

REFLECTIONS FROM FORMER AHH STAFF MEMBERS

Working at the Hospitality House gave me a new perspective on the criminal justice system in our country. Meeting the families and friends of the women in the prison put a face and name to the people often forgotten. It is one thing to watch *Orange is the New Black* or to listen to a story on NPR; it is another thing to play with the children and eat with the parents of inmates.

When working at the Hospitality House, I also had the chance to live in the state of West Virginia, a state that is incredibly beautiful and full of opportunity. The town of Alderson is a welcoming community, and nearby Lewisburg is a really cool place to hang out. I met some of the most interesting artists, writers, farmers and change makers when I was living in West Virginia; people who touched my life and gave me a wider perspective.

-MARISSA MINNICK

While living and working at the Alderson Hospitality House, I watched with delight as guests came together around a common difficult experience to care for one another. I recall fondly a group of men – husbands visiting their wives at FPC-Alderson – who would come together from different corners of the region nearly every week. They would arrive home from visitation and find me in the kitchen, where they'd eagerly take over the task of creatively preparing potatoes for other guests while bonding with one another over laughter and shared reflections on their visits that day at the prison camp. To live and work at the Hospitality House was to bear witness to the creation of a graced space.

Living in Alderson involves a lot of co-creation of these types of spaces. Directors Kathleen and Brian DeRouen, together with their children Vitale and Micah, are constantly working to better themselves, the Hospitality House, and the greater community. I learned a lot about community organizing during my time at the Hospitality House. Brian and Kathleen, as well as other community friends you're sure to meet if you stick around long enough, are excellent mentors: they listen to the needs of the community around them and do their best to creatively and compassionately respond, all while maintaining a healthy sense of realism about their limitations and needs for self-care. From the guests, from the DeRouens, and from the greater Alderson community, I learned so much about what it means to be in meaningful community during my time at the Hospitality House. I carry my time there with gratitude in my daily life now working with young people in ministry.

-ANNA ROBERTSON

I knew I wanted to do something meaningful, something challenging, something life-changing. By chance, I read an email about the Alderson Hospitality House and decided to try something new. I soon learned this experience would absolutely change my life.

Within hours of arriving, I had toured the Alderson Hospitality House, moved all my belongings into my new room, and been served a plastic, play hotdog by two year old Vitale. The next day, I was picking 80 pounds of blueberries with the rest of the AHH staff. I remember any anxiety and worry disappearing as I discovered the warmth of the house and the people surrounding it. I was immediately welcomed into the community of hundreds of guests that visit Alderson.

AHH embraces people and people appreciate that. At a time when many families struggle and are confused and feel helpless, AHH creates a community of openness and healing. Every week, I served meals, watched football games, and ultimately became friends with these people. It was a privilege to experience and help create such companionship and intimacy with so many different people.

The house, property, and community provide new experiences every day. As the staff

person at AHH, alongside the DeRouen family, I was responsible for many tasks necessary to keep the house running, but granted the freedom to manage my time and select projects that interest and inspire me. During my time at AHH, I slept in a lot; I connected with nature, ate new food, and met people from around the world. I spent many mornings in the garden and many afternoons chatting with guests over a sweet treat. I learned how to bake bread, change a tire, and stay positive with whatever task is in front of me.

Brian and Kathleen live full of passion, mindfulness, and joy. As a young person, Brian and Kathleen's constant encouragement to explore my interests, challenge my beliefs, and open myself to the world was invaluable. Along with their young sons they live focused on meaningful relationships and constant growth, which greatly impacts the atmosphere of AHH.

By choosing to work for AHH, you will be empowered to not only impact people's lives, but also to intentionally advance yourself in all aspects of your own life.

-JULIA MEANS

The Alderson Hospitality House is really special among the hospitality houses where I've lived and worked. People come here from all over the country, from all different walks of life. I really treasured the opportunity to become friends with our guests and to support them in their dedication to their loved ones. It was a privilege to participate in bringing joy to the women at the prison, to help make sure they were not forgotten about, to make sure that the precious relationships they had in their lives remained strong.

The warmth of a hospitality house is so needed after what many people experience at the prison: the pain of separation and the dehumanizing coldness of a large bureaucratic institution. My experiences at the house impelled me to be attentive and thoughtful in my work, if for no other reason than to stand against the twisted logic of punishment, with the logic of love. We're not two groups - the acceptable and the outcasts. We are all one, we are all loved, and we are all equal in God's eyes. Every time I picked up a mop, or a frying pan, or a weed eater, or a trowel, it was my way of making real the truth that I believe: we are one family.

Recreation was an important part of my life at the Hospitality House too. I have many wonderful memories of sitting by (and floating down!) the beautiful Greenbrier River, biking down peaceful country roads, and traveling up and down the hills and hollers to visit friends. Time with friends was plentiful and relaxed, full of laughter and music and thoughtful conversation.

-CHRISSEY NESBITT

I have thoroughly enjoyed the last 2 years working at AHH. It has been a wonderful opportunity to meet many interesting people, to encourage and show them love during a tough time in their lives. The atmosphere of companionship and family that thrives here is truly a privilege to experience and be a part of.

One of the best aspects of this job is getting to work with the Directors, Brian and Kathleen. From the moment I stepped off the train and was greeted by 2 little boys dressed as puppy dogs, I felt immediately welcomed and made a part of their loving family. As some of the most inspiring people I've met, they create a flexible and caring work environment. There is plenty to do to keep the house running, but there is always room for fun and fellowship, as well.

I would highly recommend this job to anyone looking for a great life experience that will positively touch many lives. These last 2 years will remain with me as a time I will never forget and the decision to come work here is one that you would not regret.

-KAYLA WEBER