

# 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 BTL is to minister to victims and offenders in an effort to show them the transforming power of God’s love and forgiveness.

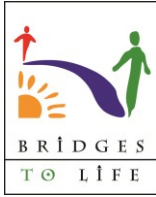
**History.** Bridges To Life was founded in 1998 by Houstonian John Sage after the brutal murder of his sister Marilyn in 1993. In the wake of this tragic event, John realized the terrible toll it had taken, not only on his family's lives, but also on those of Marilyn's friends, co-workers, and the community 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 15 other states and 7 countries, graduating more than 62,000 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 involved.

**2021: A Year of Expansion.** As the global pandemic continued and volunteers remained restricted from many prisons, the Self-Study version of the BTL program continued to fill the gap in 2021, even allowing us to add 23 new locations and 4 returning ones to our roster of facilities. By using Self-Study where needed, and resuming our volunteer-facilitated method where possible, over 7,000 participants graduated from our program!

With the assistance of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s Chaplaincy Department and other partners, Bridges To Life completed 192 projects in 112 prisons and alternative facilities in 2021. And an achievement of which we are especially proud, for the first time in our history, **the BTL program is now available to inmates on Texas Death Row at the Polunsky Unit in Livingston.**

**In 2021, 7,047 participants graduated from the BTL program. Of these, 6,010 graduated from Self-Study projects, and 1,037 participants from projects that were volunteer-led.**



## 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. 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. The latest recidivism study of BTL graduates is very encouraging. This large and diversified sample group is made up of 13,153 BTL graduates from 70 Institutional Division prisons who were released from 2011 to 2018. The recidivism rate for this group is 14%, in comparison with the current national recidivism rate of 37% (*Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018*). Of this group, only 2.4% returned to prison for a violent crime!

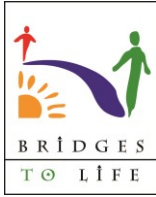
Additionally, a National Police Foundation study of parolees released in the Dallas area between September 2014 and August 2015, compared the recidivism rates of those who had taken the BTL program during their incarceration with those who had not. *"The results of this analysis support the proposition 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. **This equates to a 62% reduction in those returning to prison for a violent crime.**

**In 2021, the recidivism rate of BTL graduates remained low at 14%, compared to the national rate of 37%.**

**Volunteer Impact.** In 2021, while many BTL volunteers continued to assist BTL Regional Coordinators with the review of thousands of completed study guides submitted by Self-Study participants, some were also able to return to their facilitator or crime victim speaker role at facilities where COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Another opportunity for service arose in July when, for the second year, volunteers joined BTL Regional Coordinators in delivering refreshments to Texas Parole Offices in 15 cities around the state in honor of Pretrial, Probation and Parole Supervision Week.

**In 2021, 325 volunteers contributed 16,443 volunteer hours, worth \$469,283\* in kind!**

*\*Independent Sector Value*



**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 piloted with 20 youth and 4 volunteers at the Harris County Leadership Academy (HCLA) in Katy, Texas, and **we have graduated 744 youth from 8 youth facilities since that time.** Unfortunately, BTL’s juvenile program activity was suspended in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

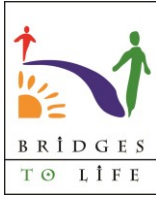
While early intervention with juvenile offenders is a small portion of BTL’s work, it is no less important than reaching adult offenders. In Texas, more than 100,000 youth are arrested annually or referred to the juvenile probation system. The Justice Policy Institute reports that youth confinement costs 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.

**In 2021, due to continued 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. While in some cases COVID-19 restrictions continued to prevent access to the BTL program, this year BTL volunteers were able to facilitate projects at the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Centers in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio; Santa Maria Hostel in Houston; Miracles & Blessings Recovery House in Gatesville; and Kingdom Towers Transitional Housing in Lubbock.

**In 2021, 126 clients in residential treatment programs graduated from 11 BTL projects conducted at 6 alternative facilities.**



**The Peer-Facilitated Model.** Starting in 2016, BTL expanded into a peer-facilitated format that allows the program to reach participants in units that are not located in close proximity to our volunteer base. Peer-facilitated projects have been conducted in 15 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 Memorial Unit) rather than by BTL volunteers, and has been well-received by prison system personnel and inmate participants.

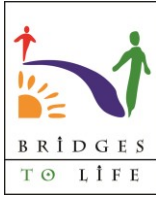
**In 2021, due to COVID restrictions, BTL completed peer-facilitated projects at 1 Texas prison and 1 California prison, graduating a total of 50 offender participants from the program.**

**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 2018. After persistent discussion with TDCJ management, we now offer our volunteer-facilitated program at the following Sex Offender Treatment Facilities (SOTF): Goree SOTF (*Huntsville*), Hightower SOTF (*Dayton*), Neal SOTF (*Amarillo*), and Stringfellow SOTF (*Rosharon*).

Starting in Fall 2020, the Self-Study version of BTL became available to all sex offenders, both in SOTFs and general population units. The number of sex offenders who enrolled was significant since so many had been waiting to participate in BTL. Because there are no face-to-face meetings or interaction with other inmates in the Self-Study model, the inherent risks of openly discussing their crimes (as required in the volunteer-led program) is avoided. We have noticed a higher level of gratitude from the sex offender inmates, and a higher 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 2021, there were 1,187 sex offender graduates 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.

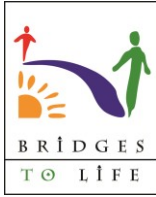


## Organizational Capacity

**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. All members of the Board of Directors donated financially in 2021, and four members donated time as volunteers.

2021 BTL Board of Directors	2021 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 2021 Annual Report***

**BTL Staff and Growth.** In 2021, Founder and CEO John Sage led a staff of 17, consisting of: Chief Operating Officer, Development Director, Communications Manager, Outreach Manager, Outreach Coordinator, and 12 Regional Coordinators. Due to expansion both in and out of the state, two new positions were added this year: a second Regional Coordinator for the Huntsville Area in Texas, and an Outreach Coordinator to assist the Outreach Manager in the starting and oversight of BTL projects in locations outside of Texas.

While the majority of BTL’s program activity is conducted in Texas facilities, interest from locations outside the state increases each year. In 2021, BTL projects took place in prison facilities in the following locations beyond Texas: California, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington; and Canada, Mexico, South Africa 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 1,835 projects in 201 prisons and alternative facilities since inception, and is always evaluating the potential for expansion.

### **2021 BRIDGES TO LIFE STAFF**

#### ***MANAGEMENT TEAM***

**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 and 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*)



## ***Bridges To Life 2021 Annual Report***

**Christine Hanks—Outreach Coordinator**—Diboll and Duncan Units (*Diboll*), Fort Stockton and Lynaugh Units (*Fort Stockton*), Robertson Unit (*Abilene*), Salvation Army ARC and Santa Maria Hostel (*Houston*), Sayle Unit (*Breckenridge*), Telford Unit (*New Boston*)

**Connie Hilton, Northeast Texas**—B. Moore Unit (*Overton*), Beto Unit (*Palestine*), Bradshaw Unit (*Henderson*), Coffield and Michael Units (*Tennessee Colony*), East Texas Treatment Facility (*Henderson*), Johnston Unit (*Winnsboro*), Powledge Unit (*Palestine*)

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

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

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

**Joel Lightfoot, Dallas/Fort Worth #2**—C. Moore and Cole Units (*Bonham*), Judge John C. Creuzot Judicial Treatment Center (Men and Women) (*Lancaster*)

**Jose Limas, Jr., Lubbock Area**—Daniel Unit (*Snyder*), Formby Unit and Wheeler State Jail (*Plainview*), Kingdom Towers Residential Housing, Lubbock County Detention Center and Montford Unit (*Lubbock*), Rudd Transfer Facility (*Brownfield*), Smith Unit (*Lamesa*), Wallace Unit (*Colorado City*)

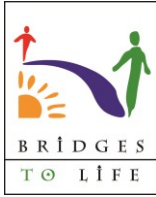
**Larry James, San Antonio Area**—Briscoe Unit (*Dilley*), Connally Unit (*Kenedy*), Cotulla Unit (*Cotulla*), Dominguez State Jail and Salvation Army ARC (*San Antonio*), Glossbrenner Unit (*San Diego*), McConnell Unit (*Beeville*), Ney and Torres Units (*Hondo*), Stevenson Unit (*Cuero*)

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

**Margie Blazier, Bryan/Huntsville**—Byrd, Huntsville and Wynne Units (*Huntsville*), Hamilton Unit (*Bryan*), Luther and Pack Units (*Navasota*), Lychner (*Humble*)

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

**Tommy Lyles, Huntsville Area**—Ellis, Estelle and Goree Units (*Huntsville*), Ferguson Unit (*Midway*), Polunsky Unit (*Livingston*), Wainwright Unit (*Lovelady*)

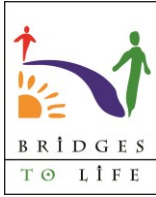


**Awards and Recognition.** Bridges To Life is a nationally recognized program. The organization and many of its volunteers have received numerous awards, including:

- **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 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 over the years. **In 2021, these included: articles** in *The Cinemaholic*, *Texas Catholic Herald*, *The Victim's Informer*, and *Voyage Houston*; **podcast interviews** on *Catholic Lunchbreak*, *Shedding Light*, *The Tumbleweed*, and *Two Beards and Some Scruff Discuss Stuff*; and a **video interview** at Watermark Community Church.





## Community Collaboration

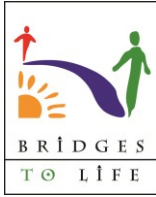
The Bridges To Life program continues to successfully carry out its mission with the cooperation and partnership of numerous community agencies, faith-based organizations, and government entities. Since its beginning, BTL has worked in close collaboration with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice 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, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, Oklahoma, 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, 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; the John C. Creuzot Judicial Treatment Center in Lancaster; Miracles & Blessings Recovery House in Gatesville; and Kingdom Towers Transitional Housing in Lubbock, 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.

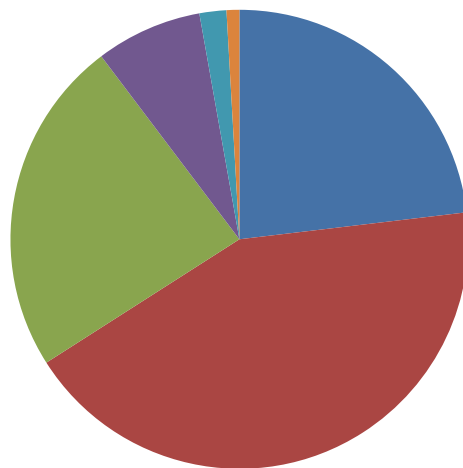
BTL is a steady source of referrals for The WorkFaith Connection, SER—Jobs for Progress, Tarrant County Reentry Coalition, One Man's Treasure, Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), Unlocking DOORS, and CrossWalk Center, among many others. These re-entry partnerships allow BTL to expand resources offered 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

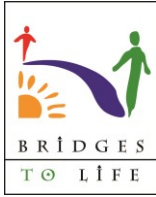
### *How Is BTL Funded?*

BTL is a 23-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 2021, Bridges To Life received \$1,587,873 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 (585 in 2021) 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.



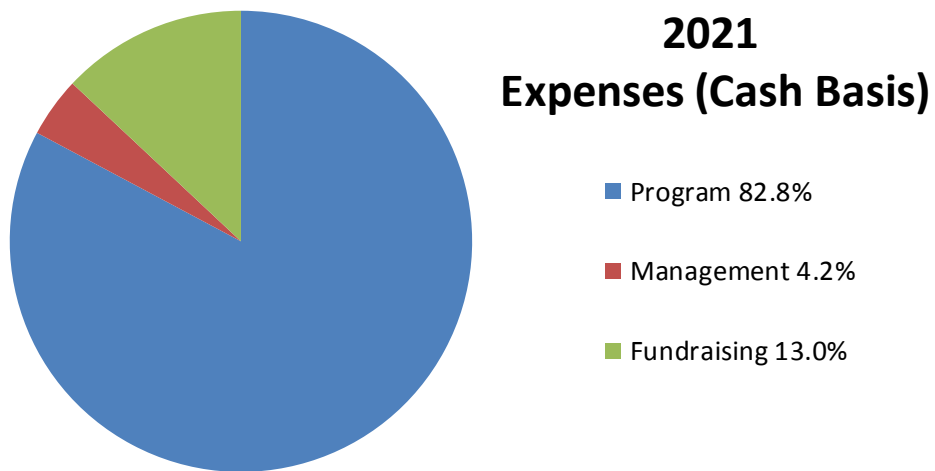
### **2021 Revenue (Cash Basis)**

- Foundations 23.1%
- Individuals 42.8%
- Government 23.7%
- Churches 7.5%
- Corporations 1.9%
- Other 0.9%



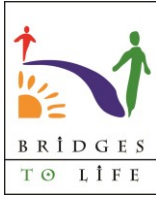
**How Is Funding Used?**

Bridges To Life is fiscally responsible. **Cash expenses in 2021 totaled \$1,337,379**, of which 82.8 cents of every dollar was spent on program services.



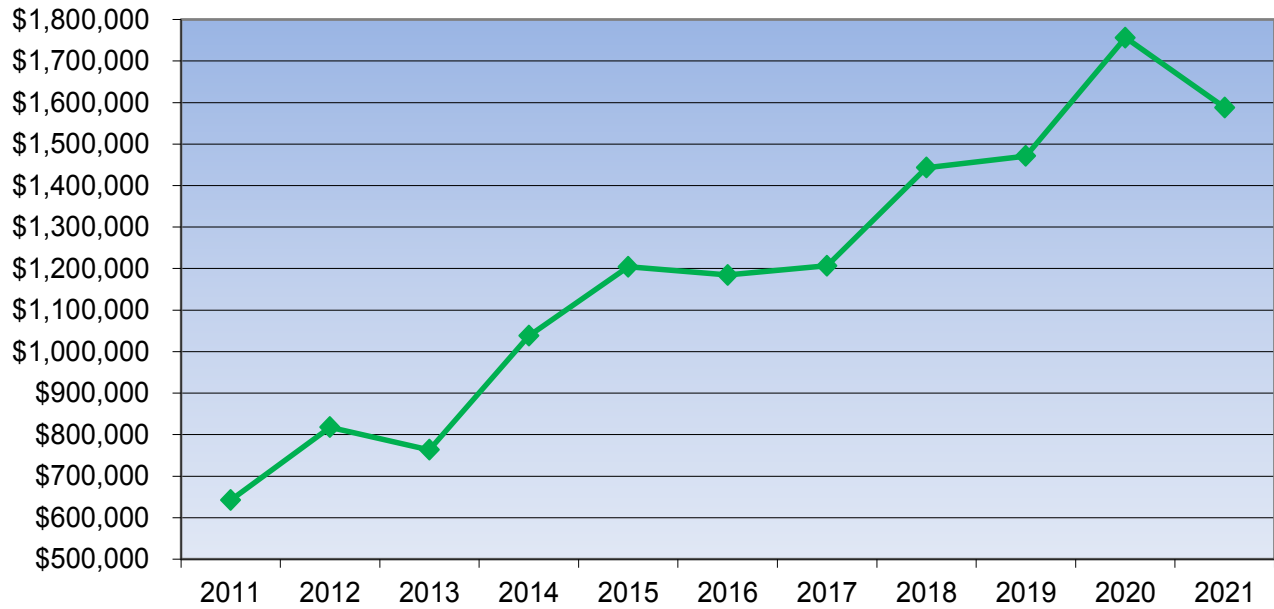
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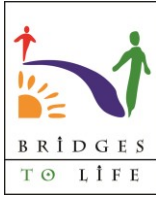
*BTL is a **Better Business Bureau Accredited Charity** and a **GuideStar Exchange Gold Participant**. The agency's IRS 990 and audited financials can be found on the GuideStar profile or by contacting our office.*



## Annual Budget History – Revenue

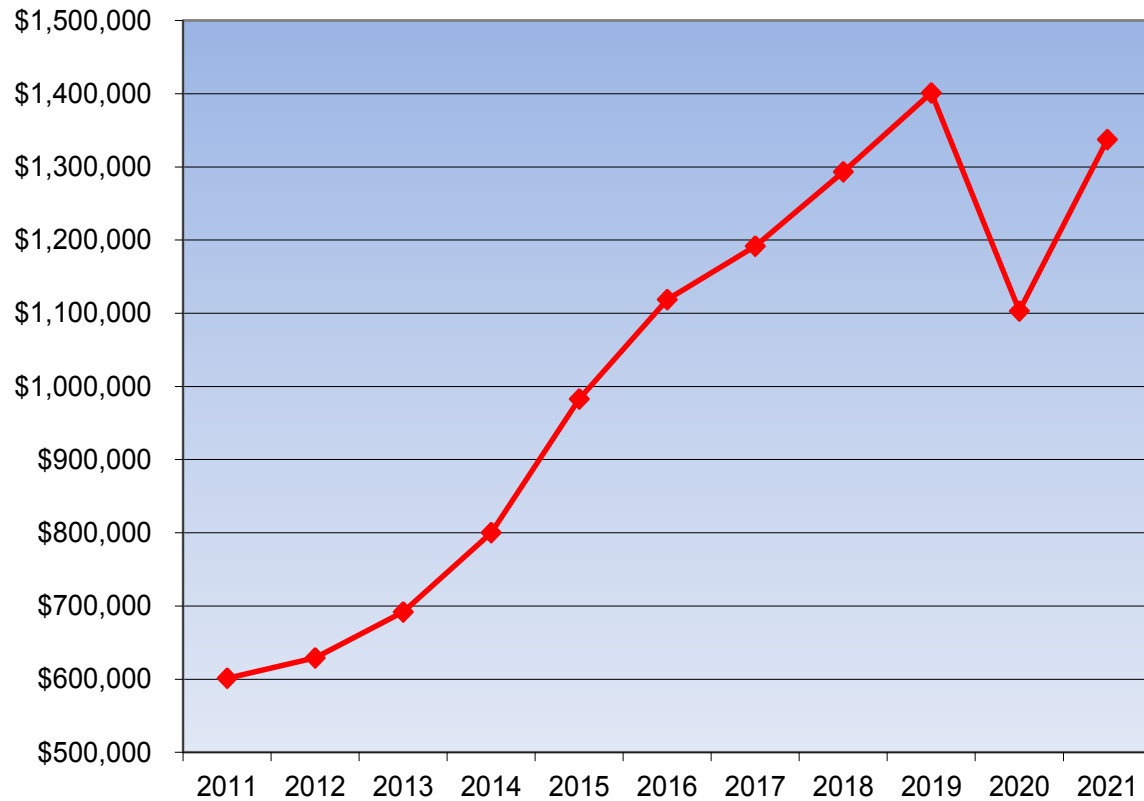
Despite the pandemic’s ongoing impact, BTL donors and supporters continued to give generously in 2021!

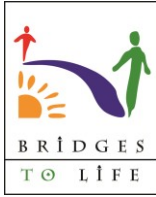




## Annual Budget History – Expenses

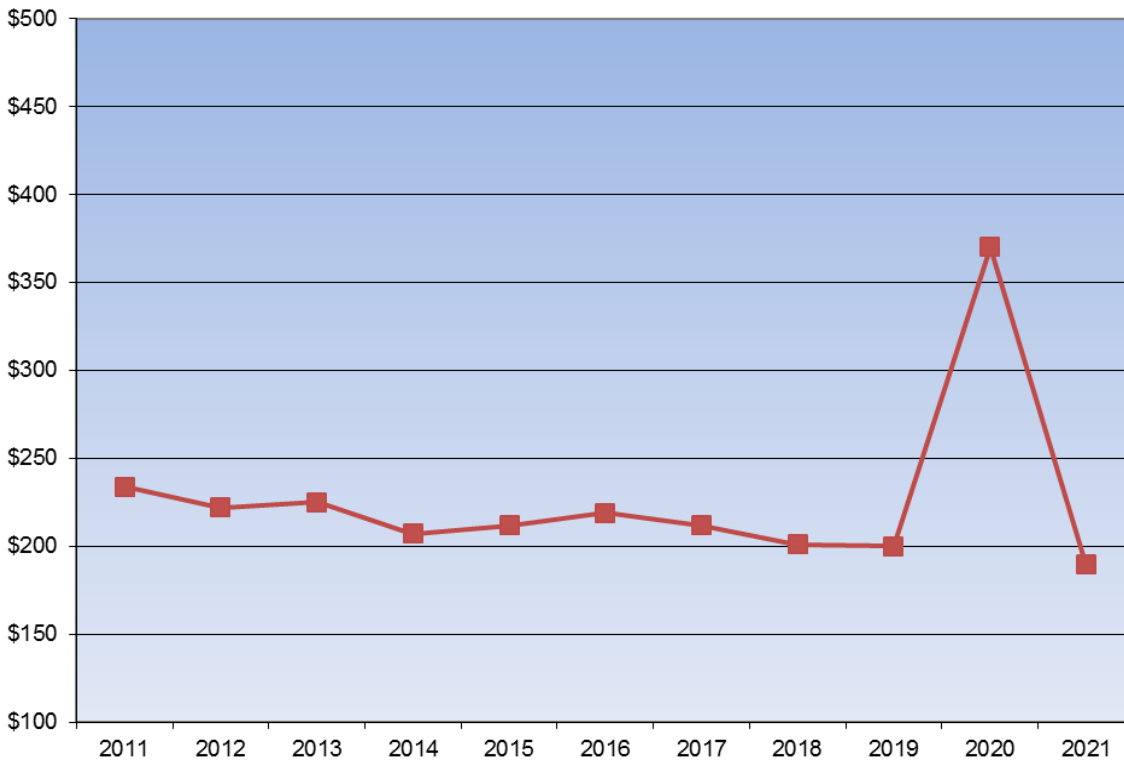
BTL expenses increased in 2021 after the pandemic-related drop of the previous year, as recovery from the pandemic began and normal program activity resumed.





## Cost Per Graduate

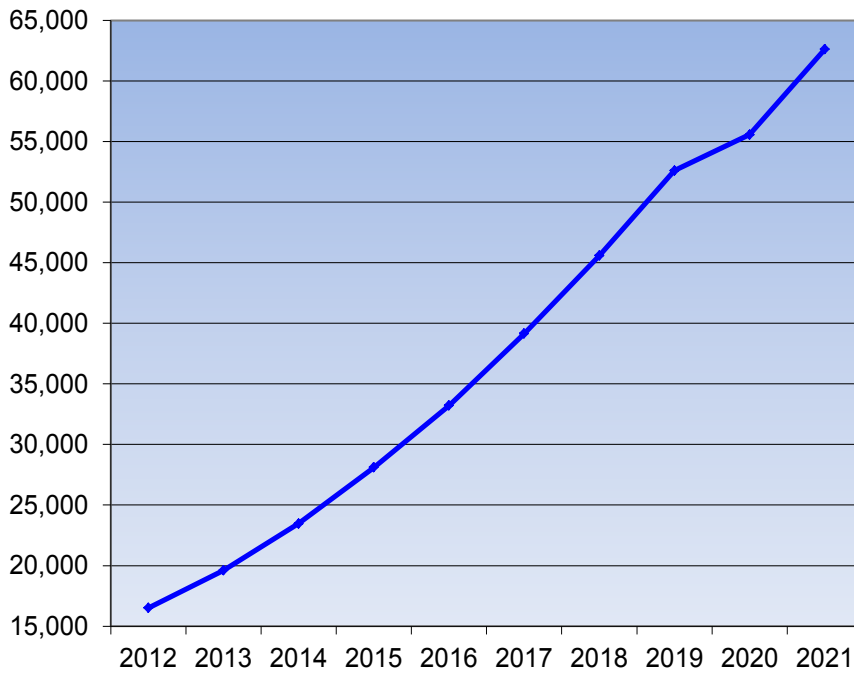
After peaking in 2020 due to lack of prison access and lower numbers of graduates, **the cost of the BTL program in 2021 reached a record low of just \$190 per inmate graduate!** The cost to incarcerate a first-time or repeat offender in Texas is \$105,000 for the average length sentence.

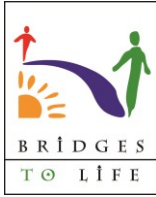




## Cumulative Total of BTL Graduates

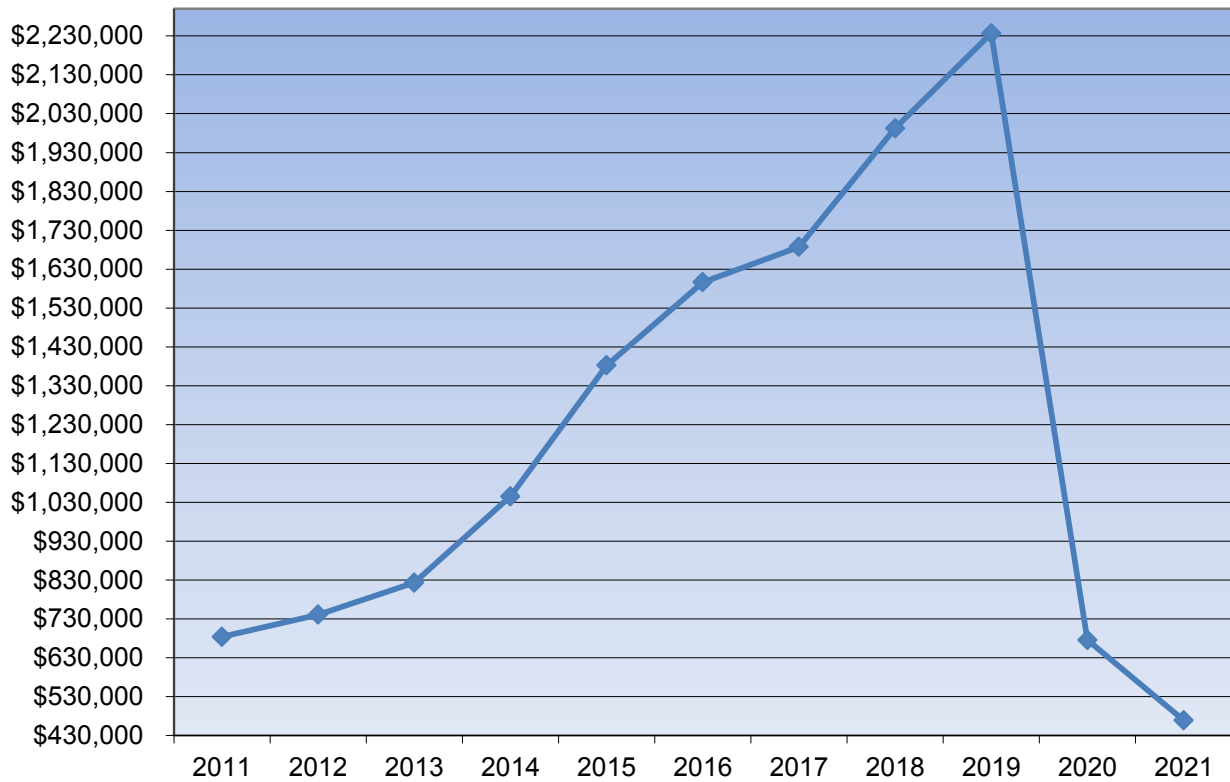
In 2021, 7,047 men and women graduated from the BTL program in 112 prison and alternative facilities, totaling **62,636 graduates since inception**.





## In-Kind Value of Volunteer Hours

While the pandemic continued to limit volunteer opportunities in 2021, BTL's 325 active volunteers still contributed **16,443 hours of service valued at \$469,283 in kind\***!



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