

## VINFEN voice



## FROM | THE PRESIDENT

At the beginning of each year, we pause to reflect on where we are as an organization and where we are going. Vinfen enters its 29<sup>th</sup> year of providing outstanding services and support to individuals with disabilities with 2,000 dedicated employees, solid financial strength, and a renewed sense of our mission.

In 2005, we were able to award our employees with a gain-sharing distribution. We were also able to provide a modest pay raise to our direct care employees due to the passage of the Salary Reserve bill by the Massachusetts State Legislature. This raise was also extended to all Vinfen employees as a result of the financial diligence and cost-saving initiatives by Vinfen's employees and programs.

This year, Vinfen continues to focus its legislative advocacy energies on overhauling the state's contracting system to improve the lives of direct care workers and individuals served. We have also embarked on a development strategy with the Boston-based Development Guild to educate potential donors about Vinfen and the services we provide. Recently, we published an annual report highlighting the success stories of three individuals served and launched an Annual Appeal to raise funds for several Vinfen programs.

On behalf of everyone at Vinfen, I thank you for your continued support and look forward to the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Gary W. Lamson

## Disability Housing Partnership offers First Advocacy Training for Consumers

Since the 1960's civil rights movement, individuals who were denied basic rights or opportunities have joined forces to "speak truth to power." Agencies like Vinfen vigorously advocate on behalf of people with disabilities. Yet typically the most powerful testimony comes from one person telling others about his/her experience and how public policy has affected his/her life. Vinfen belongs to a cross-disability coalition of agencies and individuals that aims to do both: advocate for people with disabilities and enhance their ability to advocate for themselves.

United Disability Housing Partnership was created in July 2004 to advocate for housing as an essential human need that cuts across all disabilities. Community Organizer Michelle Maslov recently joined United's staff to focus on training people with disabilities to become strong, effective advocates for change at the "grassroots" level. "The idea emerged when several organizations realized that there was a common need for housing regardless of specific disabilities and that it made more sense to work together as a group," she says. Fifteen people, including individuals with physical disabilities, representatives of the Massachusetts Clubhouse Coalition, and the Boston Center for Independent Living, attended the first training held on December 6, 2005, in Boston.

Paula Callanan, a skills specialist at the Northeast Independent Living Program (NILP) in Lawrence, Mass., hoped to learn "ways to assist my consumers and me to improve the housing situation in the northeast and to help me better organize community change. There's very little accessible and affordable housing available. Elected officials know about the problem but they have no answers for us... We want to restore housing programs the way they were before [Governor] Romney cut them." Mark Walker, also a skills specialist at NILP, thinks that the community of disabled individuals must communicate more and better explain the needs to other communities if it wants to be well-heard and understood. When asked what organizing means to them, participants said: "People, collective efforts, exercising power to achieve a common goal, to make changes."



Paula Callanan and Mark Walker, of Northeast Independent Living Program, during last December's first United advocacy training.

The overall objective of the coalition is the creation of more affordable, accessible housing. But community organizing can also focus on smaller steps like working with housing authorities to improve operations or advocating for housing development near public transportation. Another larger goal might be fighting for funds to convert abandoned properties to affordable housing. This first session sparked interest and generated some worthwhile goals. Already, several Vinfen residents decided to join the second session on January 6. "Hopefully more will attend the next spring session or consider membership in the United Citizen Action Network," concludes Maureen Drouin, Director of Planning at Vinfen and member of United's partnership.

For more information about the United Disability Housing Partnership and upcoming advocacy training dates, go to [www.unitedhousing.org](http://www.unitedhousing.org) or contact Michelle Maslov at (617) 927-0088 #24, by email at [mamaslov@ahc.org](mailto:mamaslov@ahc.org).

## Q & A: Lisa Hughes, recipient of the 2005 Providers' Media Award



"I love the caricature; it's great!" smiles Lisa Hughes in her CBS4 office in Brighton.

Beyond her work as a talented Emmy Award journalist and anchor-woman at CBS4 Boston, Lisa Hughes actively supports various nonprofits. In 2002, she agreed to host the Peer Providers Awards of the Massachusetts Council of Human Service Providers (MCHSP) for the first time. Since then, she has been a staunch supporter of the MCHSP and its members, contributing to the understanding of the vital role of human services. Last November, she joined us again at the Milestones convention and received the 2005 Providers' Media Award.

What does public engagement mean to you? Being a public figure who talks every day about the news requires that I get involved in the community. I need to know the people who are making the news, lobbying for legislation, and helping the most vulnerable people in our community. Otherwise, my understanding of a story is only half of what it should be. Also, I have lived in many different locations, and the best way to know a city is through its people and its different organizations.

Why did you decide to support human service providers in the first place? When I was approached, I did a little research and realized how vast the human service field is, with so many different organizations who meet so many vital needs. It is a real honor to be offered an opportunity to get involved with the MCHSP, which really means a lot of different organizations from all over the state.

How did you feel upon receiving the Providers' Award? It's already a reward to come back every year, so to get an award was the icing on the cake! It is also a nice way of bringing into focus how great the media's role is in informing people about the needs of the community and who is addressing those needs.

What do you think of the media's coverage on human services and on disabilities? It could and it should be more. The stories that people really remember and that are the most rewarding for us to tell in the newsroom are the ones of people with disabilities overcoming odds because they truly represent the human spirit.

Do you have a message for human service providers for the New Year? First, thank you for fulfilling a vital role at a critical time and doing it under some of the most difficult circumstances possible. Every year, when we get together for the Providers Awards, I marvel at the scope of agencies and at how well they work together. Know that you are appreciated and valued, and I would hope that the people who are in a position to provide more support, financially and otherwise, would recognize that value even more in 2006.

# SPOTLIGHT

## VINFEN NURSES DEVELOP DIABETES MANUAL, FIRST IN SERIES

In an effort to address the alarming growth rate of diabetes among individuals served by Vinfen, the Medical/Nursing Department completed the first of several medical information manuals for use by program staff. Authored by Vinfen Nurses Marilyn McKay, Joan DiTucci, Joan Belson (pictured below l to r), the first manual on diabetes tackles how a sedentary lifestyle combined with atypical antipsychotic medications prescribed for schizophrenia and other brain disorders can increase one's risk of diabetes and weight gain. One reason for the weight gain is that medications such as Clozapine<sup>®</sup>, Zyprexa<sup>®</sup>, Risperdal<sup>®</sup>, and Seroquel<sup>®</sup>, tend to dull an individual's sensation of feeling full after eating, thus causing the individual to continue eating. Some weight gain could also be linked to a direct effect of these medicines on the pancreas. Additionally, many people take other medications which can compound the weight gain problem.

### So what to do?

A sensible fitness and diet regimen are two key preventive measures to avoid diabetes and weight gain. Among other pieces of advice, nurses recommend walking as the best exercise possible. In addition to burning excess calories, a quick 20-minute walk relieves depression, anxiety and stress, generating an overall feeling of well-being. Beginning walkers report they sleep better, their mental outlook improves, and smokers cut down or even quit the habit. "Find a walking buddy, someone who will commit to be physically active on a regular basis with you so that you encourage each other," suggests Dr. Ken Duckworth, Medical Director, Vinfen. The manual also underlines how critical it is that individuals learn more about diabetes and their mental health condition, and that those with diabetes learn how to manage it in order to prevent the onset of major complications often associated with this disease. A way to do that is to visit the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Web site ([www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)) and click on the *Hearts and Minds* program page. The program was developed to provide information on heart disease, diabetes, exercise, and smoking. Also, be sure to review Vinfen's *Tasty & Healty! Teaching Cookbook* designed to help residential program staff and residents purchase, cook, and eat nutritious foods. It is available for download on Vinfen's Web site [www.vinfen.org](http://www.vinfen.org).



This diabetes manual is one example of Vinfen nurses working proactively to ensure that individuals served have the right supports in place and receive the medical care they need, while providing ongoing technical assistance, support and guidance with treatment planning to both individuals and staff. The next two manuals will address hepatitis and metabolic syndrome issues.

## OVERCOMING DISABILITY WITH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

"Coffee with two creams and sweet n' low" intones the computer-generated voice on Wesley Goodman's speech-generating device, or Voice Output Communication Aid (VOCA). Wesley, who is served by Vinfen's Mental Retardation Division both residentially and at the Brighton Day Habilitation program, suffers from a speech impairment that makes it almost impossible for anyone to understand him verbally, except for those who are very familiar with Wesley. Even then, however, it is sometimes a struggle to comprehend what he is saying. Before Wesley received the speech-generating device in February 2005, he would often become frustrated when people could not understand how he wanted his coffee or that he wished to buy a thank you card for an especially helpful staff member.



Wesley Goodman uses his speech-generating device as Margaret Coleman, Assistant Program Director at Brighton Day Hab, looks on.

When Speech Pathologist Lisa Wiedersheim started working with Wesley at Brighton Day Hab more than five years ago, she was struck by his intelligence and strong motivation to communicate. She knew almost immediately that he would benefit from a speech-generating device, but Wesley wasn't so sure. "It took me three years to convince him to be evaluated for such a device," says Wiedersheim. In addition to Wesley's reticence, there were other obstacles to overcome including the \$8,000 price tag. Wesley was initially denied the funding needed for this technology. But thanks to assistance from Kathryn Zainea, Speech Pathologist at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, Wesley was eventually approved for the device through Medicare and MassHealth.

Wesley now benefits from a fully-integrated Microsoft Windows XP Mercury computer with a flat touch screen and voice capability attached to his motorized wheelchair for optimum convenience and mobility. This type of assistive technology is known as augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) technology, created to assist people who are unable to meet their communication needs through speech or writing. "When it arrived, Wesley was so excited! He wanted to show it to everyone," remembers Wesley's House Manager Liz Friary.

However, before he could start using it, the computer needed to be programmed specifically for Wesley. In the past year, Wiedersheim has spent many hours working intensively with Wesley to develop a virtual library of pictures and symbols that best meet his needs. When Wesley is asked to show how it works, he immediately goes to the icon with the photo of a woman above the name Maryann. "Maryann is my girlfriend" the computer voice says when Wesley touches the screen. Wesley laughs at what is clearly his favorite feature.

Margaret Coleman, Assistant Program Director at Brighton Day Hab who has worked with Wesley since he arrived at the program in 2000, is quick to remind him about the "my jobs" feature. One of Wesley's jobs at Brighton Day Hab is to announce the vans when they arrive at the end of the day to take individuals served back to their residences. Each day, Wesley sits with the Program Administrative Assistant Lisa Metzger at the front entrance and, as each van arrives, touches the corresponding icon on his screen and holds the phone to the computer so that the van's name is broadcasted over the loudspeaker. Although he tried hard, Wesley could not perform this task before he was equipped with his speech-generating device.

At times, Wesley still gets frustrated when people can't understand him even with his speech-generating device. Though it is not perfect and funding is often difficult to obtain, assistive technology has allowed people with disabilities to become more independent. When communicating with people such as Margaret who have known him for many years, Wesley prefers not to use his computer. However, his resolution is to use it at least twice a day and, with encouragement from staff, that goal is sure to become a reality in 2006.

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## WELCOMED GIFT FOR THANKSGIVING

Watermark Donut Company, one of the largest Dunkin' Donuts franchises in the U.S., donated 10 turkeys with all the trimmings and other treats to Vinfen's Baycove office for Thanksgiving. Vinfen Program Director Colleen McKenney arranged for the donation valued at \$350. Thanks to Watermark Donut Company, 93 individuals served in eight programs enjoyed a hearty Thanksgiving feast.



Baycove CRS program team with a sample of the donation (l to r): Alice Dailey-Burson, Rita Osajie, Franca Cugini, Senior Program Director Tori Bell, Max Maksimik, Mark Weaver, and, kneeling in front, Program Director Thomas Sweetland and Beverly Broughton.

## SKI MARKET HOLIDAY DONATION

Just in time for Christmas, more than 20 individuals served from Vinfen's Lynn ACT program received approximately \$7,500 worth of winter clothes donated by Ski Market Corporation. Vinfen Case Worker Courtney Wilson, who also works part-time for Ski Market in Dedham, Mass., secured the thoughtful donation with Store Manager Shane McClelland. Vinfen is grateful to Courtney's dedication as well as Ski Market's generosity.

## NATIONALLY RENOWN EXPERT INSPIRES VINFEN MANAGERS

On December 22, guest speaker and psychiatric rehabilitation expert Dr. Bill Anthony gave an inspiring presentation to managers from Vinfen's Psychiatric Rehabilitation Division on the state of recovery from severe mental illness and the role of program leadership in supporting rehabilitation and recovery efforts of individuals served. Dr. Anthony is Director of the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation and professor at the Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Boston University.



(l to r) Steve LaMaster, Director of Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Dr. Bill Anthony, and Susan Abbott, Senior Vice President, Psychiatric Rehabilitation Division, Vinfen.

## NEW SEASON WITH THE CELTICS

For the second year in a row, the Celtics have kindly agreed to provide Vinfen with complimentary tickets for a selection of home games. Since the start of the season, 370 individuals served and staff enjoyed games at the Garden, representing a donation of \$13,310. Special thanks to the Celtics for their continuing support!

# milestones



## VINFEN WELL-REPRESENTED AT MASS. COUNCIL'S ANNUAL CONVENTION

On November 21, a large delegation from Vinfen attended the Massachusetts Council of Human Service Provider's 30th Annual Convention and Expo at the Sheraton Boston Hotel. Vinfen was a bronze sponsor of the day-long event that included professional workshops, a compelling keynote address, service awards, 50-plus exhibitors, networking opportunities, and entertainment.

Council President Michael Weekes welcomed the more than 1,000 convention participants saying, "We are thrilled to have you with us to celebrate the Council's 30th anniversary." Weekes highlighted the accomplishments and milestones of the Council over the past three decades. He then introduced the state's Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Secretary Timothy Murphy who thanked the attendees for all that they do for the citizens of the Commonwealth and expressed his desire to work with the Council and other providers to move forward EOHHS's agenda to reform healthcare, secure Medicaid funding, and improve the state's human services.



Linda Palladino (pictured), Vice President for Vinfen's child and family services, gave an eloquent introduction to keynote speaker Children's Defense Fund President and Founder Marian Wright Edelman underlining her distinguished career as a lawyer, educator, and political activist. Palladino, who supervises

Vinfen's School Community Consultation and Treatment program that provides clinical and support services to children and their families in 35

Boston Public Schools, cited Edelman as one of her role models. After Edelman's gripping keynote address on child poverty and neglect in America that disproportionately affect African-American and Latino children, it was easy to see why.

In addition to Palladino, Vice President of Vinfen's Behavioral Health Division Marty Martini played a major role at the convention by presenting a workshop on "The Balanced Scorecard for Non-profits" to a larger-than-anticipated audience. He outlined the process of adopting and cascading the Balanced Scorecard at Vinfen, discussing some of the challenges unique to non-profits. He fielded numerous questions about strategy and execution from providers interested in launching the Balanced Scorecard at their organizations. Many participants requested additional information and gave positive feedback, including Advocates, Inc. CFO James Mills who wrote "I really enjoyed your presentation. It sounds like you are doing great things with this at Vinfen. And Marty, you are a great spokesperson for the project. Your enthusiasm really comes through when you talk."

"Vinfen is proud to be an active member of the Mass. Council and it was an honor to have Linda Palladino and Marty Martini represent Vinfen in their high-profile roles at the convention," says Vinfen President and CEO Gary W. Lamson. "Vinfen looks forward to working with the Mass. Council to ensure that the needs of human service providers and individuals served are met."

## GATEWAY DIRECTOR WINS AWARD

Director of Gateway Arts Rae Edelson won the *National Public Citizen of the Year Award* from the Massachusetts chapter of the National Social Workers' Organization. She was the only non-social worker honored. The award ceremony will take place on March 14 at the Newton Marriott Hotel.

The *Vinfen Voice* is published quarterly by Vinfen's Public Affairs Department. Maureen Drouin, Director of Planning, and Dr. Ken Duckworth, Medical Director, contributed to this issue. Letters and story ideas can be sent by e-mail to the editor, Sophie Beauvais, at [beauvaiss@vinfen.org](mailto:beauvaiss@vinfen.org).

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helping to transform lives

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