Falling in Love at Vinfen’s Film Festival

Vinfen invites you to attend our 9th Annual Moving Images Film Festival. Each year, we host a film festival to increase awareness, educate our community, and fight prejudice associated with people with disabilities. This year’s festival, Films from the Heart, will feature five inspirational films and two panels that will explore love, intimacy, relationships, self-advocacy, and self-determination.

The festival is on Saturday, March 12 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and will be held at the Joseph B. Martin Conference Center at Harvard Medical School in Boston. The event is free and open to the public, but a $5 donation is suggested and appreciated.

For more information and to register, visit www.vinfen.org/moving-images

Autism in Love
The story of four adults with autism spectrum disorders as they search for love and manage romantic relationships. The film explores how members of an often-misunderstood community learn what it means to love and to be loved.

Bumblebees
Despite being told as a child he would never speak or walk, Vance accomplished what doctors thought was impossible. His next new challenge: dating.

Guest Room
A short film about a young woman with Down Syndrome who grapples with intimacy, identity, and adulthood in the midst of an unplanned pregnancy with her boyfriend.

Last Week Tonight with John Oliver
Host John Oliver explains the importance of how we talk about mental health.

Love & Mercy
A biographical drama about Brian Wilson, the mercurial singer, songwriter, and leader of The Beach Boys. Set against the era-defining catalog of Wilson’s music, the film intimately examines the personal voyage and ultimate salvation of the icon whose success came at extraordinary personal cost.

Due to this year’s theme, Vinfen's Moving Images Film Festival is rated PG-13.

Continuing Education credits for psychologists, licensed mental health counselors, nurses, and certified psychiatric rehabilitation practitioners have been approved. An application for social work continuing education credits has been submitted. For more information and updates, visit www.vinfen.org/moving-images. If you have any questions, please contact Alex Yellin at yellina@vinfen.org.

The theme of Vinfen’s 9th Annual Moving Images Film Festival this year is love and relationships. It is a theme that should not be controversial but often is: The search to find love and meaningful relationships by people with psychiatric conditions, intellectual and developmental disabilities, brain injuries, and behavioral health challenges.

When we ask the people we serve what they want in life, they almost always answer a home, a job, and a meaningful relationship with someone they love. That should be no surprise, as these are fundamental dreams shared by all of us. But for family members, friends, guardians, and caregivers of people with disabilities, supporting someone who is exploring a relationship often triggers an immediate response to protect the person. There are obvious risks, including relationships that end up badly. This can add to the challenges already faced by the individual we support.

Recently, I saw a national news story about a couple who both have Down Syndrome. Tim, a restaurant owner in Albuquerque, NM, left his long-held job and closed his restaurant to move to Denver, CO to be with his love Tiffany. Tim’s father was very happy and supportive of this decision. It was a very positive story and a hopeful sign that our views are changing.

The films and panels at this year’s film festival will provide compelling stories about individuals and families and our roles in supporting individuals in making choices about relationships. They also confirm growing recognition in our society that individuals with disabilities have a right to an important and crucial dream that we all mutually want: The right to pursue relationships and experience romantic love.
spotlight on peer support

Sharing to Transform Lives

Megan Knowlton's journey with Vinfen began in 2007, when she started receiving our services. By 2013, Megan had transformed her life through hard work and dedication. She became a Recovery Coordinator at Vinfen, where today she continues to use her training and lived experience to support individuals with their recovery.

“I never dreamed I would be where I am today,” said Megan. “I struggled for so many years with who am I, what am I meant to do, who am I as a person. And I finally just accepted you know what, I’m me. I’m a daughter, I’m a wife, I’m a friend, I’m a co-worker, I’m an advocate; and most importantly, I’m a survivor.”

For Megan, supporting the people she serves in their recovery begins with encouraging them to form their own definition of success. “[I] teach the people I work with that they are always their own best advocates,” said Megan. “Sometimes I feel like I know the answer for the person, but it’s important for me to let them find it. That’s their journey.”

In dedicating her life to providing guidance to others with psychiatric conditions, Megan has not only found an outlet that supports her own wellness and mental health, but also a job that she excels at and adores. “I love the team I work for, I love my coworkers, and I enjoy every opportunity I have to work with the people we serve,” Megan said.

Honoring Great Peer Leadership

Since joining Vinfen in 2011, Recovery Coordinator Audrey Hayward has drawn on her training and background as a person with lived experience to transform the lives of countless people. This year, she was honored with Vinfen's Peer Leadership Award in recognition of the outstanding support she has provided to those we serve and her contributions to the peer movement.

Each day, Audrey builds and maintains trusting relationships with the people she serves to help them gain the confidence, skills, and resources they need to establish and succeed in self-determined goals. Certified as a Peer Specialist and Wellness Recovery Action Plan facilitator, Audrey is able to offer guidance and support from the perspective of someone who’s been in their shoes. “We’re trained to very intentionally tell our story and do it in a way to help inspire hope to make people feel more of a connection and feel less alone in what they’re going through,” Audrey said.

To help improve Vinfen services, Audrey teamed up with her peers to create a workshop teaching staff practical methods to help change their perception of the people we serve and eliminate the natural biases that can arise within the relationship.

“Audrey imparts the concepts of hope and resiliency through recovery,” said Vinfen Director of Recovery Services Lisa Halpern, “She is a steadfast advocate for the people we serve with whom she works, and I always know that what she has to say will be very meaningful and insightful.”
Working Together to Grow

A key factor in determining our success in the work we do is the depth of the relationships we build. Intentional Peer Support (IPS), founded by Shery Mead, provides a way of thinking about transformative relationships. IPS relationships are viewed as partnerships that invite and inspire both parties to learn and grow, rather than as one person needing to help another.

A 2014 report by the British Psychological Society, “Understanding Psychosis and Schizophrenia,” explains that most mental health services are currently based on the medical model in which there is a paternalistic bent to care whereby the provider is seen as “knowing” and the person seeking support is seen as “not knowing.” Perhaps the most important message of this report is that “every service user needs a worker who enables them to talk and think about their experiences in a calm, supportive and nonjudgmental atmosphere and who is willing to accept their own beliefs about the nature of their experiences.” When we prioritize the relationship, we are reminded that providers should not suggest any one form of help because that one thing is not helpful for everyone. Rather, our job is to support people in exploring and determining whatever they personally find most helpful.

What strengthens the relationship between provider and the people they serve?

• Trust: It is at the core of the two-sided relationship.

• Hope: You may have to hold the hope for people when they cannot yet hold the hope for themselves. You have the advantage of already having seen people you serve get better and having a trajectory toward improvement over time that sometimes isn’t evident for a person “in the thick of it.” Remind the person of this and that, “it is going to get better.”

• High expectations: Set the bar high and help people to reach it.

• Meeting the person where they are at: This concept is the flip side to high expectations. Design your strategies to meet the person where they can use what you have to offer, then offer them the chance to do more on their own.

• Humor: Levity goes a long way amidst a serious situation. Use it skillfully.

• The Golden Rule: Treat people as you would want to be treated. It sounds simple but it is sometimes challenging to do so. All people want respect, kindness, and dignity.

Rather than hierarchical relationships, our work demands fluid partnerships. Only then will paternalism give way to collaboration.
Expanding Support for Better Care

Vinfen is thrilled to announce that, thanks to a grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) Foundation, our Smartphone app designed to enhance services to young adults with emotional and behavioral health challenges will be expanded to support adults with serious mental illness. With this award of $175,000 per year for three years, Vinfen will be able to evaluate and assess the success of this integrated care model in increasing access to services, improving outcomes, and engaging the people we serve.

Vinfen Director of Strategic Initiatives Sophie Jones said, “We are delighted to be continuing our collaboration with the BCBSMA Foundation and are very appreciative that they have chosen to support our efforts to integrate behavioral health and primary care, and to improve access to care for the people we serve.”

In collaboration with Wellframe and through a grant from The Cummings Foundation, Vinfen's Smartphone app began a pilot in January 2015 with twenty young adults, and provides personalized, daily supports and clinical resources to educate those receiving Vinfen services. The app’s expansion will be evaluated by one of Vinfen’s Community Based Flexible Supports (CBFS) teams in Plymouth County.

Recognizing Excellent Leadership

Vinfen’s CBFS Team Leader Lisa Goldsmith was honored with the Excellence in Program Leadership Award at this year’s Association for Behavioral Healthcare Conference: Salute to Excellence. The event was held on October 23 at the Westin Waltham Hotel and brought together behavioral healthcare providers from across the state. Lisa was recognized for her commitment to transforming lives and the grace with which she motivates and manages her staff to provide the best possible support.

Making an Impact in Healthcare

Vinfen President and CEO Bruce Bird presented at the Healthcare Information and Management System Society Connected Health Conference in Washington, DC. In his presentation, “Mental Health: A Key Opportunity for Mobile Impact in Healthcare,” Bruce discussed the applications of remote monitoring and mobile technologies within a community behavioral healthcare system and showcased Vinfen’s innovative Smartphone app for young adults.

President of COMCARE David Aylward, and Centerstone Research Institute CEO Tom Douth, joined Bruce Bird as speakers at the conference.

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Director of Strategic Initiatives Sophie Jones, Lisa Goldsmith, Rehabilitation Specialist Rebecca High, and CBFS Operations Director Heather Ness.

A participant getting support from a staff member from the pilot Smartphone app program.
You Can Contribute to Vinfen in Many Ways

- Direct, unrestricted donations
- Matching gifts
- Gifts in memory, in honor, or in celebration
- Gifts of bequests or planned giving
- Donate online: Visit www.vinfen.org and click “donate now” to make a secure and convenient online donation to Vinfen.
- A donation envelope is also enclosed for your convenience.

For more information, contact our Director of Communications and Public Affairs Erin Tighe at 617-441-1736 or tighee@vinfen.org.
Vinfen Director of Training and Development Katherine Fox and Community Integration Coordinator Elizabeth Treacy testified to extend continuing education and tuition remission.

Vinfen joined the Providers’ Council and several human services organizations to testify before the Joint Committee on Higher Education of the Massachusetts State Legislature on October 7. Katherine Fox and Elizabeth Treacy urged the committee to pass Senate Bill 680, which would extend Tuition Remission programs to the graduate level and to continuing education courses, and make Tuition Remission available to workers’ spouses.

Vinfen’s Cambridge/Somerville 6th Annual Community Celebration brought together over 200 people we serve, family, friends, and supporters for a luau-themed party on November 12 at the Arts at the Armory in Somerville, MA. The evening featured personal testimonials and performances from the people we serve, live music, and dancing.

Vinfen was honored to be a sponsor and attend the Providers’ Council’s 40th Annual Convention & Expo on October 19 at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel in Boston. Vinfen Family Advisory Council Chair Kathleen Crawford received the Volunteer of the Year award. Vinfen staff also led a workshop showcasing our Smartphone app aimed at assisting young adults with behavioral management.

Expanding Tuition Remission

Advocating for Better Housing

Vinfen Housing Specialist Frank Kimenyi III, Housing Specialist Sharon Jones, Director of Affordable Housing Sue White, Housing Specialist Franca Cugini, and Rental Subsidy Coordinator Jeff Chasse at the event.

Vinfen participated as a sponsor of the Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association’s 2nd Annual Housing Day at the Massachusetts State House on Tuesday, November 10. To advocate for the passage of three bills relating to the housing needs of people we serve, Vinfen staff met with state representatives, senators, and experts in the field.
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Having a Ball at Vinfen CT

Vinfen Connecticut hosted its 16th annual Winter Wonderland ball at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Enfield, CT on January 16. The black-and-white-themed event was attended by over 100 people we serve, their family, and staff. Guests were treated to a delicious meal followed by dessert including a chocolate fountain, entertainment, and dancing.

This wonderful night would not have been possible without the donations from local vendors and the support of our volunteers.

vinfen arts

Exploring Art with the Governor

Art Connection Studio was honored to welcome Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy and First Lady and CEO of the Greater Hartford Arts Council Cathy Malloy for the opening reception of their exhibit, “Home: where the art is,” on December 4. The Governor and First Lady toured the studio, learned about the mission, and talked with artists.

Stay-tuned for Art Connection Studio’s next exhibit on April 22. For more information visit www.artconnectionstudio.org, call 860-236-0705, or email artconnection@vinfen.org.

Celebrating Great Taste and Talent

Join Gateway Arts for A Taste of Gateway on April 2 from 5 to 8 p.m. Guests will enjoy silent and live auctions, live music, a beer and wine tasting, and delicious snacks. A special treat is the art swap where participants trade works and select their very own piece crafted by a Gateway Arts artist. These one-of-a-kind works are valued up to $400.

Art swap tickets are $175 and event-only tickets are $75. Tickets can be purchased at www.gatewayarts.org/events/a-taste-of-gateway.

For more information, visit www.gatewayarts.org, call 617-734-1577, or email gatewayarts@vinfen.org.
Making a Difference One Mile At A Time

On May 13 and 14, staff, supporters, and people we serve will team up to race in the Run-4-Life, a 190-mile relay from Hull to Provincetown, MA. They run to raise awareness and funds for people with psychiatric conditions, who experience one of the most significant health disparities in the country.

“Running and exercising is an important part of my recovery. It helps me manage the symptoms of my mental illness. And being on the team is totally awesome because it gives you a goal beyond just being healthy. There is a common goal that unites us, improving the health and life of our community.”

—Paul M., runner and person served by Vinfen

Want to make a difference without lacing up your sneakers? Sponsor a Vinfen Run-4-Life runner or team. For more information, please visit the Run-4-Life website www.firstgiving.com/vinfen/run-4-life-2016.