



The Starry Night Gazette

Vincent House, 4801 78th Avenue
Pinellas Park, FL 33781
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www.vincenthouse.org

May - June 2010

Hope unites Friends, Families and our Local Community Our Annual Fundraiser - 2010



On Tuesday, April 28, we held our annual Breakfast of Hope. It was a great success! We hosted 150 friends, family members and supporters for an hour of presentations and healthy breakfast options. Together we celebrated the successes of Vincent House members and the hope of rekindled dreams.

In the effort to reduce overhead costs and put into practice our grassroots values, we decided to host the entire breakfast. This meant that Vincent House members, staff, family members and Board of Directors did everything, from food preparation and set-up to serving and clean-up. What an experience! For weeks prior to the event, we worked at

preparing programs, gathering tablecloths and silverware, making the centerpieces and purchasing the needed supplies. On the weekend before, we set-up the Pinellas Park Performing Arts Center (donated free of charge from the City of Pinellas Park!) and practiced operating the audio-visual system. On the night before, we prepared 200 fruit, yogurt and pastry breakfast plates. Finally, at 4:00 am on Tuesday morning, members and staff began the final set-up of place settings, food and beverages. Whew! It was an amazing team effort.

Guests enjoyed presentations by Dorene Thomas, Vincent House Board President; Kimmy Esternik and Stephanie

Freskos, Vincent House members; Leilani Smith, Rehabilitation Staff; Elliott Steele, Director and Co-Founder; and Jodi Martino, Vincent House Board Member. In addition, we played a video by member Justin Shea entitled "Journal of Hope."

We express our deepest gratitude to all our guests. Thank you for taking the time to join us. Special thanks also to the Martino Family Foundation for its \$25,000 Matching Gift, to the Modern Woodman of America for its \$2,500 Matching Gift and to the John Posey Group at UBS for the \$1,000 Leadership Gift. Contributions raised at the Breakfast exceeded the Matching Gift goals. Thanks to everyone for your continued support!!

A TRIBUTE TO OUR STAFF

The Most Rewarding Work Experience of My Life

By Jonathan Godwin

My four years working at Vincent House has been by far the most enjoyable and rewarding work experience of my life. My title is Rehabilitation Specialist, but that title does not describe my experience here at Vincent House. I love what I do! While I am challenged in my work and it is difficult at times, at Vincent House we achieve success! We see success every day! The members are the successes! Each member is part of each staff and members victories! And there are so many!

Over the years, many of the members have moved on with their lives and only come back periodically. We miss them,

but are overjoyed with their accomplishments, and just with the fact that they are happy. I notice and "bank" the little personal successes of members each day; like the member who before did not seem to hear my morning greeting and now greets me in the morning. There are big successes just as frequently.

The number of members getting jobs makes it seem as if there is no recession. Members also stop smoking, take care of their health, continue their education, obtain job skills, make friends, and get drivers licenses. Having worked a variety of social work type jobs for over two decades, I have seen the other side of "social work." I am not exaggerating when I say that never have I seen a "program" which is so well administered, and effective, and which truly helps people as here at Vincent House. I consider

myself quite fortunate to be a part of this wonderful group of beautiful people!



Jonathan dedicates much of his energies to supporting members in obtaining paid employment. In this photograph, he is standing before the Vincent House job board, which includes employment partners such as Liberty Lanes; Suncoast Center, Inc., Sirata Beach Resort; the TradeWinds Island Resort; and the Public Defenders' Office.

What Motivates our Rehabilitation Staff to Work at Vincent House?

Putting Our Hearts into our Work

By Laia Longo

I found Vincent House two years ago. I had just moved back to the United States after living in Spain for five years and I was searching for a job that was meaningful. I wanted to work for something I believed in. On my first tour, I saw so much warmth and enthusiasm! I knew it would be a good fit.

At Vincent House, I value the opportunity to relate to each person in a different way; to treat members as unique, gifted individuals. As a staff, there is nothing more meaningful than to celebrate with a member who has reached up and beyond to meet a new challenge. It is so gratifying to see members reconnect with their dreams and goals. Milestones are different for each person: earning a pay check, balancing numbers in our bank, moving into an apartment, making friends, or going home tired and happy from a day at Vincent House. I have come to believe whole-heartedly in Vincent House and the ability of people to overcome mental illness through work and relationships.

On that first visit to Vincent House, after applying for the job, I sat down with our Program Coordinator, William. It was a moment I remember very clearly. He looked at me earnestly and said, "We are looking for someone who will put their heart into this." I took a deep breath and answered with equal sincerity, "So am I." The passion and integrity behind Vincent House were abundantly clear to me then, and they continue to be evident in everything we do. Vincent House is a beautiful thing to be a part of.

Belonging to Something Greater than Myself

By Leilani Smith

I started working at Vincent House on my birthday two years ago. I suppose that coincidence reaffirms how I feel about this job; it is a gift to be here. I love being a part of the special things that happen at Vincent House and I have always believed that it is important to help people and give back to the community. Unlike many other social service jobs where it may take years to see progress,



here you get to see the fruits of your labor every single day. That is what makes it so special...it's a "warm fuzzy" job. But, that's not to say that our work is not without its challenges. The Peace Corps has a motto that says, "the toughest job you'll ever love," and I believe that holds true for Vincent House as well.

Being a staff person at Vincent House means many things. I hate to be cliché but we "wear many hats" here. At Vincent House, one must be ready for anything and everything at a moment's notice. A typical day means that I am a chef, a janitor, a mailroom clerk, a rehabilitation facilitator, a co-worker and a friend.

Vincent House is a place where I feel like I belong to something greater than myself, where I am challenged daily to be a better person, and where members and staff face our struggles together, as equals...as it should be.



Leilani Smith

Small Town Secrets

By William McKeever

I was born in a small town in Western Pennsylvania where people honor the value of a day's work and neighbors look out for each other. During childhood, I was unable to understand why some folks rode in automobiles and others in horse and buggy. As an adult, I've not always felt part of the mainstream. I've experienced the angst of city life and the strangeness of living in a foreign country.

I am not sure if Vincent House found me or I found Vincent House, but somehow I've returned home.

I'm working in a place that I love — one that embodies values dear to my heart. Central to these are the dignity of work and power of mutual relationships. Without work, friends and family, what meaning would life hold for any of us? In a society where self-worth is so tied to work and careers, Vincent House provides members with a sense of purpose



and the opportunity to contribute in constructive ways. Our motto is "recovery through work," which means that we do more than talk about improving the lives of persons with mental illnesses, we work and make it happen.

In Amish country, neighbors work together to raise a barn, an impossible task if one were to attempt it alone. At Vincent House, we elevate the life experience of each of our members through the combined efforts of our community. The simple values of shared work, inclusion and interdependence are our foundation. How many other people, organizations or nations might benefit from these small town secrets?

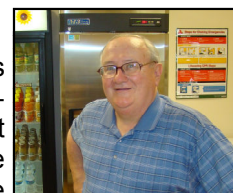
Witnessing Miracles

By Robert Canada

I have worked as a Rehabilitation Specialist at Vincent House for three years and I have seen miracles. You cannot believe the satisfaction of seeing a new member, after a period of time, blossom into a vibrant, enthusiastic person who, for the first time in many years, is able to dream and feel normal. We do this every day at Vincent House. It takes a team of hard working very dedicated professionals to make this happen. Though the "formula" is very complicated, it can be summed up with following 36 Standards of the International Center for Clubhouse Development (ICCD).

I personally have experienced a time in my life that has enabled me to feel deeply for the life of our members. I developed a subdural cerebral hematoma that caused me to experience mental issues before it was properly diagnosed some time later. I did not feel normal, and I lost friends and family. My life was in shambles and I had no support from any source. The problem was finally resolved after I had a seriously difficult operation. It saved my life, but it took many long years to get back to a somewhat normal life. I was lucky to have a brother who took me under his wing and allowed me time and a place to recover.

Our members are fortunate to have Vincent House close to their residence. We are their family. We need more Clubhouses to adequately support all the communities. My goal in life is to support this team and make that happen.



An Evolution in Recovery

By Jodi-lee Weiss

I'd worked in mental health for years before discovering Vincent House. Struck by the lack of dignity afforded to this group of people, I engaged in their stories and how illness robbed them of the lives and livelihoods that they once enjoyed. I felt compelled to help.

The work was satisfying. I was creating connections, fostering trust in those who did not easily trust. But satisfaction was tinged with a sense of futility. The facilities were like revolving doors; the same faces would return again and

again. We were creating comfort, yes. But there didn't seem to be any cogent recovery. When I began vocational work, the model still didn't seem to foster true recovery. We put people to work, but there was carelessness to the approach; a lack of cognizance of the bigger picture.

Stepping through the doors at Vincent House, this seemed different. William talked about transitional employment. He said, "If a member works even one day, it is a success." He spoke of a well-



ness model, and about the role of work in the lives of people who may have begun to believe that they had nothing to offer. With each word he spoke, I felt more acutely that this was a unique place; an evolution in recovery!

I've worked here for only 6-months. In that time, I've seen what comes with the assumption of success. I enter the Business Unit and see a member who, weeks ago, told me that she couldn't learn how to use the copy machine. Today she is standing over it with another member, teaching him how to make copies. Seeing me, she beams with pride. "What can I do next?" she asks.

CELEBRATING RECOVERY THROUGH WORK

Members
Employed

during

March - April 2010

TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Josh Babcock
Jenny Beckus
Nancy Brown
Pat Curtin
Rachel Cruz
Latoya Johnson
Clyde Kobayashi
Aloysia McPherson
Anthony Patten
Beth Schweikert
Catherine Smith
Jackie Williams

Sirata Beach Resort
Liberty Lanes
Suncoast Center
Sirata Beach Resort
Suncoast Center
Sirata Beach Resort
Suncoast Center
Suncoast Center
Liberty Lanes
TradeWinds Resort
Senior Services
TradeWinds Resort

Continuing Education in 2009

Michael Ballenger
Latoya Johnson
Bob Krehbiel
Gayle Marchiniak

Heidi Rippen
Steve Scofield
Justin Shea
Jason Sulimay

Supported & Independent Employment

Michael Ballenger	Irrigation Specialist
William Champion	Peer Counselor
Tess Daniels	Housekeeping
Jennifer Dean	Dining Services
Stephanie Freskos	Concessions
Eddie Gares	Recovery Coach
Craig Hayden	Ground Maintenance
Dennis Hill	Theater Usher
Brian Howe	Prep Technician
Patty Kremzier	Housekeeping
Bonnie Lawniczak	Machine Operator
Brian Lutz	Food Preparation
Karen Maloof	Filing Clerk
Gayle Marchiniak	Kennel Assistant
Jason Michaud	Environ. Services
Philip Noonan	Maintenance
Angela Parker	Transportation
Michael Ralston	Transportation
Shannon Riley	Recovery Coach
Heidi Rippen	Service Clerk
Ron Ritchie	Transportation
Lisa Sanders	Transportation
Chris Schaer	Telemarketer
Justin Shea	Recreation Leader
Michael Taddeo	Grounds

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THE BREAKFAST OF HOPE 2010

Thanks to everyone!

