

# THE OPEN DOOR

FROM THE CORE COMMUNITY OF ANDRE HOUSE

SUMMER 2019



## HEARTS OF CHANGE *ERIN CLAPP Core Staff 2017-2019*

*"The Gospel takes away our right forever to discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor" - Dorothy Day*

Who are we to decide who deserves love and care? I remember reading this and believing with my whole heart that Andre House exists because each person has the right to have their basic needs met. Each individual we meet has the right to take a shower, to have clean clothes, and to have a warm meal each night. I leave Andre House after over 800 days and I am certain that it is so much more than this.

I have learned patience at Andre House - but most importantly, I have learned presence. I have learned to sit with people on the sidewalk and to listen. I have learned to allow people to feel their emotions fully and uninterrupted. I have learned that each person needs a space to be listened to and also heard.

One of the most important memories I have from Andre House comes from an afternoon in the Pascente office. A few staff were sitting in the office while a guest told a story - she said, *"I don't believe that one person is better than anyone else...But everyone is better than this."* No one deserves a life on the street.

Homelessness is effect of the failures of the healthcare system, of the criminal justice system, of the lack of affordable housing. I have seen first hand how these systems lead people to living a life on the street. I have seen how when people are released from jail or prison they are left to find their own way back into society. I have seen people experiencing mental illness or developmental disabilities struggling to find ways to connect with the resources they need. Within our homeless services system, some people are treated as more deserving than others.

I have learned so much at Andre House but now I wish to learn to better support the man suffering from addiction outside our front gate, to encourage the woman who doesn't believe she is worthy of anything but living on the street, to help the talented young man who hears voices access mental health care.

Andre House has helped me to open my heart and my mind to each person and their beautiful and unique existence. Each individual is worthy of being treated with dignity; each individual is worthy of being understood. Each individual is worthy of so much more than this.

*Erin is heading back east to Boston College where she will be pursuing her Masters Degree in Social Work*



## LIFETIMES in a DAY

*RYAN DALY Core Staff 2018-2019*

As my time at Andre House comes to a close, I find myself peppered with questions. One of which is: what have you learned in your time here?

When I interviewed for Core Staff, Fr. Tom said to me, "When you go somewhere for a week you write a book, stay somewhere for a month and you might write an article, and live somewhere for six months or longer and you'll struggle to find words." At this point in time, I struggle to summarize what I've learned in ten months at Andre House; so much has happened! From the de-escalation of a guest so desperately in need of mental health help after chasing a staff member with a kitchen knife, to taking a right hook to the jaw on my second day, to our friends on the streets struggling to hold onto life and passing on without a hand to hold, to the passing of a men's transitional house guest, to the altercations with police harassing our friends on the streets, to the interactions with police officers that genuinely care for the well-being of Phoenix's chronically bad sleepers, to the prideful Monday night soup-line volunteers, to the two dogs that we fostered for a week, to the surprised look on everyone's face when I knew all of the words to Tunnel Vision by Kodak Black, to the night I saw my first gunshot wounds, to the guy who threw coffee at a woman out of "self-defense," to the beautiful people that I live with, to the time I used the question, "Did you guys get any fried chicken tonight?" to de-escalate a feuding couple. Every single day has been a lifetime in itself.

Throughout the dynamic, precarious, joy-ridden, sorrow-drenched days living in a different culture (that of the streets) there has been one constant—the community. Although members of the community have come and gone, every soul that passes through the gate joins the Greater Andre House Community—a community that stands to be a physical manifestation of agape, self-giving love. And that's what I've learned in a year at Andre House—the power of an open door where entrants are showered with love as they cross the threshold.

As I plan my departure, which is just two short months away at the time of this writing, I pray that Andre House continues to welcome all.

**Ryan will be headed to Boston as an AmeriCorps member working with Boston Healthcare for the Homeless**





## CONVERSATIONS OF CHANGE *LEXI SWAGLER Core Staff 2018-2019*

Trying to write about my experience at Andre House in just a few short paragraphs seems like absolutely impossible task. Looking back sometimes it feels like I've been here forever, but other times its like I just arrived. That's one thing that I love about this place is that there's always something new happening, its not just the same old thing over and over again. Yes, the tasks may be the same clothing closet on Thursday morning, showers on Tuesday afternoon with Dennis, meal service all day Wednesday, but to say each time I complete these tasks it's the same experience is anything but true. Each day that I walk into the building I find a new adventure awaiting me, and that excites me.

The encounters that I have each day with guests I've known since my very first day, guests who it's their first day in the zone, my faithful Wednesday volunteers, a brand-new Saturday volunteer, and everyone in between are what I cherish most about this experience. I've learned so much more than I ever expected to, and the encounters with all these different people are the reason why. I have formed some of the most genuine and beautiful relationships in the past year that I am forever grateful for. One of my favorite things about this place is the ability for everyone to feel and be accepted for who they are, which is a rare thing to find today. One of my favorite memories from this year is on a Thursday, after a particularly difficult meal service, Sam was taking pictures and many guests came up to me wanting to include me in their photos. This sounds like a very small thing, but to me it was everything, it made me feel so loved and appreciated, and I'm thankful for that.

Andre House truly is a special place. It's a place where nothing is black and white, everything is grey area. Which at first was completely daunting and I was terrified that I wouldn't be able to decipher what was the 'right thing to do', and I'm not quite sure I've gotten it down or even close. While it's one of the hardest parts, it's also one of the most beautiful, because it reminds me that I am not just running showers, clothing closet, or the office, I'm having encounters with people; people who are unique individuals and have different experiences. It's very easy to forget that people are human and deserve to be treated well regardless of their situation or past, and that is something I will never forget.

People do not like being uncomfortable, which makes sense, its not always a fun place to be in, however, its vital to change. Anyone coming to Andre House will be uncomfortable at first, no matter who they are, but that's the point. If I've learned anything in my time here, it's that it's okay to be uncomfortable and in most cases it's necessary. As Dorothy Day said: "We must talk about poverty, because people insulated by their own comfort lose sight of it". We need to talk and experience uncomfortable things, because if we don't no change will come, and the system will stay broken forever. It's very easy for me to be outraged by the faults in the system, but I see it every day. Staying motivated to fix a broken system is difficult, especially when the problem can seem so far away. We need to continue to have difficult conversations and do what we can to create change.

*Lexi is applying to nursing school as she heads to Tucson, AZ to hopefully work in medical research.*





Joe and I are in the office. He's a big dude and antsy, and he's trying to get a bus pass. My job: defend the bus passes. We only have so many, we have to pay for them, and we have to make sure that they are being used productively (medical, employment, shopping, etc.)

*"Why do you need a bus pass?"*

He gives a reasonable answer.

*I question his reasonable answer.*

He questions why I question his reasonable answer: "Why are you making it so \*dang\* hard?"

*Good question. Note to self: Believe in people as a default, and if you don't believe in sending people into the eternal swirl of reluctant resources, then don't become a part of the swirl. Be helpful.*

---

There's a dog barking in the parking lot. No owner.

*"Does anyone know whose dog this is?"*

People offer a couple of suggestions, but no one is sure. The dog barks— not just one of those annoyed, whiny barks— a big bark: one of those "love me or I will eat your face off" kind of barks. To avoid the latter, Jose and I sit with the dog and scratch his neck a bit, trying to get him to calm down.

*"Anyone know whose dog this is?"*

Nancy asks for her laundry, and I run inside to grab it. Jose sticks with the dog.

*"Hey man you can't smoke in the lot!" Man kindly stops smoking: "My b, didn't even see the signs... Whose dog is that?"*

You and me both my man.

The man who was previously smoking helps hang out with the dog, and someone asks for 4 plastic bags. Can do, I'll be right back. As I go inside, I get a glimpse of Blake, who's by the gate and has been for a month or two. Set a reminder, brain, to talk with Blake and see if you can convince him to come inside and wash up or get something to eat.

Back outside: plastics delivered, and the dog barks. Man who was smoking and stopped to help with the dog gave the dog some water, but the dog is on a literal short leash and not liking it.

Steve asks for his laundry, and a cop car rolls down the street. Slowly.

The dog barks. The laundry is delivered. Emily walks into the gate! Emily was one of the potential owners of the dog, and it's clear, now, that she is in fact the owner of the dog. I rush over to her, eager to give her a kind and gentle reminder that you can't leave your dog in the lot unattended. But as I meet her, I see there are tears coming down her face, and my compassionate reminder of the rules flops and flubbers out of my mouth and onto the floor.

Lamely: "Are you okay?" She nods, and takes her dog by the leash.

---

We're cleaning the porta potties, and Joe (bus pass guy) is showing me how it's done. Armed in one hand with a big wad of Clorox wipes, he dives bravely into battle with the porta potty floor. "They're the dirtiest part, and when I'm in there, I want to put my stuff down," he explains. I nod in wonder. The porta potty floor, to me, had always been an agreed upon place of nastiness— a place beyond cleaning or ever being clean. Truth be told, it took a lot of Clorox wipes, but those porta potties never looked cleaner than when Joe cleaned them.

---

Talking about Andre House feels like making a smoothie without a blender: it's just hard. I know these things all fit together— strawberries, bananas, ice, even spinach! Kale! But my hands are all mushy from the bananas and I'm having trouble ripping the spinach and kale into small enough pieces; meanwhile, the ice is on the corner of the desk just melting away and you know it's important and somehow it has to fit into the smoothie because it adds something, but you're too focused on the bananas and the spinach and the kale to do anything about it. So you forgo the ice and hope it still makes sense.

Andre House has taught me a lot. Joe taught me to clean porta potties. I think of him when I clean the floor. Andre house taught me to embrace the chaos and the life within. It gave me a taste of the stress of street live and made me understand that I don't understand the magnitude of that stress or its effects on physical and mental health. Andre House helped me appreciate "the rules." Rules provide order and consistency, which are precious and rare to our friends on the street. At the same time, Joe reminded me that I'm not supposed to be working for the rules, I'm supposed to be working with people. Too much is left unsaid, but anyways the ice is melting!







**COME AND SEE**     *LAUREN SCHMIDT*     *Core Staff 2018-2019*

I don't believe words can capture the true essence of this past year at Andre House, but I will try my best.

*The day begins and so it seems that fellow man is looking for me.*

*He needs a shirt, she needs a bag, but really it's Christ whose looking back.*

*I see Him in his or her eyes, as I'm reminded why*

*Why this place means so much to me because it's the essence of Christ and I'm at His feet.*

*I find myself down on my knees, asking for the grace to continue and succeed.*

*Succeed in being present to the person who is there, even though my mind may drift off I still desire to care.*

*It's hard to be present all of the time, especially when my mind seeks asylum inside.*

*Inside my mind tells me I have so much to do, but Christ reminds me "I'm in front of you."*

*"Look into my eyes, listen to my heart, even if I don't look the part."*

*My heart struggles day in and day out, but Christ is present to draw me out.*

*He draws me outside of myself to love and be loved.*

*To partake in this gift exchange from above.*

*So again I'm reminded why this place means so much because He's opened my eyes and now I'm in touch.*

*In touch with Christ in all that I see, in touch with Christ in all those around me.*

*So I invite you now to come and see,*

*to see how His love has completely transformed me.*

*How He's transformed my heart, my soul, and my mind, through the gift of Andre House that is truly divine.*

**Lauren will be going to the Israel and the Holy Land to volunteer for the city of Magdala , home of Mary Magdalene**





## “A CHANGE IS GONNA COME” *ASH USS Advocacy and Partnerships Coordinator*

In 1963, a musician named Sam Cooke was turned away from a whites-only motel in Louisiana. He then went on to share his experience in a beautifully crafted song called “A Change is Gonna Come.” He sings,

*“It’s been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will.”*

The song is deeply embedded into the history of the Civil Rights movement. It became something that people could turn to for hope in the pursuit of equality. Sam Cooke believed that change was coming, that despite the masses of black Americans who were being killed and deprived of their rights, things were going to change for the better. When Barack Obama was elected the first black President of the United States, he referenced this very song saying, “change has come to America.” Things have changed since 1963. We cannot deny the work of so many brave and honorable people who risked everything for those changes. We should be proud of how far we’ve come and how much progress we’ve made as a country since Sam Cooke first wrote this song. But over fifty years have passed and I can’t help but feel both ashamed and grateful that I am still singing this song.

I say that I’m ashamed because my job at Andre House is to fight for beds. I am fighting so that people can have a place to sleep. Somewhere to rest their heads that is safe and humane. Every day feels like a fight. I go to neighborhood meetings and make my sales pitch for shelter beds. I sit down with elected officials and city staff and am required to speak about how increases in shelter beds will clean up parks and neighborhoods (instead of focusing on the human beings in those parks and neighborhoods). Instead of focusing on the programs and social services that will help the most vulnerable of people on the streets, we are being asked to stop street feeding and reduce the amount of trash.

If I’m being frank, this process of trying to create more shelter beds has really enraged and frustrated me. I find myself questioning God and the role of government and the general apathy of our humanity. But I also haven’t stopped listening to Sam Cooke. And I will keep humming the lyrics to “A Change is Gonna Come” until my lips are sore and my tongue is swollen. I have to believe that a change is gonna come for our friends on the streets.

Changes are coming to Andre House. The Core Staff is about to transition. Father Tom is going to be leaving Andre House. We are going to welcome a wonderful new Director in just a few weeks. We bought a building to use for emergency shelter. And at the end of the summer, our permit to increase the number of shelter beds in the area will be put to a vote at City Council.

When I interviewed people sleeping on the streets, I learned how the shelter system has failed to provide dignity and humanity to people experiencing homelessness. I learned that 90 out of the 100 people I spoke with do NOT want to be sleeping on the streets. I learned that people’s needs are as simple as safety and security and family. The time I spent listening to people on the streets ignited a profound philosophical and emotional change within me. I will never again assume that people sleeping on the streets want to be outside. I will never use the term-resistant to describe someone who has valid concerns for not sleeping in a shelter. Andre House and all of our guests have changed me.

**Now it’s time to invoke change in this city.** Until this community can establish longer time solutions and investments such as affordable housing, we need shelter beds. We need to be open to what Dorothy Day calls “a revolution of the heart.” We need to be catalysts for change in others. Thank you, Sam Cooke. I do believe, “a change is gonna come.” But I’m darn ready to make that change. I just pray and hope that you’ll join us. We’re not just fighting for shelter beds or metal frames. We’re fighting for people who need those beds to sleep in. If you are a Phoenix resident or are connected to businesses and residents of Phoenix, please consider writing a letter in support of our request for more shelter beds. For more information and a template to follow, please e-mail [ashu@andrehouse.org](mailto:ashu@andrehouse.org)

A change is gonna come; we just have to fight for it. Will you join us?







**FR. TOM DOYLE C.S.C.** *Director of Andre House*

When we are aware time is finite, time becomes more precious to us. A fine new priest, Fr. Dan has been chosen by the Congregation of Holy Cross to be the next Director of Andre House. My time here is limited. Over the last five years, we have accomplished so much together. More than a million meals served, a new roof, a new floor and in-between them we have chilled air! But those are not as precious as the people who we have served and those who have served here.

“How do you feel Fr. Tom?” is a question posed frequently. I feel hyper-aware how time is short. I’m sad but stoic. Underneath, I feel like the portrayal of Oscar Schindler in the penultimate scene of the movie, *Schindler’s List*. WW II is over and Schindler, a German industrialist, is parting with the nearly 1,200 Jews that labored for him and who he saved from extermination, through his cunning and bribery of the Nazis. As his head bows, he sees his golden Nazi Party lapel pin and laments that if he had sold that pin, he could have paid the ransom and saved one more life. In my waning days at Andre House, I fell so far short of Jesus’ admonition to the young man: “If you want to be perfect, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor.” (Mt 19:21) Like the young man, I leave sad because I have many possessions.

I am haunted by the faces of people that I didn’t or couldn’t help. The woman in a wheelchair on a rainy January night shivering next to the concrete wall outside the shelter at the Human Services Campus. I wrapped her in a tarp from my trunk, prayed with her, kissed her forehead and guiltily slipped into my bed. The depressed man who has lain for 30 days on the sidewalk outside our gate in his own filth resisting our help. Although he can’t get up or walk on his own, the fire department won’t transport him to the hospital, the mental health agency says he is alert and permitted to decline services and I don’t believe having him arrested for trespassing is a proper solution. The former gang member who left LA to escape and found an honest job in Phoenix. He broke down crying in my car one night, exhausted because he worked all day and had to walk all night because sleeping on the street was not safe.

The number of homeless people in Phoenix rose again this year. Each night, at least 2,500 humans are next to Andre House, near the railroad tracks or in our alleys throughout the city. Andre House has purchased a lot adjacent to our center and intends to establish a low barrier shelter. The low barrier shelter will focus on the most difficult and resistant to serve. The admonition from the Hebrew Scriptures that suggests that “we are our brothers and sisters keeper” (Genesis 4:9) is not merely a Judeo-Christian admonition, but also something fundamental to America.

The largest barrier in our way is not the \$1 million needed to improve the building and lot. The most formidable resistance comes from some members of the Phoenix City Council. It may seem illogical that the City would oppose Andre House from creating a shelter to triage and shelter people on the streets who are have pets, are mentally ill or someone who finds themselves homeless in the middle of the night. We are not requesting any funding from the City, simply the permission to allow us to help individuals and make safer our community. Those councilpersons who currently oppose special permits that we require argue that the neighborhood around us and Phoenix have already done enough, and the surrounding municipalities should take responsibility. The fact is, our communities would be wise to work together before we find ourselves overwhelmed like many West Coast cities.

Time is running short. Not my own but all of ours. There is a short window of opportunity for us to convince the elected city officials that each life has infinite value; that shelters don’t create homelessness, but rather respond and help resolve homelessness. In August or September, we will go before the Council, with the Human Services Campus and St. Vincent DePaul. If you are a resident or business owner in the City of Phoenix will you consider writing a letter of support? Would you please join us in prayer not for 2,500 people sleeping on the streets but for each person without shelter?

I am profoundly thankful for my time at Andre House. I will remember being inspired by each one of you, of our staff, of our guests and of our volunteers for the rest of my life. Please continue taking good care of Andre House. According to the Talmud, “. . . whoever saves a life, it is as if he saved an entire world.” *Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 4:1 (22a)*. Please continue to take care of one another and each guest.

**After five years of leading Andre House in constant growth, structurally and spiritually, it is time for Fr. Tom to accept a new assignment. Fr. Tom will be handing over the responsibility of Directorship to Fr. Dan Ponisciak C.S.C.**

**Fr. Tom will remain at Andre House until the end of December to focus on development of the low barrier shelter**





André House  
of Arizona

ANDRE HOUSE  
PO BOX 2014  
Phoenix, AZ 85001  
Phone: 602-255-0580  
[www.andrehouse.org](http://www.andrehouse.org)  
[www.andrehouse.volunteerhub.com](http://www.andrehouse.volunteerhub.com)

Non-Profit Org  
US Postage  
Paid  
Phoenix, AZ  
Permit No. 2751

**CORE STAFF 2019**

Aidan Byrnes  
Luke Brennan  
Erin Clapp  
Ryan Daly  
Lauren Schmidt  
Lexi Swagler

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Fr. Tom Doyle, C.S.C.

**TREASURER**

Br. Richard Armstrong, C.S.C.

**SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR**

Fr. Bill Dorwart, C.S.C.

**DIRECTOR of FINANCE and  
ADMINISTRATION**

Jay Minich

**DIRECTOR of STEWARDSHIP and  
DEVELOPMENT**

Melia Smith

**DIRECTOR of VOLUNTEER  
SERVICES and COMMUNICATIONS**

Elizabeth Wunsch

**DIRECTOR of SERVICES**

Debbie Shane

**DIRECTOR of FACILITIES**

Ted Dunne

**ADVOCACY and PARTNERSHIPS**

Ash Uss

**BOARD of DIRECTORS**

Rev. William M. Lies, C.S.C.  
Fr. Tom Doyle, C.S.C.  
Br. Richard Armstrong, C.S.C.  
Fr. Bill Dorwart, C.S.C.  
Megan Agliano  
Tom Crotty  
Mike Hanosh  
Kevin Hanson  
Greg Herrle  
Todd Kallmyer  
Leslie Korte  
Kristen Masloski  
Wendy Patterson  
Mike Smith

SOMETIMES ANGELS ARE JUST ORDINARY PEOPLE  
THAT HELP US BELIEVE IN MIRACLES



Colette  
Miller 2019

ANDRE HOUSE MAKING GOD KNOWN, LOVED and SERVED