

# VOICE

News and information for friends and supporters of Vinfen



Recovery Coordinator Adam Whitney and Melissa work together on her employment goals.

## Finding Her Role through Peer Support

Melissa knows firsthand how peer support can make all the difference in a person's recovery. Two years ago, she finally felt ready to begin her job search after not being employed for many years. Through the support of Vinfen, Melissa realized that helping others with psychiatric conditions would be a great job for her.

Recovery Coordinator Adam Whitney, who first met Melissa in a peer group, recruited her to speak on a panel for new hires at Vinfen. Meanwhile, many people at Vinfen suggested the Certified Peer Specialist Training, a program that teaches peers how to provide guidance to others who have psychiatric conditions. It was during the training that she first endeavored to write her story. "It was me being me, being honest," Melissa said. "It was the first time I owned my story."

Not only did Melissa obtain her certification, she is thrilled to be joining Vinfen's Quincy Recovery Learning Center as a Recovery Youth Leader. Despite past setbacks, she is achieving her dreams and is inspired to help others do the same.

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health has replaced Community Based Flexible Supports with a new model, Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS). ACCS places a greater emphasis on peer support like Melissa received and offers others support in their recovery journeys.

"Our experience providing services to thousands of people in recovery for over 40 years has taught us that folks need three things: social connection, the confidence that they have the strength to cope with their struggles, and encouragement to strive and try new things," said Vinfen Senior Vice President of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Susan Abbott. "Peer support helps with all of those things, and we are strengthening our peer support resources to people receiving ACCS since July 2018."



## President's Message

Bruce L. Bird, President & Chief Executive Officer

As community and healthcare providers in Massachusetts prepare for the new Medicaid and Department of Mental Health systems of care, workforce challenges have increased. It is the topic of conversation among my fellow providers and our associations.

It has been widely publicized for many years that the turnover rates in our service sector have been larger than desired. The Providers Council, of which Vinfen is a member, has contracted with consultants at the Donahue Institute and UMass Dartmouth and published three reports on workforce issues. The reports demonstrate that the growth in demand for services has been rising much faster than the workforce and that poor compensation is a major concern as the gap widens.

Everyone who benefits from our services understands the importance of a caring, well-trained workforce. So what can we do? Vinfen consistently enacts programs to support staff, including training, staff recognition programs, and tuition and fee reimbursement for staff enrolled in college. For the past seven years, we have also had sufficient resources to provide pension and gain-share distributions to staff. In annual surveys, employees generally rate Vinfen high in job satisfaction and support and our turnover is usually slightly below the average for our sector. But we are constantly seeking to do better.

In 2019, thanks to successful advocacy with the legislatures in both Massachusetts and Connecticut, we will be able to provide modest increases in compensation to our workers. It is critical we continue our advocacy in both statehouses. We ask all of our employees and our supporters to be engaged in this advocacy process – it is our number one priority, and ask that it be yours also.

# vinfen leading the way

## Making a House a Home



(Above) David relaxes in a living room designed by Kerri.  
(Below) Another living room created by Kerri.



One of Vinfen's best kept secrets is that we have an interior decorator designing beautiful dwellings for the people who live in our residential services. Interior decorator Kerri Ahern is very passionate about her work and her impact on the people Vinfen serves. "This is the most rewarding job I've ever had," she remarked.

Kerri's passion stems from her first job as a residential counselor at Vinfen. Even then, she was always re-arranging the furniture in the house and trying to make it more of a home. Residents and staff in turn were always receptive to her design choices. When an interior decorator position opened up at Vinfen, Kerri knew she had to apply. "This was something I loved, but also something I could do for others," she exclaimed.

She tries to mix old and new elements, but avoids anything too trendy, favoring a more classical approach. She is quick to point out that there needs to be quiet, sanctuary spaces as well as more dynamic and stimulating rooms. "It has to be sustainable and practical as well as visually appealing," said Kerri. She also gets input from the residents, especially regarding the color of their bedroom.

The best feedback Kerri receives is when residents tell her that they feel at home and a sense of pride in where they live.

## Working Toward a Dream with Dough

Daniel's lifelong dreams are to become a baker and to have his own bakery. He lights up whenever he discusses his favorite baked goods, and he has made drawings of his future bakery. His passion stems from his fond memories and love of his late mother. "I used to bake with my mother when I was younger," recounted Daniel. "Baking makes me feel close to her."

"I was so moved when he told me why he bakes, because baking is a way he honors her memory," noted Job Developer Sage Elbot.

With the support of Sage and fellow staff, Daniel is working toward his goals. At Vinfen's Employment Training Center, he has been practicing and perfecting many delicious recipes. And last year, when he applied to work as a dishwasher at Wegmans, he voiced his dreams to become a baker. The hiring manager said if Daniel put in the time and effort, he might be able to later pick up shifts at the bakery. Once hired, Daniel worked hard to memorize his commute on public transportation, the layout of the dish room, and how to operate all the equipment. Daniel's supervisor has been very impressed and sees Daniel in the future being cross-trained in the bakery department.



Daniel preparing whoopie pies at Vinfen's Employee Training Center.

"It has been an absolute pleasure to watch Daniel quickly thrive in his new work environment," said Sage. "His supervisor said Daniel comes to work every day with a smile on his face and that his fellow employees value him as part of their team. It's wonderful that Wegmans recognizes Daniel's dedication and is actively supporting his dream to become a baker."



Phoebe Goodman  
Supported Employment Director

## Recovery Is Not Linear

Since the onset of bipolar disorder symptoms in my late teens, I have been working toward my recovery. Despite struggling with my mental health in high school, I decided to move to Chicago for college. This meant leaving my family, friends, and my mental health care providers in Massachusetts. I managed to attend school full-time for three years. During that time, I struggled with intense mood swings, overwhelming anxiety, and self-harm.

I was in-patient hospitalized three times while in college. Finally, I realized with the help of my parents that I couldn't continue in the same way. I moved back to Boston, and I started to engage more in treatment and began taking better care of myself. This included focusing on my career, engaging in more intensive therapy, improving my sleep habits, eating healthier, exercising, and reaching out to friends. By the summer of 2013, I felt stable and genuinely happy. I was enjoying my career, my regular yoga practice, and my friends. I had made huge steps forward in my recovery. I thought I was going to stay in this "happy place" forever.

Then on October 5, 2013, the unthinkable happened; my dear friend and life mentor, Alissa, took her own life. Losing her to suicide was unlike any other loss I had experienced. I felt overwhelmed and unable to manage my mental health without more intensive supports. As I checked myself into the hospital, I felt that all of the forward progress I had made since 2009 had come crashing down. I was devastated by the loss of my friend and felt frustrated that I had taken steps backwards in my recovery.

It was through peer support in the hospital and the Samaritans Safe Place Support Group, a peer-led support group for people who have lost loved ones to suicide, that I began to think about recovery as a nonlinear path. (You can learn more at <https://samaritanshope.org/our-services/grief-support-services>.) I was reminded by other people that even if I was struggling with my mental health again, it didn't mean I would be stuck there forever. I had the potential to make forward progress again, just as I had done before.

I have taken steps in the right direction since then. I continued my self-care practices and added mindfulness to my life. I reached out for support from friends, family, and other people who have lived experience. Though I generally feel stable and happy, there are still days I feel overwhelmed by my mood swings and anxiety. I recognize that living with a mental health condition means there is a variable in my life that I cannot fully control. I remind myself on those tough days that recovery is not linear and there is no perfect path to follow.

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### Mission Statement

*Vinfen transforms lives by building the capacity of individuals, families, organizations, and communities to learn, thrive, and achieve their goals. Our services and advocacy promote the recovery, resiliency, habilitation, and self-determination of the people we serve. As a human services leader, we strive to be the provider, employer, and partner of choice.*

# vinfen leading the way

## Advocating for Human Rights

Four members of Vinfen's Self-Advocacy group attended a Human Rights Forum on April 13 at the University of Massachusetts in Shrewsbury. The self-advocates were supported by Vinfen Programs Directors Michelle Contreras and Heather Garoufalís and by Director of Service Asela Jayasinghe. "The self-advocates had a great time and asked thoughtful questions as well," said Asela, who also leads and supports the group.

The event's theme was *Self* and featured a moving keynote from award-winning advocate, speaker, educator, and author Sheila Radziewicz. The forum was hosted by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services' Metro Regional Office for Human Rights, Central West Regional Office for Human Rights, and the Metro Regional Diversity Committee.



Self-advocates Thomas, Judy, Kim, and Todd meet with keynote speaker Sheila Radziewicz (middle).

## Creating Connections through Work

Norma, an individual served by Vinfen, shared her employment story during a presentation at the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers LEAD! Conference on April 12 in Worcester, MA. The presentation focused on the importance of friendships between people with and without disabilities, and it was led by Vinfen Supported Employment Director Phoebe Goodman, The Arc Pathways Facilitator Jim Ross, and Creating our Common Wealth Coordinator Jack Yates.

Norma spoke about making friends with her coworkers and the customers who frequented the gym where she worked at the Jewish Community Center for the past two years. "I was nervous [presenting] at first, but then I went out there and spoke," said Norma. "Phoebe stayed with me and that made me feel much better about speaking. Presenting went well and it was super fun. I made lots of friends at the conference."



Jim, Norma, and Phoebe right after their shared presentation.

## Shining a Light on Risk

Vinfen held our 2018 Annual Moving Images Film Festival, *The Dignity of Risk*, on Saturday, March 24 at Harvard Medical School. Over 500 professionals, people we serve, staff, family, advocates, and supporters attended. The event presented films and panel discussions exploring how the right to take risks, both big and small, is an essential element to self-advocacy, services, recovery, and the pursuit of one's dreams. *Crazy Director* Lise Zumwalt introduced her film, and *Wizard Mode* stars Robert and Kathy Gagno made a special virtual appearance.

Thanks to this year's sponsors: Ozzy Properties, Inc.; Shaevel, Krems, O'Connor & Jackowitz, LLP; CityPsych Wellness, Inc.; Interior Resources; Jackson Lewis P.C.; Mass Cultural Council; MSG Staffing; Parker, Brown, Macaulay, & Sheerin.



Vinfen Team Leader Evan Schinell and Director of Clinical Services Sharon Barry with Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change Board Chair Sophia Johansson were panelists at the festival.

# vinfen making a difference

## Knitting Communities Together

Building a sense of community is important to Vinfen. We are so thankful to have partnered with local businesses who in turn have helped us raise funds and awareness of our mission. Atwood's Tavern in Cambridge, MA has hosted many Run-4-Life events over the years. The Cambridge-based craft business, gather here, donated 5% of their profits on Wednesdays in April to us. The Hot Stove Saloon on Cape Cod stopped taking credit cards and donates the money saved annually to nonprofits like Vinfen, which has received a donation for the past five years. We encourage you to visit these businesses and thank them for their generous support.



A Run-4-Life event at Atwood's Tavern.

## Running for Health of Others



One of the Run-4-Life teams at the finish line.

Thanks to contributions both big and small, this year's Run-4-Life brought in over \$30,000. Four teams ran through the night in the 190-mile relay from Hull to Provincetown, MA, raising awareness and funds for people served by Vinfen. Thanks to our sponsors: Pelham Pharmacy; Alexandria Real Estate Equities; Principal Builders; J&F Construction; Morgan, Brown & Joy, LLP; MIT; Afia, Atlantis Investments; Fenway Consulting Group; Mintz Levin Cohn Ferris Glovsky and Popeo PC; Swift Staffing; WastePlace; Watertown Savings Bank; Olympia Moving and Storage; Merchants Leasing; Atwood's Tavern; and Favorite Health Care Staffing.

## Saying Namaste to Health

At Plymouth Bay Clubhouse, many members have found yoga to be a beneficial practice in their health and wellness. Open Doors Yoga Studio instructor Meg Garfield originally taught the members through a grant-funded program. And thanks to the generous support of NAMI Plymouth and the Massachusetts Charitable Society, members have returned to their yoga practice. Clubhouse staff have noticed that members are more confident and positive after their classes. One member remarked, "Meg really takes her time with us. We do a big meditation piece that makes me feel good!"



Members at the Open Doors Yoga Studio.

## You Can Contribute to Vinfen in Many Ways

- Direct, unrestricted donations
- Matching gifts from your employer
- Gifts in memory, in honor, or in celebration
- Gifts of bequests or planned giving
- Donate online. Visit [www.vinfen.org](http://www.vinfen.org) and click "donate now" to make a secure and convenient donation to Vinfen. Consider recurring gifts.
- Donate your used vehicle. Visit [www.v-dac.com](http://www.v-dac.com) or call 877-999-8322 and select Vinfen as the nonprofit you wish to support.

Mail



Web



A donation envelope is also enclosed for your convenience. For more information, please contact Development and Special Events Manager Ann Bausman at 617-441-1896 or [bausmana@vinfen.org](mailto:bausmana@vinfen.org).

# vinfen happenings

## Rallying for Human Services



*Vinfen members wear their yellow shirts to show their support for The Caring Force.*

Vinfen participated in The Caring Force's Seventh Annual Rally and Lobby Day on April 10 at the Massachusetts State House. The rally was held to support loan repayment legislation and raise pay for human service workers. State Senator Sal DiDomenico and Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier were both presented with The Caring Bear Award for their dedication to championing legislation that supports the human services sector.

## Raising Mental Health Awareness



*Member Anna welcomes guests to the event.*

Dozens of Clubhouse members, friends, family members, staff, and supporters attended Point After Club's 5th Annual Mental Health Awareness Month Celebration on May 4 at Lawrence Heritage State Park in Lawrence, MA. Guests were treated to recovery stories and a proclamation from Lawrence's Mayor Dan Rivera. An art gallery gala reception followed the program.

## Putting on the Ritz



*Marilyn and Delilah strike a pose together.*

Massachusetts Mental Health Center Community Based Flexible Supports program held their 6th Annual Recovery Celebration Spring Fling on April 19 at Carson Place in South Boston. Over 150 people we serve and staff attended the Hollywood-themed event to recognize individuals' achievements and honor the family and employers who support them. Guests were treated to dinner, prizes, dancing, and a special guest appearance by Marilyn Monroe.

## Working on Recovery Goals



*Atlantic Clubhouse Program Director Janette Tibets and State Senator John F. Keenan pose in front of Artist Michael Manchester's painting of local legislators that includes Kennan.*

Atlantic Clubhouse held their *Learning and Working Toward Recovery... Stories That Inspire Forum* event on May 15 in Quincy, MA. People shared how employment and education played vital roles in their recovery. Speakers included State Senator Keenan, employers, and educators who partner with Clubhouse members to help them achieve their goals.

# vinfen connecticut

## Cooking a Recipe for Success

Angel discovered he had a love of cooking while working at Vinfen CT's Vocational Training Center (VVTC). The center provides individuals an opportunity for career planning, job training, and securing employment. When a prep cook position opened up at a fast food restaurant, the VVTC team suggested Angel should apply. "Angel nailed the interview with confidence and professionalism," said Job Coach Courtney Lausier. Since his first shift in March, he has been excelling at his position. "He prepares all the food in a timely manner and even has time for extra tasks," said Courtney. "He is a wonderful asset to his team and management could not be happier with his daily performance."



Angel on his way to work.

# vinfen arts

## Witnessing Works of Bark

Gateway Arts recently held two opening receptions: *Three Views* on May 10 and *All About Cats & Dogs* on June 10. The first exhibit highlighted the work of three Gateway artists. The second show features a variety of mediums with each artist rendering either a cat or dog in their own unique style. *All About Cats & Dogs* will remain open through August 29. Also, please stay tuned for their next exhibit *Recovering Identity* which starts on September 10 and goes through November 3.

For more information about Gateway Arts, visit their website at [www.gatewayarts.org](http://www.gatewayarts.org).



Artist Paul Stevenson (right) with his father and twin brother in front of two of Paul's pieces at the "Three Views" reception at Gateway Arts.

## Flowing through Art

Art Connection Studio held their 20th exhibit, *Ebb & Flow*, on April 20 at their studio in Hartford, CT. It featured paintings, mixed media works, fiber arts, wood burnings, living art made of succulents, and handcrafted, wearable pieces.

"*Ebb & Flow* was based on the cycles of life. The artists and facilitators came up with the theme together," said Program Specialist Michael Galaburri. "It was very successful; one of our better shows." The exhibit also had a mural created by an intern and several artists. It was one of the largest pieces the studio has shown in an exhibit.

For more information about Art Connection Studio, please visit [www.artconnectionstudio.org](http://www.artconnectionstudio.org).



Assistant Program Director Latavia Walker and artist See Yang next to the exhibit's mural.

Piece by Gateway Arts artist Carl Phillips.

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## Investing in our Staff for Better Care and Support



Nicholas Ferri receiving his scholarship from President and CEO Bruce Bird.

Vinfen is proud to award this year's Board of Directors Scholarship to Site Coordinator Nicholas Ferri. The scholarship is generously funded by Vinfen's board members to help employees further their education, career, and their commitment to the people Vinfen serves.

*"It is a privilege to work for a company whose values closely align with my own. My goal is to use the knowledge and skills I learn from the program to help others."*

—Nicholas Ferri

Nicholas has worked at Vinfen since 2013. It is here he found his passion for working with adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Nicholas matriculated into Simmons College's Behavior Analysis master's program last summer. When he earns his degree, he hopes to transition to an Assistant Clinical Director position at Vinfen.

**vinfen**  
*transforming lives together*

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Featured Artists: Carl Phillips, Tevon Mcknight

Designer: Rachel Heafeld

and Alexandra Yellin

Contributors: Bruce Bird, Phoebe Goodman, Rachel Heafeld, Ann Bausman, Erin Tigue,

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