



Save The Dates!!!

Rutland Phonathon
Nov. 14th, 15th, 16th

Rutland Dismas Annual
Celebration May 25th,
2024

Burlington Phonathon
Nov. 13th, 14th, 15th

Burlington Dismas
Annual Celebration
featuring Kat Wright
and the Indomitable
Soul Band
May 4th, 2024

Birthright - Jim Curran - Executive Director

“Every human is born with a birthright. That birthright is happiness. Our greatest challenge to achieving happiness is not the obstacles we encounter in our life. The true barrier to happiness lies inside of us—and it’s the one thing we can’t ever escape: our own mind.

From birth, we are educated on countless aspects of life, from personal hygiene to personal finance, but there is no widely accepted curriculum for understanding and managing our minds. Indeed, almost every human remains the victim of their own mind throughout their entire life, never learning to master it, or manage it, or even understand it”

- Stephen Kellert Birthright: People and Nature in the Modern World

In my personal reading, I often stumble across pieces of Stephen Kellert’s book Birthright: People and Nature in the Modern World. I copy the passages and save them to reflect upon as a reminder that everyone’s experience in life is different. Life is influenced by what happens in the everyday: on the way to work, at the grocery store, at home, or in childhood. I recently heard a resident talking about his experience with our volunteer cooks at dinner time. At a local council meeting, he explained how weird and uncomfortable it was at first, but he values their time now. He said, “In prison, you must hurry up and eat, especially during COVID when we were all isolated and eating in our cells. If you were not done, you needed to find a bowl to scrape it in if you wanted to finish.” He also said that growing up, “I wasn’t really part of a ‘please pass potatoes’ family.” To him, dinnertime is not normal.

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Changes - Tom Grillo - Hartford Dismas Director

During my first year working at Hartford Dismas, I have seen amazing things accomplished by the residents. Many of these successes are truly incredible. They are going to change while at Dismas. Most of the time, this is very gradual, but every once in a while, I glimpse the beginning of change. Change often starts with an overwhelming sense of gratitude that I see on a former inmate's face during the first few days at Hartford Dismas House. This often happens when they realize that they are accepted and valued. Here are a couple of experiences that I have witnessed.



A resident arrived very anxious, which is to be expected. When someone first arrives at Dismas, they don't know what to expect. They don't know what the staff will be like or how the other residents will treat them. The expression this resident had on his face at dinner the first few nights was of amazement. He was welcomed by the volunteers who brought dinner. He could smell a home-cooked meal. At dinner, we go around the table saying our daily gratitudes. When it's his turn, he is overcome with emotion. Barely able to speak, with a smile of awe and wonder, he shared his sincere gratitude. Every resident in the room knew exactly how he felt. Everyone welcomed him in.

A week before Christmas, another resident arriving at Dismas brought a special sense of gratitude. Unfortunately, he couldn't see his daughter over the holidays. This brought on feelings that he wasn't good enough or worthy to see her. Dismas always tries to provide the residents with a Christmas. At Hartford Dismas, we have a tradition of opening gifts at the house meeting the week before the holiday. As I look around the room and take in the excitement, this particular resident opens his presents with shaking hands. I turn to him and ask him if he's all right. He stops opening the present, turns, looks at me with tears in his eyes, and simply states, "I can't believe people bought these gifts for me." He started to realize that people cared for him, that he was worthy and good enough for a safe and happy life.

For someone who hasn't been in prison, these things can be taken for granted, but for these individuals, it was something that they had not experienced in several years. Being incarcerated takes away a sense of belonging, gratitude, and self-worth.

Tom says, "*Dismas House is much more than just a place of shelter. We help reconcile people with themselves and the community, and support them in finding and developing their better lives.*"





Wendy joined us in July as our Transition Coordinator at Hartford Dismas. Wendy is the type of person that can make anywhere feel like home. Living and traveling worldwide has given her the privilege of experiencing many unfamiliar places.

Wendy has driven across the country six times because once was just not enough! She also traveled to Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Mexico. Although Wendy has lived in Colorado, California, and South Carolina, she was born and raised a New Englander. Like most of us, she loves the waterfalls, hiking, and covered bridges that make New England so special of a place.

Before working for the Dismas House, she worked in the restaurant business, taught Title One, and owned and operated her own daycare, KIDS R WEE, in Keene, which supported over 100 families. Most recently, she worked with people on the autism spectrum.

Wendy chose Dismas because she has seen the challenges plaguing our residents due to past events and offenses. Wendy is a firm believer in taking ownership of her own mistakes and aims to help others come to that belief alongside her here. She understands that “one or more ‘mistakes’ in life don’t make the person.” People deserve a shot at “redemption and rehabilitation” and a chance to successfully reenter society. This position has given her the chance to support herself and others in a way that truly reflects those beliefs.

Birthright - continued from page 1

These snapshots of another reality are a real gift and make me question how my life would be different if I shared these similar experiences – if I had a different perception of normal. And then I remember my reading regarding the lack of a “how to” when it comes to managing the mind, and I struggle less to understand why addiction is so powerful for some but not for others. I begin to understand why a person would risk doing something that would put them back in prison when they just got out.

We have all heard the phrase, “Pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.” What if you never had boots or can’t afford them? What if you never had people behind you saying, “You can,” instead of telling you, “No, you can’t?” Sometimes certain actions make more sense when we zoom out and look at them with a wider lens.

The Dismas mission is a two-way street. To reconcile formally incarcerated individuals with society, and society with the formally incarcerated. To do this, we must create community that normalizes another way. That is done with your help and that of each person passing through the Dismas doors. It is done when we allow our perceptions and assumptions to change. Dismas encourages us all to challenge our biases and beliefs. Because people can change, they should not always be judged for the worst thing they have done. Instead, let us give them the chance to reconcile with the community and themselves so that they, too, can reclaim their birthright.

For those of us without much experience cooking for large groups, putting together a meal for 10-12 people can be a challenge. My worst fear is that I haven't made enough food. I worry more about that than how the meal turns out taste-wise. I've been cooking for the Hartford house for about a year, and this is one recipe I've made a few times that I'm pretty confident will feed 12 with some leftovers. In fact, the last time I made it, it overflowed my crockpot, so I guess that's the bar now!

This recipe for beef bourguignon is made for the slow cooker, which fits my schedule perfectly: I make it first thing in the morning and leave it cooking all day. It's perfect for the tougher (aka cheaper!) cuts of meat; the slow cooking breaks down the connective tissue that can make beef tough. I serve this with rice, which makes plenty for 12 people with some leftovers.

This recipe is courtesy of Alyssa Rivers at therecipecritic.com. Her site lets you easily double or triple. I've put the measurement for a double recipe, which is too much for my slow cooker, but works fine in an 8 or 9-quart pot.

Submit your favorite recipe in the return envelope and we may use it in our next newsletter!



- 10 slices bacon finely chopped
- 6 pounds boneless beef chuck cut to 1-inch cubes
- 2 cups red cooking wine
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 0.5 cup soy sauce
- 0.5 cup flour
- 6 garlic cloves finely chopped
- 4 tablespoons thyme finely chopped
- 10 medium carrots sliced
- 2 pounds baby potatoes (I used tri-color)
- 16 ounces fresh mushrooms sliced
- fresh chopped parsley for garnish

1. In a large skillet, cook bacon over medium-high heat until crisp. Put bacon in slow cooker. Salt and pepper the beef, add to the skillet, and sear on each side for 2-3 minutes. Transfer beef to the slow cooker.
2. Add the red wine to the skillet, scraping down the brown bits on the side. Allow it to simmer and reduce, then slowly add the chicken broth, tomato sauce, and soy sauce. Slowly whisk in the flour. Add the sauce to the slow cooker.
3. Add garlic, thyme, carrots, potatoes, and mushrooms to the slow cooker. Stir well, and then cook on low until the beef is tender (8-10 hours on low). Garnish with fresh parsley and serve with mashed potatoes, if you like.



Christina Goodwin of Worcester, Vermont, has been appointed the Development Director for Dismas of Vermont as of October 1, 2023. This role will support each house in its fundraising activities and the organization as a whole. In this first year, her work will largely be focused on forming new relationships with private foundations.

With extensive experience in all facets of third-sector leadership and a long history of volunteerism. Christina will approach her work in such a way that accounts for Dismas’ vision for the future, its essential history, and its present operational needs. She brings over twenty years of experience in Vermont’s nonprofit sector and has successfully raised funds across numerous sub-sectors: housing, food security, health and wellness, education, and the environment. Christina most recently served as the Vice President for Advancement at Vermont’s Sterling College, her alma mater. Before Sterling, she spent eight years as the executive director of a home sharing program in central Vermont that is now a part of HomeShare Vermont in South Burlington.

In her time with the hiring committee – a body with representation from staff and volunteer board and council members – Christina emphasized her personal connection to the vital role that supportive communities play in our lives, the layers of challenge facing the formerly incarcerated, and her deep desire to re-engage in community-based work. “It was clear Christina was the right person for Dismas. Her approach to having meaningful conversations with all of us stood out. I look forward to Christina meeting the entire Dismas family,” says Jim Curran, Executive Director.

“I support Dismas because I realize we all need to help one another to live a successful, happy life.”



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It hasn’t been a perfect path for me because I did make some bad choices, and I recently relapsed. Living at Dismas, I have the support and accountability to help me move forward and learn from my mistakes. If I wasn’t at Dismas, I would have continued to use, which is a hopeless path that I don’t want to go back down again.

Thanks to Dismas and my supports here, I was able to stop using after my relapse, and now I’m back on the right track and working towards my goals! I love that I can keep moving forward while learning to love myself and others.



Please consider supporting our statewide campaign at:

<https://www.dismasofvt.org/dov-annual-appeal.html>

“I’ve started to learn that I do matter and that I am worthy of a good, happy, and sober life!” -Trisaia

Dismas - *Written by Trisaia Junior*

The amount of help and all-around happiness that Dismas, Heather, and Kaylee have brought to me since getting out of jail in March of 2023 is absolutely amazing.

I feel like I would not be remotely close to where I am now in life without the support of Dismas. Before going to jail, I was homeless, doing nothing but drugs and stealing to support my habit. I wasn’t thinking about anyone that matters to me, nor was I thinking about my own worth, my life, or my future.

I’ve started to learn that I do matter and that I am worthy of a good, happy, and sober life!

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