

## **Andrea Leeds**

### **1. Why do you volunteer?**

“I’m a social worker and approaching 60. I have had so many good breaks in my life that I didn’t appreciate at the time. Every time I come out of [Interfaith Sanctuary] it’s a reminder about how blessed I am. It’s almost embarrassing to talk about, like I think I deserve some kind of special attention. I don’t, I do this because I feel I must. I believe we all have a responsibility to do this. I’ve worked in the mental health field and thank God I was born without a mental health issue. I’m a richer person for doing this, the people at Sanctuary teach me things every time I go. The first time I volunteered at Sanctuary was I think about a month after they opened. We were way downtown.”

“I take so much for granted. I lost my parents at 19 and 21 and was blessed with a second family who taught me so much about how the world really works. It changed who I was and how I looked at the rest of the world. I can’t be a human with a clear conscience without giving to the community. It’s my core, my obligation to give back to people who have not had what I’ve been given.”

### **2. What are your impressions of Interfaith Sanctuary?**

“The idea at Sanctuary is you come as you are and we’ll try to figure out a way to give you a place to stay. The only line we draw is when people are violent to one another. I believe charity shouldn’t have strings attached. I’ve worked with people for the last 15 years and they have to go through so much suffering, and painful humiliation. They get judged because of their beliefs. I’m Jewish and that’s not that common around here. I know about being judged because of your spiritual beliefs. I love that Sanctuary takes people just as they are. I like to think of Sanctuary as the beginning. We can’t make that journey for you but we will introduce you to the resources available. Before you make any further assumptions about homeless people, spend one night there volunteering. I promise you’ll come out of there with different beliefs. Every time I go, it’s eye opening.”

### **3. How do you see homelessness in general?**

“The biggest misconception people make about [the homeless] is they’re all drunks or drug addicts. This is a needy population by definition and many needed social services don’t exist in our community. We need to create a non-judgmental environment where people are encouraged to get on their feet. They’re judged so harshly, it violates my fundamental beliefs about how humans should be treated. I hate the general assumptions that people make about people who are homeless without knowing the real story. If someone didn’t believe in me, I wouldn’t have achieved any of what I’ve done. Unconditional acceptance is the priority.”

**Andrea Leeds** is a member of the Boise community and Congregation Ahavath Beth Israel. She earned a MBA equivalent from Purdue University and a Master degree in Social Work from Boise State University. She worked for Hewlett Packard for almost 14 years then found her calling in social work at Mountain View Behavioral Health.

- As relayed by Barry Franklin, Sanctuary Public Relations Team Writer