

VINFEN voice



FROM | THE PRESIDENT

In celebration of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month this March, Vinfen's Mental Retardation Division hosted a series of Open Houses to honor the dedication of the organization's direct care staff as well as to highlight the success of numerous individuals served by Vinfen.

When I began my career in human services 35 years ago, individuals with developmental disabilities were too often left behind at state institutions and forgotten. Today, due to deinstitutionalization, these same individuals are thriving, working, and contributing to society.

Many of those whom Vinfen serves are gainfully employed by companies such as New Balance, Shaw's Supermarkets, Super Fitness, and Pizzeria Uno, to name a few. We are grateful to the continued support of these businesses for helping us to provide a better way of life to people with disabilities.

As we commemorate Development Disabilities Awareness Month, we celebrate how the lives of individuals with disabilities have been transformed from being placed in state institutions to having meaningful employment and a place to truly call home. For those of us in human services, we look at each person we serve as an individual, not as someone with a disability.

Sincerely,

Gary W. Lamson

Valentine's Day Art Group warms hearts across ages at Hancock Center

Expressive Therapist Elena Clamen couldn't find a better way to introduce the Valentine's Day Art Group to five residents of Vinfen's Hancock Center and five Harbor School students but to read a poem on love. Although most of us would like to believe that Valentine's Day is special for everyone, for residents of Vinfen's Hancock Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Dorchester (Hancock Center), it isn't. But this year was special thanks to Elena Clamen and the InnerView Therapeutic Arts Program.



Art Therapist Elena Clamen discusses ideas with Paul Montgomery, resident, to help him create his valentine. In the foreground, individual served Oscar Bonilla works meticulously on his card.

Also known as the Resident Empowerment Grant, the initiative was funded by a \$30,000 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in April 2005. In September, Sharon Keyes, Guidance Counselor at the Harbor School, a Dorchester public middle school, agreed on a partnership with Hancock Center to send students to share in weekly group activities. "The Harbor School is unique because of its autonomy, and each child is required to do community service as part of their curriculum," says Keyes. For her, community service is an eye-opener for everyone: kids, parents, and the community. "It gives the community another look at the children. And for the kids, it's an opportunity to explore and discover different activities and people."

The Art Group brings together four to six residents and five to six students every Wednesday for an hour of drawing, painting, singing, and laughing. "The residents really love to interact with the children," says Activities Director JoAnn Banner, fondly remembering the first time the group got together in the lower dining room of Hancock Center. For some residents, like Rita Quealy, it brings back memories of when "I was an art teacher." For others, like Bill Chernsky, it just feels good to come and see the kids each week. Some of the projects the group worked on are: treasure chests (what we treasure); tracing hands and talking about the present, past, and future; puzzle painting (in pairs); and working with clay.

For Valentines Day, the group, organized in pairs of one resident and one child, had to create valentines for each other. "Everyday-love can be expressed in little ways, like visiting a neighbor. How do you show love to someone?" asks Clamen around the table. Answers vary. "Giving a kiss," was the answer of Resident Paul Montgomery. "Being with someone when they are lonely and sad," answered 6th grade student Angelica Baez-Vasquez. Bill Chernsky, paired with Angelica, articulates with visible difficulty "being with someone". No one laughs at Bill because respect is the keyword in this group.

Q & A: Karen M. Quigley, Vinfen's New Chairwoman



In January, Karen M. Quigley, a healthcare consultant and a faculty member in the Department of Health Policy and Management at Harvard University's School of Public Health, was appointed as Chairwoman to Vinfen's Board of Directors. Ms. Quigley's distinguished career spans more than 35 years of developing innovative health policy and finance programs for leading health care organizations throughout Massachusetts. She took some time out of her busy schedule to share her thoughts on human services and her goals for Vinfen.

What attracted you to Vinfen? I was originally drawn to Vinfen because of the quality of its programs and its commitment to helping people with complex challenges lead meaningful and rewarding lives. I've been a Vinfen board member for seven years now and I am continually inspired by Vinfen's vision, high organizational standards, and dedicated staff. Vinfen is an important part of our community, and I'm hopeful that my knowledge of the Massachusetts health care environment will help us achieve our goals.

How will you help advance Vinfen's mission and community outreach? After 35 years of developing health care programs, I'm able to view the current system from many perspectives. I will use this experience to help the Board and staff foster a unified and rich approach to how Vinfen works to ensure that its mission is achieved in a collaborative and creative way.

What are some of your priorities in the coming year? Vinfen recently finished a three-year strategic planning and implementation cycle and is entering a new cycle. We will focus on looking at the current mental health and disabilities landscape, what new opportunities exist, and how we can continue to work with our funders to ensure that the needs of those whom we serve and our staff are met. Additionally, the Board and I want to ensure that our staff are provided with career growth opportunities, fair pay, and that their achievements are recognized.

Where would you like to see Vinfen a year from now, five years from now? Vinfen is a leader in the human services field but is not widely recognized among the general public. In the short and long term, I want to broaden Vinfen's community of support to include the general public and the communities in which we provide services. We're always strengthened if the public better understands those we serve and the services we provide. The heart and soul of Vinfen is within its programs. As Chair, I will work to ensure that the community better understands our mission of transforming lives and is involved in helping us succeed.

SPOTLIGHT

CONNECTICUT BOWLING LEAGUE BRINGS EVERYONE TOGETHER

Last summer, individuals served in Vinfen-Connecticut (CT) programs, families, staff, and community members teamed up to play in a local softball league. But when the season came to an end in the fall and that there was no other recreational activity to fill the void, everyone was extremely disappointed. That was when Ronnell Monts, Assistant Program Director at the Forest Road Program, stepped up to the plate. Monts has more than 10 years experience organizing recreational activities in the community. So when one of his staff approached him about starting a bowling league, it was right up his alley. Through a partnership with AMF Silver Lanes Bowling in East Hartford, Conn., Monts arranged a successful weekly bowling outing and pizza party at a price that everyone could afford.

The Forest Road Program is home to three young adults who are among the more than 30 individuals that Vinfen-CT serves annually in residential and day programs. Referred by the Connecticut Department of Mental Retardation or the Department of Children and Family Services, they are challenged with a wide range of cognitive and psychiatric disabilities, as well as intense behavioral issues. But despite these challenges, Gary Smith, Manager at AMF Bowling, welcomed the opportunity to give back to the community by starting a new league as soon as he was contacted. Smith and Monts then arranged a great deal: two strings of bowling, shoe rental, and pizza party afterwards for only \$8, about half the regular price. Smith recognizes the importance of reaching out to the community and says, "I am happy to do what I can to make an evening of exercise, competition, and camaraderie possible for Vinfen individuals and staff."

The first 8-week session began in September with only ten participants, but excitement surrounding the bowling league was contagious and by the end of the second session there were more than 20 people participating. Elisa Velardo, Vice President of Vinfen-CT, has received only positive feedback. "I hear all the time that people love it," she says. Monts, who gets rewarded by seeing everyone come back week after week, says, "It makes me feel good just to see people enjoying themselves period." Although Monts was the driving force in organizing the league, he humbly admits that it's a team effort.

The best part for Individual Served Jamar Cherry is "getting strikes!"

Part of the team is Assistant Site Manager Lamont McDermott. On the rare occasion when Monts is not able to make it to bowling night, McDermott and other staff pitch in to keep things running smoothly. Teamwork is a hallmark of Vinfen-CT for both staff and individuals served, and the bowling league has helped to cultivate camaraderie among them all. "When individuals served are bowling together, they help each other. We can see relationships being built," remarks McDermott. Thanks to the bowling league, individuals served Dan Derby and Luis Cruz, who live in different Vinfen houses, have become best friends and now get together to hang out at least once a week. Residential Counselor Todd Turner credits the league for fostering their friendship, saying, "It's amazing how these two became friends. Without bowling, they would never have interacted this way." Along with the camaraderie, there is also some healthy competition. The best part for Individual Served Jamar Cherry is "getting strikes!" For McDermott, it is having the chance for everyone to get together. "People from all twelve residences come out for bowling night."

With the arrival of spring, Vinfen individuals served and staff are looking forward to getting back out on the softball field. Individual Served Stephanie Sanders, who is an

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

VINFEN MARKS DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH

Once again, Vinfen marked Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month by organizing five Open Houses in day programs throughout Massachusetts in March. Day programs provide vocational and habilitation services such as skills training that help individuals achieve increased independence. Legislators, elected officials, funders, families and individuals served, and Vinfen staff joined in this annual show of support for services and programs in the Mental Retardation Division. Vinfen's Day Development and Transition Center (DDTC-South) in Weymouth was awarded a Mass. House Citation in recognition of its outstanding services provided to individuals with disabilities.



Long-standing Vinfen supporters Representatives Kevin Honan (left) and Michael Moran (second from right) toured Vinfen's Day Development and Transition Center in

Brighton on March 7. They are pictured here with Vinfen COO Bruce Bird (right), Vinfen Director of Service Maria Joseph, and Individual Served Isabella "Choopy" Ortiz (center).



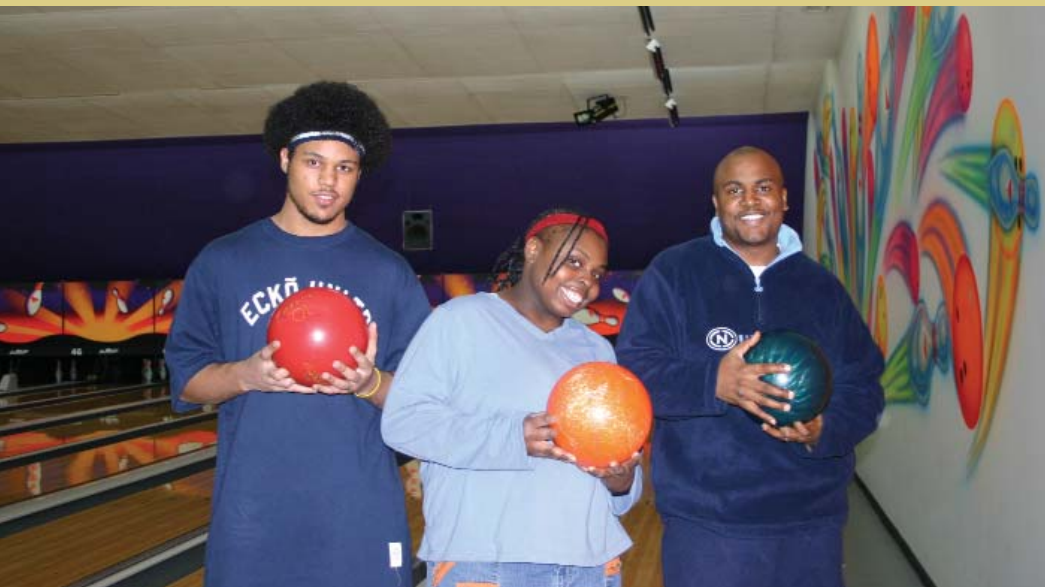
Brendan Mullen, DDTC-South Program Director, proudly holds the House Citation awarded to his program during the Open House on March 21. On his right are: Rep. James Murphy, Assistant Program Director Cindy Kibble, and Director of Service Maria Joseph; and on his left: Site Manager Marcia Selig, and Vinfen COO Bruce Bird. Rep. Michael Moran also attended the Open House.



Individual Served John Young Jr., center, is surrounded by his father, Mr. Young Sr. (left), and by Rep. Joseph Driscoll, showing his support to Vinfen's South Shore Day Habilitation program in Braintree, Mass., at the Open House on March 23.

BECOME A HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEMBER

Vinfen is looking for volunteers to participate in 3 Human Rights Committees throughout Massachusetts. Human Rights Committees help affirm, promote, and protect the Human and Civil rights of individuals served. Interested? Contact Helen Fantasia at (617) 441-1800 or helenf@vinfen.org to learn more.



(l to r) Individuals Served Jonathan Figueroa and Stephanie Sanders strike a pose with Assistant Site Manager Lamont McDermott at Silver Lanes Bowling Alley in East Hartford, Connecticut.

enthusiastic member of both the bowling and the softball teams, is grateful to Vinfen staff like Ronnell Monts for making these activities possible. "They are all great people. They came to work at Vinfen to help us, but they are doing much more than that by going the extra mile and giving us a chance to be part of the community."

VALENTINES DAY ART GROUP WARMS HEARTS ACROSS AGES AT HANCOCK CENTER

-- continued from cover --

When speaking of the group, Angelica remembers that she was a little shy at the beginning, "but then I realized that I just needed to speak a little louder for residents to hear me." "Working with seniors and individuals with disabilities can be difficult and frightening to understand for children," rightly points Keyes. "But it's fantastic to see how they handled these challenges with such maturity," she adds. When asked about their feelings, students reply with a burst of enthusiasm and pride that they love doing artistic activities, getting together, and meeting with new people at the Hancock Center.



Angelica Baez-Vasquez, 6th grade student from The Harbor School, and Resident Bill Chernsky, working on each other's valentines during last February's Art Group at Vinfen's Hancock Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Dorchester.

Another resident, who really looks forward to the group each week, says that she feels rewarded each time because children have original minds and are fascinating. For Elena Clamen, art is the medium that helps residents build their self-esteem and children are the link to the community. Clearly, the art group brings a little of the community to Hancock residents and empowers them by making them realize they can still do things on their own.

The art work created by residents and students was displayed for the first time at the Harbor School's Winter Celebration of

Student Work last February. "It's really important to me that Angelica gets involved in as many good endeavors and projects in the community as possible," Lydia Vasquez, Angelica's mother, proudly said as she watched her daughter leaving the stage with the school's Community Service Award in hand.

The art group will take a break in June. But before the end of school year, Elena Clamen, JoAnn Banner, residents, and students are busy working on the 'Hand in Hand Creations' finale show, to be held on May 31 at Vinfen's Hancock Center in Dorchester.

calendar



GET READY FOR THE 3RD NAMI-MASS WALK EVENT

The Massachusetts Chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) will hold its 3rd Annual Walk for the Mind of America on Saturday, May 6. Former Governor Michael Dukakis and his wife, Kitty, Senator Stephen Tolman, and Representative Ruth Balser will be Honorary Chairs, while Rhonda Mann, Medical Correspondent at WCVB Channel 5, will emcee the walk. This event sheds light on mental illness and stigmatization, and helps fund programs all over the state. More than half a million dollars were raised the first two years and distributed to NAMI's 26 local affiliates and to statewide initiatives that provide support, education, advocacy, and increase awareness. The fundraising goal for this year's event is set at \$300,000. According to NAMI, one Massachusetts family in four is affected by mental illness. This year, everyone is invited to join the walk for a day of fun with a 3-mile walk-a-thon and live entertainment, music, and food. Check-in is at 9 a.m., and the walk starts at 11 a.m. at the Artisan Park, Soldier's Field Road in Brighton, along the Charles River. Vinfen is a proud supporter and Gold sponsor of the NAMI Walk 2006. For more information, visit NAMI-MASS's Web site at <http://www.namimass.org>.



the back is Lynn ACT PD Phil Moncreiff, NAMI-MASS Executive Director Toby Fisher, Bay Cove Outreach Worker Mark Weaver, NAMI President Phil Hadley, and Senior PD Will Buckley.

> On March 21, the NAMI-MASS Walk Kickoff Luncheon took place in Wakefield: (l to r) Residential Counselor Denis Nwetbefua and Resident Domingo Gomes from the Wallace St. Program, Individual Served Jackie Kusch and Counselor Steve Erickson from Lynn ACT, standing in front is Wallace St. Resident Janice LoRusso; to her right is Occupational Therapist Ricky Greenly, Bailey St. Program; in

SAVE-THE-DATE FOR TASTE OF GATEWAY, 5TH EDITION

The time to support Gateway has come again! Vinfen's Gateway Arts program invites everyone to celebrate the work of 90 talented artists with disabilities on May 20, from 5 to 8 p.m. Guests joining this annual event with a \$100 ticket will receive a piece of artwork from the show in a high-spirited Yankee Swap. All guests will enjoy a delicious catered buffet and live music by S&Y Project /John Payne Music Center. A silent auction featuring exceptional prizes such as one week vacation at Wellfleet National Seashore will also be organized. Tickets to the event only are \$50 (no artwork). All proceeds will



fund the renovation of Gateway's main studio. The *Taste of Gateway* exhibit will be held from May 8 through May 20 with guest curator Ceci Mendez, Exhibition Director at The New Art Center in Newton. For more information, please call (617) 734-1577 ext. 11. Gateway Arts, 62 Harvard Street, Brookline Village, MA 02445.

> *Vase with Flowers*, by Cathy Anderson, is one of the artworks to be given at the Taste of Gateway Fundraising Event.

SCREENINGS OF NEW DOCUMENTARY FILM, *GROWING OLD*

How does someone define aging? MonkeyRay Productions tried to answer this question by focusing on the lives of four people embracing the wonders of aging and dealing with its challenges in *Growing Old*, a new documentary film released in January 2006. Among them, Dr. Paul Mazur, who believes in giving quality treatment to elders, visits people throughout greater Boston in group homes, nursing homes, assisted living, and on the street, and was filmed at Vinfen's Hancock Center. Upcoming screenings are planned in Watertown at the Arsenal Center for the Arts on April 21 and 22, and in Brookline at the Coolidge Corner Theatre on June 14.

The *Vinfen Voice* is published quarterly by Vinfen's Public Affairs Department. Letters and story ideas can be sent by e-mail to the editor, Sophie Beauvais, at beauvaiss@vinfen.org.

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