

Since 1986, more than
2,500 residents
have walked into a Dismas House.

Some succeed; others stumble, but every
person is offered the gift of a **fresh start**.



Buell Street, 1986

For forty years, the Dismas community has walked alongside them all.

From the Desk of Dismas of Vermont Founder, Rita Whalen McCaffrey



Our inspiration has always been about building community. Community starts inside the walls of a Dismas house among staff and residents; volunteers are invited from the community into our homes, and the positive tides we turn together ripple out into the regions in which we serve and the families we touch. It's being in community that is the "secret sauce" that has held us together for forty years.

The year was 1984, when a small group of prison volunteers from Burlington and I from Rutland were convened to consider what else the community might offer to an often-forgotten slice of our community: the incarcerated. We had been teaching a well-received course in decision-making skills and problem-solving to people in prisons for ten years, a program that grew from Rutland to Burlington, Woodstock, St. Johnsbury, and Windsor.

This spirited volunteer group first considered a Prison Chaplaincy, an idea that was denied. I brought a flipchart to the next meeting to help us brainstorm what else we might offer. Someone suggested post-prison housing. It was then that I remembered that in 1980 my husband and I had given a Decisions Training in Memphis to prospective volunteers, where our friend and prison volunteer, Rev. Art Kirwin, OP, had invited us to his parish community. One of the trainees was Rev. Jack Hickey, OP, Chaplain at Vanderbilt University, who founded the Nashville Dismas House with students in 1974.

Rita's Words, continued

Our local volunteer group embraced the Dismas concept and, well, the rest is history. It would take almost two years to open the first house, a project of great interest to the community, college students, and, of course, our friend Jack Hickey, who was our mentor and task master. He made several trips from Nashville to speak to the Vermont Department of Corrections, faith communities, service clubs, house parties, colleges, and the local news. Our initial group of ten evolved into several committees and, eventually, a Board of Directors. And our faithful, generous donors have believed in us from the very beginning, opening their hearts and sharing their treasure.

We first opened the Burlington Dismas House on Buell Street in 1986, happy with our result, never dreaming that Dismas would grow to five houses across Vermont—despite numerous court cases—and then launch Step-Down Housing to further address barriers to permanent, independent housing for those we serve.

It's been quite a ride to see how many folks have embraced our mission of reconciliation, working diligently to open and sustain their local house. From the very beginning, my dear late husband, Frank McCaffrey, was always the "wind beneath my sail," driving me to meetings, stuffing envelopes, and encouraging me every step of the way. I also owe special thanks to two retired House Directors from the original house in Burlington, who were with us for 35+ years: Richard Gagne and Kimberly Parsons. They gave me strength and added greatly to our program quality and longevity.

Dismas of Vermont is deeply grateful to the hundreds of volunteers, staff, and donors who have had faith in us and have worked with us to make Dismas of Vermont the organization it is today, a beacon of hope to residents and the communities who support them in Vermont and beyond.



Join Dismas of Vermont's Circle of Support Monthly giving makes a lasting difference.

1. Make an impact on the lives of residents all year long.
2. Help us plan with confidence. Your monthly gift means we can count on resources throughout the year.
3. Keep giving simple.
Your monthly gift is made each month, automatically. Cancel when you like.
4. Give to fit your budget. Giving a smaller amount each month can be easier than paying a larger sum all at once.



bit.ly/dismas-circle

Hartford Dismas House: A Home Where Community is Built

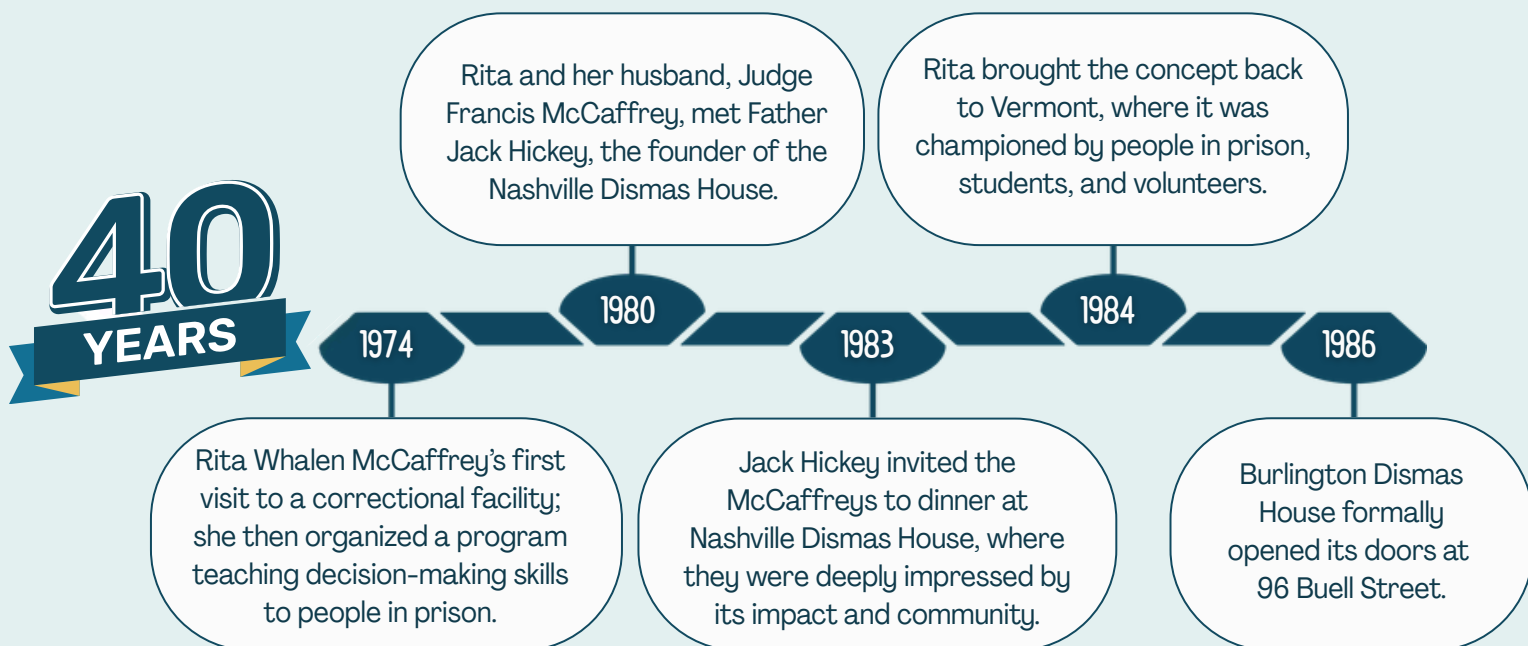
There is a new feeling when you walk into the living room at Hartford Dismas House—and it feels like home. Thanks to the generosity of the Mascoma Bank, residents now enjoy a beautifully refreshed community living space featuring comfortable new seating, updated furnishings, and a warm, inviting atmosphere designed for connection. This trauma-informed environment fosters a sense of safety, belonging, and stability as they rebuild their lives.

Since the renovations, the room has come alive. Residents gather after work to watch a game, share stories about their day, enjoy a movie, celebrate milestones, or simply relax together. It's where community is built. The new furnishings do more than brighten the room—they support our commitment to creating a space that reflects hope, dignity, and community that define Hartford Dismas House.



Dismas of Vermont's Family-Style Homes are Certified

As of mid-June, all five of Dismas of Vermont's family-style homes are certified as Level II Recovery Residences by the Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences (VTARR). Dismas of Vermont's VTARR certification acknowledges that Dismas adheres to a code of ethics, provides quality services, addresses a stated need of the recovery community, and offers informed recovery and housing choices. Most importantly, it provides additional tools, resources, and opportunities for Dismas residents and the staff who support them on the journey of substance use disorder and recovery.



Reflecting Back and Looking Ahead

Jim Curran, Executive Director

Recently, I took some time to reflect on my six years of service to the Dismas community. In the context of Dismas of Vermont's 40-year history, six years seems like just a drop in the bucket. Yet in that short time, so much has changed. Dismas now operates five houses across the state of Vermont. We piloted and established a Step-Down Housing program that provides housing opportunities for formerly incarcerated people when other options are unavailable or when affordable housing policies create barriers to participation and real opportunity. All five houses are now certified recovery residences. As the needs of our residents have grown, our staff has grown—from 10 to 17 people.

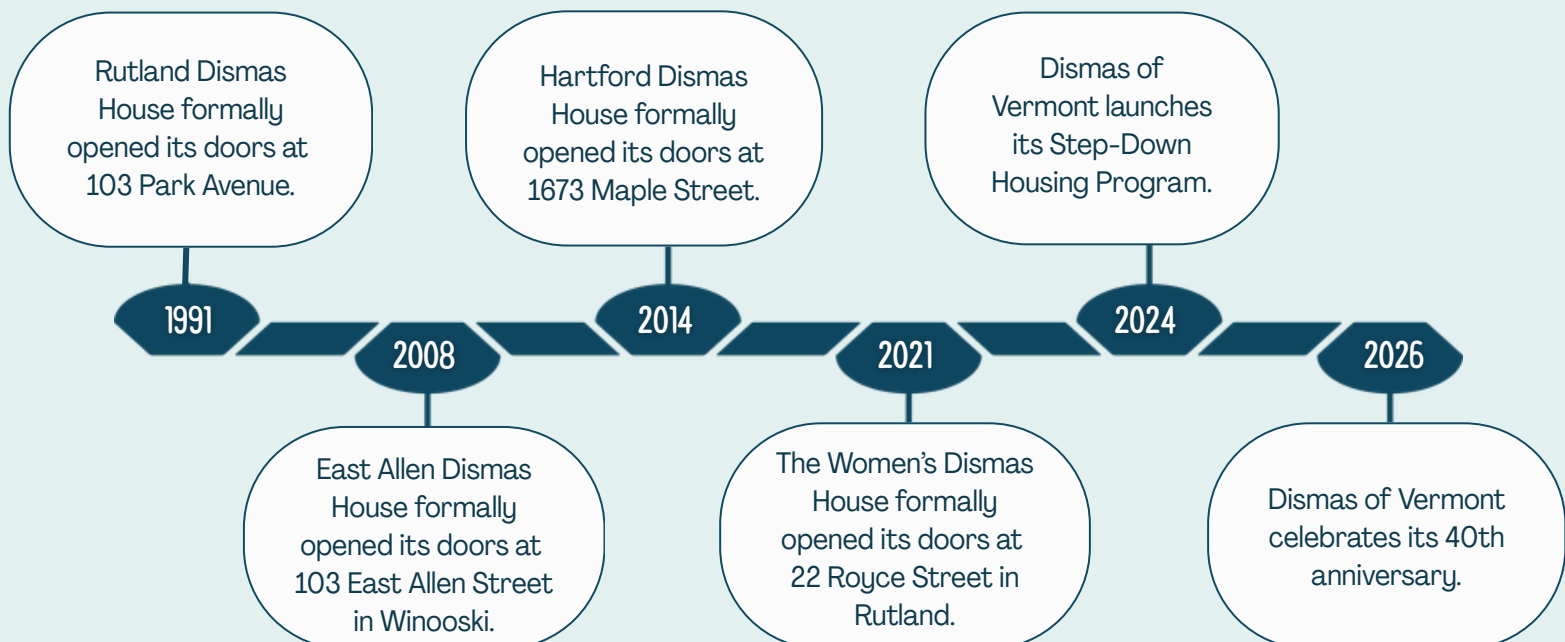


In those six years of growth, staff, board members, and residents have come and gone, each leaving a lasting impact on our organization and on me. I learned so much from Richard and Kim, and I remain thankful for their guidance and steady support during my first four years with Dismas. Rita still makes the rounds and always leaves an impact on everyone she meets. I continue to learn from our current staff, and I am always learning from residents. I feel grateful to play a role in their journeys. Every day brings something new. There are joys, successes, and heartaches. Through it all, the beauty of Dismas remains: community, acceptance, and care, provided by everyone. It is what all of us need most.

These six years have reminded me that Dismas is more than a program or a set of houses. It is a living community shaped by residents, staff, board members, volunteers, and supporters who keep choosing community, accountability, and hope.

It is in this spirit of reflection that I look forward to the future of Dismas.

We will continue to harness the spirit of community, acceptance, and care to meet people's growing needs. We will continue to create and provide opportunity where there seems to be none. We will lean in where others might back away because the work feels uncomfortable, hard, or too risky. The goal will remain the same: to make sure everyone has access to a safe and caring community, regardless of the worst day of their life.



Sarah, a Soldier for her Sobriety

For nearly twenty years, addiction controlled every decision I made. I gave my life to drugs. Everything revolved around getting high, staying high, and surviving that lifestyle. Along the way, I lost pieces of myself—my self-worth, my relationships, my opportunities, and the person I was meant to be. I used drugs to avoid pain, to numb guilt, and to escape the hurt I had caused others and the hurt I carried inside myself.

Looking back, I realize addiction took so much from me, but I also have to accept that I allowed it to because I didn't know another way to live.

Today, my life looks completely different.

I am alive when there were times I honestly shouldn't have been. I have maintained steady employment, something I had never been able to do before. More importantly, I show up for myself every single day. Recovery isn't something I put on like a jacket—it's the way I choose to live daily because I know sobriety requires honesty, humility, and effort.

I used to be a soldier for the streets. I was loyal to a life that was slowly destroying me. Today, I am a soldier for my sobriety. I fight for my recovery, my future, my family, and the life I have been given a second chance to live. No matter what challenges come my way, I refuse to go back to the person addiction made me become.

One of the greatest lessons I have learned is patience. For so long, I wanted everything instantly. Addiction taught me to chase immediate relief, but recovery has taught me that the best things in life take time. I have learned to slow down, trust the process, and take life one day at a time. Some days are harder than others, but I no longer look for an escape.

Instead, I face each day as it comes, knowing that every sober day is another step toward the life I am building. Recovery has shown me that progress isn't measured by perfection—it's measured by continuing to move forward, even on the difficult days.

Living at the Women's Dismas House has been one of the most important parts of my recovery. It taught me how to live alongside other women who were fighting the same battles I was. We didn't always agree, and we didn't always get along, but that's part of life. Being an adult means understanding that you don't always get your way and that you still have responsibilities: to respect others and do what needs to be done, even when it's difficult. Those experiences taught me patience, accountability, compromise, and how to build healthy relationships. Most importantly, they reminded me that none of us have to fight this battle alone.

The Women's Dismas House and Treatment Court didn't just help me get sober—they saved my life. They believed in me when I had forgotten how to believe in myself.

They challenged me to become accountable, pushed me to grow, and helped me discover strengths I never knew I had. I will be forever grateful to every counselor, case manager, probation officer, judge, staff member, peer, and every woman I had the privilege of walking beside on this journey. Each of them played a part in helping me become the woman I am today. I will never forget where I came from, I will never take this second chance for granted, and I will carry these lessons with me for the rest of my life. Recovery has given me more than sobriety—it has given me hope, purpose, and a future. For that, I will always be thankful.





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Growth and New Beginnings



Desiree Trapani
Women's Dismas House
Director



Matthew Plotzker
Chittenden County
Philanthropic Associate



Katy Foote
Rutland Dismas House
Assistant Director



Richard Griffith
East Allen Dismas House
Assistant Director

Monday and Tuesday, November 16 & 17, 2026: The Annual Phoneathon (Chittenden & Rutland Locations)

Saturday, April 17, 2027: Rutland Annual Dinner Auction

Sunday, April 25, 2027: Annual Community Celebration to benefit Buell Street & East Allen

Saturday, May 1, 2027: Hartford Volunteer Celebration

Saturday, June 19, 2027: First Annual Golf for Good Tournament to benefit the Rutland Houses

