

Pamela Alvey is up to her wrists in potting soil. She is crouched in a field of fertilizer, in front of a new two-story yellow home in Milwaukie, Ore., which emits the fresh odors of recent construction. In a few weeks, Alvey will welcome her first two residents, a man and a woman living with AIDS-related illnesses.

Alvey is the director of Swan House, a new specialized adult foster care home to serve low-income individuals with HIV/AIDS.

As she makes final arrangements for the Swan House opening, Alvey's most urgent desire is to cultivate a healthy relationship with her neighbors as she cultivates healthy plants in her garden—but the growing is a little slow going.

"I found a note that said 'fuck you' on the mailbox today," she says regretfully. "Right there, right on No. 7. It looks like a child's handwriting."

Rick Skidmore, the minister next door at the queer-friendly Milwaukie United Church of Christ, has stopped by to see the note.

"It certainly seems like a child's mentality," he says.

Alvey seems bothered, but not daunted by the message. In actuality, she believes the note might have been written as a response to her being an out lesbian, not because she's running an HIV/AIDS-related facility.

(As *Just Out* went to press, Alvey said she learned—from the mail carrier—that many people along her street had received a similar note that day.)

Since builders began constructing the Swan House late last year, Alvey has made herself available to address neighbors' concerns. She says a mother of a 2-year-old stopped by to get information about the soon-to-be residents of the foster home. She told the woman that Swan House will be home to individuals living with HIV or AIDS, but will shelter no secrets.

When the establishment is up and running, with all five bedrooms filled, Alvey says, the residents will hold barbecues regularly and extend invitations to the whole neighborhood.

According to Alvey, a steady flow of support and an inundation of donations have characterized the last few months. The living room is a comfortable hive of sofas. Someone recently donated a copy machine.

Swan House looks like an established living space, but the only items not donated are the beds.

"Everything on my wish list has come true," she says. "The other week I said, 'Wouldn't it be great if we got a TV in here?' and a few days later, it was donated."

Alvey, who has been involved in HIV work since she was 17, has wanted to run an operation



LIVING WITH HIV, LIVING TOGETHER

Swan House, an HIV/AIDS foster home, prepares to open in Milwaukie by Katy Davidson

home's name), an avid churchgoer at the next-door house of worship who had a relative die from an AIDS-related illness.

Alvey says Swan wanted to donate the plot to any organization that worked for AIDS relief.

Northwest Housing Alternatives and CCARE built the home; the funding was provided by Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS and others.

Because Swan House will have a small number of residents, Alvey believes the home should be run with cooperation and communal principles. For example, the residents will collectively decide what they want to eat for dinner, and then they will cook it together. The resident council will also decide what activities everyone will do.

"We will run on a social model," Alvey says.

"We want to encourage people to live together."

This idea will remain the driving force behind Swan House. Whereas Our House is more hospicelike, with a registered nurse on duty around the clock, Swan House will be more of a stopover point for individuals coming out of the hospital or out of drug treatment. There will even be an occupational therapist to help the residents get back into the workforce.

With respect to Our House, Alvey says, "There's a place for both of us here."

The final item on Alvey's wish list is a slew of volunteers. Just like the myriad donations she received during the last few weeks, Alvey believes volunteers will eventually show up.

"People want to help," she says.

■ To volunteer at SWAN HOUSE, call (503) 422-7410.

KATY DAVIDSON is a *Just Out* staff writer. She can be reached at katy@justout.com.

Pamela Alvey at Swan House



like Swan House for a while. Eight years ago, she bought a turn-of-the-century home in Portland, hoping to transform it into her own nursing facility. She postponed the idea when she realized how many structural changes the house would need to undergo.

Alvey is an HIV/AIDS-experienced registered nurse who worked previously at Our House of Portland, a facility serving people with AIDS.

She says the position at Swan House became available when Arthur Buck, the director of Clackamas County AIDS Relief Effort, visited a meeting at Our House. He asked the staff who would be available to manage a new foster care facility in Milwaukie.

Alvey didn't hesitate to accept the position.

Swan House is a modern establishment. The building is fully handicap-accessible, with a large kitchen, living room and activities room. Five bedrooms extend from the main body of the house, each one with its own bathroom and outside deck area.

"It's rare for homes like these to give each person their own bath and deck," Alvey points out.

What's more rare is that Swan House will open its doors completely debt-free. The property was donated by Eunice Swan (hence the

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