

CUSD Cares

One Small Step

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CUSD Director of Counseling & Social Services, Brenda Vargas talks with Amanda Nosbisch, Executive Director with organization **One Small Step**. One Small Step's mission is to provide clothing relief to those who could not afford what they needed.

Brenda Vargas: (00:06)

Welcome parents and community to another edition of CUSD Cares. This is Brenda Vargas, Director of Counseling and Social Services, and today I am delighted to be joined by One Small Step, the executive director, Amanda Nosbisch. Welcome Amanda.

Amanda Nosbisch: (00:22)

Thank you so much for having us today.

Brenda Vargas: (00:24)

Let's just jump right in One Small Step, most people are going to go, what in the world do you do? What is one small step?

Amanda Nosbisch: (00:32)

One Small Step is a nonprofit located in Gilbert. We're primarily a clothing bank, but we have a couple other programs as well, which I'll touch on. The community does know us better by our program name, which is Closed Cabin.

Brenda Vargas: (00:45)

So, you shared just a snippet how you guys got started. Do you mind just expanding on that just a bit and sharing that with our community?

Amanda Nosbisch: (00:54)

Yeah, absolutely. Our founder is Karen Shoemaker, and basically what started this organization was some outreach work that she was doing with a group from her church providing hot breakfast at some

of the local farming areas in Chandler for workers out on the farm and their families. And when they were out there in the morning hours, it does sometimes get chilly in Arizona. She noticed that there were several kids in line for breakfast that were wearing shoes, without socks, and it was pretty cold. Maybe they had flip flops on, but no cozy socks. They were kind of putting their foot, one foot on top of the other to keep their feet warm or maybe complaining about cold feet. And she thought, "Oh, next time we come out, let's just bring some socks so we can hand 'em out to the kids and they can be comfy".

Amanda Nosbisch: (01:46)

And that was received very well. And it was easy enough for this group of ladies to collect socks to bring out, which they did several times when they were doing this before long other places were saying, "Hey, I heard you have socks. We could use socks at our programs, we could use socks in our schools. We could use socks when we give out food boxes." So, they really just started expanding and it was this lovely group of ladies who would collect socks from all over, even had women repairing socks, making matches out of unmatched socks and just grew and grew. And they were providing lots of groups and organizations with socks that were expressing a need for the socks. And then the clothing bank Chandler closed, and right as it was announced that the clothing bank and Chandler was closing this great group of gals put their heads together and said, "Well, who is going to provide clothing in this area? Where are all these families and individuals going to get clothing when they need new clothes for school or clothes for work?" And they said, I think we can do it. And so, at that point, they took that next step and made a 501 C3 called One Small Step and expanded into clothing, shoes, linens, and the other programs we now have.

Brenda Vargas: (03:03)

That's amazing. The fact that they saw a need and just wanted to fill it and immediately stepped into action, such an honorable way to serve our community. And then it has turned into this amazing organization that does so much good. I know for our CUSD community, you have been instrumental in making sure that our students that are coming to school every day have what they need so that they can sit and learn and focus on learning. So, I cannot tell you how thankful our social workers that have worked with you are so that these students and families can have access to clothing. And I want to talk a little bit about that, about what you do for our community and specifically what you have done in CUSD schools, because I don't want to give it away, but setting up shop at our schools, please do share with our parents and community about what it looks like.

Amanda Nosbisch: (03:58)

Yeah, sure. I'll start with our programs at our main building. In 2019 we did move into Gilbert. We were looking for our own building with our own space where we could expand a couple of our programs and add a shower to our unsheltered program. We needed desperately more space, so we did move to Gilbert, but we still deeply love and are connected to the Chandler community and are committed to

serving the Chandler families and individuals. So, we often bring our services out into Chandler, but anybody is welcome at our location in Gilbert. We are a no barrier clothing program. Our clothing bank is truly open to anybody in need. You come in and you say, I need assistance with clothing, shoes, linens, and that's all it takes to get help from us. It's very intentional that we have low to no barrier.

Amanda Nosbisch: (04:50)

It's very hard to put an exact number on when the family budget is in need of help with clothing and when you're like, Oh no, you're good. And when you may look good on paper, but when on paper doesn't reflect the flat tire and the battery that went dead and all the things that had, that disrupted the family budget that month. And kids don't stop growing and clothes don't stop wearing and tearing. People have needs that just need to be filled and fortunate for us, we have this great opportunity to simply leverage what the community regularly has in excess with what the community needs. And we just get to be that bridge between. Our four main programs are Clothe the Clothing Bank, Closed Cabin, and like I said, open to anybody. We're open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM and Thursday evenings from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM and you do not need an appointment or a referral.

Amanda Nosbisch: (05:43)

You simply come in to receive services. It's great if you have some form of ID with a photo, but it's not required. And we do take down some of your information to create an account that helps you get into a routine of being able to come in every three months to select clothing for yourself and the whole family or just yourself if you're just an individual. When you come in, you get a shopping list with the number of items you can select per person in the family. And it ends up being somewhere between 12 and 15 items that would include shoes. We only do new socks and underwear, so though some of our clothing is gently used, some of our clothing is new and our socks and underwear are always new. And it would include family linens, like sheets, towels, blankets, or hygiene goods. So, all in all, per person, you know, that can be a value of \$150 to \$250 per person each visit. So, though we're not solving family budget problems, we're hopefully helping significantly with just removing the barrier of needing to get clothes that fit.

Brenda Vargas: (06:49)

Well with the inflation now, right? It's so hard to keep up with grandkids.

Amanda Nosbisch: (06:53)

Yeah, inflation and sometimes it's not inflation, but the job market is bad and of course Covid, people are still feeling the effects of that. Sometimes it's just simply a bad couple of months, just a couple of months of bad luck that just can wreck your budget and your plans. And like I said, you know, kids still need socks and underwear, kids still need new shorts. They still outgrow their clothing, whether you had to replace two tires or not. Another program we have is called Back to Work and Back to Work is

basically a program where we provide expensive uniform items that are required to begin work. This came through conversations with our clients as all of our programs have, where we were hearing, "Oh, hey, I got a job, I'm supposed to start tomorrow, but I have to have steel-toed work boots."

Amanda Nosbisch: (07:41)

And we would hunt up and down, oh, we don't have any steel-toed work boots. And sure enough, if you find a really good deal, even at Walmart, they're \$35, \$45 dollars, probably \$50 now. And unfortunately, if you didn't have your work boots, you couldn't start the next day. If you can't start the next day, then that's a bridge burned and that's makes it all that much harder to start. So, we started with steel toed work boots. We then added sturdy work boots, understanding some jobs don't require steel toes, but require an ankle and a sturdy boot. Conversations with clients led us to add things like scrubs for home healthcare jobs or cleaning jobs, or daycare jobs where scrubs aren't provided but are required. Even if you're working in a hospital situation or a medical facility situation, a lot of times they provide one pair of scrubs.

Amanda Nosbisch: (08:29)

I don't know about you, but I'm not doing laundry every night. So, we like to be able to offer a couple extra pairs of scrubs. We have heavy pants, tool belts, all kinds of things that we have been hearing, and we connect with local job placement agencies to help us know what's the barrier to starting work. We like to provide these items on a one-time basis, but new to the clients. I would say 99% of what we offer through Back to Work are brand new items. But then of course we have an unsheltered program as well. Our Homeless Assistance program focuses on anyone that comes to visit us who is currently unsheltered or temporarily sheltered. What we'll offer are just basically additional services to the clothing bank. So, of course we're addressing their needs every time they come in.

Amanda Nosbisch: (09:12)

The general client sees us every three months. Shelter clients are welcome to visit us every week and every week that they come in, we'll address their clothing needs. What do you need in regard to clothing or shoes today? And then we offer additional services like free laundry lockers for them to use and keep, they can keep extra clothes or shoes or paperwork or any valuables that they would like to keep safe while they're active with us. They can use our lockers for free. And we have mailboxes as well, so they can use our mailing address and receive mail, either to start a job or to start services or cash assistance or food stamps, any of those things. You have to have a mailing address for that. So, we provide that for them. And then we have a shower.

Brenda Vargas: (09:56)

Wow, that's an amazing service to be able to get them going and find shelter and then stable, right? I had no idea about that mailbox service that you have.

Amanda Nosbisch: (10:06)

In fact, we've served a couple of Chandler kids with mail as well. Some unaccompanied youths have been brought in by your amazing social workers and we've set them up with a place so that they could receive mail safely. Then the shower is the last part of that program. It is not a temporary shower; it is not a group shower. It is a real dignified regular bathroom brick and mortar shower, which is something we're very proud to offer. If you visit our cleaning bank and our services, the one thing I love to know is that people walk in and immediately go, "Oh wow, this does not feel like what I thought it would look like." We really corner all of our programs with kindness and dignity. We really put a lot of energy into making sure that everything that goes out on our floor is the kind of quality that we would feel comfortable wearing, that we would give to our own family members and our own friends and say, hey, here's a pair of shorts, would you like to have these? And we don't mind putting all the extra work and effort into making sure that it feels like that. So, our building, our services are bright, welcoming, inviting, clean, organized, and it's important to us, it's important to us to do it that way.

Brenda Vargas: (11:15)

Well, it certainly is obvious to us and our folks that connect with you and your organization, Amanda, that that's what sets you apart. And what makes you unique and different is that you do it in the most loving way, the same way you and I expect to receive these services. And I think that is such an honorable way to hold space and to, and to bring this much needed service to people that maybe just need a helping hand instead of getting the leftovers, you guys really make sure that they get the best, just like what they deserve.

Amanda Nosbisch: (11:49)

Anything is better than nothing, does not live in our building. Now that said, we, we do have many partners, about 12-14 partners that we partner with specifically to provide things that do not meet our standards or that we have excess. So, every single thing that comes into our building does go to use, it may not be in our program, but we have identified a place for it right down to a recycling partner for pants that are ripped all the way through or things that are non-functioning anymore. We find a place for everything that comes in. I'll just say quickly, our last program is our classroom and that is just a space where we partner with other agencies. We really value partnership and collaboration. We want to work together to serve the community. We're not trying to be the experts in everything.

Amanda Nosbisch: (12:34)

So that classroom is designed for our fellow social work agencies out there that are helping people and they can use that space for free. So, we have classes in there, groups in there, we have enrollment assistance for access and food stamps every week. They're in there two days a week helping families to get registered or individuals. And then we do our mobile events as well, which is what you were talking

about. During Covid times, it got you thinking outside the box and thinking how you could do things differently and better. And at that time when people were really conservative about going out or unsure if things were open, we said, Boy, we've got to get out into the community to reach people where they are. So instead of just waiting for them to find us. So, we did our very first mobile outreach event where we took basically 50 or 60 bags of clothes and tables and chairs and brought 'em out into the community, set 'em up, organized all the clothes, and did a fill a bag event where we just found, you know, what's your zip code?

Amanda Nosbisch: (13:34)

How many people are you looking for today? And gave them a bag and said, Enjoy, take what you need. And it was something that we quickly learned was needed and well received and something that was easy for us to do. We started getting more intentional about that. And we have done several in the Chandler School District and you guys are one of our best partners on that, which is wonderful. We've gone to Galveston and Sanborn and these are lovely events. We just like to partner with the school to see, what's a good time and a day to come in either onto your field or into your cafeteria? Set this up and just give out as much clothing as the community can use. It's a great way to connect with people and we can always tell them, hey, if you enjoyed this kind of thing, come and see us at our location where we have more and better items like this. You can get something for the whole family.

Brenda Vargas: (14:23)

Which is really needed. I want folks to know you are in Gilbert, but in our backyard you're about at Cooper and Guadalupe, Is that correct, Amanda? That is correct. It's not too far for a lot of our families, which I wanna make sure. But most importantly, I know that we have amazing community members and parents that sometimes have an extra day. Maybe they are looking to give back in some way. If I were someone that was interested in wanting to help One Small Step, what are ways that I can help support what the good work that you guys are doing in our community.

Amanda Nosbisch: (14:55)

Four ways that you can help us. One, we rely heavily on volunteers. We have four part-time employees for the agency and our numbers rival agencies that have upwards of 20 or 40 employees. We may be small, but our work is big and that's because we have so many amazing volunteers that give us their time every week. We have weekly volunteers, biweekly volunteers, even once a month volunteers. But when you're volunteering with us, you really are doing a part-time job essentially because we don't have paid staff for every position. You're doing the real work, you're checking families in, you're helping to check families out, you're helping address need, you're helping us sort and organize and get ready for services. So volunteering is extremely important for us. We have volunteers also at our Little Boutique, which is still located in Chandler at Alma School and Ray Road.

Amanda Nosbisch: (15:47)

It's called Friends Resale Boutique. This is just a non-profit fundraiser for us, a thrift store that sells things that don't meet our mission vision, like purses and home decor and things like that. It's a really cute little space there, that is also volunteer run. So, volunteering at either one of those or shopping at Friends Resale Boutique is a great way to support us. You could attend a fundraiser. We basically have two a year. One is our Beamers and Keys fundraiser, which is a lot of fun. Actually, Chapman is our title sponsor, Chapman BMW and so that's the Beamers part. It's held at their location in Chandler. Their building is quite beautiful and fun for events. And then Keys is, we have dueling pianos. It's a fun night with lots of entertainment and it's a good time.

Amanda Nosbisch: (16:35)

And that's in March. And then we have a kickball tournament, which is in November. Mostly for organizations like small business groups or small businesses that want to have a kickball team and have some good old competition. This past year we had the Suns and FedEx and First Bank and Freeport McRowan, and just like a lot of fun, and so we're having that in November. And the last is just donate. If you have used clothing, gently used clothing, gently used shoes. Our most needed items are kids' clothes and tennis shoes, tennis shoes, tennis shoes, walking shoes. We need them so bad. Or financial donations as well. We use those to support our operations but also for some of those purchases we make, particularly for schools, clothes for kids, uniforms for kids or shoes for kids for school. Those are some of the lowest items that we get in that are usable. We will use donated funds to help purchase those at salvage pricing. We have partnerships with other non-profits that allow us to buy those items at one to \$5 an item. We are a charitable organization. We do qualify for tax credits, so that's great. And that's who we are and how to help.

Brenda Vargas: (17:42)

That's amazing. And the fact that you guys started with just giving socks, wow. It's just what a great story, what an absolutely great story. And you know what I do believe the Chandler Gilbert community is always looking to give and wanting to always do something to lend a hand to their neighbor. And it's just amazing to hear some of the work that you're doing and how it really gets to kids and families. So, I know someone listening to this podcast, you'll get a random call someday and or how can they find you on your website, if you don't mind sharing that information?

Amanda Nosbisch: (18:18)

Sure. Our website is www.onesmallstepaz.org. And we also have a Facebook page, which is One Small Step AZ and an Instagram page, One Small Step. We're pretty active on the socials and our website is pretty comprehensive. And you're right, this is an amazing community. Chandler is where we were founded and where we grew and many, many, many of our supporters are from Chandler and regularly support us financially and with clothing donations. We would never be able to do this without all of the

kind donations that come to us and all of the volunteers that support us. And that is quite frankly, this community. So, we're very grateful. Chandler is a great place to be.

Brenda Vargas: (19:02)

Yes, it sure is. Well, we thank you, Amanda. We know that there's some bighearted people listening, and we just wish you the best of luck and we love the partnership we have with you and we will continue to work together to bring what's needed for our students and families. Thank you for your time today. Thank you parents and community for another edition of CUSD Cares.