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Fall Newsletter 2022

Reconciling Former Prisoners With Society and Society With Prisoners Since 1986



Dave's Story- David Holmes - Stone Mason

My story starts like a lot of people's... violent upbringing and other traumas, but it's not about where you start. It's about where you finish.

It's very upsetting for me to see all of the opportunities that are afforded to people. It's upsetting to see all of the young people that are provided these opportunities but are unwilling to do the work.

So many people give time and money to create opportunity. Time to make hay. A door is opening for people just like me that need a hand up and not a hand out.

You don't feel as guilty getting the hand up as long as you're willing to do the work. The work makes the man.

I arrived at Dismas after 12 years incarcerated and I took full advantage of the opportunity presented by Dismas House. Arriving at Dismas House was like being dropped into a BIG MARSHMALLOW. With everything that Dismas House provides, there's no reason not to succeed.

I could write a book on the excuses I've heard from young men that would make you sick. There is no way to get around doing the work. Ultimately, you're responsible for your own wellbeing as a man or woman.

I left Dismas House and went to work washing dishes at Big Fatty's BBQ, even though I'm a stone mason by trade. I'm not above washing dishes, it was humbling to work my way out of the toilet, and I like it out here. Today, a year after I've been released, I'm back working as a stone mason, landscaping, and my true passion, stone carving.

My art means everything to me. It helped me get through my time in jail, the true light at the end of the tunnel. It helped me transition at Dismas, and it helps me today. - Continued on page 5





Thoughts from the Dismas of Vermont Board - Drew Rockwell - President



I turn to my wife Bartlett as we drive home from cooking and sharing a meal with the residents of Hartford Dismas House. "I'm glad we did that," I say. I always say that every time we drive home, after cooking and sharing a meal, visiting in the kitchen for a few minutes. Members of the community cook five nights a week. Every week.

The truth is, I learn a lot from the residents. I have made some friends, maybe a little bit different than my normal friend group. Maybe not as different as you think.

Tonight, we talked with a resident about an afternoon spent with a child for the first time in a year. We talk about jobs, about something funny our kids did when they were growing up, about fishing, about whether a potential new apartment has a closet. Poland. About beets that a resident grew in the garden. Over the dinner table, sharing a meal together.

In one way or another, they've all made some bad choices along the way. We all have, not as consequential, for sure, but still. We all share a common humanity, after all.

Residents come and go over the months and years. I am in awe of the enormous challenges they face as they strive to re-enter the community, to live in congregate housing together with 9 or 10 other individuals, to stay sober, to hold a job, to reconcile with their families and friends, to deal with the stigma of having been in prison. The courage it takes. It doesn't always work; it is messy; there are second, third, and fourth chances. It is part of it.

At a Board meeting last month, we talked about providing more support to the residents; we examined whether we can be in the business of also providing living units, a place people can transition to as they gather themselves. I am looking forward to cooking and sharing a meal again next week.



Having fun with the Rutland Dismas House -Geraldine Burke - AHD - Rutland



The Dismas Community knows how to have fun, which was evident at the 2nd Annual Honorable Francis B. McCaffrey Putt Putt Fundraiser held on Saturday, September 10th. A beautiful late summer day brought golfers and novices to the Mendon Mini-Golf & Snack Bar for eighteen holes of mini-golf for exercise and the sweet reward of an ice cream cone. Teams of four Dismas friends, residents, and staff used their best putting skills on the course in pursuit of the best golf score. The player with the lowest score on each team won a Rutland Dismas House water bottle provided by Sally Koch, so there was a friendly rivalry within the teams.

This year there were more participants than last year with a team from Heritage Family Credit Union and a team that included Rita McCaffrey and Jeff Backus from Hartford Dismas House. Rita says her days being a caddie for her father did not give her an edge. Competition at this event was healthy for the Hole-in-One Challenge although Hole Ten posed real challenges for most players.



Judge McCaffrey appreciated sports as a way to engage with others and was a huge supporter of Dismas, so the Putt Putt event is an appropriate tribute to him. We could not have hosted this event without the assistance of amazing volunteers and residents who helped with set-up, registration, awarding the water bottles, and clean up. Our thanks to the Hole Sponsors and businesses that provided the gift certificates for prizes. A special thank you goes to all of you who came to play.





Giving Back- Justin Adair - Assistant House Director - East Allen



On September 11th, 2022 both Burlington Dismas House locations from Buell St. and East Allen spent a day together in Morrisville, VT helping out the United Way of Lamoille County with their annual firewood project.

This is an event we do every year and has become quite the tradition! As a matter of fact, this is how we first met our current Executive Director, Jim Curran, as he was part of the United Way team before coming on board with Dismas!

The day started off with beautiful weather as we all piled into vehicles and drove out to Morrisville. With fresh coffees and donuts in hand, we got to work with those already there around ten o'clock. There were about ten of us who joined in and the leaders from United Way were delighted to have us.

After a brief introduction, we got to splitting wood and throwing them into large piles for the trucks. By the end, we had cleared out what was there and chucked the piles of wood into the beds of pickups and dump trucks.

Smiling and waving to our hosts, we left around two o'clock feeling sweaty, tired, and accomplished. It was a great day for Dismas, the United Way, and the community!



Honest Efforts Do Honest Work- Jeff Backus - Continued from page 6

...other than a superhuman desire to help. The residents continually work to recover from being marginalized in not only how the community views them but in how they view themselves.

We are incredibly grateful for how the Dismas community continues to support us financially. With locations in Burlington, Rutland, and Hartford – the passions for supporting your own home team are even greater.

Please take the time to consider taking your own positive energy a step further... sign up for an extra volunteer cook date, join a local house committee, inquire about council or board membership... and feel the fulfillment of our mission and the true appreciation of those you support.



Watch for the Hartford Dismas House's annual letter in November and help us turn \$10,000 of community support into \$30,000! Made possible by the Couch Family Foundation and an anonymous Upper Valley Donor!



Rutland Dismas Welcomes -Peter Baird - Resident Transition Coordinator



Hi, my name is Peter and I'm the newest staff member at Rutland Dismas House. I am here at Dismas House for a couple of reasons. The first reason being the love I have for working with this population. I have worked in the substance abuse, mental health and criminal justice involved populations in the past for 12 years and thoroughly enjoy it.

Throughout my life, I've worked in many different fields and this by far has been the most rewarding because I am able to invest myself in the people we serve. I really do not consider this a job, rather a coach for adults in their everyday lives.

As far as things that I like to do, the list is long! Outside of being a father of two and married for 24 years, I enjoy attending the Devil's Bowl Speedway weekly during the summer, Castleton University hockey during the winter and as many concerts as I can!

I also love to coach area youth. I've lived another one of my passions coaching middle school softball and basketball for 17 years, but I've hung up the whistle this year to make time for my first grandchild who will be arriving in February! I am very excited for the opportunity to work at Dismas House and with all the residents that will come through the front door!



Rutland Dismas Reentry Initiative -Eric Maguire - House Director - Rutland

With the Covid pandemic finally moving to endemic status, Rutland Dismas House (RDH) staff are now able to visit Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility (MVRFC) to deliver the "RDH Reentry Initiative". This initiative was originally established back in June of 2020 with funding generously provided by the United Way of Rutland County to assist individuals reintegrating into society.



Utilizing community connections through RDH's network of volunteers and participants will build a thorough reentry foundation that will improve chances of success through utilizing the Circle of Support model. Effective August 1st, 2022, phase two of the "RDH Reentry Initiative" is conducting a weekly reentry group at the local correctional facility to expand on the breadth of our efforts.

Every Monday from 1pm to 3pm, I am at MVRFC facilitating a reentry group of men with upcoming release dates. We assist incarcerated individuals in developing release plans and providing attendees with a resource booklet, developed by Woman's House Director, Heather and myself. Included in this booklet is information on all available agencies and resources as well as contact information so that upon release the community connections are readily available.

Over the last couple of months, we met with approximately sixteen individuals. Many of those individuals expressed finding the reentry group helpful as they continue to attend each week. On several occasions, representatives from our partners Rutland County Community Justice Center, Rutland Turning Point, and Evergreen Services shared specifically on how they may be able to assist individuals once released.

This initiative is developing into a much needed, collaborative effort of numerous community resources and individuals focused on more supportive and successful reentry efforts. I personally believe that the men in the facility were as happy to see me as much as I was to get back into the facility and see them too!



Burlington Dismas Welcomes-Hailey Leisten - AHD - Buell Street Dismas



Hi, my name is Hailey and I'm the newest staff member at the Buell Street Dismas House. After traveling extensively and experiencing many cultures, ranging from Denmark to Utah my family and I have landed here in beautiful Vermont.

I found my way to Burlington Dismas House after working for nearly a decade in the mental health and addiction recovery field. Dismas is a much needed organization and an incredible asset to this community.

In my free time I enjoy exploring this new area with my two dogs "Indy and Ohana", attending UVM hockey games, and sampling as much maple-infused foods as I can find! I look forward to getting started and continuing to build off the strong foundation Richard/Kim/Rita have created in this community!



The future...- Jim Curran - Executive Director



The future. That is a big word. I think back to my childhood, and it seemed so far away. Now that I am older, I recognize that time is relevant. The older you get, the faster it moves. For many of our residents, two years seems like a long time away. What's significant about two years? That's typically the amount of time an individual has remaining on their supervision when they come to us. Two years to reconcile with the community and most importantly, with themselves.

Two years to find permanent housing. No big deal, right? Wrong. Many of the residents excel and walk the "right" path once they come to the Dismas family, only to experience automatic denials due to their past histories or bad credit from affordable housing. Appeal processes are great and in place, but if you have been told no your whole life, how likely are you to appeal that answer? Many have said to me, "Why would I go through that [process] again?" Many Dismas residents have a complex history of trauma that has led up to the worst day in their life, and this can affect how they react to the processes that are put in place by society.

As a community, we need to decide if this makes sense. If we continue to identify the formally incarcerated as criminals for the rest of their lives, they will always be criminals. We will continue to constrain their path forward as criminals regardless of any amount of reconciliation that might occur. This is why Dismas has set our own path to identify ways to break down these real or perceived barriers. This could mean Dismas starts building its own housing stock through master lease programs or acquisitions of buildings to provide true low-barrier options. These ideas are grand and scary to some, but if nothing is done, what will be their path forward to independent living? How much safer will our communities be? We need your help! Please reach out and join us if you are able to help. Donations are great. If this isn't an option, we would love your time to help us on the councils or board to build these housing options and further the reconciliation process. Thank you again for all the support and hard work. *You* are why we are still here and continue to be a strong organization.



Dave's Story- David Holmes - Stone Mason -contiued from page 1

I love the tangible finished product of my sculptures, and it gives time accountability. Ask me what I've done this week and I'll happily point it out to you; talk is cheap, do the work and it'll speak for itself. Now I'm writing my own legacy.

I can't thank enough all the people that have helped me. I've had the best support system out of anybody I've ever met, I am VERY fortunate. Somebody in my position would have to be totally out of their mind to mess that up.

Because I did the work, I'm seeing the fruits of the efforts now. I've been clean and sober long enough; I'm living independently and very proud of where I am and what I've achieved since getting out. The future looks very bright and I'm very, very grateful and thankful and really have a lot of respect for those who have helped me.

I hope I can pay it forward and share this lesson with younger generations (without preaching).



**Hear more resident and volunteer stories
by listening at:**

www.dismasofvt.org/news-events/going-the-dismas-podcast-series.html

www.dismasofvt.org



 **Honest Efforts Do Honest Work- Jeff Backus - Development Director**

Donations are great. We at Dismas of Vermont rely on the generosity of our community to sustain the organization and help us meet our mission. What is even better are the deposits we make into the bank of goodwill.

Honest efforts to do honest work is the formula to success and what distinguishes Dismas of Vermont as a premier nonprofit organization. We aspire to provide the structure and resources necessary for the residents of Dismas to optimize the opportunity for a second chance and a fresh start.

Making an event out of “Friendraisers” (as opposed to fundraisers) is what keeps our community as grassroots like it has always been. We take pride in our community dinners, where we are afforded the opportunity to share stories around the table. We take pride in volunteering with other organizations that share our passion for social improvement and giving back to the community.

We at Dismas of Vermont want our community to feel confident in the cause they are supporting. Our staff members are down-to-earth people with no superhuman skills... - Continued on page 3