

Sojourners' Alliance in need of community support

By Meredith Metsker

When James Fernandez arrived at Sojourners' Alliance more than a year ago, he had nothing.

Back problems after years of construction work left the 40-year-old unable to work. He couldn't afford housing or food. Not wanting to be a burden to his friends by sleeping on their couch, James sought a different solution that would allow him more independence and a chance to get back on his feet with dignity.

He discovered Sojourners' Alliance, the only transitional housing shelter in the Moscow/Pullman area.

Now, the Hawaii native is back in school, seeking a bachelor's degree in mathematics from the University of Idaho. He hopes to go to grad school someday and study plasma physics.

Homelessness in our community

Without Sojourners' Alliance, people like James would never be able to reach their full potential.

I think a lot of us, myself included, forget that homelessness exists in our small communities. We don't see our homeless neighbors sleeping on the streets like we might in downtown Seattle.

Homelessness looks different here. Because we live in a rural area, our homeless neighbors are sleeping in sheds or barns on the outskirts of town. They're camping in abandoned trailers or tents in Robinson Park, by the river, up on Moscow Mountain, or out in the forest.

According to the most recent point-in-time count report conducted in January by the Idaho Housing and Finance Association, there are **1,966 homeless people in Idaho**. Five percent of them live in Region 2, which includes Latah, Idaho, Clearwater, Lewis, and Nez Perce counties. That's 96 people.



Sojourners' participant James Fernandez and Executive Director Steve Bonnar

So you see, homelessness does exist right in our backyards. We are lucky to have an organization like Sojourners' Alliance helping the less fortunate in our communities. However, if we don't support this essential organization, we will lose it.

Working at Sojourners' Alliance

The atmosphere at Sojourners' Alliance is probably not what you'd

expect at a transitional housing shelter. The three full-time employees and one part-time employee in the front office make it a homey, comfortable environment. Complete with rubber band fights, jokes, and three fun-loving dogs, the office is a place where shelter residents, volunteers, and staff can get to know each other.

It is also a place where hard decisions have to be made.

Steve Bonnar, executive director of Sojourners' Alliance for more than nine years, knows better than anyone what it's like to make the tough calls. Whether it's coming up with a plan to keep Sojourners' open despite increasingly limited funding or expelling a resident for violating rules, Steve gets the job done.

A major part of what makes Steve such an inspirational leader is his ability to work with people. He's known for his compassion, knowledge, dedication, and laid-back personality along with his ability to be harsh with people when he needs to be.

Full time case manager Tanya Salada, 51, who's worked at Sojourners' for three years, says Steve is the best boss she's ever

had.

"Without Steve, it wouldn't be Sojourners," she says.

Steve Bonnar: leading by example

"Moscow, as a community, is very lucky to have someone like Steve," says part-time case manager Kelsey Black, 22. "He's worked hundreds of hours of unpaid overtime. He stays

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Sojourners' Alliance

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This issue of *Sojourners' Alliance News* was edited by Elaina Pierson.

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Mission Statement

Sojourners' Alliance is a private, non-profit organization working toward a vision of dignity and respect for all people. Our mission is to confront the barriers that lead to hunger, homelessness and poverty through direct intervention with those in need by providing a safe and comfortable living environment while receiving intensive case management. We are actively engaged in community efforts to address root issues while advocating for those in need.

The many ways to give

It's that time of year again when our thoughts turn to giving. Did you know that shopping this holiday season can benefit Sojourners' Alliance? **AmazonSmile** is an easy way to automatically support participating nonprofits every time you shop. Simply go to smile.amazon.com and choose Sojourners' as your charity. Every time you purchase one of the millions of eligible items, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate .5% of the purchase price. You can still use your same amazon.com account, just remember to log onto smile.amazon.com.

While visiting AmazonSmile, please consider checking out our Wish List. At the top right on the Amazon home page click on "Wish List" then put "Sojourners' Alliance" in the search box and our list will appear.

If direct donations are more your thing, **PayPal** is a quick and easy option. You can find a direct link on our webpage, sojournersalliance.org under the "How Can I Help?" tab.

If you shop at **Moscow Food Co-op** another easy way to give is **Impulse Giving**. When checking out simply tell the checker that you want to do impulse giving, X amount, to Sojourners' Alliance. I round up my ticket to the next dollar amount every time I shop and the Co-op sends a check to Sojourners' each month.

A similar option can be found at the **Moscow Recycling Center**. When turning in aluminum cans, you can ask that the money be given to Sojourners', and they will mail a check.

Currently, the biggest opportunity for fundraising is the **Avenues for Hope Housing Challenge**

sponsored by The Home Partnership Foundation. Each donation of \$25 or more qualifies us for additional challenge prizes, as well as a percentage of regional match funds at the end. New this year, checks of \$100 or more will be accepted. To qualify, the check must be received no later than December 30, made out to "Home Partnership Foundation" with your nonprofit of choice noted in the Memo line, and mailed to Home Partnership Foundation, PO Box 7899, Boise ID 83702.

All donations are tax deductible, and those made to us via the website or by check are passed directly to us in January. **Last year, between individual donations and match prizes, we received \$22,556, making it our biggest fundraiser of the year!**

To donate, and for more information on prizes and rules, visit avenuesforhope.org.

—Deb Rupp, Board Member



Sojourners' helps start Latah Recovery Center

Thanks to Sojourners' Alliance, local legislators, and a concerned group of local citizens led by Tom Stroschein, people in recovery from addictions and mental health issues have a new resource. The Latah Recovery Center opened its doors on September 1 at 531 S Main in Moscow.

"When I first heard about the effort it seemed a natural match to our mission," said Steve Bonnar. "Sojourners' clients struggle with these issues themselves. Over time we decided to bring it in completely under our wing as it starts. We hired Darrell Keim to run it."

Keim is excited. "I'd been involved from the start due to my work with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. I couldn't resist the opportunity to help the organization grow." And grow it has. In the period between their September 1 opening and 10/31/2015 they have seen:

- 110 community resource referrals
- 364 attendees of anonymous support groups
- 161 attendees at various classes and workshops
- 499.5 volunteer hours

"We're excited to be impacting the community in five different ways," says Keim. The group has a resource room dedicated to recovery. It offers life skills classes that are open to anyone. It offers recovery coaching and telephone recovery - both designed to connect those new in recovery with people that are experienced

and successful in their own recovery from addictions or mental health issues. Finally, it provides an excellent way for those in recovery to give back to the community that has helped them by volunteering.

An example of a typical weeks offerings at The Center includes:

- Tobacco Cessation Class 3, 11/9/15, 10:30-11:30
- Mindfulness Meditation with Ava Isaacson, 11/12/15, 1:10-2pm
- Art for Recovery (Collage this time) with Debi Robinson-Smith, 11/12/15, 5-7pm
- LAMI Family Support, 11/12/15, 7-9pm
- Protecting Yourself from Identity Theft with Karen Richel, 11/13/15, 1-2pm
- Learn to Crochet and Rewire Your Brain! with Alicia Hu, Jane Westervelt, Marcy Paul, Lauren Macrae and Angela Corwin 11/14/15, 10-11:30am.

For a full calendar check out the group's web page: www.latahrecoverycenter.org



In search of the "Ah Ha Moment"

I want to tell you about my "Ah Ha Moment" here at Sojourners'. The moment I realized that yes, I think I've got this case management thing down. The moment when I felt that I could handle anything that comes my way because I've seen, heard, done it all after three years. But before I tell you about that truly uplifting moment in my career, I would like to think back on some of the more inglorious moments I've had here.

Like the time I felt sorry for an individual who couldn't afford to buy cigarettes. I told this person to take the aluminum cans we had been saving to the recycling center. There. I didn't give them the money, I made them work for it! It took three trips with our wheelbarrow to get enough money to buy a pack and a couple colas. What I didn't know was that those cans were being saved for "Double Buy Back Day" and that money was to be used as emergency gas money for the residents!

Or the time I accidentally gave out a probation officer's cell phone number to a resident! Ouch! Sorry

about that! Or when I helped create a new policy: Do not sell donated items for personal gain on the internet. I thought the participant just loved having a large wardrobe! Didn't think twice about letting them "look" in our donation room. Dang.

How about the resident that convinced me they were going to be paid over \$7000 once their fantasy game company's computers came back online. This person was good at creating fantasy worlds and characters - they stuck to this story for six months until we finally kicked him out.

I've been here through arrests, births and deaths. Have I had my "Ah Ha Moment"? Nope. Not yet. I still have a lot to learn because as I've found out working here, you just never know what's around the corner (hey, is that Homeland Security?), and that's what I like about this job. It's not tangible, but it is certainly challenging.

—Tanya Salada

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late and comes in early. He comes in on the weekends. He took two weeks off in September, and it was his first vacation in years.”

This has been Steve’s reality for nearly a decade as he’s worked to transform Sojourners’ Alliance into what it is today. When others would have given up or gotten burnt out, Steve has kept at it.

In addition to his role as executive director of Sojourners’ Alliance, Steve serves on several state committees addressing poverty. He also partnered with former Sojourners’ Board of Directors president Darrell Keim to open the Latah Recovery Center on Main Street in Moscow, which seeks to help those dealing with mental health and/or addiction issues.

“As an executive director, Steve is well-informed, well-prepared, and bright, but modest and unassuming,” says Nancy Chaney, former mayor of Moscow. “Befitting his role, he does not put on airs in dress, speech, or manner.”

“Steve is a tremendous asset to this community, more than almost all of its citizens will ever realize because his contributions are so much behind the scenes,” says Carl Hunt, the current president of the Sojourners’ Alliance Board of Directors.

Even before he began his work at Sojourners’ Alliance, Steve was helping the disadvantaged. He worked as a therapist from 1985-2001 and ran a regional crisis hotline for years before shutting it down in 2006. One time, Steve sat by the hotline phone for 86 hours straight.

The good, the bad, and the reality

Steve has seen Sojourners’ residents successfully transition into their own housing, find jobs, and begin new stable lives. He’s also seen residents fall victim to addiction and once discovered a resident who’d

killed himself. The emotional toll would break most people, but somehow Steve keeps working.

Steve and his staff members operate on a budget that barely keeps the doors open every year. Funding from state and federal grants is becoming increasingly limited while operating costs continue to skyrocket due to inflation. Then there are unexpected expenses like the \$18,000 needed to repair an off-site Sojourners’ apartment destroyed by a recent tenant.

In order to keep the shelter open, Steve and the staff have made many sacrifices. Over the years, Steve and his coworker/wife Elaina Pierson have personally given up about \$25,000 in unpaid overtime, unused vacation time, and cut hours.

This summer, Elaina was laid off for several months and Tanya cut her hours from 40 to 32 per week. At age 60, Steve has no retirement funding.

“To say that the organization operates on a ‘shoestring’ budget would be a gross understatement,” says Sojourners’ auditor Jason Wills.

Despite Steve and the staff’s endless hard work, there is still a very

**“To say that the organization operates on a ‘shoestring’ budget would be a gross understatement.”
—Sojourners’ auditor Jason Wills**



Left to right, Case Manager Kelsey Black, Office Manager Elaina Pierson, Executive Director Steve Bonnar, Case Manager Tanya Salada, and office pups Moose, Hurley and Cooper.

real chance Sojourners’ Alliance could close in the next year due to financial hardship. This would be catastrophic to the people who depend on the shelter’s services.

A community effort

This is where we, as a community, can help. Sojourners’ depends heavily on monetary donations to cover operational expenses. If each of us gave a little (or a lot!), we could make a tremendous difference. Our dollars would go directly toward helping our disadvantaged neighbors.

It’s an investment in the future of our community, and it’s an investment worth making.

To make a donation, bring cash or a check to the Sojourners’ Alliance office at 627 N. Van Buren St. in Moscow. You can also donate and find other information online at www.sojournersalliance.org.

Sojourners' Alliance would like to thank the following for providing invaluable assistance in the last year

- ◇ Avista Foundation
- ◇ United Methodist Church, Colfax
- ◇ Moscow Cares
- ◇ United Methodist Women
- ◇ Emmanuel Lutheran Church
- ◇ St Mark's Episcopal Church
- ◇ Schreck Family Foundation
- ◇ United Way of Moscow/Latah County
- ◇ Gritman Medical Center
- ◇ Latah County
- ◇ First United Methodist Church
- ◇ Palouse Cares
- ◇ First Presbyterian Church of Moscow
- ◇ Eagles Ladies' Auxiliary
- ◇ Alpha Gamma Delta Alumni, Delta Theta Chapter
- ◇ Eagles Auxiliary #2277
- ◇ Sacred Heart Parish
- ◇ Unitarian Universalist Church of the Palouse
- ◇ US Bancorp Foundation
- ◇ Living Faith Fellowship
- ◇ Howard Hughes Appliance
- ◇ Intolerista Wingding
- ◇ PEO Sisterhood, Chapter BH
- ◇ The anonymous donors through the Network for Good, TRUiST, the State of Washington Combined Fund Drive, the Moscow Food Co-op's Impulse Giving program, and AmazonSmile
- ◇ The many businesses, individuals and volunteers that contributed to the 2015 Night at the Oscars gala
- ◇ And, last but not least, a huge thank you to the many individual donors, one time and regular, big and small. We couldn't keep doing this without you! Thank you!

Wish List

If you can help by contributing any of these items, they would be greatly appreciated.

- Twin size sheet sets
- Bed pillows
- Shampoo/conditioner
- Bath towels
- Toilet paper
- Paper towels
- Kleenex
- Large garbage bags (30+ gallon)
- Kitchen garbage bags (13 gallon)
- Dish soap
- Sanitizing/disinfecting wipes
- Hand sanitizer
- General cleaning supplies
- Food

Our needs are always changing. If you are unsure about particular items you would like to donate, don't hesitate to give us a call at (208) 883-3438. Thank you!



Joseph Cornwall designed and created this sign for his Eagle Scout project. Now people can find us! Thank you!

The men of Delta Sigma Phi at UI spent an afternoon doing some fall cleaning around Sojourners'. Thanks, guys!





Sojourners' Alliance
Bringing the Pieces Together

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December 10-31, 2015

Presented by Home Partnership Foundation



See Page 2 for details, or visit the website above!