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Recovery in the Words of Sarah Lefebvre

Every day, I make a choice that used to feel impossible. I choose to stay sober, not because it's easy, not because I've mastered some secret formula, but because I've tasted the alternative. And I know what it costs. **My peace. My dignity. My soul.**

Showing up in recovery isn't some fluffy Instagram story. It's war. A quiet one, fought in early mornings and long nights. Fought when nobody's watching, when the cravings whisper like old friends, when the shame knocks like a bill collector. But I show up anyway. Why? Because I want this life. Not the illusion I used to chase, but a real life—messy, beautiful, grounded, and mine.

There were times I disappeared into my addiction, body present, soul gone. I lied, I ran, I numbed. And for what? A moment of silence that turned into years of screaming pain. I don't want to vanish again. I've already missed too much.

Sobriety isn't just about saying no to drugs. It's about saying yes to healing, to purpose, and to joy that doesn't come with a crash. It's saying yes to facing my trauma head-on, with trembling hands and an open heart. It's about being honest, even when my voice shakes. It's learning to sit in the fire without trying to burn the whole world down to escape it.

I stay sober because I want to be someone my past self would be proud of. Someone my future self can trust. I want to be present for the people who never gave up on me, even when I gave up on myself. I want to show others that recovery is not just possible, it's worth every scar, every tear, and every hard-fought step forward.

Some days I still stumble. Some days I want to scream or run or hide. But I don't. I show up. For the meetings, for the steps, for the hard conversations. I show up for the girl I used to be—the one who didn't believe she deserved anything good. **I show up for the woman I'm becoming—the one who chooses courage over comfort. Every. Single. Time.**

I'm not just staying sober. I'm building a life that doesn't require escape. That's the real flex.



Dismas residents like Sarah are the ones doing the real work every day to create a better life for themselves and their community. For women, the Women's Dismas House in Rutland is the only place of its kind in Vermont. Residents there come from incarceration, a rehabilitation facility, or another place of trauma, such as intimate partner violence. Nearly 100% of the Women's Dismas House residents are in recovery from substance use disorder, which is both a response to and a cause of profound trauma.

Recovery is not an easy path. It is a long and winding road that requires deep healing and strong community support. Dismas volunteers and supporters create the safe space that makes it possible for residents like Sarah to draw on their inner strength and realize their capacity for lasting positive change. **Thank you.**

Our Gratitude to Drew Rockwell, Outgoing Board President

My wife Bartlett and I, pictured here with our granddaughter, were driving to cook our first dinner at Hartford Dismas House over ten years ago, and honestly, with a small dose of apprehension. On the way home, we both agreed to sign up to cook another meal. As the years passed, one thing led to another. At the end of June, I finished a three-year stint as President of the Board of Dismas of Vermont. I've always been horrified by the criminal justice system in our country, and Dismas offered itself up as a way for me to try and make whatever difference I could.



For me, the magic of Dismas is that it is a two-way street: reconciliation between formerly incarcerated individuals and the community, and the community with those very same individuals. Dismas supports individuals as they work to re-enter society, and in doing so, it also makes our communities stronger, benefiting us all.

As a Board, our job is to do as much as we can to support those we serve, while being financially responsible. In the last few years, under Jim Curran's leadership and with the support of the broad community assembly, we've expanded our impact, opening a Women's House in Rutland, deepening our organization's capabilities to serve a changing demographic, and launching step-down housing to help our residents transition out of congregate living into an incredibly challenging housing market.

With all those accomplishments, my favorite moment is still that first dinner, and every dinner since. Dismas has so much to be thankful for. Thanks for sitting at our table.

Drew Rockwell

Welcome Tracy Dustin-Eichler, Incoming Board President

I believe in the incredible power of community. As the director of Dartmouth's Center for Social Impact and a lifelong community-engaged educator, I have spent my career in witness to the brilliance that can emerge when people come together around a common goal. It is exactly that cultivation of relationships and building of community that defines Dismas of Vermont.

I joined Dismas as a member of the Hartford Council when the house on Maple Street was a vision and a building in need of many repairs. I had the good fortune of meeting Rita and learning about the work of this organization in Burlington, Winooski, and Rutland, and how my own community of Hartford could become part of this transformative movement to build better, stronger, more welcoming communities for individuals exiting incarceration.

Now, after 9+ years serving on the Hartford Council and almost two years on the Dismas of Vermont board, I find myself in awe of how Dismas has grown and inspired by how this organization has continued to evolve while staying true to its central mission of building community.

I am excited to embark on the next phase of Dismas's success. I hope you are too!



Tracy Dustin-Eichler

Family-style Housing + Step-Down Housing = Four Years of Transitional Housing

Dismas of Vermont's Step-Down Housing initiative has moved from pilot to program, thanks to generous funding from the Canaday Family Charitable Trust and the Fanny Holt Ames and Edna Louise Holt Fund. These funders are following in the generosity of the TD Charitable Foundation.



This progressive model of family-style housing followed by step-down housing offers up to four years of support, providing residents with an extended runway for success. This approach is innovative, replicable, and evidence-based. Step-down housing specifically for previously incarcerated individuals does not exist elsewhere in Vermont, where people who have been successfully served in congregate housing can transition to greater independence with supportive master leasing and later take over the rental entirely. With this successive model, Dismas has essentially created its own continuum of care for the most underserved individuals.

Dismas is currently building its portfolio of apartment leases towards the goal of 18 units in three Vermont communities (Rutland, Burlington/Winooski, and Hartford). If you have rental units for consideration by the program, please contact Jennifer Dennis, jennifer@dismasoft.org or 802-208-2029.

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Deana McCloud, Executive Director
Woody Guthrie Center

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Employment is Compassionate Reconciliation in Action

The 4 Aces Diner in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, first opened in 1952 as a Worcester Lunch Car and was later moved to its current Bridge Street location in the 1980s after a fire. For decades, it was operated by the Shorey–Briggs family, becoming a beloved community landmark known for its classic diner atmosphere and hearty meals.

In 2022, the diner celebrated its 70th anniversary. Most recently, it was purchased by Doug and Stephanie Allard, who plan to preserve its nostalgic character while continuing its tradition of serving locals and visitors alike.

Another 4 Aces tradition that Doug and Stephanie uphold is their belief in giving people coming from incarceration a fresh start.



Employers like the Allards recognize that providing someone with a fair opportunity offers stability and financial independence, reduces the risk of recidivism, and supports social justice and equity. Stephanie encourages other employers to do the same, noting that second starts change lives and strengthen businesses and communities.

“I would recommend to other employers that they consider hiring residents from Hartford Dismas House,” Stephanie says. “It has been a positive experience for us, and it’s a way to invest in both people and our community.”

One example is Chad, a current resident of Hartford Dismas House, who now works at 4 Aces. Stephanie and the staff say, “Chad is fantastic! He is hard-working, reliable, and serious about the job.” They also see real potential for his growth at the diner and value his contributions to their team. Pictured here are Stephanie Allard and Chad.

When Chad first arrived at Hartford Dismas House, he set clear goals for himself: to reenter the workforce, rebuild his life, and achieve lasting stability. Today, he is on that path. “I like working at 4 Aces for the Allards,” Chad shares. “They are great employers, and it’s a great place to work. I feel like I am contributing to their business, and they are invested in me as well. Recently, when something came up and I had to step away from work, Doug noticed right away and offered to drive me and bring me back—that showed me how much they care about me as a person, not just an employee.”

Chad’s story is just one example of the critical role compassionate employers play in counteracting societal bias. The lack of protection for the previously incarcerated among housing and employment opportunities creates a situation where one mistake can lead to a lifetime sentence of discrimination. Businesses like 4 Aces have the capacity to serve as a link between Dismas residents and the broader community from which they have been separated, and send essential messages of acceptance and worth, rather than rejection.

The Dismas of Vermont mission is centered around reconciliation. If we hold people accountable for their actions as a matter of justice, then reconciliation is the completion of that justice. For a Dismas resident to be reconciled in their community, they need to be a welcomed and valued member, with all the responsibilities and rights that come with it, including employment opportunities. To learn more about hiring Dismas residents, contact your local Dismas house.

Welcome and Congratulations to Rutland Dismas Staff

The Rutland Dismas House and Women's Dismas House, also in Rutland, are benefitting from a new face and changing roles this fall, all of which are dedicated to improving the lives of Dismas residents. Both houses now benefit from the work and heart of Tatiana Abatemarco, Philanthropic Associate. Tatiana drives locally-based fundraising and works with our other two Philanthropic Associates and the Development Director to think about fund development on the whole. She comes to us from the Vermont Foodbank and lives in Rutland County. Heather Hurley, former House Director at the Women's Dismas House, has returned to the role of House Director at the Rutland Dismas House. Kaylee Rankin, former Assistant Director at the Women's Dismas House, has been promoted to House Director. Congrats and welcome.



Tatiana Abatemarco
Philanthropic Associate



Heather Hurley
Rutland Dismas House Director



Kaylee Rankin
Women's Dismas House Director

In Memoriam: Sue Drollette

Suzette Drollette, fondly known as Sue to the Dismas family, passed away peacefully in her home with her husband and two sons by her side on July 25, 2025.

Sue served Dismas of Vermont as the Assistant House Director at the East Allen Dismas House for more than a decade. Sue's care and love impacted many lives and, as expressed in her obituary, she, too, greatly benefited from these connections.

Richard Gagné, former East Allen House Director, described Sue's nurturing presence among residents as warm and maternal. These attributes earned her respect and lasting relationships. He recalled a significant moment when residents visited Sue in the hospital during her illness, a testament to the strong relationships she had built with them.



Christine Babb, a longtime Dismas volunteer, noted that Sue always had a twinkle in her eye and was generous with her time and wisdom when it came to the residents; they loved her in return. She was always willing to help them solve a problem or be a compassionate ear. Among volunteers, Sue was quick to pull up a chair and chat about the house and its happenings. Christine said, "Sue's goodwill was infectious and certainly made me feel at home at Dismas and inspired me to do more. Needless to say, she is greatly missed." Sue had a special way of making everyone feel welcome. Everyone in her presence felt her intuitive, caring nature and deep kindness. In addition to her deep commitment to Dismas, Sue was an avid reader, enjoyed playing pinochle, and loved cheering on her Boston Celtics. Above all else, she treasured visits with family and friends.



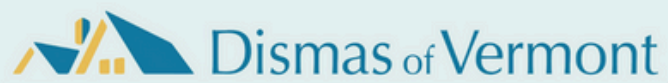
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