

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Anne Fracht and Craig Smith of Vinfen recognized for their accomplishments in self-advocacy with the 2007 Gunnar Dybwad Leadership Award

Under their leadership, Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS), the first statewide self-advocacy organization founded and operated by individuals with cognitive and developmental disabilities, went from 500 to over 3,000 members.

Cambridge, Mass. — Anne Fracht and Craig Smith of Vinfen were honored Thursday, March 29 with 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) 11th SAC/DMR State House Recognition Event, "Welcome Home: A Celebration of Community Life."

"They are pioneers in advancing the quality of life of individuals with disabilities, and they will have a lasting impact on our community. With perseverance and assertiveness, they've made it possible for people with disabilities to be taken seriously and listened to, and, more importantly, to believe in themselves," said DMR Commissioner Gerald Morrissey. Fracht and Smith acknowledged the honor of receiving an award named after their mentor and friend Gunnar Dybwad, and Fracht especially thanked Craig [Smith] for getting her involved in the self-advocacy movement, concluding with a message to all self-advocates: "Never stop dreaming and fighting for your rights."



(From left) DMR Com. Morrissey and Gunnar Dybwad Leadership Award recipients Anne Fracht and Craig Smith during the March 29 ceremony in the Grand Staircase of the Mass. State House.

Since 1994, Craig Smith has worked tirelessly to create the statewide self-advocacy organization Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS), and was appointed its first chairperson in 1997. A past member of the Board of Directors of the Mass. Chapter of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), he currently serves on the Board of Directors of The Arc of Greater Boston and 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. Smith has been working at Vinfen for more than 10 years, and has participated in Vinfen's Human Rights Committee. He regularly speaks at national conferences and is a project trainer for MASS.

Anne Fracht began her journey as a self-advocate in 1997 when she joined MASS, and became its second chairperson in 2002 until 2005. An Administrative Aide at Vinfen since 1996 and a former member of Vinfen's Human Rights Committee, Fracht serves on the Board of Directors of The ARC of Greater Boston and represents MASS on numerous steering committees at the state and national level. She has received several prestigious awards including the 2002 Ruth M. Batson Advocate of the Year Award along with Senate and House citations.

Smith and Fracht are former recipients of Vinfen supported housing and vocational arts services.

The Gunnar Dybwad Leadership Award is presented every year to individuals whose leadership reflects the inspiration, integrity, and commitment 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 human rights of people with intellectual disabilities. Together with his wife Rosemary, they committed their lives' work to promoting and fighting for the civil rights and self-determination of persons with disabilities in America and around the world. The Dybwad Award was first presented in 1999 to its namesake and has since honored 15 individuals. State Representative Angelo Scaccia (D) is the third 2007 Gunnar Dybwad Leadership Award recipient.

Vinfen: Celebrating 30 Years of helping to transform lives

Established in 1977, Vinfen is a private, nonprofit human services organization that provides a comprehensive array of services to children, adolescents and adults with psychiatric, developmental, and behavioral disabilities. Vinfen supports thousands of individuals each year in more than 300 residential, respite, day, and crisis intervention programs and services in eastern Massachusetts and northern Connecticut. Vinfen's 2,000 dedicated employees are experienced, highly trained professionals who provide a full range of educational, rehabilitative, and clinical services. For more information, visit <http://www.vinfen.org>

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For more information on the self-advocacy movement, please visit the following web sites:

www.massadvocatesstandingstrong.org

www.inclusion-international.org

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