

## Rethinking a Holiday

For the most part, 2019 will go down as the worst year of my life - well, most of it anyway. December rolled in with snow and subzero temperatures. I had only been a resident at Dismas House for a couple weeks but things were starting to look up. Still, Christmas was coming and I had become somewhat of a “scrooge” over the years.



Jeffrey Lockyer

One morning, I spotted fellow resident, Dale, in the kitchen busy tending to a flower pot. He was planting some kind of bulb. “What are you working on Dale, you growing pot?” He chuckled, “It’s an Amaryllis.”

“Huh, never heard of it. Is it a Christmas thing? “Something like that, long stalk, big red flowers. They grow pretty fast... It’ll bloom before Christmas.” He took the plant and headed to his room. A week later, Dale was back in the kitchen watering his plant. The bulb had grown a tall green stalk with three red buds. He left it in the kitchen and like magic, two days later the Amaryllis was in full bloom! Awestruck I said, “Damn, I’ve never seen anything grow that fast.” “I told you they grow fast, especially around Christmas”, says Dale. “Fast, that’s incredible... you got one hell of a green thumb!”

With a grin, Dale walked out of the room and came back with a second pot; in it a single bulb with a hint of green stalk emerging. “Oh, man, another Amaryllis. Leave it so I can watch it grow. It’ll bloom in a few days right?” Dale says “Weeeell, maybe not...” “What do you mean ‘maybe not’?”

The truth came out. Dale had had two

Amaryllis in his room all along. One he had just planted—the first one I saw; the other, a healthy, older plant that he’d been growing for some time. When he

suspected he might have “a live one on the line” he switched the mature budding plant for the immature one. He played me like a fiddle; I fell for it hook, line, and sinker. We all had a good laugh. Regardless that it was “sleight of hand,” Dale’s Amaryllis had somehow

instilled in me a sense of the Christmas spirit I hadn’t seen in myself for many years.

The thing that affected me most about this Christmas season was the renewed sense of family and friendship. It’s a good feeling when you realize you are part of a community that really cares about you. Without the Dismas House Council, the staff, and the support they bring, many of us, who might otherwise become victims of the spiraling reality of recidivism, are given a second chance. I realize there’s a lot of good in the world... and it all starts at home. My name is Jeff Lockyer, and I live at Dismas! ❖



I saw the suffering and I let myself feel it... I saw the injustice and was compelled to do something about it. I changed from being a nun who only prayed for the suffering world to a woman with my sleeves rolled up, living my prayer.

— Helen Prejean —

## HOUSE HAPPENINGS

### 2020 Annual Gala Celebration!

Sunday, April 19th - 5-8pm

Hanover Inn, Hanover, NH  
Dinner | Auction | Speakers

**Guest Speaker:** Sister Helen Prejean

**Master of Ceremonies:**

Attorney General TJ Donovan

**Honorary Chair:** Barbara Couch

Sign-up online at <http://dismasofvt.org/hartford-dismas/hartford-annual-event/>

OR Contact Jeff Backus

802-698-8661

Jeff@dismasofvt.org

## OUR WISH LIST

- |                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Razors            | Dryer Sheets |
| Shaving Cream     | Toothpaste   |
| Body Wash         | Toothbrushes |
| Shampoo           | Mouthwash    |
| Nail Clippers     | Floss        |
| Laundry Detergent | Twin Bedding |

## From the Desk of the Director - Jeff Backus

This job can be hard. The days where I find myself unable to help an individual make a successful transition to independent living can be discouraging. But disappointments are not final. Recently, two former residents stopped by to visit and catch up. One of the visitors wouldn't be considered a "successful transition" because addiction caught up with him and he returned to incarceration for a while. But what he had to say inspired me. He thanked me for giving him the foundational skill-set to establish himself beyond incarceration. When he had a second chance to pull his life together – it finally clicked for him. He is now engaged to be married, with a baby on the way, and his own place to call home.

The second visitor had made it to independent living beyond Dismas, but had since fallen into hardship. With few resources and supports available to him, he came back here, to where he knew he could find those very things. I was very limited in what I could offer him since he was no longer under

the supervision of the Department of Corrections. What I could offer him is the community connections we have established in the Upper Valley. I suggested he talk to Dan Fraser of Dan and Whit's to see if he could get his job back. I referred him to The Haven for a temporary place to sleep. I told him to talk to the Community Justice Center for other housing resources, and more. It taught me that, similar to it taking a village to raise a child, it takes a community to establish long term success for the population we serve.

In the midst of winter we can struggle to stay together as a house. Of course it's not just us, everybody struggles in the winter with the shortened days, holidays, and being stuck inside due to cold winter weather. I turned to a Dismas principle that has helped us over the past 34 years – the food! With help from generous donors, I went a little over the top with holiday celebrations. The community dinner table is the cornerstone at Dismas. Sitting down to a meal, sharing our gratitude and having that designated



Volunteer Laura Gillespie and House Director Jeff Backus

time to come together, that got us through the winter season.

Hartford Dismas House is embraced by the most incredible community of volunteers. This is where our strength is, our driving force, and why we are able to do what we do. I like to think my leadership helps, too, but if we were to put this into terms of the superheroes "The Avengers", I would see myself as Samuel L. Jackson's character in the eye patch; the director of what needs to be done. All the real superheroes are the cooks, committees, and council members. They invest their compassion and hard work toward the highest possible mission standard. And we are doing it. ❖

## Old Fashioned Christmas in Hartford Village - by Drew Rockwell, Chair of the Outreach Committee

A very busy Santa Claus traveled over hill and Dale (see what I did there?) to spend the afternoon of December 14th welcoming about forty neighbors inside the very best decorated house in the entire Upper Valley, as part of the Old Fashioned Village Christmas celebration in Hartford Village. Together with the Hartford Library, the Historical Society, and the United Church of Christ, residents, staff and volunteers helped Hartford Dismas House open its doors to our neighbors to help them celebrate Christmas.

For two and a half hours, Outreach Committee members Celia Chen and Nancy Snyder helped visitors make remarkable reindeer ornaments in the living room, while Development Committee Chair Bartlett Leber, fresh off her month trip to San Francisco to welcome her new granddaughter, led a team of intrepid holiday wreath makers in the dining room.



Resident Jonathan Alvarez learning to make wreaths.

In the kitchen were the most amazing Christmas cookies, hot chocolate, and cider, thanks to pro baker and Outreach Committee member Nancy Serrell.

And, thanks to Jeff, Robert and some enthusiastic volunteers from Dartmouth College, powered by some generous decorative donations, Hartford Dismas House looked pretty remarkable (move over Clark Griswold!) and amazingly welcoming on a rainy and dreary December day.

We saw some old friends and made some new ones, and everyone agreed the craft tables really helped the community get engaged and connected, not only to their project but also to the Dismas mission!

The pictures tell the real story. Thanks to all who pitched in to make it a great community event. ❖



Volunteer Cook Celia Chen, resident Santa Dale, resident Jonathan.



## ~ Dismas Engages Students ~

### Nichole Kingsbury - Community College of Vermont

I am a student at Community College of Vermont, and fortunate to have the opportunity to do my internship at the Dismas House in Hartford. Everyone here is friendly, outgoing, and welcoming. The home is warm and inviting, just like the residents that live here. I was instantly comfortable with my surroundings and started to build relationships with the residents. I have enjoyed the opportunity to get to know each of the residents personally.

Throughout my internship, I got to be a part of house meetings, committee meetings and volunteer dinners. I was able to sit in on resident appeals at the House and inmate interviews in the correctional facility. I learned how to process the welcome of a new resident, how to do weekly check-ins and how to do transitional planning for residents. I updated the brochure for the house and made flyers to help spread awareness for our Annual Celebration coming up in April. I even recruited Christmas donations to help decorate for the holidays. Currently, I am helping a resident prepare his panel presentation for the legislature in January and

working with Mariah to make a video about the house. The video includes interviews from residents, volunteers, board members and directors.

My overall experience at the Hartford Dismas House

has been an excellent one. My educational requirements were not only met but exceeded. I have gained more knowledge with computers, processing paperwork as well as how to communicate appropriately in different circumstances. I have gained my professional skills during my internship here. I couldn't be happier with my experience. ❖



College Interns Mariah Swasey (left) and Nicole Kingsbury.

### Mariah Swasey - Community College of Vermont

I am a student at the Community College of Vermont (CCV), about to graduate with two associate's degrees: one in human services and one in criminal justice. My biggest goal is to one day become a criminal psychologist, largely because of my strong belief in forgiveness and loving everybody. Everybody means everybody, not just the people that make it easy. Dismas House is the perfect place for me to intern.

Seeing the stigma that comes with having been to jail makes me realize how important it is for returning prisoners to have help and support, and to realize that they are still good people, and they can still live good lives, even after they have made a mistake. I have seen residents cry as well as laugh; when one resident has some

sort of set-back, the rest of the residents work to pick him back up. Everybody is incredibly supportive of each other and thoughtful when making decisions as a group. In many ways it really is like they are a family.

On top of the events and meetings I have attended, I have designed photo canvases for the house, made fliers, collected donations of Christmas decorations and created a banner. I am working with the other intern, Nichole Kingsbury, to create an informational video for Dismas House. Most important, I have learned a lot about the process of probation, parole, and furlough. I know about the challenges that come with getting out of jail and the resources available to help, and I know that Dismas House is truly an amazing place that is doing great things for people. ❖

### Alecia Thompson - Hartford, VT, High School

This past October, we were given the opportunity to hear from residents of the Dismas House in our community, as well as the Director, Jeff Backus. The residents shared with us about many topics, such as their reputations in the past, how they ended up in prison, what it was like, and where they are today. As current high schoolers the various things shared with us were things we knew little to nothing about.

A common theme of the discussion was that many people who spend time in jail are forever labeled as "criminals". However, I saw them simply as people who were overcome by addiction or other challenges. What this opportunity left me with was two things: First, that I want to avoid falling into the same situations as people who end up in jail, but also that there is something very wrong with our justice system. I learned through talking with our guest speakers that what they need isn't so much punishment, as much of their actions were a cry for help. These people were challenged so much by addiction or other challenges that not only did it put them behind bars but it also prevented them from getting the



Dismas panel at Hartford High School. Alecia Thompson at far left.

real help they needed. None of these people chose to end up in jail. Addiction chose them, they did not choose addiction. As Mr. Backus said when referring to addiction, "it does not discriminate." In the end I feel this experience will have a lasting impact on myself and others. Not only do I see those in prison in a different light but I also see those fighting addiction as people just trying to fight for their lives. ❖

Supporting Dismas Houses  
in Burlington, Hartford,  
Rutland and Winooski

# Dismas Across Vermont

*Reconciling Former Prisoners with Society, and Society with Former Prisoners for 34 Years!*

## What Happens Next - From the Executive Director



*Vermont Representative Becca White (D-Windsor) and Jan Tarjan, Executive Director, at the General Assembly.*

*“To exist is to change,  
to change is to mature, to mature is  
to go on creating oneself endlessly.”*

So said French philosopher Henri Bergson during the first part of the last century. His words are a good description of, and prescription for, Dismas of Vermont in 2020. We have, for a couple of years, been engaged in a process of maturing (updated bylaws, a new strategic plan, an extended state-wide Board of Directors). Also during this time, increased public and governmental focus upon the crises of over-incarceration in our prisons, and substance use disorders in our communities, has led to a call for change. A new bill in the legislature, based on recommendations from the Council on State Government study

“Justice Reinvestment II”, calls for big reforms in the justice system and also in transitional housing. With shifts in the Vermont correctional system to think about, Dismas will also be examining our programs, and how we can evolve and flex to best serve our mission and the public need.

Another change: I will commence a long-planned retirement at the end of June, and henceforth see much more of my grandchildren. Being Executive Director of Dismas of Vermont and serving this vital mission for nine years has been a culminating joy in my working life, and a great honor. The courage of our residents, the dedication of our staff, the compassion of our volunteers, the generosity of our donors and the profound kindness that defines Dismas

have fostered for me a deeply meaningful experience. I am confident that the next Dismas leader will guide Dismas well, supported by our foundation in the community. Any changes ahead are all part of growing and “creating (Dismas) endlessly”. Remember that, in ourselves, in YOU, we have everything we need to reach transformational heights. Margaret Mead said it best: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” ❖

## Dismas Goes to the Legislature

In January we took Dismas to the Legislature. Our panel, supported by Representative Rebecca White (Hartford), was comprised, with me, of House Directors from Burlington, Rutland and Hartford Dismas houses and several Dismas residents.

House Directors who were on the panel are front-line in the work of reconciling prisoners with society and society with prisoners. They told of their work and provided data about our impact. The most affecting part of our panel was, of course, the experiences and perspectives offered by three Dismas residents. One, Jeffrey Lockyer, was living at Dismas. The others, Seth Osgood and Thomas Shea, have made successful transition to community life and employment. Their stories of



*Dismas Panel Presenters at Legislature.*

struggle were moving; the descriptions of their progress inspiring. It was a rare opportunity for those who make our laws and policies to hear directly from people who have been incarcerated, and are taking good advantages now of their second chances.

It was also empowering and affirming for our residents, themselves, to have a voice and to speak their “truth to power”. ❖

*“Being part of the panel from Dismas House that spoke to various State Legislators was a memorable experience. The State Building, the ornate interior, the hustle and bustle of legislatures and constituents—it was politics in action. At home at Dismas we reintegrate with the local community; there, I had an opportunity to ‘reintegrate’ at a State level. It’s what Dismas is all about.”*

*- Jeffrey Lockyer, Resident*

## The Senator and the Shopping Cart

by Senator Cheryl Hooker

Cheryl Hooker is a lifelong Rutland resident, retired teacher, former Alderman, mother, grandmother, a long-time Representative and now Senator at the Vermont Legislature. With her husband George, she shops for the groceries at Rutland Dismas House every week. That's a lot of groceries and probably more than one cart. In the Legislature, Senator Hooker serves on the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs, Senate Committee on Institutions, Senate Sexual Harassment Panel and the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee.

*“As a State Senator dealing with Corrections and Justice, I recognize the need for the type of transitional housing Dismas House provides.”*

- Senator Cheryl Hooker

Even in retirement, it seems that my husband George and I don't have a lot of time to volunteer on a regular basis. But

a few years ago when, after being the weekly grocery shopper for Dismas House in Rutland for over 10 years, Marty Barclay was ready to hand over the list to someone else, we were asked to step in. Since we live only blocks away from Price Chopper and shop there regularly, it was easy to say yes.

We've supported Rutland Dismas House since Rita McCaffrey worked so hard to establish it in 1990. We've helped with phone-a-thons, auctions and dinners throughout the years, but those were only periodic opportunities to volunteer. Shopping each week gives us a closer connection to the House and its mission. We believe that Dismas is feeding the spirit and souls of the residents who, with staff and volunteers committed to helping them, are transitioning back to being fully contributing members of the community.



Senator Hooker and husband George unload weekly groceries at Dismas.

As a State Senator dealing with corrections and Justice, I recognize the need for the type of transitional housing that Dismas House provides.

Dismas cares for the whole person: body, mind and spirit. Grocery shopping each week makes us feel that we have a small part in helping to feed those who come through the door. ❖

## Shout Out to Legislators and Public Servants

Dismas is proud to count among its history of volunteers and supporters many Vermont legislators and others in public service. These special people have volunteered at Dismas as Volunteer Cooks, Council members and Board members:

### CURRENT LEGISLATORS:

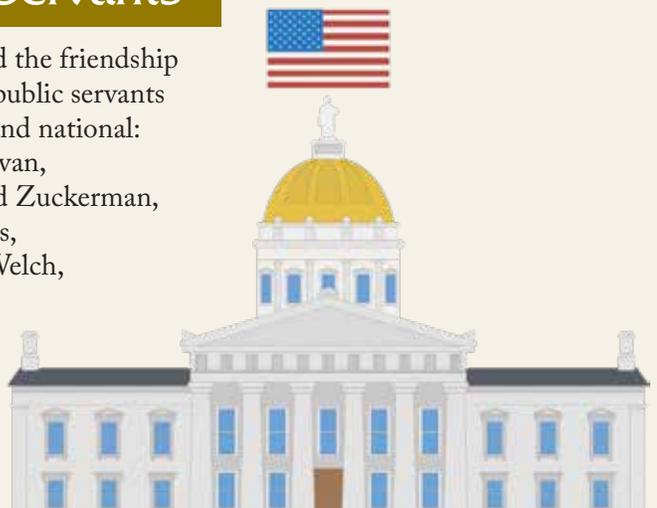
Jean Ankeny, Johannah Donovan, Cheryl Hooker, Ann Pugh, Jean O'Sullivan, Butch Shaw, Mary Sullivan.

### FORMER LEGISLATORS:

Susan Buckholz, Diane Carmoli, Joanna Cole, Ann Cummings, Dennis Delaney, Helen Head, Jim Leddy, Joanne Lenas, Bill Lippert, Gabrielle Lucke, Ginny Lyons, Rita McCaffrey, Carol Ode.

In Addition, we have valued the friendship and assistance of Vermont public servants in other arenas, both state and national: Attorney General TJ Donovan, Lieutenant Governor David Zuckerman, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, U.S. Representative Peter Welch, Governor Madeleine Kunin, Judges McCaffrey, Cashman and Griffin. Rita McCaffrey, our Founder, and a former Representative from Weston, is especially proud that a handmade,

log cabin design Vermont quilt hung for many years in the Washington D.C. office of the late Senator James Jeffords—an award token from Dismas—recognizing the Senator's concern for justice and reconciliation. We appreciate the continuing opportunity to work together to solve critical challenges in Vermont. ❖



# Ways to Give

Discover the many ways to support Dismas and make a difference in someone's life

No matter how you give, why you give, or how much you give, your gift is vital to Dismas of Vermont's programs. You can give to support one of our local programs, or to Dismas of Vermont in general. Please contact either the program you wish to support, or our Executive Director, Jan Tarjan, for more information or assistance.

## GIFTS BY CHECK:

Checks should be made out to the local program you wish to support, or to Dismas of Vermont Statewide if you prefer, and mailed to the addresses listed on this page.

## GIFTS BY CREDIT CARD:

Credit Card donations may be made by visiting us online at <http://www.dismasofvt.org/donate>

## MATCHING GIFTS:

Your employer may offer an employee matching gift program to support your charitable giving. Please check with your employer to determine if they offer this option.

## HONOR AND MEMORIAL GIFTS:

These gifts offer a meaningful way to pay tribute to loved ones.

## GIFTS OF STOCKS, SECURITIES:

You can make a gift of stock by contacting our brokerage account with MassMutual.

ACCOUNT NAME: Dismas of Vermont Inc.

ACCOUNT NUMBER: R72025577

DTC NUMBER: 0226

MASSMUTUAL RE: Roger Webster

Phone: 802-264-6620

## RECURRING GIFTS:

Sustaining gifts can be made by credit card.

Visit us online at <http://www.dismasofvt.org/donate>

## PLANNED GIVING/BEQUESTS:

You may include Dismas in your lifetime charitable giving plans through a bequest, charitable gift annuity, insurance policy, charitable trust or other planned giving vehicle.

Planned gifts can be constructed today to benefit Dismas of Vermont at a future date.

Contact our Executive Director to learn more!

## DISMAS PROGRAM LOCATIONS:

### Burlington Dismas House

Locations at:  
96 Buell Street, Burlington, VT 05401  
103 East Allen St., Winooski, VT 05404  
Kimberly Parsons and Richard Gagne,  
House Directors  
(802) 658-0381  
[kim@dismasofvt.org](mailto:kim@dismasofvt.org)  
[richard@dismasofvt.org](mailto:richard@dismasofvt.org)

### Hartford Dismas House

1673 Maple Street, PO Box 174,  
Hartford, VT 05047  
Jeff Backus, House Director  
(802) 698-8661  
[jeff@dismasofvt.org](mailto:jeff@dismasofvt.org)

### Rutland Dismas House

103 Park Avenue, Rutland, VT 05701  
Eric Maguire, House Director  
(802) 775-5539  
[eric@dismasofvt.org](mailto:eric@dismasofvt.org)

### Dismas of Vermont, Inc.

103 East Allen St., Winooski, VT 05404  
Jan-Roberta Tarjan, Executive Director  
(603) 795-2770  
[jan@dismasofvt.org](mailto:jan@dismasofvt.org)

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Program Manager  
  
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Rita McCaffrey  
Founder & Adviser

## Donors Promote Pride of Workmanship by Darby, Dismas Resident

"I am a recovering addict. I went to Valley Vista for twenty-three days and then was asked to be a part of the Dismas House program. WOW what a great decision I made. There are many men living here



Darby helps keep Dismas in good shape.

with many talents, mine is fine carpentry. Thanks to all the caring people that have donated to the Dismas house, we were able to buy necessary building material for the house. I am so proud to be able to put my craftsmanship to work, so we can keep this beautiful house alive and looking its finest. And my work as well as my name will always be a part of this house and the wonderful program that it is. God bless to all that have donated or given their time to this warm caring home." (abridged text) ❖

I was raised in an upper middle class family in Southern NJ, Ocean City to be more precise. My parents worked very hard and owned/operated their own businesses. I was the only boy of four children. My parents instilled a strong work ethic and taught us to be kind and respectful of others. When I was ten my parents bought a deli/convenience store and all of us worked there in some capacity. My mother joked that I ate all the profits. I started working for my father in his pest control business at age thirteen. I ran a hammer drill and mixed/applied pesticides.

Growing up on the beach was great! I surfed, swam and almost lived on the beach in the summer time. I also met tons of other kids, both good and not so good. In my teenage years I had a few run-ins with local law enforcement. Marijuana, drinking underage. General juvenile delinquency. I was actually made to attend the Scared Straight program at Rahway State Prison in New Jersey at one point. I was also the Captain of the Basketball team in High School, actively participated in my church youth group, and worked for my parents daily.

I started selling marijuana at age 16. My father turned me into the police when I was 17. But that didn't stop me. I continued to sell pot on and off for my entire adult life. I have sold small amounts, been a professional grower and a broker for large sales. I have moved hundreds of pounds across America. At times, I even helped unload bales off boats. The industry still holds a certain allure for me even after spending four-plus years in Vermont's prison system for my offences.

I have owned and operated a number of businesses in my life. General contractor, pest control, landscaping and lawn care, a marijuana farm. All have been reasonably successful.

I got married at age 28. I had two beautiful children. I was a volunteer

track coach at Windsor High School, coached Little League baseball and basketball. But good times don't always last. The marriage didn't last but my love for my kids has never died. During my recent incarceration my son, Tyler, succumbed to a years-long heroin addiction, overdosed and died. Two weeks later my Father died. At that time Jeff Backus, from Dismas, worked very hard to have me released. He went above and beyond but to no avail. Probation and Parole would not release me. So I missed the funerals for my son and my father.

Thanks to the staff at Dismas, my family and other residents at Dismas. I have been able to deal with the grief that followed my release. I am very happy I am staying at Dismas during this time. I'm able to get my life back together. I get to see my daughter Courtney and grandchildren Melodie,



Bob with his grandkids.

Tristan and Nathan grow up, and to be a part of their lives. I get to help them learn about the world around them and go to their basketball, soccer, and baseball games. To see them have children of their own.

I can also save money to begin life on my own terms again. I don't think that any of these things would have been possible without the Dismas staff and this program. ❖

## Creating Community

Driving home from volunteering at the Dismas House 5k benefit in October, I started thinking about what it means to be part of a "community." Is community a place? A marketing phrase, like the "Facebook Community"? Is it a kind of affinity group? None of those seemed quite right to describe how satisfying it was to be among those who gathered that day to support a fresh start for people in our region who are newly released from prison.

We were Dismas residents and staff, board members and volunteers, scrambling to hang crepe paper and set out the coffee pot and cider, marking out



Nancy in costume at the 5k for Dismas.

– by Nancy Serrell, Volunteer Cook and Dismas Council Member

the finish line, registering and cheering on runners, hailing staff members Jeff and Robert to find things and fix things. At the end of the day it was good to feel lifted, hopeful, purposeful by our collective action. I couldn't remember the last time I so keenly felt that "sense of community."

One way that community is nurtured at Dismas is through evening meals prepared by volunteer cooks, who then join residents and staff around the dinner table. The call to the table marks the moment in the day when everything

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# Hartford Dismas House

## Creating Community

*(continued from page 7)*

else gives way to communality. We talk about where the best fishing holes are, which teachers are still at Hartford High, what it's like to be out on parole, how the new job is going. We laugh, we pass the salad dressing, and we get to know each other the way neighbors do.

The notion that Western societies lose connection to their neighborhoods and communities as they modernize is a recurring theme in social science research. It certainly seems that it's true of contemporary life in this country. But maybe we need to reframe the way we think about that connection. I came across this definition of community online: "a group of people that care about each other and feel they belong together." Thinking back to my drive home from the 5k, that's not far off. ❖

*"I love being at Dismas because the people there are very, very kind and they make the place much better because they play with me and I have the best time ever! Also, I enjoy all the visitors and people that live and come here. I have a lot of fun being with the people that come and live here."*

- Rian Backus, age 7

Rian spends part of many days at Dismas with her Dad, House Director Jeff Backus.

### HARTFORD DISMAS HOUSE COUNCIL

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Richard Gagne... *Program Manager*



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