

Annual Report 2012

Paul Rodrigue, President
Judy Coven, Vice President
Mary Mathias, Treasurer
Fiona Cook, Board Member
Claire Stanley, Guiding Teacher

Living the Practice and the Teachings of the Dharma

Throughout his teaching lifetime over a 40-year span, the Buddha continually referred to the agrarian model of cultivation. Many suttas contain references to planting seeds, cultivating the ground, watching the seeds break through the earth, noticing both the roots and the new stalk, noticing the growth of the plant – and finally noticing the plant or tree bearing fruit. In 2012 Vermont Insight Meditation Center continued to deepen the foundational roots of the dharma both in formal practice, formal study, and daily life applications in our private lives and in our community. This year, students of the Dharma at Vermont Insight continued integrating the teachings more fully into their lives in a way that could be called a living practice. In this way, we follow in the footsteps of the Buddha and the teachings, seeing the practice take root, break ground, and now growing in strength and vitality.

In the seventh year of Vermont Insight Meditation Center, more people attended all of our offerings than ever before: the morning sittings, regular Sunday Sangha sittings, evening courses, Dharma Friends and Daylong Retreats. With no purposeful intention to grow, Vermont Insight continued to grow as new people came to our offerings and as the teaching offerings expanded. On any given Sunday, there was a mix of regular students and new students, with about a quarter of those attending being young people in their twenties.

One of the newcomers to Vermont Insight in 2012 was Dharma teacher, Manny Mansbach, who comes from San Francisco and has been teaching the Dharma since 2007. This past year at VIMC, he offered teachings at Sunday sittings, daylongs and evening courses, including a course during the summer. Kate Wylie, who has been regularly offering a Sunday practice session on the second Sunday of the month also offered a course in the winter. And finally, Cheryl Wilfong expanded the outreach of Vermont Insight by offering an Introduction to Meditation course in Bellows Falls in the fall.

With an increased number of teachers and locations, Vermont Insight was able to offer 17 courses, an increase of 5 courses from 2011 when we offered 12 courses. Topics of study in 2012 included many aspects of the Dharma including an in-depth study over six months of the Noble Eightfold Path, and another 10-week course on the Eightfold Path, as well as courses on the Paramis, the Four Brahma-Viharas, Dependent Co-Arising, and the Cultivation of Wisdom and Compassion in the meditation practice and in all aspects of life. A new course on Wise Speech was offered in the summer.

In 2012, an Introduction to Insight Meditation course was offered in the Winter, Spring and Fall (both Brattleboro and Bellows Falls), which was a new precedent, sustaining this very important foundational training in the meditation practices for new students as well as an overview of the key teachings and their applications to daily life. Follow-up courses such as Deepening our Meditation Practice and Begin Again were offered to support those who began their meditation practice for the first time in 2012.

The strength of Vermont Insight was evidenced in other ways as well. By the end of the year 2012, the number of people on our email listserv rose to 472, about a 20% increase over last year, while the number on the database for mailings was up to 519. Sunday group sittings generally attracted an average of 12 people, though this average increased to 17.5 when Claire was the teacher/leader. A New Years Eve gathering led by Cheryl attracted 27 this year, with attendees enjoying sitting, movement, walking, and refreshments. Course attendance averaged 9 per class, about the same number as last year, though the total number of students was much higher due to the increased number of courses. Tuesday and Thursday morning sittings continued regularly with up to eight, but averaging four, participants.

In 2012, Vermont Insight offered a meditation retreat or special dharma presentation almost every month of the year. The teachers this year were: Cheryl Wilfong and Eowyn Allstrom, Manny Mansbach, Jack Millett and Claire Stanley, Chas DiCapua, Kamala Masters, Ven. Daw Viranani, Rebecca Bradshaw, Marcia Rose, and Mu Soeng. Numbers for these all-day retreats ranged from 10-43, or an average of 23, with leading teachers from IMS or BCBS attracting the largest groups. The daylong with Ven. Daw Viranani included a lunch meal offering with the monastic blessings and silent group meal, a lovely experience for all of those attending.

In addition, the Dharma Friends or Kalyana Mitta Group, continued to meet on Wednesday evenings, with an average of 5-6 attending. Dharma Friends is a peer-led group with an emphasis on daily life practice focused on study of a particular book, chosen by the group. The VIMC Dharma Friends group has attracted people from various Buddhist traditions.

Sangha Activities

The Sangha Development Committee organized two Pot Luck Dinners in 2012, on Sunday, April 22, at Cheryl Wilfong's in Dummerston and on Sunday, July 29, at Fiona and Gene's in West Brattleboro. Both were well attended although rain on both evenings thwarted an appreciation of the outdoor gardens and woodlands.

The group also organized three Movie Nights during the winter months. On Sunday February 5 the German film, "Cherry Blossoms" was shown, on Wednesday March 7, the Dharma Friends hosted the documentary, "Unmistaken Child", and on Sunday December 2, "The Dhamma Brothers" was viewed followed by a discussion led by Kate Wiley.

In the summer Cheryl organized three outdoor activities for sangha members. She led two kayaking outings on the West River, on Sunday, June 24, and on Sunday August 5, while Dharma Friend Marki Webber led a hike along the "river trail" at the base of Wantastiquet on Tuesday, July 10.

Cheryl continued to spearhead our outreach efforts, maintaining Vermont Insight's Facebook page and posting announcements about VIMC events there. She reported that two out of the six people in her fall "Begin Again" course came through the Facebook connection. Cheryl also hosted an information table on Saturday, September 22, at the Wellness in Windham Health Fair. Drew Kovach joined her at the table for this. Cheryl prepared and ran a slide show on her i-Pad, collected new names for the e-mail list, and distributed flyers for courses.

The Board continued its commitment to the Winter Overflow Shelter in Brattleboro. Fiona Cook and Cheryl Baxley again took responsibility for recruiting and coordinating VIMC volunteers to prepare and serve meals at the Winter Overflow Shelter. A total of 27 volunteers from the sangha

contributed to the preparation and serving of dinners in January, February, March, and December of 2012. Many of these volunteers participated in more than one of these dinners. The numbers of people using the shelter has increased noticeably over the years. Some members of the sangha also volunteered for overnight duty at the shelter.

Participation of Sangha Members on Committees

Sangha participation in the overall running of VIMC continues to be strong. The following committees supported the work of VIMC during 2012:

The Sangha Development Committee: Fiona Cook, Mary Mathias, and Cheryl Wilfong. This group organized the two Pot Luck Dinners, the movie nights, and the outdoor activities, as well as the other outreach efforts, all mentioned above.

The Set-Up Support Committee: Under the management of Alison Taylor and Mary Mathias, the Set-Up Support Committee became well-organized in 2012. A regular group of volunteers corresponds via email at the beginning of the month to decide who will set up Neighbors Hall each week for the Sunday sitting. The set-up includes turning on the heat, setting up the hall, greeting arriving meditators, and closing the hall again when sitting is over. Daylong retreats require 2 to 4 volunteers, and we are fortunate to have a list of those willing to pitch in when more volunteers are needed. In 2012, the regular volunteers were: Alison Taylor, Paula Swenson, Margaret Wilson, Betty Phillips, and Mary Mathias; Rose O'Connor is often there when needed, as well. We are always open to having others join us on this important committee.

The Publicity Committee: Fiona Cook, Susan Denison, Roger Wilken, and Kevin O'Connor. Fiona oversees this committee.

This committee was responsible for distributing and posting flyers for the monthly daylong retreats, courses, and other events, such as Movie Nights. Nine other sangha members helped with posting flyers in a total of 30 locations around the community and surrounding towns. Fiona also prepared three postcard mailings prior to each term while Rose O'Connor took care of the address labels, stamps, and mailing them out. Kevin took care of sending notices about our events to the Brattleboro Reformer and i-Brattleboro.

The Finance Committee: Judy Coven, Mary Mathias, Rose O'Connor, and Cheryl Wilfong. The finance committee sent out two appeals in 2012: one for Guiding Teacher Education and the other our Annual Appeal. In addition to committee members, Mary Ide and Betty Phillips helped with the Annual Appeal. While VIMC continues to receive regular contributions, sustaining support has almost doubled since last year, with now seven sustaining supporters.

The Compassionate Action Newsletter Committee: Judy Coven, Paul Rodrigue, and Alison Taylor. Four quarterly Compassionate Action Newsletters were sent out to sangha members by email. The newsletters included interviews with sangha members engaged in a variety of forms of compassionate action, as well as articles, resources, and other related information from the Board.

Retreat Assistance Fund Committee: Paul Rodrigue, Alison Taylor, and Megan Littlehales. The retreat assistance fund continues to grow by \$100 per month, thanks to a generous anonymous donor. Five people requested assistance and were provided funding. Vermont

Insight is grateful to be in the position of helping people experience the wonderful benefits of extended retreat time. The RAF disbursed a total of \$1,210 for the year.

The **Administrative Support Team Committee:** Cheryl Baxley began at the end of January to support Rose O'Connor in working with the phone and email traffic that has increased considerably over the past year. Rose was able to take a two-week retreat at the end of January. Because Rose also does a number of other jobs (Registrar, fundraising, and teacher support) for VIMC, it is helpful for her to be able to let go of the more mundane responding to inquiries by phone and email. Interestingly, however, inquiries have become a bit more complex recently with many newcomers requesting information and advice.

Rose O'Connor reported that the Administrative Support Team is functioning quite well at this moment. Cheryl has agreed to work with Rose until June 2013. Clearly, having two people on the Committee – so long as it is a Volunteer Committee – is essential.

VIMC Board of Directors' Activity

In 2012, the Board launched a new effort to promote the idea of engaged Buddhism. We committed to creating and publishing a quarterly newsletter, which we called the Compassionate Action Newsletter. The idea behind the newsletter was that it would raise awareness of different ways to get involved in the community, and promote ideas for further investigation by its readers. A new committee was formed to take on this task, comprised of Alison Taylor, Judy Coven, and Paul Rodrigue. The newsletter was distributed online to all of the people on our email list. Four issues were published over the course of the year. It received positive feedback from readers, although the responses were limited.

In addition to this effort, the Board chose to continue its study of Karen Armstrong's Charter for Compassion, with discussion and personal challenges considered at many of our meetings.

Anne Fine's term on the Board came to an end in August 2012. We deeply appreciated Anne's many contributions to the Board and to VIMC. Her place on the Board was taken by Ann Fielder, a sangha member with much previous experience with organizations and boards. She has quickly become an active and engaged member of the Board.

The Board gave serious consideration to its responsibilities to the community and after much discussion over a number of months, decided to provide a \$1,000 loan to the Brattleboro Coop to aide its efforts in building the new store. This gift is a recognition of the primary role that the Coop plays in our community. We also donated \$200 to a local Heat Fund.

VIMC and the Board continued to revise our use of the website and hone our presence on the Internet.

In an effort to relieve our Treasurer of some of her responsibilities, and to maintain accountability of VIMC funds, we began to consider hiring a professional bookkeeper to handle basic accounting tasks for the organization.

We participated in a full day board retreat to begin a serious look at current organizational structures at VIMC. This meeting began a significant review of the organization in hopes that we can move well into the near and distant future. The Board would like to ensure for a sustainable, vital, and vibrant VIMC as we move into the years to come. Connie Woodbury led this meeting

for us, which happened in July. We continued to have discussions about these matters at the monthly meetings. The Mission and Vision Statements were revised. We plan to meet two times (in addition to our monthly board meetings) in 2013 to continue this effort. Among the specific issues being considered are the role of the Guiding Teacher and the best ways to accomplish the many organizational and administrative tasks that Claire Stanley has been responsible for during the past many years. As part of this effort, the Board acknowledged the significant efforts and contributions that Claire has made to both create and sustain a VIMC that we all find to be so important in our lives.

VIMC wishes to express a deep expression of gratitude to all Vermont Insight members who serve on the Board and on Committees.

Board member term expirations were reviewed and were revised so that all terms end and new ones begin in March. They are as follows:

Mary — March 2014 (second term)

Alison — March 2014 (first term)

Fiona — March 2015 (second term)

Paul — March 2015 (second term)

Judy — March 2016 (second term)

Ann — March 2016 (first term)

VIMC FINANCIAL REPORT for the YEAR 2012

The growth of Vermont Insight is reflected in our continuing financial stability. 2012 saw another year in which we exceeded our budgetary projections. The Board is grateful for the generosity of the Sangha, in keeping the organization vibrant, solvent, and able to implement new programs. Donations to the Center and to Teacher Dana ensure the excellence and continuing vitality of VIMC.

The number of sustaining members doubled in 2012. These are Sangha members who donate a small amount monthly throughout the year via direct deposit from Paypal, checking account or credit card. This type of dependable income provides peace of mind both for the donor and for VIMC, and we encourage more donors to take advantage of this method.

Financial Picture:

2012 Income: The Annual Appeal and the Spring appeal were successful in generating operating funds for VIMC, and especially for making it possible for Claire Stanley, our Guiding Teacher, to continue to deepen her practice by attending retreats.

The increased number of Courses offered in 2012 generated increased overall revenue for the year.

2012 Expenses: Expenses also increased, specifically Rent paid to Solar Hill, due to increase in number of events and classes, Postage and Office Expenses also went up; and we engaged our excellent web designer to update the website.

Net Surplus for the year: \$2,267. This amount will remain in the general fund to help defray expenses for the coming year, and to help institute new directions as the Board holds its Visioning meetings about shaping the future of VIMC.

Income & Expenses:

Contributed Support:

Annual Appeal	\$2,245.00
Spring Appeal	\$2,350.00
Dana – Sitting Groups	\$4,305.00
Dana – Movie Night	\$126.00
Donations	\$42.00
Sustaining Support	\$985.00
Earned Revenues:	
Course Registrations	\$8,275.00
Daylong Registrations	\$3,386.00
Interest Income	\$34.00

Total Income: \$21,748.00

EXPENSES:

Board Development	\$152.00
Books & Subscriptions	\$100.00
Charitable Contributions	\$400.00
Liability Insurance	\$533.00
Legal Fees	\$0.00
Movie Night	\$50.00
Office	\$1,546.00
Paypal Fees	\$194.00
Postage	\$735.00
Guiding Teacher Education	\$2,468.00
Health Insurance	\$3,000.00
Speaker Stipends	\$219.00
Retreat Supplies	\$11.00
Telephone & Internet	\$543.00
Travel, Meals	\$236.00
Website Development	\$920.00
Rent	\$8,143.00
Misc	\$127.00

Total Expenses: \$19,481.00

Net Surplus: \$2,267.00