

Vermont Insight Meditation Center 2022 Annual Report

Note from the Board President

Boy, do we do a lot! Take a moment, and give this report a look!

During 2022, Vermont Insight continued to serve its members and the community at large, and, with the accomplishment of a Strategic Plan, developed several new initiatives. Note for instance the increased participation in the Shelter Meals programs and the Volunteer report below.

We officially inaugurated the new University Way meditation hall with a June dharma-talk and celebration—which was so successful, we’re planning a repeat this year. And during the year, as COVID waned, Sunday attendance at the hall grew, while our hybrid zoom audience continued to spread.

As the Teachers’ Report below attests, we offered a wide variety of classes and retreats throughout the year and initiated several new outreach offerings. Meanwhile, we trained our Practice Leaders in the intricacies of hybrid zoom-casting and began planning teacher-training systems aimed at developing an unbroken teaching lineage at VIMC into the future.

Our finances have kept pace with our needs, and the generosity of our members and the steady stewardship of our treasurer has allowed Vermont Insight to maintain a strong fiscal position.

The research of the Strategic Planning Report has led to the establishment of a new cadre of volunteer workers and exciting outreach initiatives including podcasts and cooperation with the Turning Point recovery center.

Below, you will find summaries of each of our 2022 activities. You will be gladdened to be part of VIMC.

Submitted with gratitude by Steve Wangh, VIMC Board President, May 2023.

STRATEGIC PLAN

At the request of the Board, an ad-hoc Strategic Planning committee was formed for the purposes of understanding the longer-term needs of the organization. The committee spent about one year on this deliberative process, culminating in a series of suggestions in Q4 2022. The members of the committee were Ann Fielder, Paula Swenson, Lisa Schmitt, Doug Wessel, Paul Rodrigue, and Jeff Bower. The committee had facilitation and guidance from Nancy Mosher.

During the process, the committee interviewed our elders, community members, and teachers, as well as leaders from local non-profit service organizations. Additionally, the committee reached out to the sangha through a wide-ranging survey for input and a greater understanding of what is going well and what may be augmented to help VIMC bring the benefits of the dharma to our community.

The five-year Strategic Plan submitted to the Board included four areas of focus:

1. Strengthen, grow and nourish the VIMC sangha in a way that meets the needs of our community and invites and welcomes new people to participate.
2. Develop a plan to support the growth and development of VIMC teachers and practice leaders, as well as other roles, to ensure the sustainability and quality of our mission.
3. Ensure VIMC has the support required to continue to provide services and meet our mission, and
4. Integrate service and compassionate action into our programs. (Note: A “sidebar” document was also established to enumerate particular action-suggestions.)

The final version is available for viewing on the Vermont Insight website:

<https://vermontinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/VIMC-Strategic-Plan-Final-1.pdf>

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Schmitt and Jeff Bower

VIMC 2022 Annual Report–Teachers’ Report

Tripod Work (Susan Dreyer Leon, Paul Rodrigue and Cheryl Wilfong)

- With the help of Ann Fielder, we have maintained a good organization of the Sunday teaching schedule, ensuring a steady rotation of teachers and maintaining a nice level of participation in our hybrid format.
- Cheryl and Paul, primarily, with some assistance from Claire, were able to create a full slate of guest teachers for Saturdays throughout the 2022 year. Attendance at Saturday ½-day retreats seems to be directly proportional to how well known the speaker is, and the Board has proposed that we move the ½-day retreats back to Sunday. As the 2023 schedule is largely set already, we will begin to make this shift for 2024. – Below you can find a list of our 2022 teaching events.
- The Tripod has been the primary point of contact between the teachers and the Board and also between the teachers and our administrative team. Although communication has not been flawless, overall, the system seems to be working.
- Paul and Susan feel that when Cheryl is ready to step back from Tripod duties, they two will be able to continue, perhaps with the addition of either a practice leader or one of the admin folks to the team.
- The Tripod has been a good support for Paul and Susan in their expanded roles and the group together has been good at working together to talk about what classes to offer and, in particular, finding a balance of topics and being responsive to interests expressed by the Sangha.
- Susan and Paul continue to offer “Meditation and Conversation” groups on the 1st and 3rd Saturday mornings of the month. Attendance is better than it was last year. It’s up to 3-4 people per session from 1-2 people per session.

Teacher’s Council Work

- Teacher’s Council work this year has primarily been focused on Dharma topics of interest or for exploration for the teachers’ group and on thinking about teacher development and new teacher training for the Sangha. Topics have included things like trauma and meditation, “stream entry,” progress on the meditation path, and the nature of insight.
- We did not have a teacher retreat in 2022, but met in February of 2023 with the express purpose of talking about Teacher Development (because it was a priority in the Strategic Plan). We came up with the following ideas:
 1. We agree that it is wise to begin noticing sangha members who appear to have potential as future teachers at VIMC.
 2. We will keep each other informed about who we have in mind.
 3. All of us will come to a consensus before a person is approached.
 4. We would ask any dharma student with potential—one who is willing to offer service and who is willing to further study and practice and to begin walking the path—to become a teacher, to follow a sequence of courses at VIMC as well as courses elsewhere (Bodhi College, Sati Center, Analayo's courses at BCBS or online) and to attend silent meditation retreats.
 5. We would agree to mentor this person along the way to support their practice, retreats, and external study.

VIMC Teacher Training and Development

- In January 2023 Paul graduated from the Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Training Certificate Program with Jack Kornfield and Tara Brach.
- Susan has joined the 2025 cohort of this same program and began work in February 2023, with an anticipated completion date of January 2025.

Prepared by Susan Dreyer Leon

Teaching Events 2022

Cheryl Wilfong
 Half-Day Online Retreat
 Dec. 31, 9:00 am – 12:30 pm (ET)
 Writing from Mindfulness

Mary Aubry
 Day-Long HYBRID Retreat
 Dec. 10, 10:00 am – 5:00 pm (ET)
 Right Effort and Embodied Mindfulness

Michael Grady
 Half-Day Online Retreat
 Discovering Dharma Ease: Practicing Wise Attitude and Effort
 September 24,

Paul Rodrigue
 A Day-Long Hybrid Retreat
 Practicing in the Presence of Fear

August 13, 2022

Leigh Brasington
A Half-Day Retreat
Annica, Dukkha, Anatta*
June 11, 2022

Rae Houseman
A Half-Day Online Retreat
Uplifting the Heart and Turning Toward the Difficult
May 14, 2022

Chris Germer
Sunday Morning
Self-Compassion, an Antidote to Shame
April 10, 2022,

Claire Stanley
Annual Women's Retreat
Transforming our Fears
April 2, 2022,
Hybrid

Ayya Santussika
The Magic of Mudita
March 5, 2022,
A Half-Day Online Retreat

Phoenix Soleil
Dawn Neal
Awareness and Improv: How Play Can Brighten the Present Moment.
February 12, 2022
A half-day Retreat on Zoom.

Cheryl Wilfong
New Years Dayye
Writing from Mindfulness
January 1, 2022

Thanisarro Bhikkhu
Strategies for Working with Self and Not Self
Dharma Talk on Zoom
January 7, 2022

VIMC Financial Report for 2022

VIMC again ended in a strong financial position, enabling support for our programming and the meditation space at the Vermont Agricultural Business Center.

The two fundraising activities in 2022—the spring and annual appeals--were successful in raising money to support the Teacher Development Fund and to support increased operating expenses at the Agricultural Center. VIMC continues to make use of volunteer support and augments that support with paid support as needed. For example, Fearless Computing assists with networking issues. VIMC also pays for the support of a part-time administrator.

Income: VIMC enjoys income from a variety of sources including sitting dana, the spring appeal, the fall appeal, registration fees, sustaining supporters, and endowment fund income.

Income from Sitting dana was 13,011.

The Spring Appeal generated \$2032 for the Teacher Development Fund.

The 2022 Fall Appeal generated \$2653 (by close of the calendar year; there were also donations in January 2023).

Income from course registration fees was \$1717 and from retreat registration fees, \$1765, bringing the total from registration fees for 2022 to \$3482. The total income from registration fees rose during 2020 and 2021 and then fell for 2022. However, interest in VIMC programs remains strong, and the hybrid offerings mean that VIMC has expanded its reach. It is interesting to note that registration fees, which are an indicator of participation in courses and retreats, has increased in the first few months of 2023.

Sustaining donations for 2022 totaled \$2565. Sustaining donations remain fairly steady. Total Income for 2022: \$24,494, which was slightly less than budgeted.

Expenses: Bookkeeper, charitable gifts, liability insurance, rent, office expenses, administrator stipend, Paypal fees, postage and PO box, website development and maintenance, IT support, internet and phone, zoom account, core teacher retreat assistance, and visiting teacher support.

Rent and expenses associated with the VABEC space. Rent of \$900 per month started on July 1, 2021. In addition to rent, VIMC covers the cost of liability insurance, WIFI, and IT support.

Administrative support expenses for 2022 were \$5030.

Total expenses for 2022: \$26,518.

Income – expenses for 2022: -\$2023.

VIMC ended 2022 with a reserve fund (in CDs) of \$30,289 and \$36,514 in bank and PayPal accounts. Total assets at the end of 2022: \$66,803. Note that in January 2023, \$5000 was invested in a CD bringing the total of CDs to six. Three are currently invested at favorable rates (\$2.50 or higher); the remaining three will be renewed at favorable rates as they mature.

Respectively submitted by Lisa Schmitt, Treasurer

VIMC Administration Annual Report for 2023

The Administrative Team consists primarily of Adm. Assistant Catherine Rogers and Paula Swenson. They are our point people for sharing news and updates with the VIMC community. During the last year, Paula and Catherine have met weekly to coordinate all the information and details related to VIMC news, classes, retreats and events. Catherine continues to work her designated hours and oversees the day-to-day management VIMC business. Paula has also been collaborating with Tom Ragland on the VIMC website. Here is a brief summary of the year's accomplishments:

1) VIMC Website

- The Board reviewed the information on the VIMC website and sent questions/suggestions for updates to Paula.
- Paula and Chris worked to update the Website, particularly the pages related to dana.

2) Retreats and Classes

- Catherine organized & streamlined the process of getting retreat information sooner from visiting teachers and course information from VIMC teachers and subsequently was able to launch publicity earlier for retreats and classes; in some cases, resulting in larger enrollment for retreats.
- Tom Ragland and Paula upgraded the registration platform, Event Espresso, making it easier to post events on the website.

3) Publicity

- Paula and Catherine meet weekly to organize the latest information for the VIMC Wednesday Newsletter. The Newsletter format is now clearer and more visually interesting as well as informative about all the sangha events, classes, activities, opportunities for meditation, etc.
- Catherine publicizes news and events in the Brattleboro Reformer as well as regular notifications about classes, retreats and dharma talks on Facebook and Instagram; this has possibly led to greater in-person attendance at Sunday sats.

4) Zoom Co-pilot

- Paula has continued serving as weekly zoom co-pilot, although training for others will resume later in 2023. During the beginning of retreats, Paula or Catherine monitors emails to provide last minute assistance to registrants who need help logging in.

5) Volunteer involvement

- Tom Ragland, a sangha member has joined the admin team, and is partnering with Paula to update webpages and to make adjustments to the website. Welcome to Tom and much gratitude for his much-needed assistance!

6) Staying ahead of things

- Chris meets with Paula at least twice a month to preview any news, events, updates that need to be publicized, planned or previewed
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Submitted by Chris Arieta, with information from Paula and Catherine

2022 Elder's Report

The Elders did not meet during 2022 and had no charges from the Board. Individual Elders did respond to the Board's request for feedback and suggestions on the VIMC newsletter and web site.

The Elders plan on meeting in 2023 to discuss the new Strategic Plan, and Sidebar recommendations, for potential tasks they may take on as a group.

Drew Kovach

FACILITIES REPORT

Having Zoom-only and hybrid (Zoom and in-person) options has increased participation in retreat days. We continue to have a fair number of folks participating in the morning sessions via Zoom, usually around 10 to 12. An email system of communication was implemented that allows leaders to report any issues with the tech setup in the hall. We can then follow up with addressing them. These issues have included connection of the TV with the laptop, sound/microphone issues, and the like. We have continued to use Steve West when needed.

Denise Glover

Mindful of Race Alumni Group (MORA)

- The MORA group consists of four regular participants and have continued to meet monthly—with occasional misses for one reason or another. Our agendas have included:
 - Re-reading sections of *Mindful of Race* by Ruth King
 - *Reading Blindsided- Essays from the Only Black Woman in the Room*, by Dawn Downey
 - *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla Saad
 - “Decolonization is not a metaphor” by Tuck and Yang

Susan Dreyer-Leon

Volunteer Committee end of year report April 12, 2023

Volunteers hold the mission, provide the energy and resources, and guide the offerings for our center. They are teachers, board members, practice leaders, and sangha members. They work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the quality of our physical and on-line presence, in keeping with ancient traditions of the dharma.

In 2022 we formally recognized the importance of volunteers to our Strategic Plan thus:

Priority III: Ensure VIMC has the support required to continue to operationalize our mission.

d. Establish a position or committee to provide volunteer coordination.

Priority IV. Integrate service and compassionate action into our programming and activities, and further develop volunteer opportunities.

We aim to make our activities accessible, including reaching out to staff of community agencies who could benefit by our teachings being available in their locations. We also recognize the needs of our sangha for support in the services we provide.

The board established a two-person committee to develop and coordinate volunteer resources. Chris Arieta and Sarah Cooper-Ellis have recruited via VIMC's weekly newsletter, by talking in person and on Zoom to attendees of sittings, by email correspondence, and by meeting in person with interested candidates.

We have worked to:

1. Make volunteer opportunities visible.
2. Welcome a diverse membership into positions of responsibility.
3. Foster community within the sangha.
4. Find projects that will support the needs of our larger community.

Our main projects have included:

1. Strengthening capabilities for physical and hybrid setup from the center and remotely with the goal of support for those who have developed and operated systems in the new space in unprecedented circumstances. We now have a team of trainees for this project.
2. Launching a podcast series consisting of one of our teachers interviewing folks who have brought mindfulness to bear in their off-the-mat activities. The series was produced by a team of volunteers and is linked to the VIMC website.
 - a. We are also exploring the potential for some recording of teacher talks in appropriate circumstances and conditions.
3. The creation of a clearinghouse for connecting volunteers to tasks is underway. One result is that we now have a volunteer regularly cleaning the dharma hall.
4. We are matching volunteers with teachers and administrators who need assistance, for example refining the website and helping teachers set up community teaching projects.
5. The end-of-year celebration is being planned, with the help of volunteers.

Submitted by Sarah Cooper-Ellis

Vermont Insight Dinners for the Groundworks Shelter (2022)

Volunteers from Vermont Insight, along with many other Brattleboro area faith and community groups, have provided dinners once a month for the Shelter guests since 2008. Until 2020, the Seasonal Overflow Shelter was open only during the winter months, but with the completion of the new Groundworks shelter on South Main Street in September 2021, the 35 guests could now be housed year-round.

2022 was the first year in which meal teams were asked to provide meals all year. As the coordinator for VIMC's meal team, I wondered whether interest and energy might flag with this increased demand, but instead, enthusiasm from our sangha members for supporting the meals program was stronger than ever in 2022. This program, continues to provide a great opportunity for offering service and generosity to those in need in our community.

A total of 26 Vermont Insight sangha members contributed to the monthly dinners during the year, providing a hearty main dish, a vegetarian alternative main dish, salad, bread and butter, desserts, milk and cider, as well as breakfast items. A deep bow of gratitude to all who helped during the year, but especially to the four people who provided dishes every month, and to the 12 people who contributed in six or more of the months. Also, I would like to acknowledge the three helpers who came forward to collaborate on organizing the May dinner on short notice, when I was called away to deal with a family situation.

Respectfully submitted by Fiona Cook, Shelter Dinners Coordinator

Practice Leaders' Report

In 2022 VIMC had nine practice leaders: Ann, Rose, Maria, Fiona, Mary, Charlene, Denise, Paul, and Drew.

Practice Leaders offer daily sittings Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday with additional sittings Tuesday and Friday nights. Maria has volunteered to do a Friday morning sit in 2023 that will be in person only. Practice Leaders also cover the Three Sit Sundays when needed.

Special thanks to Ann for her consistent attention to scheduling us for the two sits on Friday night and occasional 3 sit Sundays.

Submitted by Drew Kovach

Ethics & Reconciliation Council

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 2022 there was no need for the Ethics and Reconciliation Counsel to meet.

Submitted Judy Coven & Jeff Bower