

2021

# Impact Report

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



Sojourner House

Committed to Ending:  
Domestic Violence • Sexual Assault • Human Trafficking

## Letter from the Executive Director

There is a common cliché about taking two steps forward and one step back --or, even more dramatically, taking one step forward and two steps back. The idea, of course, is that there are experiences that feel like false starts, or movements toward progress, only then to wind up where you began, or even further behind from your starting place.

2021 felt a lot like false starts as we all continued to live with the COVID-19 pandemic, and we often ran in circles, exerting a lot of effort only to feel like we hadn't made any progress.

There were COVID vaccinations (step forward), dropping mask mandates (step forward), the Delta variant (a step back), more mask mandates (a step back), and then Omicron (definitely two steps back).

As we emerge into the Spring of 2022 after two years of unbearable challenges brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic, it feels like many of us are cautiously optimistic, if not warily keeping an eye over our shoulder for which

setback may occur next.

Our work at Sojourner House during FY 2021 followed a similar trajectory. Many of our programs grew in scope and size (two+ steps forward); some of our long-time federal funding was cut (a step back); some of our staff fell ill, grappled with family challenges, or decided to transition out of the victim services field (many steps back); and we served more clients than ever before (a strong step forward); but we also grappled with the reality that there were dozens, if not hundreds, of families who remained unserved (many steps back).

2021 also marked Sojourner House's 45th anniversary as a Rhode Island incorporated non-profit organization. Throughout our history, we have experienced many triumphs and many failures; we've taken many confident steps forward only then to realize that they were missteps. If the past is any indicator, we know that many challenges and successes lie ahead of us as well.

As Sojourner House emerges from

the COVID-19 pandemic, we do so with a strong foundation, an overwhelmingly supportive community of supporters, and a renewed commitment to execute our mission. The work we do to help victims and survivors rebuild their lives is a non-linear journey that has many circuitous routes. Thank you for joining us on our journey.



Warmly,

Vanessa Volz,  
Executive Director

## Program Spotlight: Housing Clinics



An important entry point to Sojourner House programs, housing clinics facilitate the navigation of affordable housing systems. In 2021, we served 491 clients for over 500 hours of ser-

vice at housing clinics around the state. During the pandemic, most domestic violence shelters were at capacity. Victims and survivors actively fleeing harm came to our housing clinics across the state looking for emergency resources and referrals to keep themselves and their children safe. Sojourner House fills out housing applications, accesses shelter and emergency housing options, and offers referrals and information for clients to access and maintain safe

and affordable housing.

This year, we assisted 248 survivors of domestic violence fill out applications for rental assistance. Sojourner House provided \$271,914 in rental assistance and helped clients access thousands of dollars in rental and utility assistance through RI Rent Relief.

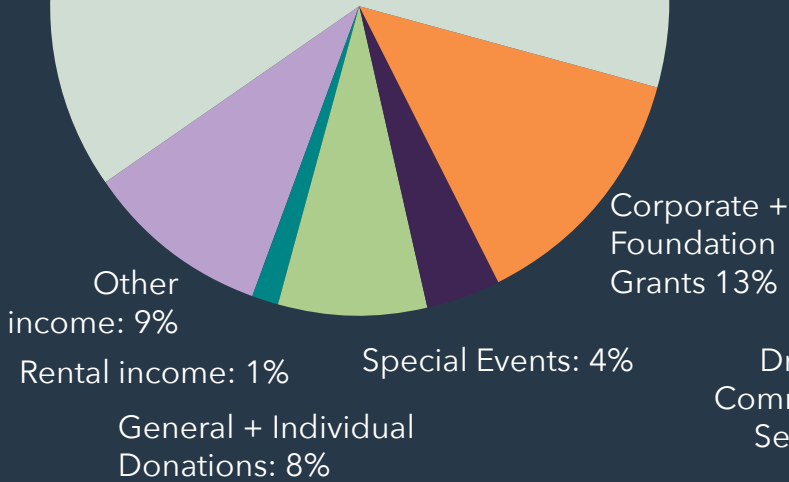
Currently Housing Clinics are held in Central Falls, Woonsocket, West Warwick, and Providence.

# FY2021 Financials

Government Grants: 64%

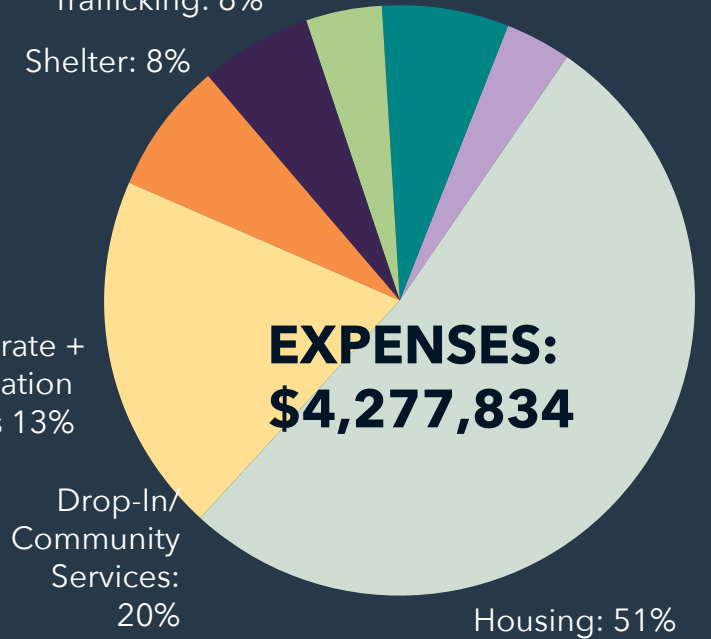
Management and General: 7%

**REVENUE:**  
**\$4,342,233**



Education: 4%  
Trafficking: 6%  
Shelter: 8%

**EXPENSES:**  
**\$4,277,834**



## In FY2021, You Helped . . .



**36,344**  
bed nights in rapid rehousing to 152 clients



**22,032**  
in permanent supportive housing to 68 clients



**22,032**  
bed nights in transitional housing to 62 clients



**258**  
clients with short term rental assistance: \$404,928.38



**2,600**  
hotline calls were answered



**1,955**  
referrals were made to other social service agencies



**240**  
clients received immigration assistance, for 1,518 sessions



**9,379**  
sessions across all of our programs for a total of 4,405 drop in hours



**5,500**  
individuals reached through education services



**947**  
hours of clinical service for over 120 clients

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued impacting the world in the year 2021, and our clients were no exception. Job loss, evictions, heightened abuse, family tensions, mental health stressors, and other serious issues caused rippling effects on the individuals and families we serve. Our programs, services, and staff had to pivot to meet the demand while adhering to mask mandates, social distancing, and other regulations.



During our 2021 fiscal year, not only did Sojourner House continue to provide in-person services at all of our locations, but some of our programs even expanded to include state-wide housing clinics in multiple locations, an immigration clinic in Newport, weekly food assistance to Providence clients, in-person HIV testing and events, and additional clinical services to community clients.



Our ever-growing staff also gathered for a retreat to discuss Sojourner House values and how they impact the work we do. Using fun activities, reflection, and the superb facilitation skills of some of our staff, we were able to connect what we do to why do it. This team parted ways on this day ready to continue tackling challenges and setbacks and knowing that what they do every day truly changes lives.



# Masquerade Ball

In November of 2021, we were able to hold our first in-person fundraiser since the pandemic began, and you all came out to support us in a big way!

Our 11th Annual Masquerade Ball brought in \$145,000 in support of our work. That's more than we've ever raised at a single event! Attendees fully



embraced this year's "Mardi Gras" theme, dressing in fun outfits and dancing the night away to live music and fun performances. We're so grateful to have been able to gather with you all again, and we're already counting down the days until this year's Masquerade Ball!

## Former Board Chair, Christine McDermott

*Christine McDermott served as the President of Sojourner House's Board of Directors for four years, and she stepped down from her post in 2021. We thank her for her service during this period of growth for the agency.*



**Back in 2014**, I was looking for a new volunteer opportunity after spending a year as the program committee co-chair for Leadership Rhode Island. Through LRI, I had met a Sojourner House employee, and she posted on social media that she was recruiting volunteers for a fundraising and events committee. I met with her at Sojourner House and was so impressed by the variety of services that were being provided to domestic violence victims, from immigration advocacy to LGBTQ-specific programming.

**Why fundraising?** I have a background in marketing and communications, and the skills transfer very well. It is so rewarding for both the fundraiser and the donor when you can help direct money to an organization performing such important, life-saving work right in your community.

**It is mind-boggling** to reflect back on the rapid growth we experienced at Sojourner House during those years. As the budget, staff and program offerings grew, our board made a concerted effort to ensure that we would be able to sustain what we were building for the future - and not lose sight of our mission.

**We were fortunate** to be in a strong fiscal position at the beginning of the pandemic so that we were not only able to maintain services but expand them as the need was greater than ever. I could not be more proud of the work that Executive Director Vanessa Volz and the

entire Sojourner House staff did during those most trying times.

**I am very excited** about the expansion of the housing program, so we can help more and more clients - many of them women with children - have a safe place to live.

**Early in my career**, I remember sitting in a leadership training, hearing the advice that everyone should join a board, and not having any clue as to how to proceed. My advice is to find a cause that you are passionate about, research the nonprofits that are serving that cause, and contact them to learn more. Most nonprofits will be happy to hear from you. It is such a rewarding experience, not just for the work you will do on that board but also because of the people you will meet along the way.

# Remembering Christina Crosby

*One of Sojourner House's founding members, Christina Crosby, passed away at the beginning of 2021.*



*While earning her Ph.D. in English from Brown in the 1970s, Christina was part of the Feminist Caucus, a group determined to address the problem of domestic violence with action.*

*They created a hotline, a community outreach program, and even makeshift shelter spaces in people's homes. It was the beginning of an organization called Sojourner House. Cathy Lewis, another founding member, said Christina was "a major force in Sojourner House's formation" and described her as "a strong, clear-eyed feminist for whom no challenge was too big or too small. Whether it was speaking truth to power or scraping lead paint from our first shelter, Christina was always thoughtful, wise, and determined to create a better future of equity and justice for all." Others who knew her then recall being in awe of her "vitality, confidence, and swagger."*



To commemorate Sojourner House's 45th Anniversary in 2021, we recruited 45 community leaders as ambassadors to raise awareness, connect victims to services and supporters who wanted to get more involved, help us raise critical funds, and advocate on behalf of victims of abuse.

Our diverse team of ambassadors come from respected fields such as law, finance, medical, and academia. Through their sphere of influence, our ambassadors played a critical role in ensuring that we are able to offer victims and survivors access to life saving services such as support groups, emergency shelter, transitional housing, sexual health advocacy, emotional support, and more.

## 2021 Board of Directors

Christine McDermott, *President*  
Kersti Yllo, Ph.D., *President-Elect*  
Prutha Patel, *Vice President*  
Judy Clare, *Secretary*  
Mary C. Moore, Ph.D., *Secretary-Elect*  
Brayden Puddington, *Treasurer*




Mahrukh Anwar  
Edward D'Arezzo  
Justine A. Dunlap  
Kevin Escudero, Ph.D.  
Stephanie Huckel  
Anne Landis  
Tracey LeBeau  
Tara McClary  
Kathleen Mullally  
Xenia Murphy  
Elizabeth O'Neill  
Kristen Quinlan, Ph.D.  
Anthony Roberson  
Henry Silva

## Get Involved with us!

The support of our community is what makes our work possible. We offer numerous volunteer positions such as shelter advocates + Drop-In Center and community outreach assistance.



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