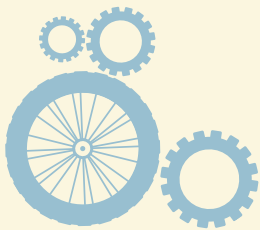


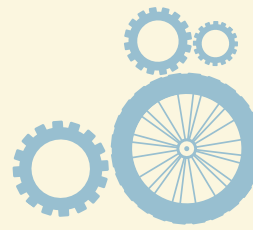


Please give a warm welcome to Anera Fočo. Anera comes to Buell Street Dismas as its House Director with nearly three decades of involvement with social justice and human rights movements. Her experience spans working directly with refugees and immigrants, incarcerated individuals, survivors of domestic, sexual, and human trafficking, and unsheltered individuals. Anera is a passionate cook and Zumba enthusiast and is very excited to share her passions with the Dismas team.

Francine Mbayu is originally from Central Africa, Congo, and has been a Vermonter for 24 years. Francine comes to the position of House Director at East Allen Dismas with 30-plus years of experience in roles such as social worker, case manager, clinician in crisis, domestic violence advocate, and community outreach worker. Francine is a graduate of Champlain College with a Bachelor's Degree in social work and a Master's Degree in healthcare management and administration.



Sometimes, Freedom is Riding a Bicycle

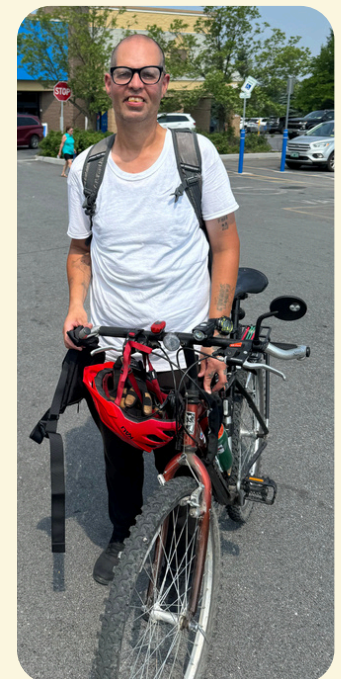


Mike, a resident at East Allen, has found his love for cycling thanks to a college student who offered him a bike that was otherwise destined for the landfill. This bike is now lovingly known as "The Beast." **This is the pursuit of happiness.**

The Beast was a project for Mike to get up and spinning, which required some creativity and diligence on Mike's part. Now that he is mobile, he bikes everywhere. And we mean everywhere. **This is freedom.** Thanks to The Beast, he bike commutes to his new job. Thanks to his employment, he's added stickers, a mirror, lights, a water bottle rack, a bell, and even a new bike rack.

One of the joys of being a part of Dismas is witnessing someone bloom in new ways. Mike's love for The Beast is evident, and he has steadily made it his own. **This is independence and free will.** The beginning seeds of transition like these prove motivating and rewarding.

We look forward to seeing where Mike goes with this, literally and figuratively. **Pedal on!**



JUSTIN ADAIR: MORE THAN A COUNTRY SONG

Justin grew up in a small town surrounded by nature, desperately trying to be a good person. He didn't understand what he was supposed to be in the world, in the face of messages to dream big and the idea that someone doesn't have value until proven. He was enslaved to these thoughts. As a child, he was angry; as a young adult, he was melancholic and resentful. He felt like he failed constantly.

In high school, despite having good friends, he craved acceptance. In 11th grade, he tried the one thing that all his peers were doing that he wasn't: drinking. One keg party and he was able to laugh at himself for the first time, enjoy others, and feel like a part of the whole—all the things that he had been searching for. Drinking became his solution, and he couldn't stop. From 18 to 23, he moved to five different states, becoming homeless or incarcerated or both in all of them, committing burglary and breaking the trust of others—including his parents—to support himself.



Sitting in a jail cell at 23 years old, something switched in Justin's thinking. In a moment of absolute clarity, he admitted to himself that he was an alcoholic and that he needed a different lifestyle that would be conducive to a genuine sense of self-value. The journey began with a twelve-step program during incarceration and continued at Buell Street Dismas upon his release.

When talking about how difficult it was for him to find his first job post-incarceration, he described the late '90s (before the "ban the box" movement) when a felony record meant society would forever brand someone as less-worthy for even just one decision. Fortunately for Justin, the Dismas volunteers saw his value again and again, and helped him piece his life together and make amends—legally, financially, emotionally, and mentally. Justin did everything he could to make things right and was left with greater ease about his place in the world.

Justin moved on from Buell Street in 2001 but always held Dismas as an important touchstone. So much so that he returned to Dismas in 2005 and, during his stint as a Resident Assistant, his brother died, reigniting unresolved feelings he escaped from with a move to Germany. Germany was rewarding but not easy, and life became extremely difficult again in 2019—Justin described it as a country song.

In 2020, he submitted his resume to Dismas after COVID interfered with his work abroad. He has been the Assistant House Director at East Allen Dismas ever since. Justin brings his lived experience to his role. He takes pride in his non-punitive disposition and an open-door policy. Partly inspired by his twelve-step program, he said, "You cannot give what others won't accept, you can only offer. And that's what I do, I offer." He doesn't judge mistakes, dishonesty, or an unwillingness to change because he feels so strongly that his role is to meet people where they are at any given moment. Justin is an eloquent, spiritual, and deeply thoughtful person, which this feature doesn't adequately convey.

In contrast to what he felt as a child, Justin is no longer defined by his goals. "I'm not trying to be something; I'm more interested in the discovery process." This one remark captures why Justin is so good at what he does. For everyone at Dismas, he has immense value.



DISMAS OF VERMONT AWARDED \$250,000 TO PILOT STEP-DOWN HOUSING

Dismas of Vermont is the recipient of \$250,000 from the TD Charitable Foundation through its 18th annual Housing for Everyone grant program, the only award made in Vermont this year. The grant will support Dismas of Vermont's step-down housing pilot for those ready for the next step after transitional housing but often screened out of affordable housing options due to their previous involvement in the criminal justice system. The pilot will master lease apartments from private landlords to provide more independent living opportunities for individuals who have demonstrated their commitments to their communities and themselves through the traditional Dismas House program. Recruitment for step-down housing staff is underway, and Dismas expects to move people into Burlington apartments this fall.

TD Charitable Foundation, the charitable giving arm of TD Bank, America's Most Convenient Bank®, awarded a total of \$7 million to 37 non-profits across the bank's Maine to Florida footprint and in Michigan through the 18th annual Housing for Everyone grant program. Grants ranging from \$150,000 to \$250,000 are supporting independent living for marginalized community members, especially those who experience homelessness and face conditions that make it difficult to maintain a stable home without additional help.

"We are so fortunate that the TD Charitable Foundation understands that investing in housing opportunities that serve all Vermonters is necessary for us to have healthy, productive, and safe communities," said Dismas of Vermont's executive director, Jim Curran. "We all look forward to working with TD Charitable Foundation, our communities, and local landlords to ensure housing is an option for those working through another chance to thrive. This is a first step to ensure that people who have served their time for their past convictions are not treated as if it is a life sentence."

Offenhartz Management has already begun to work with Dismas of Vermont to secure appropriate housing for the pilot in Burlington. "Offenhartz Management is excited to partner with Dismas of Vermont in offering transitional housing. We support Dismas's mission statement and are looking forward to our partnership." says Offenhartz Management. Dismas is especially interested in securing additional one- and two-bedroom apartments in the Hartford and/or Rutland areas.

"Dismas of Vermont makes it their primary mission to help relieve some of the most vulnerable members of our community by continuing to support their journey to independence," said Paige Carlson-Heim, Director of the TD Charitable Foundation. "Housing for Everyone grant recipients are working closely with TD to improve access by creating innovative solutions that are helping to create a more sustainable and inclusive future for everyone. It is a privilege to support our 2024 Housing for Everyone grant recipients and to continue to be a part of this imperative work."

"Dismas of Vermont makes it their primary mission to help relieve some of the most vulnerable members of our community by continuing to support their journey to independence."

The TD Charitable Foundation is the charitable giving arm of TD Bank, America's Most Convenient Bank®, one of the 10 largest banks in the U.S., providing over 10 million customers with a full range of retail, small business and commercial banking products and services at more than 1,100 convenient locations throughout the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Metro D.C., the Carolinas and Florida. Since its inception in 2002, the Foundation has distributed over \$323 million through donations to local nonprofits from Maine to Florida.



**Landlords! For more information
about this opportunity:**



MELISSA: SELF-DETERMINED & FOCUSED

More than a year after her release from jail, Melissa was still trying to find housing after utilizing a motel voucher and a Rutland shelter. When Melissa found the Women’s Dismas House in July 2023, she had already established a commitment to her sobriety, partly thanks to the support of another twelve-step participant who later became her sponsor. Melissa describes her as one of her favorite people in the world.

Melissa’s sobriety is just one example of her determined spirit.

The successes she has accumulated since her release are her own doing; she simply needed the space to blossom. For Melissa, the value of a stay at Dismas comes down to having stable, safe housing, which underscores the Housing First model that Dismas of Vermont provides.

Not all Dismas residents arrive with the laser focus that Melissa possesses, and she credits her time in the motel, which allowed her to reflect without distraction, learn new things (she taught herself to crochet), and explore new ideas about navigating her next steps. In these moments, she recognized that in “those last six years of drinking, I did nothing for myself.” Now, everything she does is for her. Melissa knows she is on a journey that will unfold with time – her forward-looking spirit is unwavering.

Once at Dismas, she approached Adult Learning to get a sense of any damage she may have caused to her brain from her years of alcohol abuse. She started with a math class to help her with her crochet hobby and day-to-day life and learned she was more than capable. This past spring, while also working, Melissa signed up for two classes at the Community College of Vermont – if she didn’t fail, she would be happy with herself for simply trying. Her hard work paid off with two A’s, and she now plans to keep working towards a liberal arts degree at 46 years old. She shares, “Humans are capable of much more than they give themselves credit for.”

Among all her goals, however, Melissa’s top priority is always her sobriety. “If I’m not sober, I am not going to work; I am not going to school; I may not have these people in my life anymore because I know from experience what happens when I’m drinking. I lived that for a lot of years; it never got better. It just got worse and worse.”

“Humans are capable of much more than they give themselves credit for.”



When all else fails these days, she has her faith, a symbol of all the good in the world that exists along with the bad. While Melissa has a high level of accountability to herself and God, Dismas has added another layer of accountability to the other women in the house, the staff, and the volunteers, many of whom she looks forward to seeing even on her busiest days. More than being held accountable, Melissa is cared for at the Women’s Dismas House – she doesn’t have to face it all alone. That said, she is excited to move into her own space and is working hard to make that happen. She will have plenty of company at work, school, twelve-step meetings, and the area churches. This is community.







PO Box 156
Hyde Park, Vermont 05655



Reconciling Former Prisoners With Society and Society With Prisoners Since 1986

SAVE THE DATES!

East Allen and Buell Street Dismas Houses Phonathon
November 18, 19, 20, 2024

Rutland and the Women's Dismas Houses Phonathon
November 19, 20, 21, 2024



Timothy Arbuckle arrived at Dismas from prison in October 2022 with a seven-year history of addiction. He said, "Dismas was a huge support for me, teaching me responsibility, leadership, and community belonging." Timothy left Dismas in July 2023, and he is "still clean and sober, have been at my job for almost two years, and I just got a promotion. I am going for my Class A CDL in a few months. I owe a lot of my success to Dismas and the staff. I have strived and reached goals I never thought possible."