

local news

Bias charged

Three Portland men claim the Salvation Army discriminated against them because they are gay

by Inga Sorensen

An openly gay Portland man is threatening legal action against the Salvation Army, claiming the organization discriminated against him due to his sexual orientation.

Charles Moore, 48, a student at Portland State University, says he approached the Portland-based Salvation Army last February to inquire about interning at the Greenhouse Drop-In Center, a Salvation Army program providing services to at-risk and street youth.

Moore, a criminal justice and psychology major, says his professional goal is to work with street youth and young people at risk, hence his interest in Greenhouse.

Moore says he approached Maj. Neil Timpson, then a local Salvation Army administrator, with his proposal. (Timpson has since transferred to a Salvation Army outpost in Alaska.)

"He said, no, I couldn't do it. He said because I was gay I would be a bad influence on the kids," charges Moore, who had previously done some volunteer work for Salvation Army. "He said if I wasn't gay, he would recommend me for the internship. He even told me he thought I would do a fine job. I was so stunned, I just kind of let the issue drop."

Then in late June, Moore says he attended Portland's annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade with some men, gay and straight, who were enrolled as residents at the Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Center, an intensive, inpatient substance abuse recovery program which can last from six months to a year.

"We went to the parade and had a really good time. We felt proud of who we were. We even marched with the mayor," says Moore, who acknowledges he had befriended some of the gay residents in the recovery program.

"The Monday after the parade, we learned that a Salvation Army employee had been dispatched to collect names of residents he saw participating in Gay Pride," says Moore. "The names were turned over to [ARC men's program director] Jim Bradley. He confronted three of the men."

According to Moore, the men, all of whom he says are gay, were told by Salvation Army officials that attending the parade was a form of "acting out," and therefore a violation of recovery program rules.

Moore further maintains the men were in-

structed not to attend any substance abuse recovery groups for gay people "because gays go there only to find sex, where straights go to their meetings for recovery."

He says the men were told they could not have gay sponsors or "practice their lifestyle while in the program," should only attend functions geared toward heterosexuals, and should not associate with Moore.

Moore says when he learned of the alleged demands, he contacted the Salvation Army. He says doing so may have prompted Bradley to speak with the men again, reportedly asking them to "forget about the whole thing."

Jonathan Boettcher, 23, is one of the program residents who says he was subjected to anti-gay abuse from Salvation Army officials.

Boettcher, who backs each of Moore's allegations, says he struggled for many years with his sexual orientation.

"I grew up in a town of 10,000. It was very, very difficult," says Boettcher, who believes much of his anguish manifested itself through substance abuse.

"It took a long time to feel OK about who I am, and then I had to go through this. It doesn't seem right," he says.

"I followed all the rules. I attended chapel services, did daily devotions, worked in the warehouse boxing up donations. Went to my recovery sessions," he continues. "Another rule prohibits sexual activity. Mr. Bradley said we were acting out and went look-

ing for sex, none of which was true."

Boettcher says Bradley later denied making such statements. Boettcher also says he dropped out of the recovery program on July 24. He cites stress as a key factor in that decision.

Bradley refused to comment when we called

him. He referred us to Capt. Lloyd Roberts, who took over Timpson's post in early July. Roberts did not respond to our inquiry, but Timpson did.

Timpson denied rejecting Moore's internship request because Moore is gay.

"My suggestion was that it may not be a good fit for him, working with homeless kids," Timpson tells *Just Out*.

When asked to explain why he felt Moore might not be "a good fit," Timpson would only say, "I can't discuss that."

Debbie Coppenger, Greenhouse administrator, says she "doesn't believe one's sexual preference poses a danger" to at-risk youth.

"As for being a role model, I'm not comfortable commenting on that," says Coppenger, who estimates Greenhouse serves between 80 to 100 youths daily, some of whom she acknowledges are gay, lesbian and bisexual.

"The problem with Charles is that when he

was an intern with the program, he violated our ethics policy," says Timpson. "It says one doesn't socialize with members of the program if one is in a staff role, which Charles essentially was."

Moore concedes he befriended gay men in

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the program, but says the charge is a smoke screen for homophobia: "If it were just about me, how can he explain what happened to these other people?"

The Salvation Army's Statement on Homosexuality states, in part: "Scripture condemns homosexual practices by direct comment...and also by clearly implied disapproval. The Bible teaches such practices as self-evidently abnormal."

In also states that "Homosexual practices render a person ineligible for Salvation Army soldiership."

Moore and two other men claiming sexual orientation discrimination have approached Portland attorney Chris Wright about the case.

When we spoke with Wright he was still in the fact-finding phase, but anticipates he will file complaints on behalf of the men with the state Bureau of Labor and Industries, which investigates complaints involving possible violations of civil rights laws.

Wright declined to elaborate, but did say "each of the men's cases is basically a twist on the same theme. Each was discriminated against in some form because of his sexual orientation. One didn't get an internship, another failed to get a promotion, and another received inadequate treatment, all because of their sexual orientation."

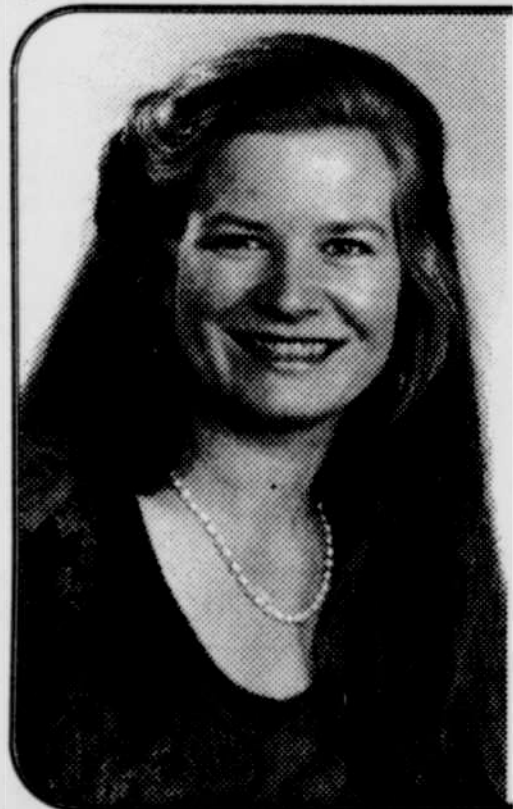
In a related matter, questions have been raised as to whether the Salvation Army's Portland chapter has the proper license to operate a residential drug rehabilitation center.

Bob Miller is with the state Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs. He says his office has sent two letters to the Salvation Army asking for further details about the organization's treatment program.

Miller says the Salvation Army may be in violation of the law if it is advertising itself as a residential drug and alcohol treatment program, something it is not currently licensed to do.

"There is cause for concern here if they are operating without the proper license," Miller tells *Just Out*. "It means they are going unregulated, and that means we can't monitor the quality of care given to clients. We are concerned if they are operating outside the law."

Miller says his office sent a letter to the Salvation Army several weeks ago but received no response. Another inquiry was recently sent out via registered mail. As of press time, Miller had not received any response.



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