



Aaron Loucks: Our First Step-Down Housing Resident

Aaron is from Shelburne, Vermont. In his 20's he struggled with addiction and mental illness. Before he was arrested, he was living in a boarding house during the COVID lockdown, a period of dark isolation. "I lost my mind in a drug psychosis," he said, which led to his arrest and a few months in prison.

"I was put in time out, and I used it to reflect on what I did wrong and what needed to change." Once sober, in a better mental state, and eligible for parole, he applied to Buell Street Dismas. Once at Buell Street, Aaron initially doubted that he could succeed. He said, "My dad reminded me that I was in a good place and that I was going to get a lot of help."



Aaron had so many good things to say about Kim Parsons, the House Director at the time. "She's an incredible human being. The number of people she helped and the balance that is so rare in social services; she was tough and told me what I needed to hear. But she's also so kind and thoughtful and loving. Having the staff to talk to and solve problems with, it was huge to have that support. When I arrived, I still had a lot of self-hatred and loathing but knew that to love other people, I had to love myself, too...and in love is forgiveness."

Aaron spent an unusually long time at Buell Street, three and a half years. He met a lot of incredible guys, people who had struggles but also inspiring. "I love and care deeply for so many of them." He has lived in other group homes, but "the support you get at Dismas is unlike anywhere else: a place to live, food, the presence of volunteers, transportation, and all the basics. It's incredible. With that support, you can really grow as a human."

"I remembered who I am. I could stop focusing on how miserable I was. I made some core lifestyle changes around diet, sleep, exercise, and how I spend my time. I started reading again, meditating, going to church, and reconnecting with path work...then things really started to turn around for me. Dismas allowed me the space to do that. I just started checking things off and slowly started showing up for the other guys. Soon I was entirely focused on what is important to me and how to help others to better this crazy world."

At the three-year mark, Aaron was motivated to move on from Buell Street and ready for some elbow room. His readiness coincided with the launch of Dismas' Step-Down Housing Program. Here, Dismas controls the leases, rented from private landlords, and can sub-lease to a successful Dismas resident ready for more independence but who could still use the supportive presence of Dismas staff in their life. "I give Dismas a lot of credit for making this program happen. There are no housing protections in Vermont and the formerly incarcerated are one of the most discriminated against groups."

**2025 Annual
Celebration
Details Inside.
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Aaron Loucks Story: Continued Inside

A New Dawn: My Journey at Dismas House and Beyond

By Joshua Jewett

Five years ago, my life seemed to be at a crossroads. I was grappling with addiction and staring down the barrel of a criminal lifestyle that was increasingly feeling like a death sentence. The desire for change and desperation led me to Dismas, a beacon of hope in a time of darkness. My journey to recovery began there.

I felt valued and cared for from the very start, offered care, wisdom, advice, and an invaluable life philosophy of H.A.R.D (Honesty, Accountability, Responsibility, Discernment). This acronym became the foundation of my recovery journey.

Dismas House offered more than just a roof over my head; it provided a supportive, safe and non-judgmental environment that played a crucial role in my transformation.

The community connections via Dismas helped me regain my footing. One of the most significant aspects of life at Dismas are the volunteer-prepared dinners. These dinners are not just about food; they are about fellowship, understanding, and building bridges between individuals from different walks of life. Here I found a sense of belonging; I was not alone in my journey...a stark contrast to the isolation and alienation I felt during my years of addiction.

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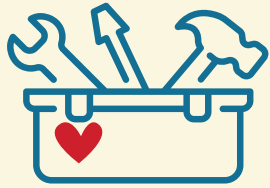
I enrolled in a local Medication-Assisted Treatment program and spent many weekends volunteering on community service projects with other residents. Through the structured programs at Dismas, I began to rebuild my life. I learned valuable life skills, pursued education, and gradually reintegrated into society. I also discovered the importance of giving back, which has led me down a career path to become a mentor for others who are struggling with addiction.

Today, I am a proud father of five wonderful children—three boys and two girls. My role as a father and a contributing community member has given me the motivation to continue striving for a better future. I am currently a student at the Community College of Vermont (CCV), on the brink of graduating with an associate degree in Behavioral Science. I have maintained high honors throughout my academic journey, receiving copious amounts of scholarships and grants to help me pursue my goals. This academic achievement is a testament to my resilience and commitment to personal growth.

Currently, I am fulfilling my internship, a degree requirement, at the Rutland Dismas House. This valuable opportunity will enhance my professional field experience and support the continuation of my education. My educational and career goal is to assist individuals suffering from active addiction by providing them with hope and guidance on their path to recovery from substance abuse.

The Rutland Dismas House served as the catalyst for my transformation, providing a solid foundation for my recovery through invaluable community connections. The journey from active addiction to becoming a responsible father, accountable community member, and soon-to-be graduate has been both challenging and immensely rewarding. I hope my story inspires others to believe in the power of recovery and the significance of community support.





Hartford Dismas House & Buell Street Dismas House Improvements Thanks to Community Partners

Hartford Dismas House is thrilled with its remodeled kitchen thanks to COVER Home Repair & Store, a non-profit in White River Junction that provides home repairs for low-income homeowners. Materials were purchased with a donation from White Mountain Capital and COVER provided volunteer labor. Thanks to its skilled team of staff and volunteers and the generous donors who supported the work, the Hartford kitchen is a welcoming space fostering nourishment, connection, and second chances.

Buell Street Dismas House in Burlington was honorably awarded a 2024 Lowe's Hometowns grant to make \$35,000 in necessary repairs. Buell Street hosted local Lowe's employees for a work day, one of 100 Lowe's community projects, and tackled a water-damaged wall, repaired a cracked and sagging ceiling, installed a dishwasher, and applied a fresh coat of paint on radiators, doors, the porch, and walls.

Thank You



Aaron Loucks: His Story Continued

"When I was at Buell Street, Dismas residents were asked by the Board of Directors, what are your barriers to moving out of the houses? We said we couldn't find affordable housing. When a landlord has ten applications for a unit, they will take someone with a clean record. A program like step-down housing helps people build rental history, puts some distance between them and their charges, and gives them time to maybe even expunge or seal their charges."

"Having volunteers and other community members come together for Dismas is an antidote to discrimination, prejudice, and biases. Building these relationships between residents and the community reminds us all that previously incarcerated folks are humans too, that they can make mistakes and then go on to improve the community. We have a choice every day to lift people up or push people down. I'm 32 and I've never had my own place before. It feels good to be trusted with this opportunity. And I have trust that my community will help me if I need it."

Aaron has been employed at Spectrum Youth Services for two years in its young adult shelter program. "Spectrum took a chance on me, and it's my dream job, to watch the people I work with go from survival mode to growth and become these incredible young adults who are self-sufficient and smart, working on their lives and working towards goals. It is beautiful." The parallels between Aaron's story and the youth he now serves are not unnoticed.

We discussed his future, which could include a tiny house or travel to Alaska, the last state he has to visit in the United States. Aaron knows he has made some mistakes, but those are in the past. "What I'm doing right now is pretty good and I fully intend for my future to be the same."

Learn more:



**The TD Charitable Foundation's 18th annual Housing
for Everyone grant program generously funds this
first year of step-down housing. Thank you!**



Jazz Brunch

The 38th Annual
Community Celebration

A BENEFIT FOR



Buell Street Dismas House East Allen Dismas House

Sunday, May 18, 2025

DELTA HOTEL, SOUTH BURLINGTON

12:00 - 3:00



FEATURING:

Pine Street Jazz

RESIDENT SPEAKERS!

SILENT AUCTION!

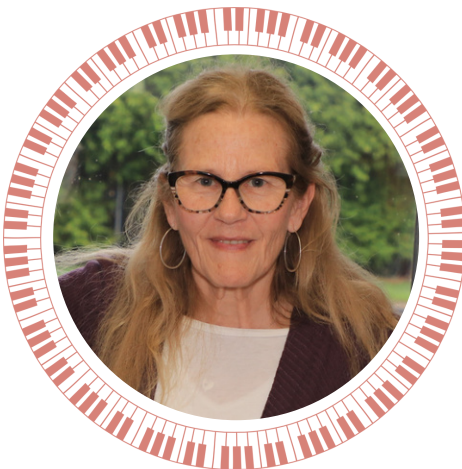
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on sale now

\$30 STUDENT TICKETS

\$60 TICKETS



Honoring Kimberly Parsons with the Jack Hickey Award for her service to the Dismas mission.



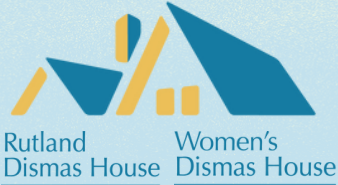
Honoring Susan Brooks with the Ann Atherton Award for exceptional volunteerism.

The 33rd DINNER AUCTION

SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 2025

KILLINGTON GRAND RESORT HOTEL

A BENEFIT FOR



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The online auction opens mid-May
COMMUNITY AWARDS!
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to purchase tickets by phone.



Rutland City Mayor Mike Doenges,
Honorary Chair



Honoring Recovery House with the Jack
Hickey Award for their service to the
Dismas mission.



Honoring Elijah & Megan LaChance with
the Mary O’ Award as Dismas champions.



Honoring St. Peter Church with the
Loving Spoonful Award.



PO Box 156

Hyde Park, Vermont 05655

Reconciling Former Prisoners With Society and Society With Prisoners Since 1986

Welcome to the team.



Amy Daviarz,
Program Director



Jennifer Dennis,
Step-Down Housing Program Manager



Sharon Miller-Dombroski,
Hartford Philanthropic Associate

Please welcome our newest staff, Amy Daviarz, Jennifer Dennis, and Sharon Miller-Dombroski. Amy supports the direct service staff at Dismas, using her social work experience, a deep understanding of cultural competency, and project management skills to guide day-to-day operations at Dismas.

Jennifer brings a comprehensive understanding of housing programs in Vermont, to help transition Dismas residents from its congregate homes to more independent housing in collaboration with private landlords and other housing providers.

Sharon brings nearly 30 years of experience in the nonprofit sector to the job of facilitating local fundraising at the Hartford Dismas House to empower good people to achieve great outcomes. We are glad to have you all on the team.