

VINFEN VOICE



FROM | THE PRESIDENT

On behalf of Vinfen's employees, I would like to thank the Massachusetts State Legislature for including \$28 million in the FY07 budget for Salary Reserve. For the third year in a row, we will be able to provide our direct care workforce with a much deserved pay raise.

In addition to this increase, I am proud to announce that in October we will award employees a gain-sharing distribution for the second year in a row. This was made possible by the financial diligence and cost-saving initiatives implemented by Vinfen's employees.

Working in human services can be challenging. As a result, we make every effort to support and reward our employees who accept these challenges through Salary Reserve pay increases, gain-sharing distributions, Major Vinfen Player awards, professional development programs, and a variety of other means.

The Boston Business Journal recently recognized Vinfen in their "Best Places to Work" June supplement. Profiled in the supplement, Vinfen Development Specialist Donald Rankins was asked about the human services profession. He responded with "You don't want to let it go. It's like a baby."

Donald's response is emblematic of Vinfen's employees. When possible, Vinfen goes "above and beyond" to ensure that we remain committed to our mission: helping to transform lives.

Sincerely,

Gary W. Lamson

Some Light on Winter Depression

by Ken Duckworth, M.D., Vinfen's Medical Director

When we switch the Red Sox for the Patriots, we may gain hope (at least this year) but we do lose sunlight. This means driving home in the dark, fewer barbeques, and a sense that maybe, just maybe, we just gotta go to Florida for a vacation this winter. This snowbird impulse may be more than just a pleasant respite from the New England winter. It may actually help you prevent or treat a condition millions of Americans have -- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Although observed for more than a century, this condition was not officially named until the early 1980s. A subtype of depression, SAD is characterized by excessive sleeping, increased appetite often accompanied by cravings for sugary and/or starchy foods, and weight gain. These are features of "atypical depression" (a "classic" depression involves weight loss, sleeplessness, and decreased appetite). SAD is most evident during the darkest months (December - February) and resolves in the spring. About 75% of the people affected are women; the most common period of onset is in one's 30s.

Sunlight appears to be a key ingredient in the "brain diet" for many individuals. People vulnerable to SAD typically experience it in some locations but not in others. Whereas a significant number of people have SAD in Alaska, it is virtually non-existent in sunny locales like Mexico. Merideth Toler, Outreach Worker at Vinfen's Supported Apartments in Plymouth, Mass., volunteered to share her experience with SAD. She noted she was fine while living in Colorado Springs with more than 300 sunny days a year. After moving to Massachusetts with fewer sunny days, she began to experience winter depression symptoms. Hers is a classic story of how sunlight changes can trigger SAD.

The treatment, not surprisingly, involves light. If symptoms are mild, increased exposure to sunlight can improve them. A long walk outside, or being exposed to a window during the day, can prove beneficial. There is solid evidence to support the use of special florescent light when depressive symptoms significantly affect daily living. They provide what the brain seems to require. Interestingly, one study found that an hour's walk in winter sunlight was as effective as 2-1/2 hours under bright artificial light. Before embarking on any course of action, get an evaluation to be sure you have the right diagnosis. Mood disorders can be a little tricky to accurately diagnose. The kind of depression associated with SAD can also be the first presenting symptom for bipolar disorder. Having the correct diagnosis is key, as the treatment plan is different for each mood condition.



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Profile: Moe Armstrong, Peer Education on his mind



Moe Armstrong, Vinfen's Director of Recovery Services, recently received national honor at the 2006 American Psychological Association Conference with the Special Achievement and the Outstanding Contributions in Psychosocial Rehabilitation Awards. They are the latest additions to a long list that includes the National Alliance on Mental Illness' prestigious Lionel Aldridge Award. All recognize his unflinching work and commitment to the development of peer education services in the mental health community.

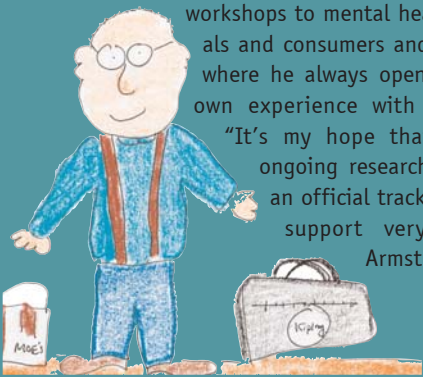
Armstrong first outlined the concept of the "Peer Educators Project" in the spring of 1994. The idea was to create discussion groups among people affected by psychiatric disabilities. Peer "facilitators" are trained to share their own experience, coping skills, and the struggles to live independently with individuals facing the challenges of mental illness, looking for help in defining their goals for recovery, and willing to share their story. To that intent, groups review and talk over recovery-oriented documentation. Funded by the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership, the project is now in its eighth year. Last year, it reached more than 8,700 people in Massachusetts alone, and has fostered numerous similar programs nationwide.

As a Vietnam Vet who has been homeless and experienced psychiatric symptoms, Armstrong was inspired to create a Vet-to-Vet program that grew out of the Peer Educators Project. To this day, he still remembers feeling an intense relief when he walked into a veterans' center out west to see a counselor for the first time. "Our challenge is to get veterans from this current war to keep contact with each other and not fall through the cracks or fall apart when they come back. A lot of veterans don't realize when there is something wrong with them. Some probably have a psychiatric condition that needs to be looked at. But mental health conditions are not easily discussed or dealt with. And that's what peer support does," explains Armstrong.

Now in 39 cities across the U.S., the program is being studied as part of a research project on peer support by the New England Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Yale University Department of Psychiatry.

At Vinfen, Armstrong continues to give workshops to mental health professionals and consumers and their families, where he always opens up about his own experience with schizophrenia.

"It's my hope that with all the ongoing research, there will be an official track record on peer support very soon," says Armstrong.



SPOTLIGHT

VINFEN HONORS DIRECTOR WHO SERVES WITH WISDOM AND HEART

by Brad Reed. Partially reprinted with permission from the West Roxbury & Roslindale Transcript, July 20, 2006.

Amali De Zoysa feels that her proudest achievement is helping others achieve goals of their own. "The most rewarding part of my job is when our clients really feel that they've achieved something, and that we had a little role to play in that," said the 28-year-old De Zoysa, a native of Sri Lanka who currently works as a Program Director (PD) at a Vinfen psychiatric rehabilitation residence in Roslindale. De Zoysa was recently rewarded for her work when the Vinfen Board of Directors awarded her a \$4,000 scholarship, which will go towards her master's degree in educational counseling at UMass-Boston.

"She's sort of the whole package," said Steven Ponte, a Senior PD at Vinfen who nominated De Zoysa for the scholarship. "She's able to be firm, yet compassionate ... there's really no ceiling for her." De Zoysa started working for Vinfen four years ago after receiving her bachelor's degree in psychology and anthropology from Middlebury College in Vermont. After working for three years as a caseworker and an assistant program director, she was promoted to be program director last year. "As a caseworker, I was responsible for my clients," said De Zoysa. "But as a director, I am a manager." De Zoysa currently directs a residence that acts as a transition house for women who are preparing to live independently while recovering from mental illness. According to her, the most common illness for women in her program is schizophrenia. "We help them manage their medicine, their money, and learn how to take care of their personal space, like how and how often to do chores," said De Zoysa. For her, the chief goal of the program is to prepare residents for the challenges they'll face when they live on their own again.

One of the program's most recent successes is Katherine Dunn, who has been a resident for the past year and plans on moving into her own apartment by the end of the year.

"The staff being here means there's something to lean upon," said Dunn, who was first hospitalized in 1974 and has been hospitalized many times since. "I've learned to trust people more, and it's important to learn that." Dunn also praised De Zoysa for her work ethic. "She's very efficient, and she gets things done," she said.

De Zoysa and her staff find their work rewarding. "You have real satisfaction in what you do," said Stephen Akinkuolie, a residential counselor at the residence for the past three years. Akinkuolie added that he liked working for De Zoysa because she has "an open administration." Despite all the praise she has received, De Zoysa has remained humble. When asked why she deserved to receive the scholarship, she responded that "there's a lot of people who do the same work who are also worthy of the scholarship."

HANDS-ON APPROACH TO SUCCESS FOR ELVIS

Larry Schiller, Major Construction Worker at Vinfen, realized right from the start that his new teammate and apprentice was avid to learn and very organized. Elvis Lynn was hired as a part-time employee in Vinfen's Housing Department in March 2005. "We needed extra help after a fire badly damaged the Pleasant St. residence. That's when the idea of having Elvis help us and get training at the same time came up," recalls Schiller. The team's first job involved installing two new bathrooms and doing some tiling, carpeting, and wood work. Since then, the pair has worked on four projects. Elvis has gradually taken on more



PD Amali De Zoysa (l) and Individuals Served Katherine Dunn (center) and Nancy Lackey at the residence in July.



Larry Schiller (l) and Elvis Lynn put the finishing touch on the newly built handicap accessible bathroom at Vinfen's Employment Training Center, where they worked for four months.

responsibility and recently was given a tool belt as a sign of the progress he has made with Larry's patient guidance and dedication.

Elvis says he started receiving mental health services at the age of 15. "I was admitted to the hospital three times. It helped me, even though I didn't think it would at the time." Referred to Vinfen's Employment Training Center (ETC) in Brighton, Mass., by the Department of Social Services two years ago, Elvis needed a flexible program that could provide him vocational training while still allowing him to attend school in the mornings. "During ETC's move in December 2004, I couldn't help but notice that Elvis was very aware of what was needed, putting down shelves, packing boxes, and rallying people to help," recalls Program Director Jennifer Straub. At the program, Elvis worked with Job Coach Paul Faircloth to create his resume, and prepare for interviews and work relationships. When the time came to look for a job, Straub and Faircloth thought a position in Vinfen's Housing Department would be an ideal fit for him. The department needed extra help, and Elvis always wanted to work with his hands.

A former construction business owner, Schiller describes the mentor-mentee relationship as mutually beneficial. "With Elvis at my side, I can do more without fear of hurting myself. At the same time, I am contributing to his training while learning from him in return," he explains. Elvis is proud to be trusted on the job. Housing Department Vice President John Lind adds that "watching individuals served develop both skills and confidence is very rewarding." The first apprentice has now been joined by Isabella 'Choopy' Ortiz, who receives services from Vinfen's Day Development and Training Center and has already completed his first project with professionals Sergio Castro and William Biscan. Joe Teixeira, Manager of the Capital Improvement Project, Vinfen's annual property renovation initiative, would like to bring in a new apprentice. "But we need to take this challenge gradually as there is still some training to do before Elvis and Isabella are fully independent," he says.

Praising the job done at ETC, Straub says Elvis fully grasped this unique learning opportunity and blossomed in the work relationship. Still a part-time student at the Phoenix School in Norwood, which offers a therapeutic environment for students with special learning and/or behavioral needs, Elvis wants to work full time at Vinfen when he's done with school in October, and also take evening classes to study counseling. "I'd like to be a social worker, like my mom is, or a counselor. A lot of kids from school come to me for advice, so I might as well make it my job!" After passing the Math MCAS* in February, he is gearing up for the English test. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, 21 to 67% of students with disabilities, depending on the grade and subject tested, failed their spring 2005 MCAS exams, while 12% did not take the test despite being enrolled. So, as Straub puts it, "It's a great achievement for Elvis." And it's a major step toward accomplishing his goals.

* Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



ROCK SOLID

Celtics forward Ryan Gomes, Mascot LUCKY, and actor Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson welcomed 150

Boston-area children and teenagers from various nonprofits for a special advance screening of Columbia Pictures' feature film *Gridiron Gang*. Among them were over 20 youths from Vinfen programs, who had a blast and were all treated to an autographed invitation from both "The Rock" and Gomes. *Gridiron Gang* opened nationwide on September 15.

SETTING SAIL ABOARD THE POINCARÉ

For the third summer in a row, more than 150 individuals served and staff participated in five cruises compliments of Keating Willcox, owner of the Poincaré Tall Ship.



On July 26, Paul Arington and Joanna Mongrain from Vinfen's Community Support Services DayHab program enjoyed a sunny afternoon aboard the Poincaré tall ship.

MASS. MENTAL HEALTH BARBEQUE



More than 80 individuals served and staff from Vinfen's Mass. Mental Health Network gathered on July 21 for the annual barbeque.

The Grotto Glen Residence teamed up with the Glen Road Residence to organize the event. Pictured here taking a break from the festivities are Case Worker Sarah Rosenstein (l) and Individual Served Delois Howel.

SCHWARTZ ROUNDS AT HANCOCK

Vinfen's Hancock Center hosted its 5th Schwartz Center Rounds on July 27. The discussion was moderated by Frank McCaffrey, Social Worker at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. Initiated in 2005 with funding from Tufts Health Plan, the Rounds help caregivers discuss difficult emotional and social issues that arise on the job, and are held in health care centers throughout the U.S.

