

# VINFEN voice



## FROM | THE PRESIDENT

In September, Vinfen joined with trade association representatives to testify in strong support for H. 2885: An Act Relative to Rates for Human and Social Service Programs. This bill recognizes the invaluable work performed by human service providers and our dedicated staff – and seeks to address long-standing funding problems that have weakened an important sector of the state’s economy.

After nearly two decades of funders expecting us to “do more with less,” the consequences are clear: inadequate reimbursement for essential services; subsistence wages for direct care staff; industry-wide high staff turnover; uneven quality of care as costs increase and funding remains stagnant; and unfunded mandates that drain limited resources.

H. 2885 goes beyond previous band-aid approaches, e.g., the Direct Care Salary Reserve, which – while much-appreciated – ignored the scope of the funding crisis we face. H. 2885 makes the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services responsible for pricing services and calls for “reasonable and adequate” reimbursement rates to deliver high quality services. It also requires that rates be adjusted annually to account for inflation, the impact of new governmental mandates, and geographic differences that increase costs.

H. 2885 is vital to all who proudly work in human services and to the quality of life for those we serve. It deserves our active, vocal support.

Sincerely,

Gary W. Lamson

## Wake-up call for World AIDS Day, December 1

Since antiretroviral therapy hit the market in the 1990’s, AIDS has slowly disappeared from public debate. During Katrina’s aftermath, little news was given on HIV-positive individuals fighting to stay medicated, housed, and healthy. In its 2004 State of AIDS in Massachusetts\* report, the AIDS Action Committee underlined that “state funding has been decreasing for over three years while the number of people living with HIV/AIDS continues to increase at an alarming pace.” According to the same report, 14,811 people are living with HIV/AIDS in Massachusetts, and an additional estimate of 7,000 to 9,000 people are unaware of their infection or are not yet in treatment. As a result, there are not



“AIDS is a hidden disease. Look at me. I am 59 years old, and everybody tells me I look younger!” laughs Paul Reddick (l), with his nephew Eddy in front of Vinfen’s School St. residence.

enough counseling and testing sites, and cuts to housing and support services are making it difficult, if not impossible, for individuals to maintain strict adherence to medication regimens or to access vital residential services.

Paul Reddick was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS nine years ago, when he ended up at Shattuck Hospital in Jamaica Plain, Mass. Before that, Paul’s life was spiraling out of control. He was living in and out of shelters, in and out of substance abuse. Paul stayed at the hospital’s shelter for three months, where he received

substance abuse treatment and counseling services. Most importantly, he started a collaborative relationship with a doctor who helped him understand HIV/AIDS. Eventually, he was enlisted to be among the first residents of Vinfen’s School Street program in 1998 and has been living there ever since.

After years of treatment, Paul’s viral load has significantly decreased while his CD 4 count, which measures the strength of his immune system, has greatly improved. It’s now been two years since he was told by his doctor to stop tri-therapy, and regular tests keep him in check. But, as he admits sternly, he doesn’t know where he would be today if it was not for School Street program. “The program sets good foundations to build on. Having a roof above your head and being surrounded by professionals are strong incentives to lead a better life,” he adds.

# INITIATIVES

## ¿Habla español?

In an effort to address the need to hire Spanish-speaking direct care employees, Vinfen recently produced a Spanish version of its award-winning recruitment video to attract qualified bilingual candidates throughout Vinfen's service area, including Connecticut. Bilingual candidates in today's workforce have a variety of available employment options. For many, the deciding factor to accept an offer is the attention and commitment that a potential employer shows in recruiting bilingual staff.

In Connecticut, 50 percent of the individuals Vinfen serves speak only Spanish or are bilingual. Having qualified bilingual direct care staff is essential to ensuring that the needs of the individuals served are met. Currently, Vinfen-Connecticut (CT) operates four residential programs for young Latino males who require bilingual support staff. "The need to connect with the individuals served as they mature into adulthood in their primary language is great," says Maricrus Davila-Ortiz, associate program director, Vinfen-CT.



Vinfen-CT Vice President Elisa Velardo (l) discusses Vinfen's mission and the Spanish recruitment video with a potential new hire.

To view Vinfen's Spanish recruitment video, go to [www.vinfen.org](http://www.vinfen.org) and click on "View Corporate Videos."

## First InnerView Art Show at Hancock Center

Vinfen's Hancock Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Center hosted its first InnerView Grant Art Show and cook-out on September 1. The show, part of the InnerView Therapeutic Arts Program made possible by a \$30,000 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, is the culminating point of four months of work.

As Expressive Therapist Elena Clamen explains, "Many of the Hancock residents have difficulty expressing themselves. The arts allow them to find healthy ways to do so and build connections with others." Hancock residents, who face severe challenges, have thrived in the arts program. Resident Roy Jarvie, whose favorite medium is watercolor, said that the show made him feel like a real artist, while Oscar Bonilla, pictured here with Elena Clamen, said it made him feel calm and serene.



# SPOTLIGHT

## GOOD DIET, EXERCISE CAN HELP HEAL BODY AND MIND

When Eliot Budd talks about his newfound love of broccoli and says with a smile that cooking is fun, Charlotte Hett, his counselor, quickly adds that they still have to set a regular cooking date together. Eliot has been receiving services from Vinfen's Apartment Living program since 1983. In 2004, Eliot and Charlotte, alongside 49 individuals served by Vinfen, enjoyed food tastings for a teaching cookbook project. They took part in the first phase of what is now called The Healthy Lifestyle initiative at Vinfen. Cooking is not new to Eliot, but the fact that he has diabetes and takes several medications makes it very important for him to take care of his health.

Despite widespread recognition that people with psychiatric disabilities have increased risks of mortality due to co-occurring conditions such as heart disease and diabetes, healthy lifestyle programs are rarely offered by human services providers. Traditionally, medication adherence and therapy are foremost objectives in managing a mental illness. In addition, recovery and independence entails maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This means living in a way that contributes to physical and emotional well-being, including nutrition, exercise, adequate rest, and social interactions.

### On the importance of making healthier choices

At Vinfen, the idea of developing a healthy lifestyle initiative emerged in 2002, when the agency received two grants to fund nutrition projects. Hoffman-Laroche offered \$58,150 to develop a teaching cookbook and Eli Lilly contributed \$8,800 to adapt two existing nutrition and fitness manuals, both for people with developmental and/or mental disabilities. "Eight residential sites were chosen to participate in the teaching cookbook part," says Julia Knowles, project director, "In order to find recipes we organized a contest at Vinfen. More than a hundred recipes were submitted." Once selected, recipes were tested in the programs. Inger Hustrulid, a registered dietitian and founder of Foundations Family Nutrition in Cambridge, Mass., helped throughout the process. While Eliot really enjoyed peeling and cubing vegetables, Charlotte remembers the food tastings as a great experience "because we were able to have some quality time together while cooking and taking care of our health." Since then, both Charlotte and Eliot have lost a few pounds and Eliot's blood-sugar levels have gone down.

Released this summer, Vinfen's *Tasty & Healthy!* Teaching Cookbook contains 12 concise lessons on nutrition and 30 easy-to-follow recipes, including 15 with step-by-step color photographs. Knowles insists that the cookbook is not a weight loss diet. "Based on the New American Plate®, which recommends eating more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, it's a diet for good health that will make individuals feel emotionally, mentally, and physically better." Another unexpected benefit among participating programs was improved relationships. A renewed sense of community blossomed in residences full of people with different backgrounds.



Baycove CRS "Fat Monday" cooking group, here headed by Chef Kenny Galloway (center), as pictured on the cover of Vinfen's *Tasty & Healthy!* Teaching Cookbook.

The second phase of the initiative involved the revision of Eli Lilly's "Food & Health" and "Fitness" manuals to better meet the needs of staff and individuals served. Both work as exercise books, with facts, guidelines, quizzes, and tips. Vinfen's Baycove Community Rehabilitative Support program (CRS) in Dorchester, led by Occupational Therapist Cynthia Berman, and Liberty Square residence in Rockland, Mass., served as official test-centers.



On Friday, September 9, Eliot Budd received his copy of Vinfen's *Tasty & Healthy!* Teaching Cookbook. With Charlotte Hett, his counselor, he started right away to plan dinner with homemade meatloaf for the same evening. He was also given the beautiful red apron pictured here by Julia Knowles, project director.

### Working towards standards for healthy lifestyle initiatives

Motivated by the positive outcomes, Vinfen launched a twelve-month pilot study in October. "The study aims at showing that individuals with serious and persistent mental illness can improve their health and overall wellness by following an intensive psycho-educational nutrition and fitness program," explains Dr. Ken Duckworth, Vinfen medical director and project adviser. Fifteen Boston-area residents of Vinfen's Psychiatric Rehabilitation division are being recruited. The first part of the study, already under way, will last eight weeks and consist of one-hour weekly classes on nutrition and fitness using the cookbook and manuals. During the second phase, trained staff will lead support group sessions to discuss with participants their successes and difficulties in adopting new diet and fitness strategies. If successful, Vinfen COO and Principal Investigator Dr. Bruce Bird hopes for a larger scale study, for which federal funding is being sought in partnership with Dr. Steve Bartels of Dartmouth Medical School, adding that "the initiative could set a precedent for future healthy lifestyle programs".

### WAKE-UP CALL FOR WORLD AIDS DAY, DECEMBER 1 *(continued)*

School St. is one of three HIV/AIDS residential programs run by Vinfen. Located near stores and public transportation, the program is a supportive housing community designed to assist men and women with HIV/AIDS live independently. Each of the 12 units has a kitchen area and a full bathroom, and extensive community spaces -- such as a fully-equipped kitchen, a living room, a yard, and a free-of-charge laundry room-- are available. Residents all receive comprehensive case management and medication follow-up, but meetings are at the core of the vital support and security net that School St. represents. Paul considers the community meeting, held on Wednesdays, to be the most important one because staff and residents come together to talk about common issues. The second meeting is the "wrap-up" group on Fridays. It works like a peer support group where residents share pamphlets and information on HIV, hepatitis C, and treatment options. But the program, like so many others, has had to deal with budget cuts. Outdoor activities, such as movies or museums visits, are not offered anymore.

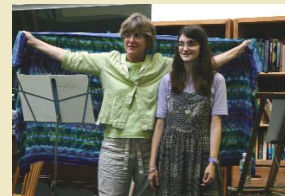
Paul, who lost a brother and a sister to AIDS, feels that society is sweeping it under the rug. "Some people think it's over with! But AIDS is a hidden epidemic that does not discriminate. Anybody can walk around with the disease without knowing it." That's why he advocates for more; more education, more testing centers, more housing and support programs, and more money for research. Because Paul, like so many everywhere, is longing for the real breakthrough: a cure or a vaccine.

\* Caring in a Time of Crisis, The State of AIDS in Massachusetts 2004, AIDS Action Committee Public Policy Department, [www.aac.org](http://www.aac.org)

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## THE DANGERS OF EMPATHY AT WEBSTER HOUSE

Written and performed by Viesia Novosielski, peer educator at Webster II, and her mother June Gross, *The Dangers of Empathy* was featured at Webster House on September 20. This autobiographical play presents a family's struggles when facing childhood mental illness. It explores the feelings of grief, loneliness, and abandonment through a collection of dialogues, metaphors, poems, and songs. The performance was followed by a discussion on mental illness, treatment, and stigma.



June Gross (l) and Viesia Novosielski (r) performing *The Dangers of Empathy* at Webster House.

## GATEWAY GALLERY CELEBRATES BROOKLINE

Gateway Gallery joined in to celebrate Brookline's 300th Anniversary with a special September exhibit featuring paintings of familiar Brookline sites by award-winning artists such as Kathleen Wells' colorful painting of the Coolidge Corner Theater. Artwork can still be viewed online at [www.gatewayarts.org](http://www.gatewayarts.org).



Gateway Director Rae Edelson (c.), at the opening reception, flanked by Chobee Hoy (l.) and Jay Veever (r.), popular Brookline activists and Gateway supporters.

## AN EVENING OF BASEBALL IN LOWELL

On August 1, individuals served from Vinfen's Hilburn Street residence enjoyed an evening of watching the Lowell Spinners at

LeLachur Park in Lowell. In addition to a complimentary baseball game, the residents were treated to a free hot dog and medium soda at the park. "The residents really enjoyed the game and were grateful for the opportunity," says Site Manager II Cheryl Oliphant. Vinfen thanks BEF Alarms in Chelmsford, Mass. for their generous sponsorship of the evening.



# milestones



# calendar

## JUDY GUZIK RECEIVES OPERATION A.B.L.E. AWARD



Judy Guzik, from Vinfen's Training Center, received the 2005 Outstanding Mature Worker Award from Operation A.B.L.E. (Ability Based on Long Experience) of Greater Boston, a nonprofit provider of employment and training services for mature workers age 45 and older. She was recognized by Executive Director Joan Cirillo for her tenacity and hard work while enrolled in a computer skills training program.

## LAUREN POWERS GETS FIRST-TIME PUBLICATION IN JABA



The results of a 2-year study on pica behavior involving Assistant Clinical Director Lauren Powers were released in the fall issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (JABA). The research, conducted in Memphis, Tenn., aimed at determining the best way to treat individuals with pica and to provide agencies such as Vinfen with effective guidelines and parameters. "Individuals engaging in pica eat inedible objects. Usually associated with another disability, pica is a very challenging and sometimes life-threatening behavior hardly studied so far," explains Powers, who joined Vinfen in January because "It is a leading human services agency and the clinical team is great!" She was also motivated to join the growing department of Clinical Director Michael Dorsey, her former professor at Simmons College.

The JABA paper is a first-time publication for Powers. "It is really exhilarating to collaborate with the top people in the field and to be the 10th paper ever published on pica in the JABA," she adds. She plans to do more research at Vinfen and is already working on a project on aggressive behavior.

Brandon E. McCord, Jason W. Grosser, Brian A. Iwata, & Lauren A. Powers (2005); *An analysis of response-blocking parameters in the prevention of pica*; *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 38, 391-394.

## THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, GIVE THE GIFT THAT GIVES TWICE!



Gateway Gallery will once again hold its annual Holiday Fair on December 3 (storm date: Dec. 10), from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. This year's fair will feature unique, high-quality, affordable gifts, and all artwork purchases made that same day will be *cash and carry*. Also, four new greeting cards were designed for the season by Gateway artists, including *Messengers of light* (pictured here) based on an original painting by Gilberto Palacios. These, and many other cards, are available individually, in packs of six or in bulk with personalization, and include photographs of the artists.

Webster House will showcase its annual holiday season exhibit, *FRAMED, A Collection of Diverse Views*, with new artwork from November 17 through February 15, and sell new greeting cards with reproductions of its well-known artists. An opening reception will be held December 1, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. and feature live music and refreshments by Webster II Catering. Webster will also open its doors for *Brookline's 12th Annual 1st Light Festival*, the kickoff event of the holiday season, on November 17, from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Come enjoy artwork, music and refreshments!

Gateway Arts is a Vinfen vocational arts program for adults with disabilities and Webster House is a Vinfen day rehabilitation program for adults with psychiatric disabilities.

### Gateway Crafts Store

Holiday Hours begin November 17:  
Mon/Sat, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Thu/8 p.m. Sun/noon - 5 p.m.  
62 Harvard Street  
Brookline Village, MA 02445

### Webster House Gallery

Mon/Fri. 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
20 Webster Place  
Brookline Village, MA 02445

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# vinfen

helping to transform lives

950 Cambridge Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
02141-1001

TEL 617.441.1800

FAX 617.441.1858

# www.vinfen.org

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