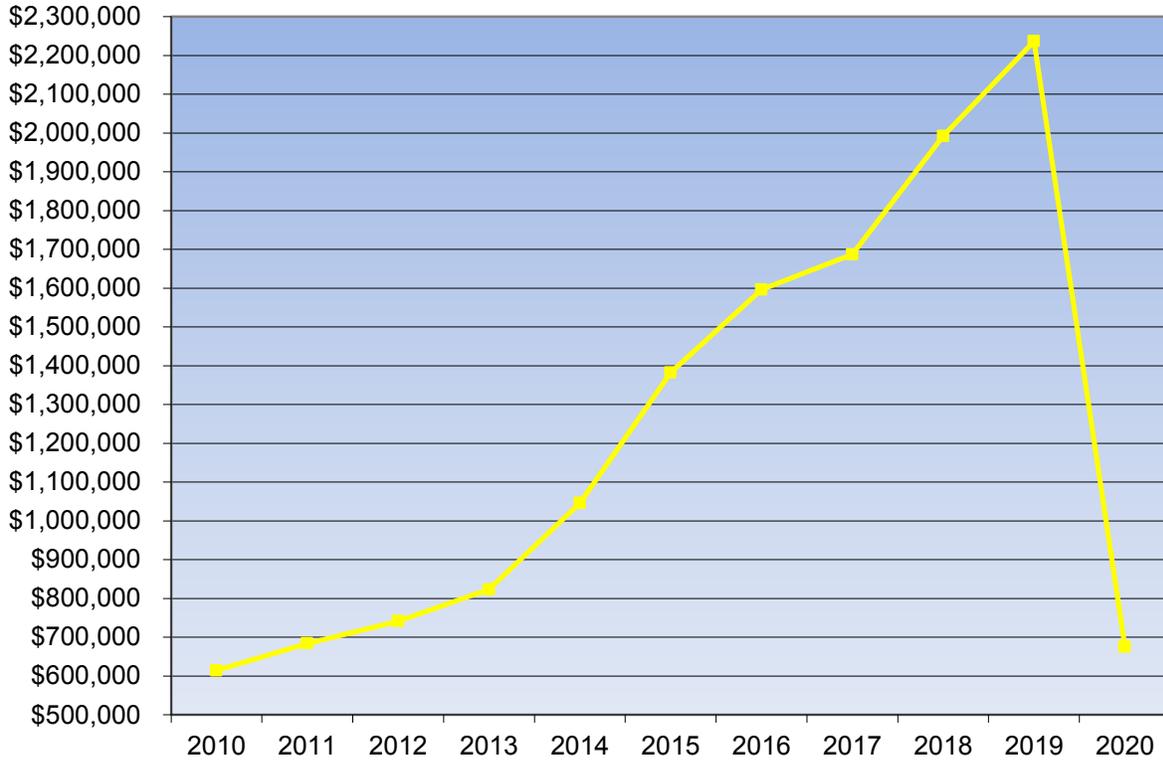
### Cumulative Total of BTL Graduates



**In 2020, 2,978 men and women graduated from the BTL program in 105 prison, juvenile, and alternative facilities, passing the milestone of 55,000 graduates since inception by the end of the year.**



### In-Kind Value of Volunteer Hours



Despite COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, BTL’s dedicated volunteers donated thousands of service hours facilitating the beginning of Spring in-prison projects, helping with donations of supplies to prisons, and assisting with homework review for Fall Self-Study projects. The in-kind value of volunteer hours, as depicted above, is determined by the Independent Sector organization each year ([www.independentsector.org](http://www.independentsector.org)). **While opportunities for volunteer service were limited in 2020, BTL’s 694 active volunteers still contributed 24,835 hours of service valued at \$675,512 in kind!**