

DISMAS HOUSE

Phone (508) 799-9389

Spring 2006

Almost Home Opens Doors!

On a bright, crisp January morning, five former inmates, still wearing jail-issued clothing, slung their belongings over their backs and walked from the gate of the Worcester County House of Corrections to a beautifully renovated farmhouse in West Boylston. They were accompanied by Dismas House Program Advocate Artie Rosenberg, Director of Treatment Services Jim DiReda, and Dismas Co-Executive Director Colleen Hilferty. These five men were now 'almost home'.

Soon, more former prisoners from the jail joined them, quickly filling the twelve beds at the Almost Home Program.



L-R Undersecretary Bradley, Deputy Shultz, Parole Chairwoman Walsh, Co-Director McMahon, Attorney General Reilly, Sheriff Glodis, Special Sheriff Turco, Sheriff Asche, Brian Canavan

The men were greeted with a feast from longtime Dismas volunteers, St. Mary's of North Grafton, and welcomed at a dinner that included residents from Dismas House, children and the warm embrace of the extended Dismas family.

The Almost Home Program is the result of more than a year of planning, fundraising and

renovating to create a home for healthy reentry for returning prisoners. A collaboration between Dismas House, the Worcester County Sheriff's Office and the Massachusetts Parole Board, Almost Home provides a toolkit for successful reentry for residents, offering needed substance abuse education and treatment, vocational, and

computer classes to former Worcester County inmates, all within the familial model that defines Dismas House.

Residents at Almost Home participate in a three-month program until they graduate to appropriate next-step housing, including the Dismas House program on Richards Street. While at Almost Home, residents participate in a vigorous daily schedule that includes; daily substance abuse education and treatment groups, one-on-one counseling, attendance at area AA/NA meetings, participation in basic computer classes in a

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Dismas Staff Named Local Hero!

Bank of America recently named Dismas House Co-Executive Director Colleen Hilferty as one of five heroes in Massachusetts for her work with former prisoners in the community. Bank

of America recognized five individuals for their contributions in human services and to their communities. Colleen was presented with the award at a Boston ceremony with Boston Mayor Tom Menino.

As local hero, Colleen received \$5,000 to give to a charitable organization of her choice. Colleen gave her award money to

the Worcester Area United Methodists (WAUM), who for several summers have been providing summer programming and activities for neighborhood children at the Richards Street Community Garden. In conjunction with the Goddard School of Technology across the street from the gardens, WAUM coordinates

activities for kids to stay off the streets and beat the heat in the Worcester summer.



Co-Executive Director Colleen Hilferty

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brand new, high-tech computer lab at Almost Home, and participation in a job-readiness curriculum designed by vocational expert Dr. David Hagner of the University of New Hampshire. Residents also meet with the Dismas House Attorney Advocate to resolve civil legal issues. Residents also participate in house activities, including a membership at the YMCA, and are embraced by the supportive community built by new Dismas staff (see story on Page 4) and Dismas House volunteers.

On February 15th, over 150 people gathered for ribbon-cutting ceremonies at Almost Home, celebrating the launch of this new model from prisoner reentry. Worcester County Sheriff Guy Glodis, Chairwoman of the Massachusetts Parole Board Maureen Walsh, Undersecretary of Public Safety

Patrick Bradley, Hampden County Sheriff Michael Asche, Attorney General Thomas Reilly, Pastor Rick Whitefleet-Smith, Dismas Co-Executive Director David McMahon, and Dismas Board Member Margaret Guzman spoke at the event, lauding the program and its promise to address the problem of recidivism in the Commonwealth.

The Almost Home Program is a unique venture that combines the new reform agenda of Sheriff Guy Glodis, reentry priorities of the Massachusetts Parole Board, the know-how and 18 years of experience and the model developed by Dismas House, and the support of Dismas funders, such as the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, the Stoddard Charitable Trust, the Russell Fuller



Sheriff Guy Glodis and Almost Home Resident Juan Carlos

Foundation, Foundation M and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. The Almost Home Program is a milestone in addressing overcrowding and recidivism in the Worcester County jail and will affect positive change for former prisoners, their families and the Worcester community.

Dismas Provides the Keys for New Apartments!

The Central Massachusetts housing market can present a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to Dismas residents looking to take the next step after Dismas House. The cost of housing, and the cost of first and last month's rent plus security deposit limits housing options. Often, the housing available to those with few resources is dreadful—chopped up lodging houses rife with drugs and criminal activity—hardly the ideal place to turn a new, healthy page in life.

Now, through a partnership with Community Healthlink, Dismas House is providing four vouchers to Dismas graduates in apartments in communities from Leicester to Worcester. These tenants only pay 30 percent of their income to Dismas House, and Community Healthlink issues market rent checks to participating landlords. Dismas House continues to provide support services and accountability for these individuals in

the community.

Thanks to a recent \$75,000 grant from CCRI/MassHousing, Dismas House plans to take this project to the next level in the next year by opening a new apartment community for Dismas graduates. Dismas House plans to purchase a multi-unit property and provide affordable housing and services to Dismas graduates. After acquisition, the project will be self-sustaining through rent and voucher income.

This program will provide safe, sober housing for 6-8 Dismas graduates and their families, and will complete a continuum of housing and services for former prisoners, from the first-step of Almost Home, to the transitional community of Dismas House, to permanent supportive housing in the community.

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Help Dismas House Keep the Momentum!

It has been an exciting year for Dismas House with the launch of the Almost Home Program and the start of permanent housing vouchers for graduating residents. We have increased our capacity and our ability to promote and sustain healthy reintegration for former prisoners, while retaining our trademark, supportive community environment for our residents. We rely on a mix of private and public funding, and we need YOUR help to make this happen. Please call or email your elected representatives to make sure Dismas House is funded—it's easy!

Call the Statehouse at (617) 722-2000!

Ask for your representative and senator. Ask for their support for Dismas House's \$80,000 line item as introduced by Representative John Binienda and Senator Ed Augustus.

Call City Hall!

Contact Councilor Gary Rosen, Chair of the Community Development Committee at (508) 799-1049 or at RosenG@ci.worcester.ma.us and ask him to support Dismas House's increased ESG request.

Thank you!

The Ex-Prisoner Gourmet

Have you ever tried Dukakis Clam Chowder or Sister Prejean Fried Catfish? How about a Bam Bam or Jailhouse Birthday Cake (honey buns with a Snickers melted between them)? These delights and more will be featured in the upcoming Dismas House cookbook—a collection of recipes from beloved Dismas volunteers and supporters. The cookbook also will share the secrets of the innovative and often delicious world of prisoner cuisine, limited by jail canteen supplies and hot pot cooking. The cookbook promises to be a fun and delectable read and a celebration of the Dismas mission!

It is not too late to send in your recipes!
Email us your specialties and family favorites today to cmdismashouse@aol.com
to be a part of this fun project!

Wish List!

Almost Home is here! There are a few household items that we need to make the transformation complete and to make our new house a home. Please call (508) 852-5986 if you are able to donate any wish list items to Almost Home. Thank you!

New Twin Sheet Sets

Pool Table

New Pillows

Gas Grill

New Bath Towels

Gift Cards to Area Stores for Clothing/Work Boots

New Twin Comforters

Dismas House Welcomes New Staff Members!

James DiReda, LICSW, Ph.D.



Jim joins Dismas House with over twenty years experience in the field of chemical dependency and mental health treatment. He holds a Bachelor's Degree from Worcester State College, a Master's Degree in Social Work

from the University of Connecticut, and a Ph.D. in Sociology and Social Work from Boston University. He serves as the Director of Treatment Services at Almost Home, designing and implementing group and individual therapy geared

specifically towards the needs of returning prisoners. Jim previously worked as the Associate Director of the PIP Shelter, and currently maintains a private practice and teaches at Clark University.

Lauren Farina



Lauren is the new Program Coordinator at Dismas House. She is a Clark University graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and Studio Art. She has completed Master's coursework in Community Development and Planning. Lauren began as an intern at Dismas House in 2002. She joined the staff this fall.

Virginia Cooke



Before joining the staff at Dismas House, Virginia was an invaluable intern working on a variety of projects for Dismas. A candidate for her Bachelor's from Clark University in 2006, Virginia works at Almost Home on weekends and teaches computer classes in the new Almost Home computer lab.

Meridith Milesi

Meridith is the new Program Coordinator at Almost Home, a position that requires constant attention to a variety of residential needs, from transition planning to leading vocational groups. Meridith has a Bachelor's in Sociology from the University of Rhode Island and a Master's in Community Planning from Clark University. She



previously worked as SMOC's Reentry Housing Specialist.

Anna Rice, Esq.

Thanks to a grant from the Massachusetts Bar Foundation, Dismas House is able to offer legal assistance to residents through Attorney Advocate Anna Rice. With both her extensive experience in human services and law, Anna helps residents resolve issues around child visitation and custody, driver's licenses, credit problems and housing



rights. Anna currently has a private law practice as well.

Dismas House Welcomes New Staff Members!

Steve Freedman

Steve comes to Almost Home as the new Overnight Coordinator, ensuring the house is safe and the community spirit is intact at night. Previously, Steve was the Owner/Operator of the Boston eatery Blue Diner, and he worked for Spectrum Health Services in their Westborough residential treatment program.



Kelly Tonini

Kelly provides services and coordinates fun house activities on the weekends at Almost Home. She also works at Project WORLD at Henry Lee Willis doing outreach to homeless individuals. Kelly has a Bachelor's Degree from Clark University and has completed Master's work in International Development.



Edward Crawford



Eddie is the newest addition to the Almost Home team, working weekend overnights at Almost Home. Eddie comes to the Dismas family with an extensive background in the

substance abuse treatment field. Previously, Eddie has worked as an Outreach Specialist for the Henry Lee Willis Center and as Peer Support Staff for AIDS Project Worcester.

Eddie has received numerous awards for his commitment to serving the community and shares his enthusiasm with the men at Almost Home. Eddie resides in Worcester.

Walkway of Hope

Buy a brick for the Dismas House Walkway of Hope! Dismas House is redoing our front walk in brick. For \$100, you can have your name, church, or organization engraved into a brick in the walkway. As new residents walk up the front walkway into our home, they will see that the community is welcoming them back into the neighborhood. Just clip the coupon and mail, or donate online at www.dismashouse.org. While there, sign our guestbook, and check out our refurbished website - thanks to web designer Matt Feinstein.

Yes! I would like to donate \$100 for a brick in the Walkway of Hope.

No, I cannot give \$100, but enclosed is a contribution of \$_____.

1-3 Lines (60 characters max - 20 characters per line) _____

Name _____ *Address* _____

Make Checks Payable to: Dismas House, PO Box 30125 Worcester, MA 01603

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☆ Almost Home Opens Doors!

☆ Dismar Welcomes New Staff Members!

☆ Dismar Cooks Up a Cookbook!

☆ Walkway of Hope!

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www.dismarhome.org*

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