



THE PROFILE

SAINT FRANCIS CENTER NEWS

SPRING 2022

Staff Spotlight Helena at S.O.S.

In her own words...

Helena, Day Site Coordinator at the St. Francis Center Safe Outdoor Space site, located in a parking lot of Regis University, shares her story of lived experience with homelessness. Helena's story is one of perseverance and resilience. It is also a story of community support and giving back to others with what we have.

After the death of my mother I wanted nothing more than to relieve myself of the agonizing pain I felt, not only emotionally but mentally, physically, and spiritually. I was lost and it felt like everyone around me was continuing on with their lives. I felt complete emptiness in my soul—an emptiness that didn't feel so dark and lonely when I used mind altering substances, which quickly became my only outlet.

In a very short amount of time my addiction progressed and my life quickly started to fall apart. Child protective services had removed my kids from my home, I lost my job due to attendance, and found myself homeless on the streets of downtown Denver. My addiction drastically intensified once I became homeless and I progressed to intravenous meth and heroin use. There was no part of me that wanted to get clean, not even for my kids whom I loved with all my heart.

Finally in August of 2020, after nine



overdoses and multiple incarcerations in several counties, I had reached my rock bottom. As I was sitting in the Douglas County Jail with a first offer of 6-12 years of prison time, I got an overwhelming feeling of wanting to be free from the shackles of addiction. After 30 days I was bonded out and I started intensive outpatient treatment, working with a new sponsor, attending meetings regularly, and building a positive spiritual foundation. In conversing with my sponsor she told me about the Safe Outdoor Space (SOS) model that Denver was just beginning and that she was looking for people with lived experience to

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work at the SOS.

At a little less than 90 days clean I began working at the first SOS site that opened in Denver. Many people in my life felt it was risky, but there was something in me that wanted so much to help others. When the SOS moved to the Regis University campus, I transferred there as well, and felt that it was a sign that my job was placed in the parking lot of the school I dropped out of in the midst of my addiction. After discussing with several Regis University connections I decided to begin the process to reapply to school there. I knew that my felony convictions could have been a barrier to my return but thankfully I had

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Winter at the Day Center

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The winter season always brings its own set of challenges for all those in our community experiencing homelessness. Many of these obstacles are reflected at the Day Center in particular. As expected, the drop in temperature creates an increased

demand to be inside. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Day Center has been keeping its guests safe with a limited capacity of 115 in the shelter at a time. While this allows guests of the Day Center to maintain social distancing, it leads to a difficult balance of →

THOUGHTS FROM TOM



Tom Luehrs
Executive Director

“You are doing so many good things!” That was a comment from a St. Francis Center (SFC) supporter. My response was “Yes we are.” I am in the enviable position of hearing many of the complimentary things people have to say about SFC (I sometimes hear the complaints too but not as often). I am quick to respond, as I did to this person, because from my perspective there are so many people working with us to create all the wonderful services that happen at SFC. Whether it is the volunteer who comes in weekly or monthly, the staff person who goes the extra mile to get someone into housing or into a job or maybe just the right size pair of shoes from our clothing room, the donor who is unable to volunteer any longer but still is financially supportive,

the group that collects clothing room items for us every month or the person who says I have more than what I need and I want my resources used where they will do the most good, all of these add to the mission of service to our people. Our guests often view SFC as a community of good. A few weeks ago when it was cold and we had 5 inch thick ice in the alley, I asked a few guests to chop up the ice to create a safer space. When I asked Terry, who was chopping, about being reimbursed for his efforts that lasted about an hour in the 20 degree temperatures, he declined and said “it’s the least I could do for all you folks have done for me.”

“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give” said Winston Churchill. SFC has grown and benefited thousands of people over the years because our supporters like you have thought and believed similarly.

Staff Spotlight

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letters written on my behalf by multiple individuals who worked closely with me.

I was officially accepted back into Regis University and given an amazing team to support me through the remainder of my degree plan, studying to earn a Master’s in Criminology. On February 21, 2022 I celebrated 18 months of continuous sobriety and today I can honestly say I love my life and actually want to live. I have an amazing relationship with my kids, my family trusts me and actually wants me around. I get to continue being the living proof and a light of hope to my residents here at the SOS.



St. Francis Center (SFC) is partnering with Regis University, the Colorado Village Collaborative (CVC), and the city and county of Denver to provide humane shelter for people experiencing homelessness and needing temporary emergency housing.

The 19,000-square-foot Safe Outdoor Space (SOS) facility in a parking lot on the Regis University’s Northwest Denver Campus at 50th Avenue and Federal Boulevard opened June 1. It offers 24-hour staffed and secured shelter for up to 60 people, who are screened and selected by service agencies. The site offers residents an individualized weatherproof tent, cots, food, bathrooms, showers, a shared dining space, wellness checks, and access to resources including assistance towards finding permanent housing.

SFC SOS Manager, Ian Stitt, answered some questions for us about the SOS model and why it is a critical piece of St. Francis Center’s wrap around service model.

S.O.S. Q&A



Winter at the Day Center Continued from pg 1

keeping people safe from the spread of COVID-19 while also trying to keep them warm.

Thanks to the partnership of Mile High United Way, on particularly cold winter days, guests are given the option to hang out in an overflow space. This large space is located at Mile High United Way's Park Avenue location, just a few blocks down from the Day Center. Guests are encouraged to utilize the Day Center services (take

a shower, check their mail, etc.) and then head to the overflow location where additional SFC staff can continue offering assistance as needed.

Much like the partnership with United Way, SFC is reliant on community support to meet the increased need of its guests through the tough winter months. SFC relies heavily on donors who continue to keep the clothing

room well stocked with long underwear, coats, hats, gloves, and other crucial winter gear. Volunteers, who have continued to amaze us throughout the pandemic, arrive for their shifts despite the snow so guests can continue to depend on SFC's

crucial services.

Without such support, the St. Francis Center would not be able to withstand the increase demand for services in the winter. During a season where the tendency for many is to hunker down, SFC and its generous community of supporters buckle down to do what we do best –provide a safe, reliable space where those who are often overlooked can continue to find compassion and hope.

Perhaps the best way to summarize the impact, is through the words of our guests. In the men's showers one guest said, "I don't know what I would do if there wasn't a SFC." To which another responded, "Yes, SFC saves lives. They sure do. Lives are saved here." Words that ring particularly true in the cold winter months.



1 Timeline for the Regis SOS site

Originally the timeline was to move the SOS site from the Regis University parking lot by April 1, 2022, per our agreement with the university. In some exciting news, Regis University decided to extend our lease to July. We will not seek another lease extension beyond this date and will likely move before July.

2 Will SFC continue to manage other sites in the future?

SFC is committed to continuing to participate in the Safe Outdoor Space Collaborative through 2022 and beyond.

3 What will current SOS site residents do when the site moves?

Our current residents will have the opportunity to move with us if they so choose. We guarantee them a spot at the new site, but our hope is that most of our residents currently at the SOS

will be moving into housing before then. Previously when the SOSs have moved locations, almost all of the current residents have chosen to move with the site.

4 What has been the most challenging part of managing the site?

The most challenging part has been building and developing a program and culture at our site. We pride ourselves on creating a trauma-informed, supportive, and client-centered experience at the St. Francis Center Safe Outdoor Space. I believe that this attention to detail and extra time has and will continue to result in better outcomes for our community members.

5 What has been the most rewarding part of managing the site?

The most rewarding part of managing our Safe Outdoor Space has got to be inviting community members from

the streets into our site and watching their transformation as they find their dignity and humanity, many times after years of being abused and overlooked. However, the best part of this process is being able to deliver the news that someone has been prioritized for housing and watching them move into housing.

6 Any major learnings you would like to share?

I have learned that any sustainable and long-term solution to homelessness is going to have to include the larger community. Our Safe Outdoor Space is no exception to this. We have been graced by our small but solid volunteer base, and we honestly would not be succeeding as we are without their involvement. We love our neighbors and would love to see more of them participate in our innovative shelter option. We have opportunities to help with meals and to volunteer onsite.

2021 was an eventful year at St. Francis Center. The continuing COVID-19 outbreak kept the Center in an emergency-response footing while waves of variants raised and lowered, in equal measure, our hopes of returning to normal life. The Center and all its programs focused on the concept of resiliency. A concept that is often displayed in the lives of the peo-



Peer Navigation

The power of peer navigation is on grand display at St. Francis Center. We have three peer navigators having an impact at three program areas (Day Center, Employment, and Outreach). Using navigators with lived experience has greatly enhanced our guest interventions and outcomes.

Saint Francis Warren Residences

After years of pre-development and construction, St. Francis Center was overjoyed to open the Saint Francis Warren Residences in October of 2021. Forty Eight units of vital and extraordinary housing provide a com-

munity living solution, breathing new life into a decommissioned church near Capitol Hill. ple we serve. So many of our guests, residents and clients have overcome substantial challenges to keep searching for the best version of themselves. Simultaneously, St. Francis Center continues its own journey of betterment with strategic goals for being the provider of choice for homeless services, the employer of choice for our staff and volunteers, and a potent resource gatherer to support all the good work we do. Here are some highlights from a busy year.

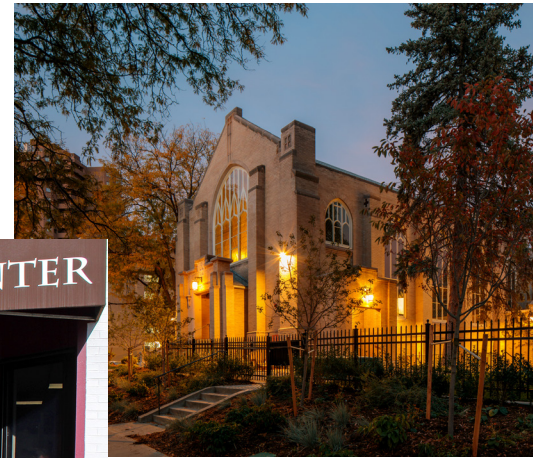


Staffing Challenges

As St. Francis Center has grown, the challenge of staffing our programs, services, and administration grows as well. Staffing constraints are an issue that the entire U.S. economy is facing, but its impact was clearly felt at our organization with some staff having to cover multiple positions. In the face of this challenge, our staff remains steadfast and our work goes on and grows on.

Safe Outdoor Space

In partnership with the Colorado Village Collaborative, St. Francis Center established and operated a 56 tent site at Regis University in north Denver. The 19,000-square-foot Safe Outdoor Space (SOS) facility offers 24-hour staffed and secured shelter for up to 60 people, who are screened and selected by service agencies. The site offers residents an individualized weatherproof tent, cots, food, bath-



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CENTER



Review:



rooms, showers, a shared dining space, wellness checks, and access to resources including assistance towards finding permanent housing. Since its opening, 19 individuals have been referred to stable housing and 26 connected to housing vouchers, demonstrating the need for this effective, transitional shelter option.

Day Center

Pandemic response has necessitated changes to the service environment at the Day Center. Seating around long tables has been replaced by scattered chairs, resulting in a change in the community life of the big room. Even in the face of these unforeseen changes, St. Francis Center strives to be a place of refuge and hospitality to our guests. But so much more is offered. The social service team has helped thousands of individuals with targeted services which provide hous-



ing, personal identity, and problem solving for lasting transformation. Additionally, the recruitment of new volunteers and the return of experienced helpers has encouraged staff and guests alike as we navigate a path back to normal.

Employment Satellite Services

The pandemic has also shifted shelter options in Denver with 24/7 facilities now being available to people experiencing homelessness. In response to these changes, St. Francis Center Employment Services has created a satellite office at various shelters to streamline

the employment procurement process for those who are able and ready to join the workforce.

Gala/Fundraising

St. Francis Center returned to in-person fundraising in October of 2021 with more than 300 people building community at Denver Botanic Gardens.

The event raised \$145,000 for programs and services. Donors and stakeholders, thankfully, continue to support the mission of St. Francis Center as our budget has grown 130% over the last dozen years.



Volunteer Corner

Scan the QR codes below on your mobile phone to connect with us online directly...

2021 Total hours volunteered = 11,960
Volunteers who served = 315
Total new volunteers = 100

There are many ways for volunteers to serve and SFC is able to accommodate a variety of schedules and circumstances.

Due to the ever-changing nature of SFC programming, current volunteer openings are listed on our website:

www.sfcdenver.org/volunteer

The possibilities for volunteering are as many and varied as the volunteers who donate their time and talent. Please contact us with your ideas!



HOW DO I BECOME A VOLUNTEER? It's as easy as 1, 2, 3!

1. Apply

Fill out the online volunteer application at www.sfcdenver.org/volunteer.



2. Interview

Volunteers are placed into assignments based on their interests, skills, and the needs of SFC. You will have a brief 10-15 minute phone call with the director of volunteers to talk about your interest in volunteering at SFC and current openings.

3. Orientation

Tour St. Francis Center and talk with the director of volunteers about what it means to be a volunteer at SFC. Many volunteer positions offer on-site training with the position supervisor once you've completed orientation.



Events

PATH Luncheon

THURSDAY, MAY 12 AT 11:30AM

Temple Emanuel Denver

51 Grape St, Denver, CO 80220

Seating Limited - register soon!

Tickets are FREE!

Register here:

<https://cbo.io/stfrancis/PATH>

Five Points Jazz Festival

SATURDAY, JUNE 4, 2022

Welton St, Denver, CO 80205

SFC will have a table set up at the Jazz Festival - to reach out to the community, share our mission and celebrate the day with our Denver neighbors.

St. Francis Center 2022 Gala

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2022
6 PM

Denver Botanic Gardens

UMB Bank Amphitheater Tent

1007 York St, Denver, CO 80206



CONTACT

Ellie Benjamin • Director of Volunteers and Community Engagement • ellie@sfcdenver.org • 303.244.0761

Support SFC



One of the things that makes the St. Francis Center (SFC) unique is its community of volunteers. Since its founding, SFC has been reliant on volunteers to keep its life saving services operating. Through the ups and downs of the pandemic, SFC volunteers have remained a constant source of support.

At the beginning of the pandemic, when volunteers were asked to go on-pause while COVID protocols were assessed, the National Guard was brought in to try and fill the many roles SFC volunteers have fulfilled for decades. Now almost 2 years into life

with COVID-19, SFC is thankful to have roughly half of its volunteers returned. These dedicated individuals are working alongside many new volunteers, who have graciously jumped in to help fill the needs during unpredictable times.

2021 brought new opportunities to volunteer. The Safe Outdoor Space (SOS) at Regis University is actively recruiting individuals seeking involvement. A typical shift for an SOS volunteer includes helping maintain the site and building relationships with the residents. Another impactful way to engage is by providing meals. Because all the residents of the Safe Outdoor Space are still experiencing homelessness, assistance with daily needs such as food is vital. Individuals and groups

can offer support by providing a meal (homemade or ordered) for the residents living on limited resources.

As St. Francis Center continues to grow, so does its reliance on the generosity of those willing to donate their time. Whether serving at the Day Center, the SOS site, or one of SFC's additional locations, volunteers play a crucial role in offering dignity and respect to Denver's unhoused community members.

If you are interested in volunteering at one of SFC's location, contact Ellie Benjamin at ellie@sfcdenver.org or (303)244-0761. You can also start by applying online at sfcdenver.org/volunteer.

MATCHING GIFTS

Have you recently made a financial donation to St. Francis Center? Many companies match their employees' donations dollar-for-dollar. Make your donation to SFC go further by checking with your human resources department to see if your company will match your donation. If they will, please be sure to let both us and them know about your donation to St. Francis Center.



IN-KIND DONATION NEEDS

Men's Jeans (all sizes)

Shoes (all sizes - men and women)

Reading Glasses

Large Bottles of Shampoo

Large Bottles of Conditioner

Large Bottles of Lotion

Tampons (various sizes)

Cologne/Perfume

Hair Gel

Vaseline

Body Wash



ENTERPRISE ZONE TAX CREDIT

St. Francis Center is a Denver Enterprise Zone (DEZ) designee. Cash contributions from \$200-\$100,000 per year are eligible to receive a 25% Colorado income tax credit, in addition to the normal federal and state charitable contribution benefits. In-kind contributions valued at \$250 and more receive a 12.5% credit. Both individuals and businesses are eligible for DEZ credit. The credit cannot exceed Colorado tax liability; however, excess credit may carry over for up to five years. We are required by the Colorado Department of Revenue to submit your paperwork with the last four digits of your Social Security Number or State or Federal Tax Payer Identification Number. If we don't already have your number on file, please provide it with your donation.

CONTACT

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Denver, CO 80205

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Saint Francis Center's Mission

*St. Francis Center offers refuge and peace
for our community members who experience homelessness,
helping them meet their basic needs and transition out of homelessness.*

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