

## From Uncertainty to Belonging: A Story of Community in Amesbury



When an exchange student from Italy suddenly found himself without a place to stay, his time in Amesbury, MA was at risk of being cut short. With no immediate solution, he faced the possibility of leaving school and the community he had just begun to call home. But what could have been a quiet departure back to Italy, instead became something much more powerful: a reminder of what can happen when a community comes together.

Victor had dreamed of studying abroad for years. Like many students in Italy, he chose to spend part of his high school experience in the United States, eager for something new. When he arrived, he felt a mix of excitement and homesickness, he was ready for the unknown, but also aware of what he had left behind. That sense of uncertainty returned months later, when he learned, he might have to leave.

“I only realized that a few days before my departure, and it hit really hard,” Victor shared. “It was knowing that all the connections I had made were soon going to become memories.”

With time running out, the Amesbury School Administration stepped in immediately. Working closely with Victor, they explored every option while respecting his comfort and privacy. What mattered most to him was to stay in Amesbury with some of the friends he had made.

Principal, Dr. Danielle Ricci crafted a note in the principal’s newsletter hoping to solve the challenge and not have to transfer Victor to a new town and school. Conversations, social media and text stings began flying lighting up across town. The response was immediate. “In times of struggle, I’ve always seen people in Amesbury rise to the challenge and rally together,” one administrator shared. “But even knowing that, I was surprised by how quickly people responded.”

Among those was a local family with a daughter in her first year in college and a son one year younger than Victor, who shared History class together. At first, the idea felt like a leap said Cory Riley and Ned Bolth, “We are not typically spontaneous, so this was a gamble,” they admitted. “We did not know him or how it might impact our lives.”

But then, encouraged by friends, and by their own son, Anderson, they made a decision that would change everything. They said yes.

From the moment Victor arrived, something clicked. “He was friendly, easy to be with, and helpful,” the family shared. “He jumped right into our family rhythm but also disrupted it in a really fun way.”



That first weekend, instead of easing in, Victor joined them in cleaning out their basement, turning a chore into a shared experience. Soon, he was cooking meals, introducing them to Italian coffee traditions, homemade tiramisu and becoming part of daily life.

For Victor, the shift was immediate. “They treated me like a part of the family from the very first day,” he said. “They gave me trust and respect even without really knowing me.”

What followed were months filled with connection: holidays with friends, Sunday meals, new traditions, trips to New York, and everyday moments that built something lasting.

Victor’s favorite memory? Playing in his first AHS home basketball game. But beyond any single moment, it was the people who made the difference. “Caring, fun, respectful, and warm,” Victor said, describing his host family, friends and the town.



For the host family, the experience was just as meaningful. It reshaped their perspective on risk, on connection, and on what it means to open your home to someone new.

Victor agrees. What stood out most wasn’t just the solution to his problem, but how it happened. “It made me realize how powerful a strong community can be.”

In the end, what could have been a story about disruption became one about belonging. Victor will return to Italy with many memories. “I’d tell them that they’re my second family,” he said. “I’ll never forget what it was like living with them.”

In a world that often feels disconnected, this story is a simple but powerful reminder that community isn’t just where you live. It’s how you show up for each other and make a difference.

