The mission for victims and survivors of Sojourner House is to promote culturally sensitive support, advocacy, housing, and education for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking; and to effect systems change.

2020 Charitable Foundation Grants

Andrade Faxon Charities for Children
Bank of America
Bank Newport
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island
Bristol County Savings Bank
Carolyn Family Charitable Trust
Centrevere Bank
Champlin Foundation
Citizens Bank
COVID-19 Emergency Fund
Rhode Island Foundation & the United Way of Rhode Island
CVS Charity Classic
Frank B. Hidley General Charitable Fund
Globe Scientifics
Greater Providence Board of Realtors, C.A.R.E.
HarborOne
Heron L. Kimball & S. Ella Kimball Foundation
Ida Bulloch Littlefield Memorial Trust
Jennison Therapeutics
John Clarke Trust

2020 Government Grants

Consolidated Homeless Funds
Emergency Food & Shelter Grant
HUD Continuum of Care
Office on Violence Against Women Transitional Housing Assistance Program
Providence CDBG
RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence Deborah Delbro
Domestic Violence Prevention Fund
RI Department of Health
Rhode Island Housing
Rhode Island Senate Legislative Grant
Town of Burrillville
Town of Foster
Town of Scituate
Traficking Victims Assistance Program
Victims of Crime Act

2020 Sojourner House Board of Directors

President: Christine McDermott
Vice-President: Pratima Patel
Secretary: Judith Clare
Treasurer: Bruce Medeiros

Members:
Edward D. Arazza
Justine A. Dunlap
Kevin Escudiero, Ph.D.
Stephanie Huckle
Anne Landis

2020 Annual Financial Report

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The mission of Sojourner House is to promote healthy relationships by providing culturally sensitive support, advocacy, housing, and education for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking; and to effect systems change.

Get Involved With Us

Sojourner House can’t do all of this work without the support of our community! We offer numerous volunteer positions such as shelter advocates, and Drop-In Center and community outreach assistants.
On the eve of our 45th anniversary — when we are commemorating all of 2021 — I reflect on Sojourner House's history and recognize that while COVID-19 presented one of the biggest challenges the agency has ever experienced, it certainly was not the first, and it won't be the last. There has been so much sweat, tears, and hard work that have been exerted over the decades to move our work forward.

The demands of managing a victim services agency during the pandemic left me with little down time, let alone reflection, but I often came back to some wise words written by researcher Angela Duckworth, who has focused her work on the premise that grit — a combination of passion and perseverance for a single important goal — is the hallmark of high achievers.

“There are no shortcuts to excellence,” Duckworth explains. “Developing real expertise, figuring out how to do really hard things, it takes all time — longer than most people imagine. Grit is about working on something you care about so much that you’re willing to stay loyal to it...it’s doing what you love, but not just falling in love — staying in love.”

There were some dark, disheartening, and downright devastating days during 2020. I witnessed our clients struggle to meet their basic needs, saw our staff attempt to balance remote working conditions with the demands of their personal life, and personally comforted families and friends who loved ones due to the pandemic. Not one of us made it through the year unscathed.

And, yet, I also observed so many remarkable acts of kindness this past year. I saw our supporters backing our work with selfless generosity. I saw our staff often go above and beyond to provide assistance to those in need. I saw our board members come together in a unified way to update our mission statement and establish clearer directives for Sojourner House’s path into the future.

The work at Sojourner House has always been, above all else, characterized by passion, commitment, and perseverance. We have a vision for a violence-free world and the tenacity to keep working until we reach that objective.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 presented unique challenges — but that was what we were formed for. In 2020, we weren’t sorry to see you go. But we appreciate the reminder that with hard work, and intention, just about anything is possible.

“I have a feeling tomorrow will be better is different from ‘I wish tomorrow would be better,’” Duckworth writes. We have a lot of resolve here at Sojourner House — and a lot of gratitude. Sojourner House sits poised to face our current challenges as we move forward. We hope you will continue to follow us on our journey.

Warmly,

Vanessa Volz
Executive Director

Sojourner House was the only agency in Rhode Island to be awarded, and we were one of only 73 organizations nationwide to receive funds from CVC’s $35-million trafficking transitional housing program. As a part of the project, Sojourner House will create five transitional housing units for victims of human trafficking. Transitional housing provides an interim housing option for up to 24 months along with supportive services. U.S. Representative David Cicilline, who has made combating human trafficking a priority, said, “We are excited the Office for Victims of Crime has recognized the important work Sojourner House is doing for victims of trafficking in Rhode Island. Trafficking greatly impacts its victims and can leave lifelong, traumatic effects. This transitional housing program will help ensure victims of trafficking have what they need to not only survive, but to overcome.”

A Mission to Empower

45 years ago, services for survivors of abuse in Rhode Island were nearly nonexistent. A group of concerned community members set out to make a difference. On November 30, 1975, that group joined together and formed Sojourner House. What started as a volunteer-led crisis hotline has expanded over the years and is now the largest and most comprehensive anti-violence organization in Rhode Island. With three shelters, 125 housing units, and over a dozen supportive service programs, Sojourner House’s Board of Directors and leadership felt that the mission didn’t accurately reflect all of our work, nor did it reflect all of the populations we serve. In response, in 2020, Sojourner House updated its mission. It now includes housing as a service provided, and it includes survivors of human trafficking – a population we have been serving for years. “These changes were important to us,” Vanessa Volz, Sojourner House’s Executive Director, stated. “This new mission statement now reflects the work that we have been doing in Rhode Island to ensure that victims have what they need to overcome trauma and live safely in the community. It also sends the message to all victims of abuse that they are welcome in our programs.” Please see the cover page of this report for our updated mission statement.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: THEIA PROJECT

In 2018, Sojourner House established Rhode Island’s first-ever emergency shelter for survivors of trafficking - the THEIA Project (Trafficking, Housing, Empowerment, and Advocacy). Over the past five years, the program has grown and now offers safe shelter, transitional housing, and a continuum of supportive services. Our goals are to empower survivors of human trafficking to rebuild their lives and to help them achieve safety and self-sufficiency. Some of the services offered to victims of trafficking include intensive case management services, life skills training, assistance navigating state systems, and medical therapy. Since the program launched, we have served more than 100 victims for almost 10,000 bed nights. We partner with Project Weben/RENEW to connect clients with peer support services from a survivor of human trafficking who has overcome their trauma and is living in recovery. In addition, Sojourner House launched a Housing Task Force and the Adult Victims Services Sub-committee of the Task Force. Sojourner House also joined as a member of the Massachusetts Anti-trafficking Task Force. These groups, along with conducting community education and training on issues related to human trafficking.

In August of 2020, Sojourner House received a half million dollar federal grant to provide transitional housing to victims of human trafficking from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC).
I researched the organization and found professional to join their finance committee. It is exceptionally generous of you to donate your time on the Finance Committee and as Treasurer of the Board of Sojourner House. What made you decide to give in this way? As a CPA and auditor at the time, I thought joining the finance committee and becoming a board member would give me greater knowledge and experience in my profession while providing support to an organization doing such important work in the community. During my time with Sojourner House, I’ve found that you become more aware and hyper-sensitive to the issues that cause the need for the organization’s services. When we hear the stories from the survivors, it’s difficult not to get emotional but at least we know that Sojourner House succeeded in their mission. Many victims don’t get a chance for that support, as we hear on the news every so often that a life was lost due to domestic violence. I think we all want to live in a world where partners have healthy relationships. Sojourner House’s mission and services provide that pathway to effectively create change in our communities.

What has been your favorite or most proud moment over the many years you’ve been connected to Sojourner House? There’s too many moments to just pick one. Every successful survival story makes me so proud to be associated with Sojourner House and the hard-working staff that are helping and caring for the victims seeking help. The growth and stability of the organization over the past 7 years is noteworthy along with the expansion of services provided. Working with Vanessa and the many board members and the passion that they show will always be remembered dearly. I am honored to be a part of such a great organization.

Donor Spotlight: Bruce Medeiros, CPA

Bruce Medeiros, Chief Financial Officer at RetHome New England, joined Sojourner House’s Board of Directors in 2014 after serving on its finance committee. As the Board Treasurer, Bruce helped to support Sojourner House’s impressive growth. Even though his term ended in 2020, Bruce will continue to be a long-time supporter of Sojourner House. Thank you, Bruce, for your service and for supporting survivors of abuse.

Sojourner House: How did you first get connected to or learn about Sojourner House? Bruce Medeiros: I learned about Sojourner House through an email that was sent from the Rhode Island Society of Certified Public Accountants. The organization was in search of an accounting of Certified Public Accountants. The email was sent from the Rhode Island Society of Certified Public Accountants to the organization. I was interested in the opportunity to get connected to or learn about Sojourner House and the work that they do. I heard the stories from the survivors, it’s difficult not to get emotional but at least we know that Sojourner House succeeded in their mission. Many victims don’t get a chance for that support, as we hear on the news every so often that a life was lost due to domestic violence. I think we all want to live in a world where partners have healthy relationships. Sojourner House’s mission and services provide that pathway to effectively create change in our communities.

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PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: HIV PROGRAM

Victims of abuse are at greater risk of contracting HIV, AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Many times, abusers will use a victim’s STI status as a way to further control them. Abusers may prevent a victim from getting medical attention, force a victim to engage in unsafe sexual practices, or withhold information about their own status. Educating victims about sexual health and giving them the opportunity to get tested for STIs are important parts of safety planning.

For over 25 years, Sojourner House has been working with community partners such as the Rhode Island Department of Health, to offer free, rapid HIV testing on-site and in the community. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, Sojourner House has been offering at-home HIV tests with detailed instructions for survivors. Now, anyone in the country can be tested for HIV through our program! In 2020 alone, we provided 122 free, rapid HIV tests. Sojourner House staff are also now certified to conduct free Hep-C testing on-site.

At the 5th Annual Sojo MoJoe Breakfast, Sojourner House was honored to present the Community Champion Award to Dr. Phillip A. Chan, MD, MS, Consultant Medical Director for the Rhode Island Department of Health for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STDs, and TB, and attending physician at The Miriam Hospital and Lifespan. Each year, this award is presented to an individual or organization doing work in community that supports our mission to end domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking in Rhode Island. For many years, Dr. Chan has worked at the Rhode Island STD Clinic at Miriam Hospital, providing STI treatment and preventative care for many victims of abuse. During Dr. Chan’s award acceptance speech, he said: “In Rhode Island, there’s a small community of professionals that work across the sexual health field. Sojourner House fulfills a critical need in Rhode Island in sexual violence, human trafficking, and domestic violence. This is why I’ve partnered with them for the past several years to provide medical care, HIV/STI, and other sexual health care to their clients. The work that the Sojourner House does is so important in providing a safety net for survivors.”

In FY2020, You Helped...

- 1,131 victims of abuse received supportive services
- 81 survivors received safe shelter for 6,065 nights
- 47,008 supportive housing bed nights were provided to 285 victims
- 130 victims received 1,190 sessions of clinical therapy
- 192 Immigrant and undocumented victims received 1,075 sessions of immigration legal assistance
- 122 free rapid HIV tests were completed
- 434 community education presentations were conducted to 7,267 duplicated students, professionals, and community members
- 331 survivors attended 286 support group sessions

[Image: Harvey staff getting ready for the statewide day of outreach]