

Vermont Insight Meditation Center

2019 Annual Report

March 24, 2020

Guiding Teacher's Report

2019 marked Vermont Insight's fourteenth year and Rae Houseman's first year as Guiding Teacher. The daily sitting groups, the Sunday sessions, day-longs, courses, dharma friends' groups and the beginners' drop-in class all continued to offer a place of practice and support for the local community that Vermont Insight serves.

In 2019, Rae Houseman offered a daylong for LGBTQIA practitioners and allies, called Cultivating Joy and True Happiness. Claire Stanley offered her annual Women's Retreat. Rae co-taught a daylong with Alexis Santos which focused on Compassionate Awareness. Guest teachers Devin Berry and Tara Mullay offered a daylong on the intersection of identity and dharma, called Beyond the Limits of Identity: Boundless Love. And Phoenix Soliel offered a daylong emphasizing cultivating joy in the practice, called Playful with the Present Moment. We also had the benefit of having Oren Jay Sofer offer a daylong on communication called, The Art of Mindful Communication; Living Your Values. We welcomed back returning guest teacher Michael Grady, who offered a daylong called Freedom from a Fear-Based Life. And we enjoyed the return of our neighboring teacher, Rebecca Bradshaw, who taught a daylong called Anatta/Non-Self from a Feminine Perspective. Cheryl Wilfong offered her annual Mindful Writing workshop to close out the year.

We had two book signings this year, one was for Narayan Helen Liebenson's newly published book, The Magnanimous Heart, and the second was for Oren Jay Sofer's book, Say What You Mean.

We also had representatives from the Extinction Rebellion Movement come and co-facilitate a regular Sunday sit with Rae Houseman. The folks from Extinction Rebellion offered a second event which further explored the realities of our current climate crisis with community members. In an inspired effort to engage in local non-violent social action addressing the issue of climate crisis, members of the VIMC community formed a street theater group. The group performed on Maine Street, Brattleboro as part of the Global Climate Strike on September 20th, 2019.

Rae offered two, six-week courses on the intersection of Mindfulness and Race for members of the community who identify as white. This course was designed to offer space for people who identify as white to explore the conversation of race, in an effort to support the undoing of conditioned internalized racism. Various participants from the two course sessions now meet once monthly to continue the work necessary to recognize, acknowledge and dismantle the conditioning of white supremacy.

Claire Stanley and Jack Millet offered several courses in support of developing practices of reflection on death and dying.

Paul Rodrigue and Rae, with back-up support from local teachers Susan Dreyer Leon, Jack Millet and Cheryl Wilfong, held space for beginners to drop-in and get guidance on meditation practice in a community setting every first and third Saturday of the month throughout the year.

The new Family Program was organized and gathered for three events in the fall of 2019. A dedicated group of organizers have been meeting regularly to further develop ideas for how The Family Program can be a more integral part of the VIMC community.

With the incredible support of our Practice Leaders we continue to have daily sitting sessions for the community and any interested visitors to join.

In October, our Teachers Council started meeting once monthly. The monthly meetings have been a great place of support for our teachers to explore community and practice related dialogue and discussion. Our Teachers Council consists of, Guiding Teacher: Rae Houseman, Teachers: Claire Stanley, Jack Millet, Cheryl Wilfong, and Assistant Teachers: Susan Dreyer Leon, and Paul Rodrigue.

Respectfully submitted by Rae Houseman, Guiding Teacher

Board President's Report

2019 has been a year of consolidation for the VIMC Board. After two years in which Board priorities have been dominated by the retirement of our founding guiding teacher and the hiring of a replacement, we have been able to turn our attention to other areas of the organization.

Program development has been a big focus this year, with a lot of work coming from our Family Group Committee. The Board is eager to see VIMC provide more family programming and to be able to fold families and children more into the life of the Sangha (see the Family Committee report for details). As we worked to hammer out the specifics of how this could move forward at VIMC, we had to figure out some very nuts and bolts issues, like switching our insurance policy so that we could cover running courses for children at Neighbor's hall on Sundays. Thanks to great work by our finance committee, we were able to do this in a cost-effective way and we are looking forward to having our first family friendly Sunday sats coming up this spring.

The Board has also been working on contingency and strategic planning around space for VIMC programs. With the loss of the Center for Mindful Inquiry office several years ago, we have less flexibility in where we can host meetings, events, and courses. Additionally, we struggle with the fact that Neighbor's Hall is not accessible to all Sangha members. We have formed a Strategic Planning Committee on space issues and will soon be issuing a survey to the VIMC community to help identify priorities and possibilities for VIMC's future.

The Board also worked harder than ever this year to make our Annual Appeal successful. We are thrilled to report that we were able to come close to balancing our budget as we had a smaller deficit than was forecast. For the first time we had an angel donor who offered to match up to ten donations, all of which were made. We are deeply grateful to all Sangha members and friends who support us in this critical effort.

Last year, the Board identified that we wanted to expand Board participation to include more representation from different part of our organization. We are happy to report that we have added two seats to the Board: an additional seat for a member of the teachers council (so that we now have both the Guiding Teacher and another teacher on the Board) and an annual rotating seat for a member of the Elder's Council. There is more direct access and communication between the Board and these two important groups within the organization. It is still an on-going board goal to ensure that every committee has representation on the Board going forward. We will continue to make that a priority into 2020.

Finance Committee Report

Members: Doug Wessel, Chair; Judy Coven; Mary Mathias; and Cheryl Wilfong

The responsibilities of the Finance Committee are to oversee the financial stability of Vermont Insight, to provide support for the Treasurer, to consider issues raised by the Board related to VIMC finances, and to make financial recommendations to the Board as appropriate. This year Finance Committee members included the current treasurer (Doug Wessel) and three former treasurers (Judy Coven, Cheryl Wilfong and Mary Mathias). The Finance Committee meets two to

four times a year as needed. Deep gratitude to the former treasurers who have been offering their time, experience, expertise and commitment to VIMC.

The Finance Committee began the year by making recommendations to the Board in preparation for 2019 budget planning and noted again that the guiding teacher transition could result in changed donations and income for VIMC. We continue to be conservative in our projections to safeguard our financial health. The budget was expected to result in a deficit that would be covered by our reserves if necessary, but due to several factors, VIMC had essentially balanced income and expenses for the year. The Spring Appeal once again was lower than in the previous year, but the Annual Appeal, partly due to an angel donor's "Match65" campaign, and other donations to VIMC were overall higher than budgeted although fundraising was much lower than expected. Financial monitoring in consultation with our bookkeeper and report generation continues monthly.

The Finance Committee researched and recommended changing our liability insurance to cover childcare during family programs. We supported offering an increased stipend to the Interim Guiding Teacher (IGT) as her responsibilities and time commitment were substantially higher than anticipated.

Respectfully submitted by Doug Wessel, Treasurer

VIMC Financial Report

Vermont Insight Meditation Center ended 2019 once again in a solid financial position, enabling us to continue to support our previously interim guiding teacher, pay the salary of our part-time administrative support person, and provide financial retreat assistance for our other core teachers as well as to maintain the various offerings of VIMC.

The Board is grateful to the Sangha for their continued generous financial support of Vermont Insight. This support is critical for the continued vitality of the organization. The Spring and Annual Appeals and the generous support of a stable and growing group of sustaining donors provide necessary funds for VIMC's operating expenses. The VIMC Endowment Fund, administered through the Vermont Community Foundation, provides us with over \$500 income annually and continues to grow. Vermont Insight is a donor to community organizations; we donated \$400 to the Windham County Heat Fund.

This year saw course registrations 53% lower than last year due to fewer courses being taught, and daylong retreats close to last year's amounts (7% lower), while sitting dana from all sittings (including Refuge Recovery, Dharma Friends and the Beginner's Class) decreased by almost 25%. Donations from the Annual Appeal increased marginally while Spring Appeal income decreased by 37%. Sustaining donations increased by 17% this year after increasing by 30% last year. Fundraising this year was minimal. VIMC ended 2019 with a consistent surplus available with close to \$22,000 invested in our reserve fund and nearly \$18,000 in our bank and PayPal accounts.

Guiding teacher support was almost 23% less than in 2018, and space rental for our courses, daylongs and sits was almost 33% lower. Fees associated with the teacher transition were \$2,240.

Sources of Income: Sitting dana, spring appeal, annual appeal, movie nights, course registrations, daylong retreat registrations, sustaining supporters, gifts, special events, fundraising activities, endowment fund income. Total Income: \$25,145.

Expenses: Bookkeeper, charitable gifts (Windham Heat Fund), liability insurance, rents, office expenses, administrator, PayPal fees, postage and post office box, filing fees, website development and maintenance, guiding teacher stipend, core teacher retreat assistance, visiting teacher support, fundraising and special events costs. Total Expenses \$26,591.

Net Deficit for 2019: \$1,446

Respectfully submitted by Doug Wessel, Treasurer

Administrative Committee

This year saw some changes with the dedicated team of volunteers who make up the administrative support team. Lysa Mosca stepped down from managing the Facebook page to devote more time to the Parents Group and Refuge Recovery; Dave Evans, who had so patiently sorted out our web page issues, has moved on to other projects; and Fiona Cook has passed on the creation and distribution of event flyers to Roger Wilkens. Rose O'Connor continues to handle the US mail and the banking, and Muriel Wolf manages the library. Denise Glover has agreed to be Vermont Insight's photographer, taking photos of events for the newsletter and the website.

Kathy Colmenares continues in the 8-hour per week paid role of administrative assistant. She produces the newsletter every week, has taken over the registration duties with the expanded role of creating events in our event management system, as well as responding to email and telephone messages and communicating with visiting teachers.

Two new webpages went live in 2019: one that answers questions for beginning meditators and one for folks who are new to VIMC.

Paula Swenson, Board Representative

Set up Committee

Members: Chris Arieta, Kathy Colmenares, Scott Hausmann, Mary Mathais, Petey Mitchell, Rose O'Connor, Paula Swenson, Alison Taylor, Dave Kolokowski

The Set-Up Committee is a group of dedicated volunteers who make sure Neighbors Hall is warm and welcoming for all who attend our regular Sunday morning sits, dharma talks, and daylong retreats. The committee currently includes nine members who take turns assuming responsibility for setting up the hall, greeting practitioners, and supporting the teachers.

It was a special moment at the Volunteer Recognition Event in March, when Chris Arieta, explained the work of the Set-up committee and how much she enjoyed greeting meditators on Sunday mornings, especially helping newcomers find the right cushions or chair and be comfortable in general. Then Atta Kurzman, who was relatively new, mentioned the warmth and welcoming atmosphere she had felt when she first began attending the Sangha.

Board Representative: Paula Swenson

Ethics and Reconciliation Council

There has been no activity on the ERC this year. The members of the council are: Jeff Bower, Judy Coven, Ann Fielder, Petey Mitchell, and Muriel Wolf. Information on the ERC can be found under the “about” tab on the VIMC website.

Board Representative: Jeff Bower

Fundraising Committee

The fundraising committee has not met this year; however, the Board took its most active role ever in promoting the annual appeal with promising results which we hope to carry forward into 2020.

Members: Susan Dreyer Leon, Petria Mitchell, and Cheryl Wilfong

Retreat Assistance Committee

Members: Susan Dreyer Leon, Paul Rodrigue, Denise Glover

Through the generous monthly donations of our benefactor, we awarded \$1,363.75 in assistance in 2019.

Elders Council

The Elders Council, whose members are primarily retired Board members, was formed at the request of the Board to provide guidance to it when needed on matters pertaining to the long-term goals of the organization. Its members, who care deeply about a sustainable future for VIMC, bring to this role their long-time experience and understanding about the vision and functioning of VIMC.

The EC meets as needed. In 2019 we met four times. We welcomed our first member since our inception, Claire Stanley, and as part of this transition clarified and re-articulated our commitment to a consensus model and an open peer group structure; we responded to a Board request for representatives on a new Strategic Planning Committee, with two members, Alison Taylor and Paul Rodrigue, volunteering to do so; we heard a report from these representatives after their first meeting and provided feedback from the EC for the next one; we responded to a Board request for an EC representative to come to Board meetings, with Fiona Cook volunteering to do so; and we spent time on self-reflection on its role in VIMC.

Members of the Elders Council in 2019 were: Fiona Cook, Judy Coven, Anne Fines, Drew Kovach, Mary Mathias, Rose O'Connor, Paul Rodrigue, Claire Stanley, Alison Taylor, Cheryl Wilfong.

Dinners for the Seasonal Overflow Shelter

Since 2008, volunteers from Vermont Insight, along with many Brattleboro area faith and community groups, have provided dinner once a month from November through April to the guests at the Seasonal Overflow Shelter. The Shelter with 33 beds, run by Groundworks Collaborative,

opened in a former dorm building on the Winston Prouty Campus in November 2018 after several years based in the Baptist Church on Main Street.

Twenty-two Vermont Insight sangha members contributed to these dinners during 2019, providing a hearty main meat dish, a vegetarian alternative main dish, side vegetables, salad, bread, dessert, milk and cider.

Serving the dinner and cleaning up afterwards was coordinated by Alison Taylor, Betty Phillips, Diana Wahle and John Warren during the year. Fiona Cook recruited and organized the list of volunteers. Both our dinners in January and February coincided with snow storms, so we are especially grateful to our volunteers who turned up with their dishes.

This is an important community service and allows sangha members a wonderful opportunity to practice generosity.

Sangha Development Committee

The “Sangha Devas” have met for more than eight years to promote social and cultural activities among members of the Sangha. During this time, we arranged on average three potlucks a year in various sangha members’ homes, three Movie Nights per winter to show Buddhist themed films, and outdoor activities such as kayaking on the West River with Cheryl Wilfong and hiking on the Manitou Project land in Williamsville with Fred Taylor.

Our sole activity in 2019 was a superb slide show of Paula Swenson’s trip to Bhutan which drew a good audience in the Co-op Community Room on March 24. In late 2018, we lost our usual Movie Night venue when the Marlboro Graduate Center changed hands. We have attempted to recruit new committee members with energy to continue this work, but with scant results to date.

Respectfully submitted: Mary Mathias, Cheryl Wilfong and Fiona Cook