

Together for the Holidays

"...God loves us. He is so forgiving and loving, and He wants good things for us, and putting your family together is a good thing...so I trusted Him."

Sarah's story inside >>



Together *for the Holidays*

JUST TWO YEARS AGO THIS CHRISTMAS, Sarah was in a dark place. She had sent her six-year-old daughter, Lylee, to live with her mom in Texas, and CPS had just taken Alize, her 6-month-old. “They literally ripped her from my arms,” Sarah told us. “It was like one of those scenes from the movies. You’re on your knees and you’re screaming, and then she was screaming. It was awful. It broke me.”

At the same time, Sarah was pregnant again. “I found out I was pregnant with Royce when Alize was only four months old. I wasn’t planning to keep him, but I made an appointment twice and both times my ride fell through.”

Spiraling from the shock of another pregnancy and the loss of another daughter, Sarah stopped paying her rent and was quickly evicted. “When you’re in that dark place and you don’t have all the tools I have now, you don’t have support, nobody believes in you, nobody wants to help you anymore, you’re just stuck and you want to die... that’s what I wanted to do. So, I ran off. I was losing my mind.”

Four weeks of burying her grief in reckless drug use brought her to her knees. “I was so broken. CPS stopped letting me even see Alize; I wasn’t doing the UAs they were requiring. That’s when I reached out to my mom, and ultimately my sister told me about the program here.”

Sarah entered UGM LIFE Recovery at the Center for Women and Children in May 2020. Her son was born two weeks before she came. CPS allowed her to keep him because both mom and child were clean from drugs at the time of the birth. As Sarah and Royce got settled at the Center, Sarah’s mom flew up with Lylee and helped her move in. “So, I had my baby and my six-year-old... and my whole recovery to figure out.”

This scenario was nothing new to UGM staff. From every department, both staff and volunteers rushed to encircle Sarah and her little family. Welcomed into a safe and healing community, Sarah was finally able to rest. Her life had been chaos since childhood, and at 14, a horrific crime committed

“I want to say thank you, not only to the people who volunteer, but to the people who donate, because without them my life would not be possible.” – Sarah

against her sent her plummeting into a world so dark she’d lost all hope of living a functional life.

Resting, going to classes, being fed three warm meals a day... Over time, Sarah’s eyes were opening to her own potential. “I was learning things I’d never heard before in my whole life. There’s parenting classes and then everything you’re learning in program. It’s like heart surgery. I tackled every single issue I’ve had the biggest problems with in my life: the drugs, the sex, the relationships being unhealthy. It’s totally holistic.

“I gained stability here, being at one address for so long. I gained sobriety time, and I gained parenting skills. They come alongside you and teach you things hand in hand. If your child is having a meltdown in the hallways, they will sit with you and bear your child with you and talk you through the whole thing. And that’s an everyday thing.”

As she healed, Sarah worked faithfully with CPS to prove she was changing. She wanted to complete her family, get Alize back. “I had such a tough case. At one point, I had no doubt I would never get her back. But that’s the one biggest thing they teach us here, is that God loves us. He is so forgiving and loving, and He wants good things for us, and putting your family together is a good thing, so I took my faith to the next level and trusted Him.” For a year, she had supervised visits with Alize. At first, it was once a week for two hours with two case workers watching the whole time. After many months, the visits were less closely monitored, and in the summer of 2021, they moved quickly from unsupervised weekend visits to full custody.

“There are girls here who are going through custody issues and my case gives them hope. If I can do this, anybody can. It’s just doing the next right thing, and the next right thing.”

Today, Sarah has completed the first four phases of her recovery program and has been hired at her business practicum. She is applying for affordable housing and childcare, which are waitlisted throughout the region, and while she waits, she remains surrounded by loving support at the Center.



Lylee, Alize, Sarah and Royce
Center for Women & Children,
Coeur d'Alene



"I feel like I have family here. I know I could call anyone and they would be there. I've gained a mentor, I've gained an incredible support team, and not only that, but the residents—we all help each other with our kids and they've grown together. Relationships have been built in this house."

As an added gift, while Sarah has been working diligently to be the best mom she can be, her own mom has extended her friendship and repaired many of Sarah's childhood wounds. "We are best friends now," says Sarah. "She is literally texting me as we speak."

When asked about her future plans, Sarah told us, "I know my future is big. 'Big' to me is helping one other woman who is even close to where I came from. I have

a purpose for my life, and this is only the beginning.

"I want to say thank you, not only to the people who volunteer, but to the people who donate, because without them my life would not be possible. If this place didn't exist, I don't even want to know where I'd be today. I'd probably be dead from overdosing."

Bringing children home; helping families heal; and providing rest, education and resources to impoverished parents is holy work. It is work we cannot do apart from the grace and love of Jesus Christ, and it is certainly work that cannot be accomplished without a community of helping hands. By the grace of God and the compassion of many, Sarah, Lylee, Alize and Royce are warm, safe and together this holiday season. ●



Phil Altmeyer
Executive Director

Bringing Us Home

*"Can a mother forget her infant,
be without tenderness for the child of her womb?
Even should she forget, I will never forget you."*

Isaiah 49:15

I DON'T KNOW IF WE CAN COMPREHEND God's desire to reconcile with His children and the lengths to which He will go (has, in fact, gone) to bring us back to Himself, but a mother's longing to be reconciled to her children does give us a glimpse.

Without question, one of the strongest motivators for women to seek recovery is the fear of losing their children or the desire to get them back. I remember Sarah from the cover story lighting up when she told me about regaining

custody of her daughter. These are the humans they grew in their bodies and carried for nine months. The connection is strong, and the joy at their reunion comes from a place deep inside them.

Jesus tells three parables about this same type of joy: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. The shepherd goes searching for his wayward sheep and joyfully puts it on his shoulders when he finds it. You can almost hear him humming and whistling all the way home. The woman cleans her house, sweeps and searches in every cranny until she discovers the missing coin. When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors so they can rejoice with her. And the father, an older, dignified man, runs to meet his son while he is still a long way off. He throws his arms around him, kisses him and calls for a feast. "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Like the son in the parable, our separation from God is on us. We are the ones who walked away, and still He pursues us.

God longs to be reconciled to His children. He formed us in the womb, inscribed our names on the palm of His hand and numbered our days. And even when we rejected Him, He sent His Son to become a man, live a perfect life and die a horrible death – all so that we could be welcomed back into His warm embrace.

It's this message of reconciliation that we share at Union Gospel Mission. There is no sheep too lost, no son too far gone, that the grace of God cannot bring him home. Thank you for partnering with us to share this good news with every man, woman and child who comes through our doors. ●



Befriending the Stranger



Reverend
Riley Palmer

WHEN REVEREND RILEY PALMER WAS PREPARING to plant Adopted Church west of Spokane, he felt the Lord calling him to be a part of local homeless ministry. For the reverend, this didn't mean starting a new soup kitchen or urging his new congregation to provide coats every winter; instead, it meant developing personal relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness.

This “aha” moment happened at the UGM Men's Shelter when he came to explore service opportunities.

“I had a lightbulb moment as I was shuffling through the line to get dinner. There were staff members behind the counter, cooking, and there were volunteers serving the food. All the people who wanted to be serving the homeless were behind the counter, and the rest of us were on the other side. At that moment, I decided that if God was calling me to serve the homeless, it would be by going through the line with them.”

The year before, in 2010, Riley had conducted an experiment: Taking nothing but his guitar and a change of clothes, he had set out on a three day, inner-city “camping trip” in an attempt to identify with those living on the street. “I knew that I was going to be back home in a few days, but laying in the darkness by myself late at night was a deeply isolating experience. I found that access to food was not the problem—Spokane has no lack of good people providing food, and I was glad for that—the problem is loneliness and lack of belonging. The loneliness was crushing.”

Since 2011, Riley has come to the Shelter every eight weeks, walked through the line, sat with strangers, built

“... if God was calling me to serve the homeless, it would be by going through the line with them.”

friendships, and moved into the chapel in the evenings where he opens the Bible and shares the love of Jesus with his friends.

He insists that ministry to the homeless isn't rocket science; in essence, it is just one simple decision: to be open to building relationships. “Success in ministry is not checking a box off a to-do list. Success is being with the ‘least of these.’ Who knows how the Lord will use a simple

meal and friendliness with a hungry and lonely person?”

“Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?” Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’”
(Matthew 25:37-40) ●

Former UGM resident GIVES BACK

In 1993, Anita Williams arrived at UGM's Anna Ogden Hall with seven children and another on the way.

28 years (and 27 grandchildren) later, she's back and she's providing a valuable resource.

Read her story on our Impact Blog:
uniongospelmission.org/anitawilliams

TAKE ACTION



The holidays are hard when you don't have a home.

Offer relief this Christmas



Gift ideas for our guests

For men: Long-sleeved shirts, work pants, heavy duty socks, underwear, hoodies, backpacks.

For women: Socks, underwear, yoga pants, sports bras, hoodies, robes, pajamas.

For children: Backpacks, pajamas (including young adult sizes), socks, shoes.

Drop off or mail your gifts to 1224 E Trent Ave., Spokane 99202 (marked "Men's," "Women's" or "Children's")

Christmas in a Bag

Deliver freezer bags filled with candy, chap stick, socks, insulated gloves, razors, deodorant, etc., to the Men's Shelter by December 20.

See more ways you can provide practical relief this winter at

uniongospelmission.org/holidays



UGM Holiday Gift Catalog

You can give a personal gift to one of our guests **in honor of your loved one.**

Choose from 10 meaningful gift options, including a whole week of food and shelter for one guest, or a hot shower and clean pajamas. Your loved one will have the joy of knowing that, because of them, someone special is safe and warm this Christmas.

uniongospelmission.org/gift-catalog



Upcoming Events

Tuesday, November 23 – Volunteer orientation, Coeur d'Alene, 10:30 a.m.; volunteer orientation, Crisis Shelter, 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, November 24 – Thanksgiving Meal, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 14 – Volunteer orientation, Coeur d'Alene, 6:00 p.m.; volunteer orientation, Men's Shelter, 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, December 28 – Volunteer orientation, Coeur d'Alene, 10:30 a.m.; volunteer orientation, Anna Ogden Hall, 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, January 11 – Volunteer orientation, Coeur d'Alene, 6:00 p.m.; volunteer orientation, Men's Shelter, 6:00 p.m.

To register for a volunteer orientation call our offices.

SPOKANE 509.535.8510 | **COEUR D'ALENE** 208.665.4673



ONE CALL

is all it takes to be a Driver of Change

When you donate your used vehicle to UGM Motors, the proceeds go to work immediately, providing meals, care and hope to dozens of hurting guests.

Schedule a pickup today. 509.327.HELP



Mission News

Phil Altmeyer, **Executive Director**

Steve Ellisen, **Director of Development**

Barbara Comito, **Director of Marketing**

Jessica Morgan, **Art Director**

Genevieve St. Martin, **Staff Writer**

James Bishop, **Multimedia Producer**

Jonathan Jones, **Web Specialist/Graphic Designer**

509.535.8510 • www.uniongospelmission.org

PO Box 4066 Spokane, WA 99220

1224 E Trent Ave., Spokane, WA 99202