Sister Jose Women’s Center

A Message from our Founder

Sister Jose Women’s Center is celebrating 10 years of service. Recently I sat down to list accomplishments the Center has completed and was astounded and humbled by the list. We started as an emergency winter nighttime shelter in a small church south of downtown. For three years, from the Friday after Thanksgiving to late March, we opened the doors to welcome the women as they came in out of the night to spend a few hours in a safe place.

Later we moved to a small house on 18th Street and opened a day program. We had no idea of the number of women who were in need of our services. Our numbers continued to grow and we realized we needed additional resources and a larger safe environment to truly serve the women. In our little 750 sq. ft house, we were able to serve 50 women during the day program and 13 at night.

Two years ago we moved to our current location and welcomed more and more women. We have also been witness to the miracle of women finding a path forward to a more sustainable life. Some have moved into permanent housing. Some have been able to receive services that have created a pathway toward receiving disability benefits or toward finding employment.

We have learned to celebrate success in small increments. They may seem small to us, but they are life changing to our women. Last week, I was speaking with a guest who is currently in supportive housing and I told her I was happy she was not on the street any more. She had been on the street for 7 years before she found us and had suffered permanent physical and mental difficulties. She quietly smiled at me and said, “Without this (place) I would not be alive”. I was profoundly struck by her comment. I wouldn’t survive out there either. She and all the women are our teachers of wisdom, our mentors and our friends.

One of the volunteers told me that while sometimes it seems chaotic, there is a presence, a calm that is evident for the women. While we were speaking, I looked out into the Gathering Room and noticed some of the most challenged of women quietly eating and others moving about helping one another. There is a feminine spirit of survival at work in this place.

It is here that we join together to provide compassion, caring and love to one another. Together we form a survival network for women to cling to and find their strength and courage to take another step. It is the blessing of my life to be part of the Center.
How We Make a Difference

As the end of 2019 approaches, I want to recognize the generosity of the volunteer instructors in the CREATE program. Their knowledge and compassion help build strong foundations for transformative change. For many students, their past experiences in school had been difficult. Some absorbed the message that they could not learn or that they were “bad” students. Recently, the new CREATE team was discussing their first week, “Our teachers are so patient! They really want to help us.” Their delighted expressions showed their surprise that learning could be so nurturing and supportive.

Janis Richert joined me in the first team to teach basic computer skills. Her knowledge and dedication to CREATE is priceless because she is an instructor and magician who maintains our prized laptops. Lini Burton’s experience teaching computer education to children has helped so many women who had never turned on a laptop overcome their fear of technology. Sloane Haywood joined us to teach Exploring Mindfulness and then took over Job Readiness. Sloane steps in to share the responsibilities of weekly team meetings and works individually with women as they seek employment. Nan Vaughn recently returned to CREATE and gets the students excited in Empowered Communications, and Jane Fitzgerald delights students in Healthy Relationships and Healthy Eating.

Gayle Sherman and the Zentangle team – Valerie, Ashley, and others – inspire everyone curious about creating art. Karenne Koo dances her way into the big room to offer Joyful Movement for all. And there are others who come when they can to share their interests and passions with our guests. To all of them, my grateful appreciation for their gifts of time so that women can enjoy creativity and learning again.

Soon the CREATE Facilitator Manual will be ready for copyright and available to other organizations. Our program is a replicable model, but our volunteer instructors are one-of-a-kind! Developing CREATE has given me the opportunity to bring my professional and life experiences together so that other women can start the exciting journey of transforming their lives into something beautiful.

In Gratitude,

Penny Buckley, Program Director

Volunteer Strong

The Volunteer Program is over 200 volunteers strong, built of women dedicated to helping other women experiencing homelessness. SJWC Volunteers come to the Center from many backgrounds and cultures themselves, and together weave a blanket of respect, dignity, and compassion to embrace, warm, and support their sisters. From January through September of 2019, SJWC Volunteers gave more than twenty-one thousand hours of service to our Guests, representing an 18% increase in time and commitment to the women in just 9 months compared to the previous 12 months of 2018 and the need grows. SJWC provided over 5000 hours to keep women safe from violence off the street in the overnight program: 36 women were safe, secure, fed, warm/cool and protected all night, every night.

Is it your time to join us by volunteering to help women experiencing homelessness in Tucson? Come find out at one of our New Volunteer Orientation and Tours held twice each month. Call 990.3905 for the schedule of classes and to learn more about how you can be a part of what has come to be known as The Miracle on Park Avenue.

8th Annual Fundraising Dinner was held on October 26, 2019

We would like to once again thank the more than 310 people who were in attendance who made this evening so special. An event of this caliber does not happen without the support from our Sponsors, Table Hosts, Ticketholders and Volunteers. We had a robust silent auction that generated a lot of interest and revenue for our women. We honored Jeanette Clifton (pictured) for the dedication that she and her husband Rodger showed to the center from its earliest days of our founding.

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