

# VINFEN voice



## FROM | THE PRESIDENT

Any one of us, or someone we care for, can experience depression. Working in this field, we recognize that fact, but the public often fails to see this possibility. Sadly, stigma still clings to mental health disorders and can trigger fear and shame.

Thus, it is even more important that Governor Patrick and his wife, Diane, chose to publicly acknowledge her recent bout with exhaustion and depression. We commend them for their disclosure and for the way it was handled as the Governor told reporters, "We're not ashamed of it. Depression is something a lot of people suffer from." We wish Diane Patrick well in her recovery and hope she and her husband continue to raise public awareness and acceptance of depression and other disorders – as well as the need for access to effective treatment and support.

Access to treatment also is enhanced by affordable healthcare. We applaud the Legislature and Governor's office for their efforts to expand affordable insurance coverage. While we strongly support the goal of universal coverage, we join other providers in raising concerns regarding the healthcare reform's impact on our industry. Unlike other businesses, human service providers cannot raise prices to absorb additional costs. We hope to work with leaders seeking constructive resolution of this problem.

Sincerely,

Gary W. Lamson

## Self-Advocacy Leaders Honored

Anne Fracht and Craig Smith of Vinfen received the 2007 Gunnar Dybwad Leadership Award for their tremendous contribution to self-advocacy. The award was presented during the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) 11<sup>th</sup> SAC/DMR State House Recognition Event on March 29. "Anne and Craig's groundbreaking efforts to create and sustain Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS) have given individuals with disabilities a voice to self-advocate. They will have a lasting impact on our community," noted DMR Commissioner Gerald Morrissey.

Since 1994, Craig Smith has worked tirelessly to create MASS, the first statewide self-advocacy organization founded and operated by people with cognitive and developmental disabilities, becoming its first chairperson in 1997. Anne Fracht served as its second chairperson from 2002 until 2005. Under their leadership, MASS developed bylaws and a brand name, and went from 500 to more than 3,000 members. "The goal of MASS is to empower people to stand up for themselves. At the beginning, self-advocates were ridiculed and discriminated against. But as a citizen, I will stand for what I believe in," said Smith during an interview with the *Voice*. This year marks the organization's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. With the lowest membership fee in the state – \$5 or \$20 to include the annual conference – MASS board members have laid out a five-year strategic plan that will focus on building a strong self-advocacy network and on addressing self-advocacy issues, from closing institutions to building community support.



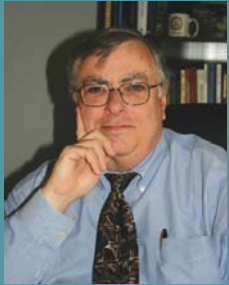
Anne Fracht (center) and Craig Smith (r), with DMR Com. Morrissey, acknowledged the honor of receiving an award named after their mentor and friend Gunnar Dybwad. Fracht thanked Smith for his inspiration and sent a message to all self-advocates: "Never stop dreaming and fighting for your rights."

Both members of the Board of Directors of The Arc of Greater Boston, Fracht and Smith have been working at Vinfen for more than 10 years. Smith serves on the Advisory Board of the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), a national disability research and training center based at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, is a project trainer for MASS, and regularly speaks at national conferences. Fracht represents MASS on numerous state and national steering committees. She has received several prestigious awards including the 2002 Ruth M. Batson Advocate of the Year Award.

The Gunnar Dybwad Leadership Award is presented every year to individuals whose leadership is committed to the empowerment of people with disabilities. Gunnar Dybwad is the founding father of Inclusion International, a global federation of family-based organizations advocating for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities. Together with his wife Rosemary, they committed their lives' work to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in America and around the world. The Award was first presented in 1999 to its namesake and has since honored 15 individuals. State Representative Angelo Scaccia (D) is the third 2007 Dybwad Award recipient.

## Focus on Positive Behavior Support

by Michael Dorsey, Ph.D.



June 2007 will mark the completion of a two-year collaboration between Dennis H. Reid, Ph.D. and Vinfen designed to implement the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Training Curriculum in more than 65 programs for

people with developmental disabilities located throughout Massachusetts. The curriculum was developed by Dr. Reid and Marsha B. Parsons, MA, as part of a joint venture between the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs and the University of South Carolina's Center for Disability Resources. It provides a comprehensive training model on the values and practices of PBS for staff supporting individuals with developmental disabilities.

PBS is an outgrowth of the larger field of Applied Behavior Analysis, which is the design, implementation, and evaluation of instructional and environmental modifications to produce socially significant improvements in human behavior through skill acquisition and the reduction of problematic behavior. The application of behavior analysis can be very broad, from helping individuals overcome drug addiction to improving workplace and even classroom environments. Likewise, PBS can be applied to an individual, a group home, or an entire day program as it includes changing variables such as task demands, interaction styles, and the availability of individual choice, instructional pace, and individualized reinforcement.

The PBS approach teaches staff to understand what a person is trying to express when they engage in a challenging behavior, and for staff to respond to their attempt to communicate in a way that uses their strengths to safely meet their needs. Contrary to intrusive or aversive interventions (i.e., punishment or coercion), PBS leads to improvements both in individuals served and in the culture of the program in which they live and/or work. It creates patterns of support that help them learn social skills. It also gives staff positive techniques to tackle difficult situations.

"PBS has clearly changed the dynamics in our program. It's a great success and resource for both staff and individuals served and their self-esteem has strongly improved," says Peter Osazuwa, site manager at Vinfen's Cedar St. Residence.

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# SPOTLIGHT

## BRINGING JOY AND HAPPINESS

"Do you feel the love? Good!" This is the witty catchphrase that Vinfen Program Specialist Helen Fantasia put on the invitation to the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Valentine's Dance Party organized for individuals served last February in Weymouth, MA. The Valentine's Dance is one of four parties put together every year since 1999 by Fantasia and her loyal group of volunteers for individuals served by Vinfen's Mental Retardation (MR) Division.

As a gospel singer, Fantasia traveled for many years all around the country singing and volunteering in nursing homes, prisons, and hospitals before joining Vinfen. She even gave live performances on radio and local cable stations and recorded two CDs of original gospel music. "This experience enabled me to witness firsthand how music can help people from various backgrounds and with different abilities connect and grow," says Helen. "One day," she recalls, "there was a magical moment when I volunteered at a nursing home and a resident who had not spoken for years started singing with me and all the while I could see a smile on her face from ear to ear." Seeing the powerful effect that music could have, it was only natural that she came up with the idea of organizing dance parties for individuals served at Vinfen.

It started with cookouts at programs on the North Shore where Fantasia was a staff supervisor. Everyone from family members to local vendors was invited to join the festivities. Helen would put her kitchen to work, preparing salads and burgers, while Wayne Arraj – her husband – brought the sound equipment and music and officiated as DJ. "Folks from programs would put in musical requests weeks before the cookouts," she fondly remembers. With the blessing of Barry Schwartz, Vinfen's former MR Senior Vice President, Fantasia began to organize the first ever division-wide Halloween party. But making her vision a reality was a daunting task. Despite support from across the organization, there were many hurdles to overcome: almost no budget, few volunteers, finding a convenient and affordable location, and convincing staff that it would be safe for individuals served who face behavioral challenges.

"The night of the party, few people were receptive and it was very hard to get people on the dance floor. But we kept on playing music," remembers Helen. When some staff mentioned that they would not do it the following year, she insisted "No, come back! This is where the learning happens, where the people we serve can learn social skills in a safe environment."

They came back and each subsequent dance party was an opportunity for improvement. First, Vinfen recognized the vocational and habilitation role of the dance parties and allocated an annual budget of \$2,500 funded through a permanent endowed gift by the Rae and Aaron Alberts Foundation. Then, individuals began to open up. Some would come to Helen wondering how to invite someone to dance. "Let's go and ask what her name is and if she would want to dance with you," was her answer. Once on the dance floor, she would be their 'ghost dancer', standing behind them and leading them. People served began asking for their own soft drinks at the bar, choosing their sandwiches at the food buffet, and making friends. Each time, they took steps towards greater independence.

Almost 10 years and 30 parties later, volunteers and staff alike are amazed



Walter Phillips asked for Janice Littlefield's hand the classic way: bended knee with an engagement ring. They reenacted the scene for the *Voice* in their apartment at Vinfen's Catherine Residence last February.

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## THUMBS UP FOR GRADUATES

Eighteen Certified Nursing and Home Health Aides from Vinfen Hancock Center graduated in January from the Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative, a workforce development program funded through a grant from the Commonwealth Corporation. From left: George Gougian, administrator at Vinfen Hancock Center; Graduate Maria Medina, and City Councilor Charles Yancey, Boston's Employment & Workforce Development Committee Chairman.



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING WORKSHOP

Sue White, Vinfen's Director of Affordable Housing, presented a workshop on "Housing Search for People with Disabilities" on March 22 at the Mass. State House for legislators and their staff. The event was sponsored by Sen. Tucker and Rep. Honan, who co-chair the Joint Committee on Housing, and facilitated by the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA).

## REINVENTING QUALITY CONFERENCE

Vinfen's Gateway Arts Program Director Rae Edelson participated in a panel discussion on "Person-Centered: Individuals in the Arts" at the National Reinventing Quality Conference last March in South Carolina. The conference was sponsored in part by ICI of UMass-Boston.

## CHRONICLE AT WEBSTER HOUSE

Webster Artist Amy Smith (l), with Reporter Debbie Shapiro, was featured in a *Chronicle* (WCVB-TV5) segment. Dr. Ken Duckworth was also interviewed. The show aired February 16.



Vinfen Residents Jeanne Sera and Allison Babiaza were all smiles at the Valentine's Dance Party organized by Program Specialist Helen Fantasia and Vinfen volunteers Sandy Cook, Donia Derismen, Joe Dorsey, Lori Finer, Anne Fracht, Suzanne Hayes, Carol Hayward, Asela Jaysinghe, Jana Kovarikova, Bill O'Brien, Gary Paris, Terry Shirsoky, Craig Smith, and Shauni Turner on February 10 in Weymouth, MA.

at the progress made. Each party now features an activity such as a costume contest, a Karaoke night, or a Yankee Swap. "The last Valentine's Dance Party was so crowded! It was a great success. I've seen a lot of growth in the individuals served involved in the dances. We all seem to work better too!" says Vinfen Program Specialist and six-year volunteer Lori Finer. "Now we see people served ask each other onto the dance floor," adds Helen.

Valentine's Dance or not, Walter Phillips and Janice Littlefield never miss a party! They've been living together in a Vinfen apartment since 1995, and have known each other and been engaged for even longer. The dance parties have definitely enriched their routine which mostly consists of coffee at the local Dunkin Donuts, walks in the park, dinners prepared by Walter, and visits to their family in Chelsea, MA, taking the bus and commuter rail once a month. "The parties mean happiness, joy, and music. We've made new friends and I invited friends from work to join us too. We're very thankful for the good times," says Janice.

Helen's next objective is to create a "Social Activities Committee" where individuals served would organize the parties with staff. But before that, Janice and Walter, along with hundreds of other individuals served, staff, and volunteers, are ready to rock-and-roll at the Spring Fling Party set for June 2.

## FOCUS ON POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

(continued from page 2)

"Residents see staff as a teacher and a source of support no matter the issues at hand and staff members feel they can better encourage and help residents achieve their goals. PBS has helped us become better communicators. We now know what to ask and how to reframe issues to make sure we understand the residents' needs and fears," adds Osazuwa.

Many state and national advocacy organizations such as The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps recognize the much longer-term positive effects of PBS and have signed policy statements supporting its adoption. In addition, the PBS Training Curriculum is a national model endorsed by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, formerly known as the American Association on Mental Retardation.

Most importantly, PBS is founded on the core beliefs that people with disabilities should be treated with compassion and respect and that they too can enjoy life, overcome challenging behavior, and become as independent as possible. As one of Massachusetts' leading human service nonprofit organizations, Vinfen fully adheres to these principles and has now adopted PBS as its foundation for clinical practice.

*Michael Dorsey, Ph.D., is Director of Clinical Services for Vinfen's Mental Retardation Division and Associate Professor at Simmons College, Boston, MA.*

# calendar



## YAI/NIPD NETWORK CONFERENCE

Vinfen-Connecticut speakers will join the 28<sup>th</sup> National Institute for People with Disabilities Network (YAI/NIPD Network) International Conference, "Charting the Future in Developmental and Learning Disabilities," from April 30 to May 4. On April 30, Training Specialist Kimberly Belanger, Facilities & Operations Administrator Janice Marden, and Assistant Program Director Jennifer Gemme will present a session on "Transforming Lives: An Integrated Peer Support Approach to Weight Loss, Wellness and Personal Empowerment." YAI/NIPD Network is an award-winning, not-for-profit, nonsectarian network of agencies serving over 20,000 people of all ages and levels of developmental and learning disabilities. The five-day conference will feature more than 300 national and international prominent speakers, and will be held at the Crowne Plaza Manhattan Hotel in New York City. For more information, please go to [www.yai.org](http://www.yai.org).

## IMAGINE THIS AT WEBSTER HOUSE

Artists from Vinfen's Webster House program will showcase new pieces from May 3 through July 31 during the spring show "Imagine this..." at the Webster House Gallery, 20 Webster Place, in Brookline, MA. The public is invited to the Opening Reception on May 10 from 4 to 6:30 p.m. The event will



feature refreshments by Vinfen Webster II Catering and music. Webster House is a psychiatric day rehabilitation program. For more information, please call (617) 739-5461. (Untitled, by Lisandra Andrades, still life pastel, 2007, is one of the pieces featured at the new Webster House show.)

## SAVE-THE-DATE FOR TASTE OF GATEWAY EVENT

Art aficionado or not, now is the time to support Vinfen's Gateway Arts program by joining the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual *Taste of Gateway* fundraiser on May 12 from

5 to 8 p.m. at the Gateway Gallery, 62 Harvard St., in Brookline, MA. Tickets are \$50 or \$100 if you wish to bring home an original artwork from the *Taste of Gateway* exhibit that runs April 5 to May 12. The event features a revved-up Yankee Swap where guests trade artwork and crafts, a silent auction that includes items such as Red Sox tickets and a Beacon Hill Athletic Club membership, live music by Blues Cabaret, and a delicious Hors d'Oeuvres



Buffet by Ethnica Catering. This year's event was made possible thanks to the partial sponsorship of Diana Temple with Countrywide Home Loans. For more information, call (617) 734-1577 or visit [www.gatewayarts.org](http://www.gatewayarts.org). ("Syncopated," by Kathleen Wells, c. 2007, acrylic on 9 canvases, each 6 x 6 in, is part of the *Taste of Gateway 2007* Yankee Swap.)

## WALK FOR NAMI

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) will hold its *Walk for the Mind of America* nationwide on Saturday, May 19. Every year, the event helps shed light on mental illness and stigmatization, and funds programs. Join the walk with your family and friends for a day of fun with speakers, live entertainment, music, and food. NAMI-MASS will welcome you at the Artisan Park, Soldiers Field Road in Brighton, along the Charles River, at 11 a.m. for the walk (9 a.m. for check-in) and NAMI-CT will start walking at 10 a.m. (check-in at 9 a.m.) at the Bushnell Park in Hartford. Vinfen is a proud supporter and Gold sponsor of the NAMI-MASS Walk 2007. For more information, visit NAMI's Web site at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).

## SUPPORT VINFEN!

We need your support to fulfill our mission of "transforming lives." For donation information, please contact the Department of Development at (617) 441-1728 or at [fieldj@vinfen.org](mailto:fieldj@vinfen.org).

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