

# Handbook for Future Interns at Sojourners Alliance

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## **Sojourners Alliance 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.*

**Programs Sojourners' Alliance operates that are part of its mission:**

- Regional Access Point: For Idaho residents of Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, and Nez Perce Counties to be directed to area resources that assist with hardships, including services offered by Sojourner's Alliance.
- Transitional Housing: On site housing for men, women, and families. A 3 month minimum commitment to participate in on site program including case management and supportive planning. Qualifications: A need for housing and a willingness to come to the shelter and abide by program rules and regulations. No violent criminal history or sexual assault in the recent past.
- Motel Vouchers: 3-night hotel vouchers for immediate, temporary relief of homelessness. Qualifications: Idaho resident. Meet federal definition of literally homeless, at imminent risk of homelessness, and/or fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence.
- Homelessness Prevention: Financial aid to help prevent an eviction due to missed rent payments. Qualifications: Idaho resident. Meet federal definition of literally homeless, at imminent risk of homelessness, and/or fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence. Household income less than 30% of Area Median Income.
- Rapid Rehousing: Financial aid to help pay for deposit and first months rent on a new residence. Qualifications: Idaho resident. Meet federal definition of literally homeless, and/or fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence. Household income less than 50% of Area Median Income.
- Permanent Supportive Housing (Project Warmth): Long term housing contracts for those with disabilities. Rental prices based on household income.

### **What do interns' job descriptions look like?**

As interns with the Sojourners Alliance, it was our duty to ensure punctuality upon arrival at the office and to effectively engage with our the Executive Director, Casey Bolt, in order to address and fulfill the day's tasks and project requirements.

### **Intern's Insight: Gisselle Alvarado**

#### **What would I have liked to have known about Sojourners Alliance?**

When I first learned about Sojourners Alliance, I didn't have much familiarity with their work until I was offered a meeting. Participating in the meeting provided a better understanding of how Sojourners contributes to the community. However, I felt that it would have been more beneficial if I had been informed about the specific tasks during the meeting and learning opportunities associated with the internship, rather than being placed into it without prior knowledge. Having a clear outline of what I would be working on would have allowed me to better prepare and maximize my experience during the internship. Nonetheless, as I spent time at the office, I began to grasp valuable skills that I know will be beneficial in the future, and encountering situations from screenings that I would not have encountered in a classroom setting.

#### **Advice about being an intern at Sojourners:**

As someone aspiring to become a social worker with little prior knowledge of the field, I found that asking questions was instrumental in expanding my understanding. At Sojourners, where I interned, this skill proved invaluable. It allowed me to dig deeper into the field of social work and gain insights that I otherwise wouldn't have had. Without a doubt, my willingness to seek clarification and guidance through questions has been pivotal in shaping my professional

growth. I highly recommend future interns at Sojourners, or any organization, to embrace this same approach. Keeping an open mind is equally essential. My time here has exposed me to vulnerable situations unlike any I've encountered before. Through openness and empathy, I've not only learned from others but also gained meaningful connections with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Above all, maintaining a positive attitude is key. Feeling welcomed and valued at Sojourners has been crucial in fostering my confidence and sense of belonging. It's this supportive environment that empowers individuals to thrive both personally and professionally. So, as you embark on your journey at Sojourners, remember to ask questions, keep an open mind, and approach each day with positivity. It's the recipe for success in both your internship and beyond.

### **What projects did interns work on?**

During my internship, I was involved in various projects, including attending screenings, tidying up onsite housing, running errands, and delivering a presentation on applying inclusive leadership. Sitting in on screenings provided me with valuable insights into the backgrounds of applicants and the factors contributing to their homelessness. It was eye-opening to learn that experiences such as domestic violence could lead individuals to homelessness, and witnessing the impact of nonprofit organizations like Sojourners Alliance firsthand underscored their importance in people's lives. Additionally, participating in cleaning onsite housing conveyed a strong message of dedication to residents, demonstrating the Sojourners team's commitment to creating a safe and welcoming environment. Running errands with the case manager further emphasized the organization's hands-on approach to meeting the needs of families and individuals, ensuring they have essential items for comfort and security. Presenting on applying inclusive leadership was a significant opportunity for me to apply classroom learning to a real-

world setting. It allowed me to contribute my knowledge and skills to an organization that could benefit from a more inclusive approach. Overall, these projects provided me with a deeper understanding of Sojourners' mission and operations, highlighting the importance of their work and the meaningful impact they have on the community.

### **Intern's Insight: Brittany Dodson**

#### **What would I have liked to have known about Sojourners Alliance?**

For me, it would have been helpful to know about the various programs Sojourners offers. It was a bit confusing at first because I thought it was a homeless shelter with different services, but it is more a collection of resources including an on-site transitional housing program. It's not really the typical thought of shelter, if you are homeless you can't just walk in and get a bed, you have to apply to the on-site program and pay a monthly program fee. It's a fee based on income so if you come in with no income it's a \$0 fee, but it was different than I expected. Also, many of the programs have different requirements, so it was hard to fully understand who could apply to what and what was offered in each different program.

I also would have liked a clearer view of what I would be doing on the day to day, but, this internship has proved to be very flexible with many different tasks that are probably hard to adequately list in a job description because they change day to day.

#### **Advice about being an intern at Sojourners:**

The biggest advice I can give you is come in with a project in mind. I was supremely lucky that during my intake interview Casey mentioned that they were hoping to expand their social media presence sometime in the future. While the duties at Sojourners are varied, there is A LOT of downtime between things to do. If you don't have something to work on in the downtime you can feel useless and bored. So, before coming in, have a pet project in mind that

you want to work on that helps both you AND the organization. I spent most of my hours working on researching social media engagement techniques, writing Facebook posts, and working on coming up with various ideas for community engagement. It fulfilled a goal of the organization and I was able to practice my research and writing skills and try my hand at using them to bridge academia and lived experience to create something relatable to the average joe on the street. Since most of you will be coming from Sociology or Anthropology I encourage you to pick an area of your studies you are passionate about that relates to homelessness (ie: economic inequality, local affordable housing, the decriminalization of drugs, mental health supports, local, state, and national government policies that need changed, etc), and meet with LT and Casey to find a way to turn your interest into a deliverable for the internship. You could start a fundraiser, lead a protest, start a petition to the government, contribute to community engagement opportunities, do a school or community presentation about issues the homeless community faces...there are many ways to have a semester long project that helps in one way or another, and you can use the opportunity to dig deeper into researching, academic writing, and practicing ethnographic skills like interviewing, participant observation, and case studies.

The other piece of advice I have is to include yourself in the goings on of the organization. It's been awhile since Sojourners has had interns and things at the office tend to run business as usual with or without an intern. Although everyone was very helpful in trying to include us in projects, sometimes you have to just stick your nose in and ask to be included if you overhear something is happening that you are interested in.

### **What projects did interns work on?**

Mostly I worked on creating potential social media content and researching effective social media engagement for nonprofits. I would make little Facebook posts using Canva or

create short Facebook story resident spotlights or news stories and submit them to director Casey, and he would post if he liked them. I also spent a lot of time researching homelessness related news issues like the passage or new bills that might impact homelessness, or supreme court rulings, various laws impacting homelessness issues, other organizations who worked with homeless populations, Moscow discussion panels, or fundraisers related to homelessness. I spent some time interviewing residents for possible posts or newsletter ideas.

I also attended a couple Lived Experience Panels (LEPs), which are when a small group of Sojourner's participants meet via zoom with other regions all over Idaho to discuss problems related to homelessness. Very interesting stuff, highly recommend attending at least one. They are generally held the first or second Friday of the month from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. In addition to the LEP's I was occasionally involved in observing the screenings for new clients, running errands, and cleaning on-site housing units.

**Benefits:**

- Insight into individuals' personal journey
- Gain a better understanding of non-profits
- Comprehend the social impact of addressing homelessness, hunger, poverty, etc.
- Acquire personal growth in developing leadership skills, expanding networks, and cultivate a sense of empathy and social responsibility

**Why are sociology and anthropology students well equipped for the internship positions?**

Sociology and anthropology students bring a unique set of skills and perspectives to intern positions within non-profit organizations. Their deep understanding of the complexities of the real world, including social structures, dynamics, and inequalities, positions them as valuable

assets in addressing pressing social issues and advocating for marginalized populations. These students possess a keen awareness of societal nuances, enabling them to navigate and challenge systemic barriers within non-profit settings. Their adeptness in conducting research equips them to contribute to assessments aimed at enhancing organizational practices, driving continuous improvement and impact. Moreover, sociology and anthropology students understand their empathy and cultural competence through their studies, facilitating the creation of inclusive environments and the tailoring of services to meet diverse needs. This sensitivity enables them to engage authentically with individuals from various backgrounds, fostering trust and collaboration. Critically, these students approach their work with a mindset geared towards understanding and dismantling social systems that perpetuate marginalization. By actively engaging with communities and advocating for the rights of marginalized populations, they contribute to meaningful social change and promote equity and justice within society.