

# VINFEN voice



## FROM | THE PRESIDENT

It is with great pleasure that I dedicate this column to Vinfen's outstanding employees who make a tremendous difference in the lives of the people Vinfen serves. In June, Vinfen honored more than 700 employees at its 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Employee Recognition Luncheon in Boston. Coming from across Vinfen's geographically diverse service area, they gathered to celebrate their successes and achievements. At the same time, the event served as a reminder as to why we work in human services: to help transform the lives of those with disabilities.

Vinfen's employees are the organization's greatest asset. Their dedication has helped make Vinfen an industry leader locally and nationally. Gathering together as an organization on a yearly basis is just one of many ways that Vinfen says "thank you" to its workforce.

As this newsletter goes to press, we await the passage of the FY07 Massachusetts state budget, which includes a \$28 million Salary Reserve for direct care workers. If signed into law, the Salary Reserve provision will allow Vinfen to provide our talented direct care staff with a much deserved pay raise.

I am proud of our employees who, despite many challenges, come to work every day to better the lives of those with disabilities and their families. To our employees, I salute you!

Sincerely,

Gary W. Lamson

## Vinfen Marks Mental Health Month with Awareness Forum

To raise awareness and promote understanding about mental health, Vinfen joined organizations across the United States in observance of Mental Health Month, by hosting its first Awareness Forum on May 11 in Cambridge. *The Inside-out Story: Another look at mental illness* Forum brought together five panelists who shared their personal experience.

Emcee Dr. Ken Duckworth, Vinfen's Medical Director, introduced the panel with a revealing story on stigma that dates back to 1986, when he was looking for a residency after medical school. "When interviewed, I would answer the question 'Why psychiatry?' with 'My father has bipolar disorder,' which prompted the following quote from a famous doctor 'that's a terrible reason to become a psychiatrist; it will be detrimental to your professional experience.' Then, later on when I would tell people I'm a psychiatrist, the most common reaction would be 'Can you read my thoughts?' But recently, I received new responses. 'Prozac and psychotherapy saved my life!' was the first reaction. 'My daughter has schizoaffective disorder,' was the second one." Though the general public has come a long way in its collective



"We relive our experience in performing. We are carried along by our personal lives, however, into another place, an energy experience and a transformative reality that happens with the audience," explains June Gross (l), who performed *The Dangers of Empathy* with daughter Viesia Novosielski (r) at Vinfen's first Awareness Forum.

understanding of mental illness over the past decades, it still hasn't come to terms with it. Stigma, misconceptions, and misinformation are still far too common.

The first panelist to share her perspective was Lisa Halpern, Director of Consumer Affairs at WestBridge Community Services, and Coordinator of *In Our Own Voice*, a speaking program for the Massachusetts National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Halpern was first diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1999, while on medical leave from graduate studies at Harvard. Even though she remembers symptoms dating back to kindergarten, such as social withdrawal, Lisa noticed an extreme change in her behavior at the age of 28. "I dropped out of a sorority I loved, I started to get lost in the subway," she recalls, and the once avid reader couldn't read anymore. After a second hospitalization, Lisa was on a cocktail of 14 medications. At that time, she started seeing a new psychiatrist, and the first thing he said was "Let's try to figure out Lisa's personality, Lisa's illness, and then see which approach and treatment works best for Lisa, so that Lisa can be Lisa again." With this new approach, and the guidance of several mentors, Lisa was able to recover and become an advocate herself. "But I'm still recovering; it's a continuation in time not a graduation point," she insists.

## Opinion: Courage & Hope for Depression by Ken Duckworth, M.D.



On March 24, the Boston Globe published a piece about Senator Robert Antonioni's battles with depression and his singular courage in being open about it. A first for Massachusetts lawmakers, this breakthrough will encourage many to get the help they need. Like the senator, professionals I have worked with frequently pay cash and travel to the next town's pharmacy--they want no paper trail. Sadly, on average it now takes well over 5 years for a person to seek help for depression.

The New England Journal of Medicine recently released the largest ever national study of serious depression conducted, called STAR-D, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. The results point to the need for persistence in trying additional treatments, and demonstrated that many people with serious depression can live their lives symptom free, not simply improved. Later versions of the study will help sort out the crucial role of psychotherapy in improvement.

In addition to a service system that works, it will take guts, perseverance, and science to continue to advance treatment for depression, a major cause of disability, health concerns and suicide for teens and adults alike. As the Senator reminds us, depression is an illness like any other. And treatment works.

### Tips: Stay cool this summer

Summer means sunny days, warm weather, and barbecues. But it can also bring heat waves with unusually high temperatures that last for days or weeks. This year, stay cool and safe from heatstroke and sunburns by taking extra precautions.

#### Do:

- Drink extra fluids. Water is best. Other fluids are juices, caffeine-free and sugar-free sodas.
- Sleep in a cool place.
- Wear loose, light-colored summer-weight clothing.
- Use fans or air conditioning.
- Remain with another person.

#### Don't:

- Engage in strenuous exercise.
- Drink alcoholic, sweet and/or caffeinated beverages.
- Spend extensive time outside in the sun.
- Sleep or sit in hot conditions.

#### Warning Signs:

- Dizziness, weakness
- Nausea, headache
- Rapid/weak pulse, breathing difficulties
- Red, hot skin, either dry or moist

# SPOTLIGHT

## VINFEN MARKS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH WITH AWARENESS FORUM

-- continued from cover --

Toby Fisher, Executive Director at NAMI-MASS, noted that everyone can be affected by mental health and/or substance-abuse disorders, but that "heart diseases get far more attention than brain diseases, which mental illnesses are". NAMI is a family and consumer-based organization that provides support and education, and advocates for the rights of people with mental illness. Organizations such as NAMI have developed a network of support and services to help families and mothers, who not so long ago were the main providers of care. "People affected with a mental illness are capable of great accomplishments if they are given the rights structure and support," concluded Fisher.

Mother and daughter June Gross and Viesia Novosielski then took the stage to perform their autobiographical play, *The Dangers of Empathy*. Gross is a writer and former editor who advocates and educates about recovery and resiliency within a managed care organization. Novosielski is a student, writer and artist, and a Peer Educator at Vinfen's Webster II program, a day rehabilitation program in Brookline, Mass., that helps adults with psychiatric disabilities learn skills and live more independently. Performed many times throughout the U.S., the play recounts their experience with the onset of mental illness in Viesia at the age of 12, explores the loss of privacy and the disruption of family life during this traumatic period, and the pain of not being able to provide for your child's needs. "All of a sudden we became a case history, which is why we wrote this play: so that people can experience what it's like from the inside-out as well as the outside-in," she says, describing the performance as "always very intense for us."

The audience was composed of a mix of people from the community, relatives of individuals served by Vinfen, and Vinfen staff. "I loved the first person accounts from Lisa Halpern and the mother-daughter play was heartbreaking in its honesty. I'm sure everyone who attended walked out with changed perceptions," said one of the guests after the event. The panel was followed by a discussion, with questions on treatment, acceptance of the illness, and how to get support. Ken Duckworth observed that there is a natural tendency to try to self-diagnose. But the illness itself often makes it impossible for persons with serious mental illness to accept that there is something wrong going on and that they need to accept treatment. "I strongly recommend reading *I'm not sick, I don't need help*, by Xavier Amador, Ph.D. It's a must read for families and caregivers trying to cope with a loved one with mental illness who refuses treatment because they do not believe that they are ill."

### A PLACE TO CALL HOME

On April 11 Bruce Thiboult was among the speakers at the Department of Mental Health (DMH) Metro Boston Area Legislative Breakfast that took place at the State House in Boston, MA. Stepping to the podium after rousing speeches from Sen. Jack Hart, Sen. Steven Tolman, and Rep. Gloria Fox, wasn't easy. But Bruce knew exactly what he wanted to say. "Thank you." He acknowledged the



Bruce Thiboult was one of three guest speakers to testify at the DMH Metro Boston Area Legislative Breakfast last April. He is flanked by Commissioner Elizabeth Childs, M.D., and Area Director Clifford Robinson.



"Living here gives me hope and a new way of life," declared Bruce Thiboult, Resident at Vinfen's Harvard Commons, standing on his porch at the end of March for a Vinfen photo shoot.

© Stu Rosner Photography (2006)

organizations and, most importantly, the people who were instrumental in his recovery process, most notably his brothers "who always answered my calls for help and were there to support me." He then went on to tell his story, and how he finally feels at home in his new Vinfen-operated apartment located at Harvard Commons in Dorchester.

Harvard Commons is the first phase of an extensive housing and community complex planned on the former Boston State Hospital site. Nineteen buildings containing 45 rental units are already built, 10 of which Vinfen operates. They look like single-family colonial-style homes, with porches and a front lawn. Studios and apartments are subsidized through the Federal Shelter Plus Care program to tenants with low income, diagnosed with a psychiatric illness, and who were homeless prior to moving into the unit.

Thiboult moved to Harvard Commons in 2005, a very busy and successful year for him. In March, he graduated from the Friends of the Shattuck Shelter Transition to Independent Living (TIL) program, a drug and alcohol free program where he lived for two and a half years. He then moved to his unit at the Commons in May. "I've been here ever since and enjoying it a lot. I can do my hobbies, gardening and cooking," he says. Last but not least, he decided to open up and share his experiences and struggles. In November, he was the talk of the town in a four-column profile in the Boston Sunday Globe titled *At site of blight, homes in bloom*. But overcoming his illness and its consequences wasn't as smooth as it seems. At the age of 42, he made several suicide attempts. Now 46, he admits that hope was what he lacked most, "I just really had no will to live." Taken to the ER by a friend, he ended up at a psychiatric ward, and then at the TIL program.

Bruce suffers from bipolar disorder II, an acute brain disorder that causes dramatic shifts in a person's mood, energy, and ability to function. He is also diabetic. After revealing his diagnosis, he quickly refers to his upbringing. "I had a really bad childhood. My father was an alcoholic. My mother was mentally ill. There was never any help. At 12, I was introduced to drugs and alcohol. I was addicted until 2002. I wanted to forget," he painfully recalls. Overlooking the houses on the Commons, he reflects on the many changes that have affected his life since he moved in his new nest. "I love my apartment. I see myself here for a long time!" he says, smiling. An amateur gardener, Bruce was given a small lot by Cruz Development Corp. of Roxbury, owner and developer of the land, to indulge in his passion.

Bruce Thiboult is moving on with his life. It's not always easy, and he still suffers from psychotic symptoms at times. But as he concluded his speech at the State House, "Today, I have hope. Today, I'm pretty much happy." A long and well-deserved standing ovation ensued.

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## SEN. BARRIOS RECEIVES AWARD

In recognition for his continuous support of Vinfen and human services, State Senator Jarrett Barrios (left), D-Cambridge, was presented with a Friend of Human Services Award by Gary Lamson, Vinfen President & CEO, at the 16<sup>th</sup> Employee Recognition Luncheon at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel on June 14. The award is the painting *The Deep Blue Sea* by Vinfen's Webster House artist Charles Mugadza.



## A RED SOX NIGHT

Thanks to the generous donation of 40 tickets by the Boston Red Sox, individuals served by Vinfen's Mass. Mental Health Supported Housing Program enjoyed a game at Fenway Park on May 25.



Residents Tony Luna and Alfred Glover are pictured here cheering on the home team, who won that night against the Tampa Devil Rays.

## VINFEN SHINES AT NAMI-MASS WALK

More than 350 individuals served, staff, and supporters of Vinfen joined the Massachusetts National Alliance on Mental Illness Walk on May 6 under sunny skies. Vinfen Team Captains raised more than five times the amount raised last year with a total of \$5,747 to support NAMI-MASS. One third of the donations were made via Vinfen's Team Web page, and Nancy O'Connor, of Vinfen's Public Affairs Dpt., ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the top 10 Online Fundraisers with \$1,050. Kudos to all!



Mark Weaver, Outreach Worker at Vinfen Baycove CRS (second from right) and individuals served by Baycove paused for a photo after checking in at the registration table.



## JANYETTE MARTIN NAMED NURSE OF THE YEAR



Janyette Martin was named Private Sector Registered Nurse of the Year by the Connecticut Department of Mental Retardation. Nominated by Elisa Velardo, Vice President of Vinfen-Connecticut, Martin received the award at the Rensselaer at Hartford's Seminar Hall Complex, CT., on May 9, from DMR Commissioner Peter O'Meara (right), and David Carlow, Director of Health Services at the DMR Central Office.

## DUCKWORTH DISTINGUISHED BY PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY

The Massachusetts Psychiatric Society awarded 14 new Distinguished Fellow awards at its 2006 Annual Meeting in May. Among them was Dr. Ken Duckworth, Vinfen's Medical Director. MPS represents over 1,700 members and is one of the largest district branches of the American Psychiatric Association. The society also installed a new President, Robert L. Pyles, M.D., former president of the American Psychoanalytic Association.

## TWO AWARDS FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS



Vinfen's Public Affairs Department received two Awards of Excellence for the Branding Initiative and the *Vinfen Voice* newsletter at the 2006 New England Society for Healthcare Communications Lamplighter Awards in Providence, RI, on May 9. Pictured here are (l to r): Nancy O'Connor, Assistant; Sophie Beauvais, Communications Specialist; Keith O'Connor, NESHCo Western Mass. Director; and Christopher Smalley, Director.

# calendar

## SUMMER SHOW AND SALE AT GATEWAY ARTS

Kicked off with a giant sidewalk sale on June 3, the Gateway Crafts Store Summer Sale lasts until July 29. With 25-75% off all items, merchandise includes fine jewelry, silk scarves, hand-painted wood furniture, unique children's items, and more from Vinfen's Gateway Arts program. The Summer



Show in the adjacent Gateway Gallery runs through August 26 and showcases the art of Cameron Wilder. For more information, please call (617) 734-1577. Store hours: M-F 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; Sat. noon-5 p.m. Gallery hours: M-F 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Sat. noon-5 p.m. 60-62 Harvard Street, Brookline Village, MA.

> *Uma*, painting by Artist Cameron Wilder featured at the show.

## ON THE ARTSIDE EXHIBIT AT WEBSTER HOUSE



The *On the Artside* show features new pieces by artists from Vinfen's Webster House through July 31. Webster House is a day rehabilitation program which helps adults with psychiatric disabilities live and work more independently. Pictured left at the Opening Reception for the show on May 18 are: (l to r) Webster House staff

Paul Lipp, Wendi Chaka, Member Angeline Tellis, and Webster House II staff Chris Masterman. For more information, please call (617) 739-5461. 20 Webster Place, Brookline Village, MA. Hours: M-F 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

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