

Vermont Insight Meditation Center

2020 Annual Report

Jeff Bower, President; Doug Wessel, Treasurer; Chris Arieta, Secretary; Steve Wanhg, Board member; Susannah Poland, Board member; Lisa Schmitt, Board member; Drew Kovach, Elder's Representative; Cheryl Wilfong, Teacher Council Representative

Note from the Board President

Who could have guessed that the year would provide us with so many diverse opportunities to expand our practice?

The sangha took a break from meeting in person due to concerns around the pandemic. I remember writing that we hoped to re-open the Hall in mid- or late April. That was supposed to be April of 2020, of course, but things have a way of turning out differently than expected. This is allowing us a chance to practice patience, which is one of the parami.

In the Spring we were given the opportunity to reflect on impermanence as we let go of our space at Solar Hill to allow the Schoolhouse to continue serving their students in accordance with expanded social distancing mandates. An intrepid group of our Elders presented a hands-on demonstration of Right Action by making a final pilgrimage up the familiar drive and transporting the cushions, library, and various other tangible elements of our fourteen-year history to Cheryl's for safekeeping.

Our sangha swiftly embraced the virtual presence of online meditation. For those of you who were involved in the sometimes frantic behind-the-scenes efforts to make the transition smooth for the rest of us, a deep bow of gratitude for this gift of loving-kindness.

Our Guiding Teacher, Rae Houseman, let us know that she would be moving to Boston and focusing her efforts on the extraordinary work she is doing for Ten Percent Happier. A heartwarming celebration of metta in honor of Rae's time with us was held in the garden at Solar Hill on an absolutely beautiful day, the only large gathering the sangha has had since the beginning of our nomadic post-Neighbors Hall experience.

This provided VIMC with an opportunity to think differently about teaching leadership. An ad-hoc group, the Teaching Leadership Committee (TLC), was formed to take stock of the sangha's resources and needs. Several open forums were held to invite input, ideas, and suggestions. One of the clearest themes was a call for transparency (practicing another parami: truthfulness, honesty), which resulted in a very open TLC process. And so, we closed up 2020, a year of transition, moving from the more familiar Guiding Teacher-led teaching structure to a Teacher Council-led structure. We are fortunate to have the wisdom, resilience, and experience of our teachers to move Vermont Insight forward in this way.

As a direct result of the TLC forums, the Board has also begun a series of open forums to share details about how things are going organizationally and to hear suggestions and ideas. This will

be a continuing process, especially as we really miss the simple community of seeing each other in person before or after a sitting.

And in spite of those headwinds before us, we maintained a remarkable offering of classes and retreats, discussions on race, beginners' classes, poetry, and our daily sittings. Our financial position remains healthy due to the sangha's continued supporting dana and the relatively lightweight lifestyle which we are currently experiencing.

And with all of that in mind, Vermont Insight remains strong and lively due to the determination, energy, and generosity (three more parami) of the sangha. 2021 is providing us with a wide range of opportunities to listen deeply and speak to our needs as a community of practitioners. One focus is on reopening safely and understanding the balance between our southern Vermont home and our newfound reach to many who are farther away. Another focus is balancing the sense of community that comes from being safely in-person with the benefits of virtual presence.

With a deep bow of respect and gratitude for each and every member of our sangha,

Jeff Bower
President, Board of Directors
Vermont Insight Meditation Center

2020 Annual Report from the VIMC Teachers Council

Guiding Teacher Rae Houseman asked for a representative from the Teachers Council to sit on the Vermont Insight Board. Cheryl volunteered for the one-year stint (and continued for one more year into 2021).

Governor Scott closed the state of Vermont on March 16 due to COVID-19. Rae immediately moved the sangha onto Zoom. The practice leaders did a superb job of rolling into the new technology; the 7:00 a.m. sits did not miss a beat. Claire and Jack were already quite familiar with Zoom and moved their classes on-line easily.

Dharma Recovery did not adapt to Zoom and disbanded. Its members found various other Dharma Recovery groups on-line.

The May Month of Practice focused on Living with Uncertainty. Cheryl offered an additional Wednesday evening sit during May.

In February, Rae gave notice that she would be leaving Vermont Insight at the end of the year. In July, Paul, Susan, and Cheryl began to meet every other week to talk about programming and how they might work together. Claire said that, having put down the managerial load, she did not want to pick it up again. Later, Rae moved her end date to October 1.

One of Rae's last acts was to designate Maria Tevolini, age 24, as a Practice Leader.

Rae's departure hit her students hard--young adults in particular.

At the end of August, Rae moved to downtown Boston to work full-time for Ten Percent Happier. The sangha offered a lovely farewell party for Rae in the garden at Solar Hill on September 12.

Jeff Bower, President of the Board, named the working group of teachers the Tripod--a very appropriate name in this era of "pods"--small groups of family or friends who quarantine together or who feel safe seeing each other.

Early on, the teachers expressed concern about the viability of a guiding Tripod. Neighboring sanghas have been torn apart by teacher in-fighting. The Tripod began by discussing intentions and repair processes. Paul uses Non-violent Communication; Cheryl uses Byron Katie's The Work.

Practice Leader Ann Fielder agreed to coordinate our Sunday teaching schedule.

Recognition of Abenaki land.

Day-long Retreats

January

Rae Houseman--Loving-Kindness

February

Gina LaRoche & Rae Houseman--Steadying in the Worldly Winds

March

Claire--Women's Retreat--What Does It Mean for a Woman to be Free?

April

Rae Houseman & Cheryl Wilfong--Cultivating Awareness

May

Michael Grady--The Four Foundations of Mindfulness: Strengthening the Power Of Mindfulness While Living In Pandemic Conditions

June

Kim Weeber--How Shall I Respond?

July

Rae Houseman: Mindful of Race

August (attended by 4 people)

Devon & Craig Hase -- The Live Wire of Authenticity

September

William Edelglass--Faith as the Ground & Sustenance of Practice
(hosted by Paul)

October

Rebecca Bradshaw--The Buddha's Recipe for a Strong & Resilient Heart.
(Hosted by Rose)

The Tripod decided to move the day-longs to Saturdays. On Zoom, a 6-hour day-long is too long, so day-long retreats were shortened to 3 or 4 hours.

November (attended by 56 people)

David Loy: Ecodharma
(Hosted by Paul Rodrigue)

Paul made arrangements with David Loy, who required a minimum of 30 attendees. The Sangha worked hard on marketing this event.

December (13 participants)

Cheryl Wilfong--Writing from Mindfulness

At 5:00 on Election Day, Paul, Cheryl, and Steve Wangh meditated in the window of the Mitchell-Giddings Gallery on Main Street.

On Wednesday after Election Day, Paul and Cheryl co-hosted The Worldly Winds of Gain and Loss.

Cheryl led a Thanksgiving morning sit & Dharma discussion following the 7 a.m. sit until 10:00 a.m.

Paul, Drew, and Kevin co-led the New Year's Eve sit from 7:00 to midnight when 108 bells were rung.

Classes

Claire and Jack continued to teach two Wednesday morning classes at the beginning of 2020: one was a Regular class and the other a Seminar class that has been a stable ongoing group for a number of years.

In the Winter of 2020, the course was entitled "Love and Awakening." In the Spring, with COVID 19 first putting us in lockdown, the Seminar course ran as usual and the title of the course was, "Spaciousness." The Fall course was entitled "Compassion: our Heartfelt Response." (Total of 4 courses - 2 in the winter, one in the spring, and one in the fall.) As Jack pulls back from teaching, and Claire takes the primary teaching role, she has found that teaching one class every 2 weeks is the best schedule for her.

Rae taught a 10-month long **Parami** class, meeting once a month.

A **Beginners** class meets the 1st and 3rd Saturdays--Rae teaching the 1st Saturday and Paul the 3rd. After Rae left at the end of September, Susan took the 1st Saturdays.

Rae's students no longer attend the Beginner class.

Rae taught **Mindful of Race** twice, and students from those classes coalesced into a Racial Affinity Group. Rae continues with this group as a member, not as a teacher.

In September, Cheryl offered a **Group Awareness Exercise** on Wednesday evenings.

In October, Cheryl and Paul co-taught **Resilience**.

With Zoom, students came from Maine, Virginia, and Thailand.

In November, Cheryl taught **Self-Compassion** as a precursor to a January Dharma talk by Christopher Germer.

In November, Susan began offering a weekly **Group Awareness Exercise** every Friday morning from 7:00-8:00 a.m.

Elders' Council

The Elders Council, whose members are primarily retired Board members, was formed in 2017 at the request of the Board to provide guidance when needed on matters pertaining to the long-term goals of VIMC. Its members, who have 'institutional memory,' and a deep commitment to a sustainable future for the organization, bring to this role their long-time experience and understanding of ongoing change and vision for VIMC.

In 2020, the EC met once a month, discussing and actively participating where needed as VIMC underwent a year of exciting changes. In January the Board invited the EC to send a representative to Board meetings, and Fiona Cook stepped up to that job; which turned out to be an excellent way to keep the EC and the Board in good contact with each other. In February, the EC met with the Board to brainstorm about VIMC's future. In May, when the pandemic required that we vacate Neighbors Hall for good, the EC spent a Saturday packing up all of VIMC's belongings and putting everything into safe storage. The EC agreed to the Board's request that we reconfigure the organizational By-Laws to reflect major reorganization; this project occupied the EC for the rest of the year.

There were 11 Elders on the EC for most of the year. As the Teachers Council became more defined, Claire Stanley and Cheryl Wilfong stepped down to take on other duties. In December, Fiona, having been EC Rep to the Board for a year, turned that function over to Drew Kovach for 2021.

Elders Council at the end of 2020: Rose O'Connor, Drew Kovach, Judy Coven, Alison Taylor, Anne Fines, Fiona Cook, Petria Mitchell, Paul Rodrigue, and Mary Mathias.

Mary Mathias, Elder

Dinners for the Seasonal Overflow Shelter

Since 2008 volunteers from Vermont Insight have joined the effort to provide dinners to the Seasonal Overflow Shelter guests once each month from November through April. During 2020, Vermont Insight continued to participate in this important community service and stepped up to increase our contributions with the sudden expansion of the meal program after the pandemic hit.

At the beginning of 2020, the Shelter, run by Groundworks Collaborative, was located in a former dorm on the Winston Prouty Campus. The Vermont Insight team cooked, delivered, and served dinners to the 33 guests housed there in January, February, and March. When the state suddenly went into lockdown in mid-March, Groundworks moved all the guests to the Quality Inn on Putney Road so they could each have a private room. The meal teams were then asked to continue to provide dinners each month in April, May, and June, for the increasing number of guests, reaching more than 70 by the summer.

At that point, Laura Chapman, the meals coordinator for Groundworks, announced that funding through the CARES Act had been made available to pay “for five local restaurants to prepare and package food for distribution [to the guests in the Quality Inn] and to other folks placed in other area motels”, so the community meal program could be safely ended for the season. A deep bow of gratitude to the 21 sangha members who contributed to the six dinners from January to June.

As the holidays approached, Laura reached out again to all the meal team volunteers with a request to contribute to a Thanksgiving Day Dinner, Holiday Gifts for the guests, a Christmas Day Lunch, and a New Year's Day Lunch, with offerings to be dropped off at the Quality Inn the day before each of these events. By this point, Groundworks was housing and supporting almost 200 people and the dishes requested were catering-size! A very special thank you to the 12 Vermont Insight volunteers who stepped up to provide what was needed to support this vulnerable population over the holidays!

Preparing and offering hearty and healthy dishes to our neighbors being supported by Groundworks is an essential community service and gives sangha members a great opportunity to practice generosity and kindness to others.

Fiona Cook, Shelter Dinners Coordinator

Dharma Friends Group

Thanks! Dharma Friends has been meeting for a long time! 9 or 10 years, can't remember anymore! We actually have folks that still meet physically outside at Solar Hill on the porch Wednesday nights from 6:30-8:00. The rest of us meet via Zoom (contact me at tbreezev@gmail.com if interested). We gather, then read from our selected book (in this case:

“In Love With The World” by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche) for approx. 20 minutes, meditate for 20 minutes, do a popcorn-style check-in in regards to our practice/reading, etc., discussion, announcements, 2-minute final sit. There’s usually a total of 6 to 10 people in the combined groups. Come join us!

Breeze

Administrative Support Committee

This Committee saw many changes this year, the biggest change was that our administrative assistant, Kathy Colmenares, left the position in October, leaving behind an administrative structure that was in good shape and functioning well. Paula Swenson, Administrative Committee Board Representative, volunteered to take on the administrative assistant duties and work closely with the newly configured teacher council to evaluate how the administrative committee might expand to support them.

The biggest need has involved the publication of event information and communicating with visiting teachers. Sending newsletter reminders dedicated to retreat and course information has increased event participation and newsletter subscriptions have increased.

Board member, Chris Arieta joined the Administrative team, taking on Facebook management and stepped into the role of co-coordinator of the Administrative Committee. Paula continues to update the website, most notably the home page and donation pages saw significant changes.

Respectfully submitted,
Paula Swenson and Chris Arieta

Ethics and Reconciliation Council

Council Members: Jeff Bower, Judy Coven, Ann Fielder, Muriel Wolf, Petey Mitchell

As a community and as an organization, we are committed to freedom for all beings. In accordance with this, it is the intention of VIMC to provide a respectful and sheltering environment in which all sangha members and visitors may be at ease in their practice and in their exploration of the Buddha’s teachings. We endeavor to create and provide a space free from the causes of physical and emotional pressures.

In 2020 the ERC crafted an updated Code of Ethics. The Code is based on the five precepts to refrain from harm, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the use of intoxicants at events.

Anyone wishing to contact the Ethics & Reconciliation Council may do so by email (vimcERC@gmail.com) or by phone message at (802) 451-0121. If there is a specific member of the ERC to whom you would like to speak, please indicate that in your message. The ERC Policy and the Code of Ethics are available on the VIMC website.

Respectfully submitted by Jeff Bower

Finance Committee Report 2020

Members: Doug Wessel, Chair; Judy Coven; Mary Mathias; and Cheryl Wilfong (partial year member)

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 former treasurers Judy Coven and Mary Mathias. Cheryl Wilfong, also a past treasurer, stepped down from the Committee when her Teachers Council duties expanded. The Finance Committee meets throughout the 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 2020 budget planning. 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 many factors, some related to the pandemic, VIMC had a net surplus. In March, the pandemic forced us to leave our long-term home at Neighbors Hall/Solar Hill which saved almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of our yearly rental expenses and insurance costs. Both our guiding teacher and administrative assistant left at the end of the third quarter and their stipends for that quarter were also undispersed.

This year the Spring Appeal was not tracked separately, but the estimated increase in dana over the Appeal period indicates that although increased from last year, receipts were again lower than in most previous years. The Annual Appeal and other donations to VIMC were lower than in previous years, probably due to the move from in-person to online Zoom-based virtual programming; dana that was offered through our website grew over the year and came close to 2019 levels. No fundraising was done. Financial monitoring in consultation with our bookkeeper and report generation continues monthly.

The Finance Committee approved a \$1,000 additional stipend for our Guiding Teacher due to the increase in responsibilities during the pandemic.

Respectfully submitted,
Doug Wessel, Treasurer

VIMC Financial Report for 2020

Vermont Insight Meditation Center ended 2020 again in a solid financial position, enabling us to continue to support our programming. We paid the stipend of our part-time administrative support person until her departure and provided financial retreat assistance for our other core teachers while maintaining the various offerings of VIMC.

The Board is grateful to the Sangha for their continued generous financial support of Vermont Insight despite the impact of the pandemic and our departure from Solar Hill. This support is

critical for the continued vitality of the organization. The Spring and Annual Appeals and the generous support of a stable 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 \$600 income annually and continues to grow. Vermont Insight is a donor to community organizations; we donated \$200 each to the Windham County Heat Fund and the Vermont Food Bank.

It is difficult to estimate how the pandemic-induced quarantine, the loss of our physical site, and the shift to virtual, online offerings and a teachers council in lieu of a guiding teacher affected individual sangha members, but support for the Center continued strong. This year saw course registration income higher than last year by almost 30% but down from the previous ten years; fewer courses are being taught. Daylong retreat income for virtual offerings for most of the year was only 4% lower than last year and close to the totals of the last several years. Sitting dana for Zoom sats for $\frac{3}{4}$ of the year (including Refuge Recovery, Dharma Friends and the Beginner's Class) decreased by about 16%. The Home Dana bowl stayed rather full in spite of all the changes!

Donations from the Annual Appeal were down 25% while Spring Appeal income increased by about 25%. Sustaining donations decreased by 9% this year after increasing by 17% last year. There was no fundraising in 2020. VIMC ended 2020 with a consistent surplus available with over \$21,000 invested in CDs for our reserve fund and over \$25,000 in our bank and PayPal accounts. Total assets were \$46,486.

Guiding teacher support was 13% less than in 2019 due to the early departure of our Guiding Teacher; administrative assistance costs were also about 13% lower than expected; and space rental for our courses, daylongs and sats was almost 58% lower because we left Solar Hill at the end of March.

Sources of Income: Sitting dana, spring appeal, annual appeal, course registrations, daylong retreat registrations, sustaining supporters, endowment fund income. Total Income: \$22,933.

Expenses: Bookkeeper, charitable gifts, liability insurance, rent, office expenses, administrator stipend, PayPal fees, postage and post office box, filing fees, website development and maintenance, Zoom accounts (2), guiding teacher stipend, core teacher retreat assistance, visiting teacher support, Total Expenses \$19,216.

Net Surplus for 2020: \$3,717

Respectfully submitted by Doug Wessel, Treasurer