BUILD’s mission is to engage at-risk youth in the schools and on the streets, so they can realize their educational and career potential and contribute to the stability, safety and well-being of our communities.
A Year of Challenge and Change

Since 1969, BUILD has helped thousands of youth reach their potential. Every day, they teach us something new. One lesson is constant. When supported by caring adults and programs that meet their needs, young people always rise to the challenge.

BUILD’s 2016 annual report highlights the accomplishments and challenges of some of the 2,000 youth we reached. In the following pages, you will meet three BUILDers – Estrella, Latee, and Shaunteese – who embody the possibilities that exist in all of our young people. Their stories and the results behind them showcase BUILD’s life-changing model, which is organized around three big ideas:

PREVENTION programs grow hope with in-school, after-school, and out-of-school experiences that equip youth to resist negative behavior and stay positive every day.

INTERVENTION programs save lives by providing safe and constructive alternatives to youth who are involved with gangs, the justice system, or risky behaviors.

BUILDING FUTURES programs prepare young people to graduate from high school and succeed in college and careers.

2016 brought many challenges. Our core neighborhoods – Austin, East Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, Hermosa and Fuller Park – are center-stage in a continuing violence epidemic that claimed more than 700 lives. BUILD has responded by taking on a bigger role in our communities, opening new programs like the BLOCK 51 teen center, expanding our arts initiative, and growing the Intervention team to ten members to reach a greater number of youth on the streets, in the schools, and in the courts.

Many people made this possible. Our Board and long-time friends set the pace by raising a record $604,000 at our 2016 gala. New supporters like Breakthru Beverage energized us with volunteers and funding. Our entrepreneurial staff and youth generated new revenue with the youth art auction, while using social media to dramatically increase our visibility. Our responsible stewardship of funds once again earned BUILD four stars from Charity Navigator – the best ranking possible.

We couldn’t be prouder of BUILD’s young people or more grateful to the adults who support them. On behalf of our Board, staff, and youth, we thank you for a tough but successful year.

Gratefully,

Adam M. Alonso, MSW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Howard "Bud" Schwarzbach
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
Rising to the Occasion

Chicago’s violence epidemic continued to escalate throughout 2016, and BUILD’s young people remain at ground zero. In every one of our neighborhoods and school-based programs, the youth we serve are more likely to be victims of violence, become entangled in gangs or the criminal justice system, or fall through the cracks of over-stressed schools or families.

Ask any young person what makes BUILD special and you’re likely to hear the word ‘family,’ followed by a story of an adult who went the extra mile to help, or an experience that changed their lives. You’d get a similar answer from our staff, but the story would be about an accomplishment by one of our youth. It’s personal here at BUILD. It’s a mindset that has changed thousands of lives since we opened our doors in 1969.

2016 was a year of positive developments and serious challenges. We reached 2,000 youth with high-quality services organized in three categories: Prevention programs that grow hope by promoting the attitudes and habits of healthy, successful lives; Intervention programs that save lives by helping kids get out of gangs and back on track; and BUILDing Futures programs that prepare young people for success in college and in their careers.

Community Focused

BUILD has stepped up substantially, increasing its visibility and activity in our core communities, especially in Austin, where we’ve been headquartered since 2012, and Humboldt Park, where we’ve worked the longest.

It started with the fundamentals. We knocked on hundreds of doors to directly hear from our neighbors. We began “Pop-up” activities on street corners and held monthly Family Nights in school gyms, so residents could gather as a community and learn what BUILD offers. We partnered with other leaders to organize peace marches, bike rides, and vigils for families that lost loved ones.

Responsive Programs

A heightened sense of urgency also brought positive changes to all three program areas. In the Prevention program, we built around the arts, opening our arts-focused BLOCK 51 teen center in our headquarters building, showcasing our young artists’ talent at our first art opening and auction, bolstering our after-school programs, and providing arts camps when school is not in session.
We grew the Intervention team to respond to the rising tide of violence. Our ten full-time Intervention Specialists directly connected with more youth who were involved with gangs and other dangerous behaviors. Most of our staff overcame the same obstacles when they were young, giving them a credibility that makes a difference.

BUILDing Futures continued to stress the importance of preparing for college and career, and increased opportunities to directly see what college is like by organizing trips to visit college campuses and by moving our annual Youth Innovation Conference to Roosevelt University.

A Stronger BUILD

The most striking changes can be seen at BUILD’s campus in Austin, as BLOCK 51, new counseling and support groups, and a hundred city-funded summer jobs turned our expansive space into a safe haven for neighborhood youth and a central hub for all BUILD programming.

Change has been positive for BUILD’s adults as well. “Having the kids here every day has energized the whole building,” says Executive Director Adam Alonso, who celebrated his first full year at BUILD in March. “Our staff do challenging, emotionally draining jobs. The students remind us what it’s all about.”

BUILD’s reputation is growing, too, and has brought media attention, including stories by the Chicago Defender, Chicago Sun-Times, ABC-Channel 7 and WYCC, as well as national outlets like Huffington Post. Dozens of elected leaders readily used their influence and resources to support our youth.

We leveraged those developments to strengthen fundraising. Our Board continued to raise the bar, new donors stepped up, and entrepreneurial events like our first art auction generated new revenue. And, we modernized data systems, making it easier to give online and cutting our administrative costs.

BUILD rose to the occasion in 2016 by building on long-time strengths, tackling new challenges head-on, and embracing change whenever change was needed. Like the young people we serve, BUILD evolves in different ways every day. We’ll continue to do what it takes to help our young people succeed. It’s what any good family would do.
SHAUNTEESE

I can make a difference in their lives, the way BUILD has helped me with mine.
A Picture of Courage

“Happy. Sad. Angry. This is how I see my daily life.”

Shaunetteese Parker shows off her latest painting from Art Boot Camp, a spring break program for students in BUILD's after-school programs. Clearly defined borders divide her canvas into three sections. Each has a distinct texture, but it’s one painting. “Red is angry. Blue is sad. Pink is happy. All three parts come together.”

It takes courage to create an original. Shaunetteese knows this because, at 15, she is heading down a path she chose - she wants to be a teacher, which is not what everyone expects.

“Everybody in my family has been in a gang,” she says, including parents, her four siblings, and numerous cousins. She’s the youngest, and feels pressure every day to follow in their footsteps. “I’m probably the only one that will finish high school.”

Her idea to teach elementary school came from observing her BUILD mentors, Ms. Lorie and Ms. Hart. Her love of children comes from her niece Alaysia, whom she has cared for since she was two weeks old.

“It’s my dream. I love children and have experience with them. I feel like I can make a difference in their lives the way BUILD has helped me with mine.

It’s easy to see Shaunetteese as a teacher. She has a strong voice, honed in BUILD's public speaking competition. In 2016 she placed third, with an original speech on a painful topic – she was abused by schoolmates as a first grader. It took a year to get ready to tell that story. “When I finally talked about it, it was a relief. I was happy I had told somebody and that they understood.”

Her family remains a source of mixed emotions. Most days, when she is not at BUILD's programs, she goes straight to her room and locks the door. Her decision to choose a different lifestyle is understandable, but the isolation is a challenge.

With BUILD's help, Shaunetteese is turning obstacles into assets. She's still a bit wary about new friends, but the peer connections she's making are starting to take hold. “I see them as my family, and know that they would protect me. Anybody in BUILD would.”
Austin could be great, if you took away the gangs and violence.
A Leadership Decision

At 16, Latee Smith gives a normal teenage answer to ‘what do you want to be?’

“I like sports, so ‘athlete.’ Or lawyer or doctor, if that doesn’t work out. Also, I want to get married and have kids.”

There’s something engaging about Latee. He carries himself with the quiet assurance of a leader, and thinks before he speaks. He’s come a long way in a short time, and appreciates it.

A year ago, Latee was in the hospital, recovering from a serious gunshot wound. It was gang-related, and he wasn’t a bystander. Gang-involved since he was 12, his leadership ability first emerged on the streets. No one was surprised when Latee got shot.

“I won’t lie – I liked it at first. If I wanted money, I didn’t ask my mom. I just went and got it.”

In Austin, that meant selling drugs and a lifestyle of dangerous friends and violent competitors. After multiple suspensions from school, he was barred from BUILD’s after-school programs.

Yet BUILD’s doors stayed open. Our Intervention team made sure Latee knew he was welcome back, once he was ready. Getting shot was his wakeup call. BUILD was there. He started coming every day, and things began to change.

“People at BUILD are doing things with their lives. I get experiences here I’d never have in my life,” such as Bulls games, sports leagues, and the leadership program. He is building new relationships with other youth, as well as with the Intervention Specialists he used to tune out. “Now I listen. They’ve been through some of the same things I have.”

Latee is now a freshman at Marshall High School, working hard to catch up. He used to get D’s and F’s. “Now it’s B’s and C’s. Sometimes an A.” He’s active in the leadership program, and looking forward to our community clean-up. “Austin could be great, if you took away the gangs and violence.”

He’s also learning that his story has power, and has appeared in the media several times. He steers clear of his former life, though our staff have noticed that his old friends still see him as an example - a positive one this time.

He doesn’t recognize it himself, but Latee’s a natural leader. Give him time. He’s just getting started.
It's not one thing. Every day has a moment that changes my life.
Star Power in Humboldt Park

“I don’t know what I’d be like without BUILD…” Estrella reflects. “Definitely not as successful.”

In Spanish, Estrella is the word for ‘star.’ It fits. As a sophomore, she’s earning a 3.9 GPA in honors courses at Roberto Clemente High School. Estrella’s been with BUILD for most of her 16 years – she started as a first grader. She’s taken advantage of every opportunity we offer – from Arts Boot Camp to the Youth Leadership Council. She’s learned the value of persistence.

“It’s not one thing. Every day has a moment that changes my life,” Estrella explains. To her, the staff are like family, especially Coco, whom she’s known for years. “It’s like we’ve grown up together.”

At BUILD, she’s already preparing for college, and is applying for summer programs at DePaul, the Art Institute, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. UIC is the top choice. The program has a health focus, and she wants to go into medicine.

It wasn’t always easy. A few years ago, her grades plummeted as struggles with bullies and the pressure to fit in distracted her from learning. “I just lost focus,” she remembers. With hard work, Estrella caught up academically and learned positive ways to handle peer pressure.

Estrella earned her success, but shares the credit with BUILD. “Coco always helped me – no matter what.” Every BUILD adult is supportive. “It’s not just a job. They care.”

We’re proud of Estrella, and look forward to watching her shine in high school, college, and into her career. Her program at BUILD costs only $630 a year. A star like Estrella is worth every penny.
Together we make an impact across Chicago. Please join us in thanking the following individuals and organizations for their generous gifts.

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Copies of BUILD’s audited financial statements and Form 990 for FY16 will be available upon request.

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 Regardless of individual challenges or neighborhood barriers, every child deserves a bright future. To transform children’s lives from at-risk to at-hope, BUILD provides comprehensive services across critical developmental milestones, meeting young people where they are: in the schools, on the streets, or in the courts. We provide continuity in communities that too often face disruption and isolation. BUILD is a constant and trusted resource for youth, whether they are struggling to stay in school and out of gangs, or striving to go to college and build a career.