

Paul Riggins

1. Why do you volunteer?

“I started volunteering here at the Sanctuary once a week since about December 2009. Life has been good to [my family and I] we really wanted to give back. This is the kind of place that literally keeps people from freezing to death or starving to death, it’s perfect for me. Here at the Sanctuary I feel like I can help people most at need at the most basic levels of existence. I’m a criminal defense lawyer. I see people who struggle with drug addiction, alcohol addiction, mental health problems, a lifetime of abuse, and there’s a lot of that here. I was a public defender, I’m in private practice now but I still care very much about persons who are dealing with a lot of pain and I like to help them out.”

“This place is a part of me. There have been times when my life has been stressful and I haven’t wanted to come. But no matter how rough my day is, it’s nothing compared to the day some of the people at Sanctuary have had. If I can come in for a few hours and make someone laugh, maybe give them some food I think I’ve done some good. If someone asks me, you know, how’s work going. I think I’ll talk about my practice for maybe 10 seconds then I’ll talk about what I really care about. That’s Sanctuary. I’ve missed probably a total of 10 times since I started volunteering here.”

2. What are your impressions of Interfaith Sanctuary?

“Sanctuary is a non-traditional homeless shelter. It’s really here to provide a place to go when people really have no other option. Especially in the wintertime, when it’s cold outside, we provide someplace warm to go. Sanctuary doesn’t turn people away. We are here to try to help, it’s a place of last resort and that’s part of why I love it so much. Other shelters, when they turn people away, they send them here and [The staff] will figure out a way to make it work, I tip my hat off to them. I like the fact that when you’ve got nowhere to go, you can go here. This is the type of place that’s the first ticket. We help the people that society cares about the least. Every little bit that we as a community can do to kind of bridge that gap. Maybe we can help these kids, you know, there are sometimes three generations of people that pass through here. It’s a continuing cycle.”

3. What issues do you see facing homeless people in general?

“It’s easy to lump people into a group but they’re here for any number of reasons. I think you have to go to the root of the problem. That is what I have to do in my profession. Even the most basic of human tasks are overwhelming. You’re going to go here and put in an application and follow up with some calls, you’re going to go find an apartment, and buy a car, and do all these things. Maybe for someone like you and me we’d make a list and knock out each one out at a time. But someone suffering from mental health issues, it’s too much. Some people are just drifters by nature and others see this and believe that’s all there is to homelessness but that’s not the case at all. Most of the people

are here as a result of other, more severe problems. A huge percentage of residents in homeless shelters are veterans and I don't think that's right."

Paul Riggins is a longtime resident of Boise, Idaho. He is a criminal defense attorney and community volunteer.

- As relayed by Barry Franklin, Sanctuary PR Team Writer.