

NEWSLETTER  
Fall 2014

# Burlington Dismas House

*Restoring former prisoners to our community for the greater good of all!*



## Save the Dates!

Annual Dismas Phonathon:

November 17, 18, 19, & 20

To help, call Sierra at: 658-0381.



To see more Dismas pictures, follow Burlington Dismas on Facebook



## Our Camping Weekend

Hi Folks. My name is Ralph, and I am a resident at East Allen Dismas.

We have two retreats here at Dismas. One is in the winter at Weston Priory and one is in the summer. I chose to write about our recent weekend retreat in July. We went to Kettle Pond in Groton State Park.

Most of the residents did not know what it was like to camp out in the woods. When we arrived at the campsite, some were fearful of sleeping in an open lean-to. The first night, a lot of residents snored so loud it was louder than the loons! Residents who have a hard time sleeping at home, slept like little children. The fresh air was so amazing. I have not slept out in the woods since I was a little kid. We had sleeping bags in the lean-to. There were a total of five lean-to buildings. When we woke up in the morning for breakfast, everyone was saying what an experience it was to sleep outside. I agree with that!

Thanks to everyone who makes Dismas possible for all of us.

*East Allen Dismas seeks volunteer cooks for 1 meal/month. Interested? Call Sue: 655-0300.*

## From Paris to Burlington Dismas

Moving abroad for a few months sounds exciting, adventurous, but also a bit frightening. So I left my family and friends as well as my country – my familiar surroundings – crossed the ocean and came to the United States of America, a place I have only heard of in books and movies. As I was delighted to discover this country I heard so much about in France, I was also apprehensive to live in a wholly unfamiliar environment, with people who don't share the same language, the same culture, or customs.

But if Dismas House helps former prisoners to reenter the community, it helped me, as a foreigner, to adapt very easily to this new culture and this country. Of course, my situation was nothing compared to what former prisoners have to face when they go out from prison, having to start everything again, and I am a witness of this every single day. Dismas House is a community but first it is a home where several people from all ages, genders, origins and backgrounds are living together. It provides a richness of Human Beings.



I consider myself as privileged as I discovered, and I am still discovering, this culture admired by us Europeans, even if we try to convince everyone and ourselves of the opposite!

Concerning my apprehensions, they were not grounded. Cohabitation with people sharing a different culture and language has proven to be very easy as we all share universal values such as patience, tolerance and respect for others and for our difference.

*Camille Apprederisse has been the Volunteer for Peace with us since April. She is just now returning to her home outside of Paris. Camille has been a wonderful, hardworking and caring resident who everyone appreciated, and a terrific help with clerical tasks. Thank you, Camille!*

### Locations at:

96 Buell Street · Burlington, VT 05401  
802-658-0381

103 East Allen Street · Winooski, VT 05404  
802-655-0300

[www.burlingtondismas.org](http://www.burlingtondismas.org)

# Burlington Dismas House

## Dismas Community Service at the Monitor Barn Farm



We worked again this year at the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps farm at the Monitor Barn in Richmond. Seven residents gave their time and good work to weeding and transplanting seedlings. At the end of the day, the clean, weeded rows and the lines of transplants gave us all a good feeling of having accomplished something. It was delightful weather and it felt great to work in the garden.

### From Hardships to Heartfelt *By Craig*

Even with the many hardships I have experienced during the course of my life, incarceration being by far the greatest, I have also been blessed by people who have graced me with their friendship. Their humaneness and compassion have sustained me and inspired me to rise to the same level. My time at Dismas House is a continuation of this positive experience. It is perhaps the most profound and affecting factor in my coming to grips with my greatest obstacles and learning a better way of living with myself, friends and family, and the world at large.

After four years in prison, in conditions that were de-humanizing, Dismas House for me is much more than my reintegration into the community. It is a re-humanizing process.

I could continue on in expressing my heartfelt gratitude. I'll simply say 'thank you' to all the people who are the heart and soul of something that is positive and helpful and that I can trust.

*Craig is a resident at Buell Street Dismas.*

## Board News

We would like to welcome, introduce, and thank new Board Members Emily Bartling, Chris Burt, Helen Head, and Melissa Hermansen.

**Emily Bartling** is a registered nurse and case manager currently working as a consultant for an accountable care organization.

**Chris Burt** was invited by her long-time friend Marykate Rowan to join the Board. She is a Production Planner at UTC Aerospace in Vergennes. Her volunteer experiences include the Champlain Valley Folk Festival, Parish Council, Vermont Refugee Program, and the COTS Phonathon.

**Helen Head** has a strong background in affordable housing, beginning in the mid-70's with New Hampshire Legal Assistance and then as executive director of Project Home (now HomeShare Vermont). Since 2003, Helen has served as a member of the Vermont Legislature representing South Burlington, chairing the House's General, Housing and Military Affairs committee since 2007. Being a volunteer cook at Buell Street for the last few years has helped keep Helen and her husband Tom Mercurio grounded in the joys and challenges of shared living.

**Melissa Hermansen**, who recently moved to Vermont, served as Project Coordinator of the Alaska Prisoner Reentry Task Force. Prior to that, she was the Program Coordinator of a Reentry Program in Anchorage, Alaska.

## Summer Camping Trip

This year, the Burlington Dismas camping trip had its high and low points. The literal high point was reaching the summit of a nearby mountain. It wasn't an easy hike, but our companionship and the reward of the view was worth the effort. The low point was the amazing rain on Sunday, which made us decide to call it good and head for our warm, dry home earlier than we'd planned. It was wonderful to get home and be able to put everything in the washer and dryer!

One of the most interesting parts was Saturday night when the loons started calling. We felt like North Americans, because Camille, our Volunteer for Peace from France, had never heard such a sound and she was really scared! She couldn't believe that such a spooky sound was from a perfectly safe bird.

It was great to be out in nature, with its vistas and wildlife and weather!



### Locations at:

96 Buell Street · Burlington, VT 05401  
802-658-0381

103 East Allen Street · Winooski, VT 05404  
802-655-0300

[www.burlingtondismas.org](http://www.burlingtondismas.org)

# Burlington Dismas House

## A Tribute to Dick Medlar *By Richard Gagne*

As a staff member I am consistently aware that Dismas House is a unique organization because we are still a grass roots organization started and supported by the community that we are a part of. The mission of Dismas, to reconcile former prisoners with society and society with former prisoners, is accomplished in large part by the presence of volunteers at Dismas House. Over 30 years thousands of families, students, Rotary members, church groups, judges, and individuals have given many hours to volunteer as cooks, board members, committee members or to help with fundraising or share their particular talent. When I think about how Dismas succeeds, I think of the volunteers who share a part of their life being in community with others.

Dick Medlar, who volunteered with Burlington Dismas House, passed away this summer at the age of ninety. More than 20 years ago, Roger Gibeault (a founding board member of Dismas) referred us to Dick. They had been coworkers at Champlain Cable. Dick had retired from their financial department. We were looking for volunteer help with our finances. It turned out to be a perfect match.

For the first 10 years, Dick would come to the office on Buell Street and for half a day a week. When the organization decided to consolidate and hire a bookkeeper, Dick became a check signer for our Dismas accounts. Two or three times a month I would go to Dick's house with Dismas checks that needed his signature. This gave me the opportunity to have a visit with him. He lived alone but was very social. He loved people and had a group that he would go to daily Mass with in the morning, followed by breakfast at their favorite restaurant. Dick also volunteered in the kitchen at Christ the King School. He was delighted to show me the crayon-colored appreciation cards he received from some of the young students.

Most volunteers at Dismas cook dinner and, by their presence at the evening meal, enter into relationships with residents - directly impacting the mission of Dismas. Preparing an evening meal was not Dick's particular way of contributing to Dismas. Dick's gift to us was organizational support. Dick Medlar's gifts to us in his passing have been a generous bequest and the fond memories of a well-loved member of our Dismas community. *Richard Gagne is a Burlington Dismas House Director.*



## Goodbye and Thank You, Dismas

As I say goodbye to Dismas House and Burlington, I'm sadder than when I left my home in Hopewell Junction, NY six years ago. I realize that it's the feeling of community that Dismas and Burlington cultivate that has made me so proud to tell others where I live and what I do. It's the people of Burlington who actively pursue their town's welfare that has made my time here so vivid.

Dismas is an active part of the Burlington community. Not only does it provide a much-needed service, but it is a model of community building. Reconciliation happens at 96 Buell Street through food, dialogue, support, conflict, and trust. Dismas and the city of Burlington have inspired in me the hope that whatever I do in the future, my main objective will be to unite and create a unique, diverse, and positive community. Thank you, Burlington. Thank you, Dismas!

*Erika Osorio has been the resident AmeriCorps Member for the past year in the role of Program Assistant. She has been steady, productive, good-natured, and enormously helpful. Thank you, Erika! You are truly part of the Dismas community!*

## Sue Drollette Reflects

As I celebrate five years as Assistant House Director at East Allen Dismas, I am reflecting on what I have observed working with residents. I enjoy working with the residents and I notice the changes they are making. The day when they arrive at Dismas is always stressful. Many are coming back into the community for the first time in a very long time. They usually have to meet with their Parole Officer within just a few days and be able to discuss their plans for the near future. They make phone calls to family and friends. Many need to find clothes, set up doctor appointments and start their job search. We help them here with information to get them started. After the first couple of weeks, most are more relaxed and in the routine of living at Dismas House.

A very rewarding part of my job is the contact I have with former residents. Best of course is a visit to introduce a new daughter or son or a new girlfriend. This is when I hear what it meant to live at Dismas. Everyone says "thank you". Some thank us for the help they received, and they say how important it was to have someone to talk to who would care and listen to them.

Many talk about how living at Dismas gave them the chance to save some money and get reacquainted with the community through dinners with volunteers. They mention group activities as lots of fun even though at first they were dubious. One past resident who visits often talks of his time at Dismas as a positive learning experience and how much the structure got him ready to be on his own. He said the evening meal and being able to talk to volunteers was really important to him. He mentioned that he often sees volunteers in the community, and it means so much when they recognize him and inquire as to how he is doing.

### Locations at:

96 Buell Street · Burlington, VT 05401  
802-658-0381

103 East Allen Street · Winooski, VT 05404  
802-655-0300

[www.burlingtondismas.org](http://www.burlingtondismas.org)

## Board of Directors

Emily Bartling  
Christine Burt  
Emily Ewald  
Kim Harry  
Helen Head  
Melissa Hermansen  
Richard Gagne  
Brad Martin  
Kimberly Parsons  
Richard Perez  
Debra Ramsdell  
Marykate Rowan  
Peter Rowan

## House Directors

Kimberly Parsons  
[kim@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:kim@dismasofvermont.org)  
Richard Gagne  
[richard@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:richard@dismasofvermont.org)

## Asst. House Directors

Sue Drollette  
[sue@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:sue@dismasofvermont.org)  
Sierra Flynn  
[sierra@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:sierra@dismasofvermont.org)

## Development Director

Jay Ladd  
[jay@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:jay@dismasofvermont.org)

A Funded Agency of



United Way of  
Chittenden County

## United Way Building Block Award for Dismas Volunteers

Dick Perez, our Dismas of Vermont Board President and Burlington Dismas Board member was honored for his many years of service to Burlington Dismas House at the United Way of Chittenden County Building Block Awards event on September 4.



Dick and his wife Bobbi have served dinners monthly at the East Allen house since it opened in 2008 and are active in the Phonathon and the Dinner Auction.

As chair of the maintenance committee, Dick has participated in three Community Development Block Grants over the past five years which have been instrumental in painting, paving, and making repairs at the Buell St. house. Dick recently stepped in to facilitate the completion of the new Hartford Dismas House.

Dick reflected, "The greatest gift I receive from volunteering with Dismas is being in the company of people who are making such monumental efforts to become the person they want to be, and with those who are encouraging them. The volunteer network at Dismas is inspiring and I'm proud to be part of it. I also get a great meal with great folks each month!"

**Thank you for years of service to Dismas, Dick, and congratulations on receiving the United Way 2014 Building Block Award!**

## Board News Cont.

We also want to thank out-going Board members Geoff Crawford, Mary Golek, Erika Osorio, Joe Stewart, and Hunter Townsend for their devoted service to Dismas. They have each brought thoughtful talent to Board discussions, Phonathon-ing, cooking dinners, and other vital Board activities.

**On behalf of the entire Dismas community – Thank You!**

## Burlington Dismas Wish List

- ◆ Table lamps
- ◆ New twin bed sheets
- ◆ Adirondack chairs
- ◆ Picnic table
- ◆ Bike rack
- ◆ 3-pin ski boots & ski poles

*We are grateful for the donation of any items listed, but are unable to accept other items due to lack of storage space. To make a donation, please call Sue at 655-0300.*

## Burlington Dismas House · 96 Buell Street · Burlington VT 05401

### House Directors:

Kimberly Parsons - [kim@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:kim@dismasofvermont.org)  
Richard Gagne - [richard@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:richard@dismasofvermont.org)

### Development Director:

Jay Ladd - [jay@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:jay@dismasofvermont.org)

### Asst. House Directors:

Sue Drollette - [sue@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:sue@dismasofvermont.org)  
Sierra Flynn - [sierra@dismasofvermont.org](mailto:sierra@dismasofvermont.org)

Phone: (802) 658-0381 Fax: (253) 322-8847

[www.burlingtondismas.org](http://www.burlingtondismas.org)

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit #815  
Burlington, VT

Burlington Dismas House  
96 Buell Street  
Burlington, VT 05401

