

I LOVE  
SOMEONE  
WITH A  
TRAUMATIC  
BRAIN INJURY

BRAIN  
REWIRING  
PLEASE WAIT

peace love hope  
TBI  
awareness

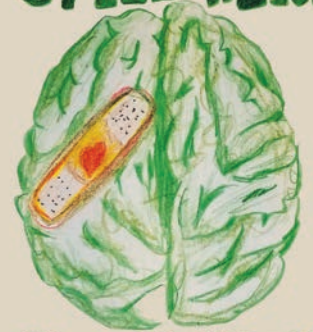
IT SUCKS  
SO, SO, SO  
MUCH!



TBI

IT MESSES  
WITH YOUR  
BRAIN, MAKES  
EVERY DAY  
HARDER, +  
LOOKS INVISIBLE  
to others!

STILL HERE



STILL FIGHTING



I AM A  
BADASS  
BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR



One of our clients created these  
spectacular drawings in honor of  
Brain Injury Awareness Month in March.  
See more art on page 5.

## March was Brain Injury Awareness Month

The Brain Injury Association of America leads the nation in observing Brain Injury Awareness Month in March every year. There are more than 5.3 million people in America estimated to be living with a permanent brain injury-related disability.

## Independence

*Independence* is a publication of Vinland National Center that is printed twice annually. The magazine currently reaches 8,000 subscribers. Articles may be reprinted if the source is credited and Vinland National Center is provided with copies. Permission to photocopy is unrestricted.

For a free subscription, cancellations, or address updates, please contact Vinland's director of business development, Molly Gilbert, at [mollyg@vinlandcenter.org](mailto:mollyg@vinlandcenter.org).

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All stories are written by Molly Gilbert, Director of Business Development and Editor of Vinland's *Independence* newsletter, unless otherwise indicated.



# THANK YOU, QUILTERS!

*Quilting nation is back in full force following the pandemic! Our clients rely on these quilts to keep them warm at night, and many are thrilled to be able to take them home when they leave. We had 352 quilts donated in 2023.*

*Many thanks to the amazing quilting groups who so generously donate these beautiful handmade quilts to our new clients.*



*Suellen Carroll, individually made and donated 18 quilts on this visit!*



*Our Father's Lutheran Church Quilters out of Rockford donated five more quilts and paused for a picture with our new services associate and reception desk greeter, Nicole, center.*



*We had one of our drivers, Marty, take a picture of the Zion Lutheran Quilters from Mayer, Minnesota, when he picked up 27 donated quilts from them! Apparently, this is only about half of them—quilting is alive and thriving!*



# A SPECIAL NOTE

*From Our Executive Director, Mary Roehl*

*Have you visited Vinland lately (or ever)? Here's your chance!  
We are holding an Open House at our Residential  
facility on June 12 from 1:30–3:30 p.m.*

Mary Roehl,  
Executive Director



Come and see our building renovations that include new shingles, siding, windows and upper parking lot, along with a complete color change. The place looks fabulous. Again, our thanks to Representative Tom Emmer for providing support through the Congressionally Directed Spending Opportunity.

The Open House includes a short presentation at 1:30 followed by tours of the facility, a walk to the lakefront and pontoon rides for anyone interested. This will be a great way to spend a June afternoon.

See invitation on page 8. I look forward to seeing you at our Open House on Wednesday, June 12, 2024!



Please RSVP for our Open House by clicking **here** or go to our website:  
<https://www.vinlandcenter.org/registration-link-for-this-junes-open-house-is-here/>



*Front entrance of Vinland's residential treatment center.*

# JEREMY FINDS PEACE

When I sat down to interview Jeremy, as often happens with so many alumni interviews, I learned so much more than I had expected to! I started by asking him how he'd learned of Vinland, and he informed me he had been here once before. A friend of his had suffered a head injury accompanied by an alcohol problem, went to Vinland and had experienced great success, so he suggested us. He described Vinland to him as "an outdoor sport-person's resort" (lol).

Jeremy had attended three previous treatments prior to his first experience at Vinland. This was now his fifth treatment episode. He is 37 years old.

When Jeremy's mom was pregnant with him, his father committed suicide at age 26, leaving his mother with three kids and no father. He said, "I felt like I grew up with half of the playbook missing."

Although there were mental health issues on his father's side, there were no addiction issues on either side of the family.

Even so, he started using opioids at the age of 16 while he was working at a nursing home and "had plenty of access to them."

At age 24, Jeremy was in a car accident that had him going head-first through a car windshield. There were no drugs or alcohol involved—he was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, and woke up on the hood of the car. All of his teeth were knocked out, and he was holding his severed cheek onto his face on the way to the hospital. He said at this point he was already an addict. But once he suffered this head injury, his impulsive behavior got worse, and the length of time that he could remain sober got less and less. "I spent a few days in the hospital, but they didn't know the severity of the head injury then. They were more concerned about the amount of plastic surgery they might have to

do on me. I shared with them that I felt like I had the symptoms of a concussion, so they placed me under protocol for that, but I was still fairly cognizant. A few days later, I suddenly started experiencing bouts of

anger, impulsivity, and difficulty making decisions. And my urge to use was so much stronger after the accident.

I never got any further help or information about my having a TBI until a few years later. This includes one time after the initial head injury when I fell and hit the backside of my head and was discharged—again—with no information. Finally, I went back in to address some nerve issues in my arm, and I mentioned while there that I had hit my head in the past, and they threw me in a CT scanner. It was only then that they identified the previous traumas to the brain. This scan showed the damage clearly."



Jeremy

Of course, the first time he came to Vinland he was incredibly nervous and somewhat overwhelmed, but everyone put effort into making him feel comfortable and his counselor helped him work on how to better manage his ADHD. After a couple of days, he was able to go fishing with a couple of other clients and took a pontoon boat ride. He stayed for a full 90 days.

Now that he is with us again, he is starting to learn about what types of thinking he might be engaging in, and what types of processing he goes through in order to get there. He said he really appreciates the classes on how the brain works and has high praise for Mr. Tom Beckers in still offering them, as it is so important to be reminded of these associated symptoms, effects and issues that often come with a brain injury. This time around, Jeremy got into reading Eckhart Tolle and says these readings help remind him to not take his thoughts so seriously. He says he's been a perfectionist his whole life, and "was an addict before I ever touched a drug." But here, he's learned how to "take it easy" and what "emotional



management” means. I’ve learned I can give it 24 hours before making a decision, which takes impulsivity out of the equation. “Time seems so urgent all the time, but it’s not!”

He says some of the real standout programs for him while in treatment have been “a combination of the recreational activities—using the 180 acres to meditatively walk, fish, canoe or go for pontoon boat rides; play volleyball, basketball, cornhole, horseshoes; you name it—along with the therapeutic exercise program, where they work miracles. My old roommate, Darnell, came in a wheelchair and left walking out on his own two feet. Then learning about how the brain works. Then the mental health inclusion within the substance use disorder program—seeing how the MH therapists and SUD case managers communicate with each other over the clients was really unique. I just felt like I had so many places to go to for support or when I was struggling.”

When I asked what he might tell others who are considering going to treatment, he said, “What do you have to lose? A place like this is quite possibly the last treatment you’ll need to attend. Invest in yourself. Three months of your life in exchange for a lifetime of peace and happiness. Vinland gives you choices and the ability to think clearly about the way you want to do life. The way they adjust to each individual’s needs here really helps this be a team effort.”

He said one of his most memorable events or “awakenings” that took place while in treatment at Vinland happened when his case manager, Kevin, shared a video in one of his groups that put in perspective how big the universe is. He said he “had the realization that we didn’t *have* to be here. Just the fact that we even exist became more of a gift to me. Until this point, I had been

agnostic my entire life. This made me realize that even sitting in jail I could find joy.

Before I came in, I couldn’t last past noon without numbing myself with meth or some other drugs. This was a real ‘A-Ha!’ moment for me.”

After his first treatment episode at Vinland, Jeremy stayed sober for 2.5 years, then relapsed and got arrested for an “impulsive decision.” This is when I heard a story I wasn’t expecting...

In July of 2022, Jeremy had purchased an abandoned storage unit that turned out to be a former professional ball player’s. In it, he discovered a necklace with 67 karats of diamonds worth \$170,000. He couldn’t contain his excitement, so told his best friend about it.

Then that best friend tried to kill him for it.

Jeremy was kidnapped and held hostage, tied up for three days. The only reason he got free was that someone made a call to report suspicious activity. This traumatic event left him with having a very hard time coping with the reality that a really good friend wanted to hurt him. This was someone he had really trusted. He had no idea there could possibly be a dollar amount you could put on a person. Distraught, he picked up a Xanax, and it took only three days before he moved on to heroin—and that has been his drug of choice, off and on, ever since. “I lasted 1.5 years out there using—just circling the drain for the past year, wondering how in the f#@k did I get here again? I’m thankful I stayed alive long enough out there to get back to Vinland.”

We are, too, Jeremy.

**“I’m thankful  
I stayed alive  
long enough  
out there to get  
back to Vinland.”**

# TAKE IT FROM THE EXPERTS

*I am happy for this opportunity to represent Vinland at this training to continue to be a part of the center's history of moving substance use disorder treatment forward.*

*Tom Beckers, Director  
of Residential Services*



Since 1991, the American Society for Addiction Medicine (ASAM) has been defining national standards for placement, continued service, and transfer criteria for persons with addiction and co-occurring conditions. The purpose of the ASAM Criteria is to promote individualized and holistic treatment planning and guide clinicians and care managers in making objective decisions about patient admission, continuing care, and movement along the continuum of care. The criteria provide a consistent way to:

- 1) Assess patients' biopsychosocial circumstances to identify the appropriate level of care, based on their individual needs.
- 2) Develop comprehensive, individualized, and patient-centered treatment plans.
- 3) Define the services that should be available at each level of care in the care continuum.<sup>1</sup>

In 2024 and 2025, greater adherence to ASAM criteria will be a requirement for service providers as part of the 1115(a) Substance Use Disorder Reform Demonstration Project. All substance use disorder treatment providers have been compelled through legislation to participate in the project.

In the spring of 2024, Vinland National Center was chosen to participate in a train-the-trainer event at the Minnesota Association of Resources for Recovery and Chemical Health's (MARRCH) spring conference at Breezy Point.

I am happy for this opportunity to represent Vinland at this training to continue to be a part of the center's history of moving substance use disorder treatment forward.

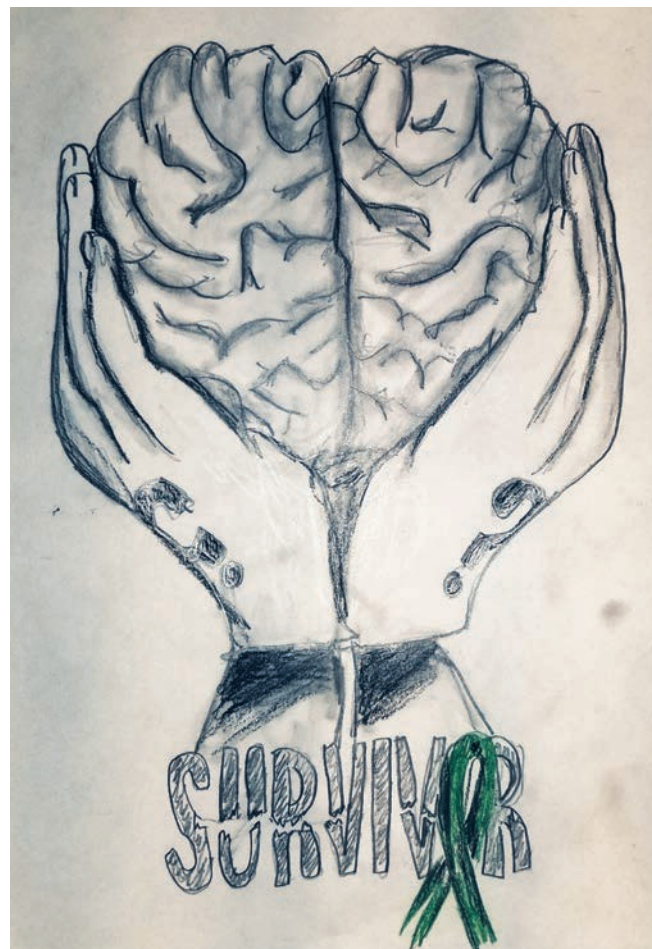
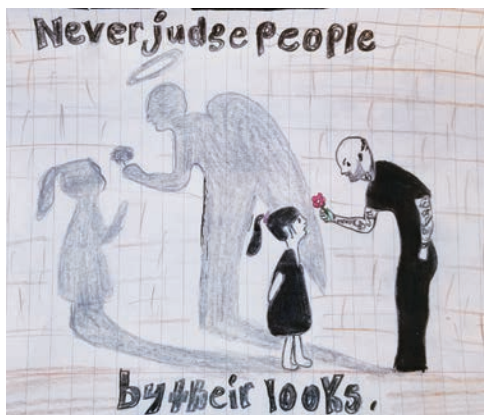
Through the efforts of our Executive Director Mary Roehl and other organizations within the Minnesota Alliance of Rural Addiction Treatment Programs (MARATP), Vinland Center will continue to position itself to be a leader in providing quality, evidence-based programming to those they serve.

Editor's note: If you or your team could benefit from a clinical training from Tom, feel free to reach out to him directly at: [tbeckers@vinlandcenter.org](mailto:tbeckers@vinlandcenter.org) or 763.479.4524.

<sup>1</sup>Waller RC, Boyle MP, Daviss SR, et al, eds. The ASAM Criteria: Treatment Criteria for Addictive, substance-Related, and Co-occurring Condition, Volume 1: Adults. 4th ed. Hazelden Publishing:2023

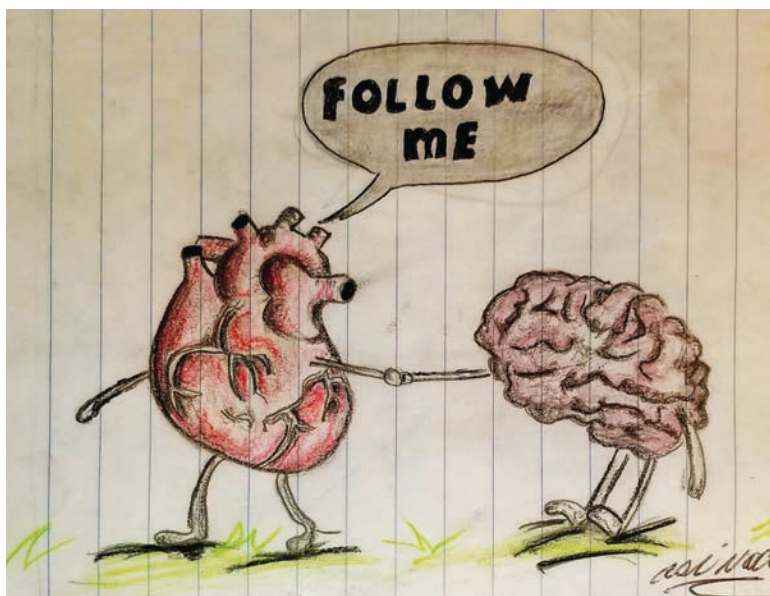


# CLIENT CREATIVITY



We had a client in our midst, Rene, who once graduated, left behind his artwork for staff, and it brought tears to some of us seeing it for the first time. What talent! Thank you for sharing your art with us, Rene! Enjoy his drawings here and on the front cover.

Over the winter holidays, another one of our talented clients, Mike, made this very special 'Chopper Santa' for our first ever Peer Recovery Specialist, Steve, who knows all about such things (choppers, not Santa). We thought it was a great piece of work and Steve proudly displays it on his desk now.





# INTRODUCING OUR RESIDENTIAL PEER RECOVERY SPECIALISTS

*Three of the most welcoming faces at Vinland's residential location happen to be our cherished Peer Recovery Specialists.*



*Peer Recovery Specialists: Romney, Ben and Steve.*

Our peer recovery specialists are the absolute best at helping welcome and acclimate new clients. They really “show them the ropes” while letting them know they can absolutely relate to where they might be, or how they might feel, as they were once where these new clients are. The creation of the peer recovery specialists position was intended to be a separate representation of recovery than the other staff at Vinland.

The Minnesota Certification Board posted this on their website (<https://www.mcboard.org/peer-recovery/>):

*“Peer Recovery Specialists help a person become ready and willing to seek treatment (if needed) and enter recovery by helping the person explore their options for recovery or treatment. Peer Recovery Specialists ask questions, offer insight, and help service recipients as they become whole, resourceful, and capable of choosing what is best for them.*

*Peer Recovery Specialists use a strengths-based approach helping service recipients find and utilize their values,*

*assets, and strengths while supporting them in achieving success. They recognize that it is normal for recovering service recipients to have gaps in their skills or development. The role of the specialist is to help service recipients recognize and fill these gaps with the skills needed. Peer Recovery services focus on the present and future and are based on partnership with the recipient.*

*The role of Peer Recovery Specialists can be viewed on a continuum of services and falls between the role of recovery support individuals/recovery sponsor and the substance abuse or mental health counselors. The role of the Peer Recovery Specialist has emerged from the recognition of a need to reconnect substance abuse and mental health treatment to the larger continuum of recovery management. The peer is not a sponsor or a therapist but rather a role model, mentor, advocate, and motivator.”*



**Steve**

*Peer Recovery Specialist*

Steve was our very first, and therefore most senior Peer Recovery Specialist (PRS), and he has just completed his Forensic Endorsement, which focuses on working with those with a justice-involved background.

“God chose the worst of us, to make the best of us, to help the rest of us.” These words were shared with me by a friend at the last facility where I was in treatment for SUD (substance use disorder). This was almost 15 years ago and these words still resonate strongly with me to this day. At the time I had just gotten out of prison, but I had hope after 40 years of addiction that I could turn my life around. In prison, I had committed to God and to myself to quit using. Now, almost 15 years later, I have the opportunity to share my journey, the rewards, and the struggles with the recoverees at Vinland.

My history at Vinland started with my bringing a 12-step meeting into the residential treatment center on the third Thursday of every month. In two years I never



missed a meeting, and was offered an HST (Health Service Tech) position. I loved my time at Vinland during these meetings, so I submitted an application. In the back of my mind I thought there was no way would I get hired with my legal issues. To my surprise, they offered me a position after the Department of Human Services did what's called a "set aside" that allowed me to come to work. I became an HST Lead, and then had to take a medical leave due to some pretty serious health reasons.

I had been away from work a little more than a year, recuperating, when I got a call from Vinland asking how I was feeling. They explained they had a position opportunity, and thought I would be perfect if I were physically able and interested. I was both. What Vinland was offering me was a position as a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS). They knew I had done the original training while I was an HST. But I did not get certified due to the medical issues I was dealing with. It was decided I should get retrained and do the follow-up certification. I did my training with the Minnesota Recovery Connection, who has been a very supportive and valuable resource to me. I passed my certification test and have been a CPRS at Vinland for the past three years.

Being a CPRS is an answer to my prayers. It allows me the opportunity to work with recoverees one-on-one. I explain to them that we are peers—equals. I have no authority over them, we are peers; human-to-human. I share that what I want for them is what I have, and that is freedom from my drug or drugs of choice. Within the first hour one of us CPRS associates gives the new recoverees a tour of the facility while answering questions about the program. This is a wonderful opportunity to help settle the new client's nerves and affirm their good decision to come to treatment. This also begins the relationship of trust which is often missing from a victim of SUD. Either that day or within a couple of days, we sit down with the new recoveree and have what I call an introductory meeting. During this time, by using motivational interviewing, we find out some of the recoveree's history and their current needs. This is a valuable time for our new recoveree because everyone should be and needs to be heard. This is a time for me to just sit back and listen, using open-ended questions, affirmation, reflection and summarizing to allow the recoveree to trust and continue on in this conversation of disclosure.

I also use this time to introduce the concept of "recovery capital." Recovery capital is the personal assets one has that will support our recoveree in, if not permanent, then long-term recovery. Let's face it, when one gets to treatment, it's not usually after one of life's special,

positive moments. Reminding recoverees at this time they have recovery capital gives them a sense of hope. If they do still have a family that supports them, or they are truly committed to a life change, or maybe, if they are spiritual, these can be the ticket to helping them come out of the feeling of being broken.

I absolutely love the work that I get to do here. I love and appreciate the team Romney and Ben provide, and we each share the same mission. I also appreciate the support we get from the rest of Vinland's staff.

Looking back at my recovery, the words my friend Ricky shared with me, "God chose the worst of us, to make the best of us, to help the rest of us," ring truer now than they did 15 years ago.



**Ben**

*Peer Recovery Specialist*

Well, it's 4 a.m. (I keep interesting hours) and I've been awake all night trying to come up with a clever/funny/intelligent sounding intro to this article soooooo, I'm just gonna

start this with how I start MOST of my conversations with peeps I have never met or spoken to before, in this type of setting.. "Here Goes Nothin'!"

My name is Ben and I'm a duder (Ed. note: Yes, he means "duder"...) in long-term recovery, which for me means that I haven't had a DROP of booze for 2.5 YEARS (something I still can't fully believe). I am a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist and a three-time graduate of Vinland, and I'm here because I care. (See related story on page 10).

I care (in all of the ways) because I feel I have had an interesting enough story of addiction and recovery, that I KNOW how "my boys" (as I call them, affectionately, weekly) can both hear and SEE an example of what recovery can LOOK like, no matter the adversity posed by mental illness, brain injury, disability, and hardcore addiction issues. In my case, that looks like a short, fuzzy-faced, happily chubby, dude on wheels (for 13 years now, wow). But most importantly, they see a HAPPY human, being sober for the first time since I was 16 or 17 years old, which is when I first realized I needed two to three shots of booze just to go to high school every day (when I actually went). Okay, it's a long and ridiculous story, but the details are many (and at times inappropriate for print) so I'll touch on the main stuff. Buckle up.

*Peer Recovery Specialists continued on page 21.*

**Wednesday, June 12 • 1:30-3:30 p.m.**



Residential Treatment Facility  
3675 Ihduhapi Road  
Loretto, Minnesota

## **Please Join Us!**

### **VINLAND'S RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM OPEN HOUSE**



**1:30 p.m. Welcome and thanks to our supporters for our full exterior renovation**

**2:00 p.m. Tours of facility**

**3:00 p.m. Walk to lake and pontoon boat rides**

Our lakefront property has a paved walking path approximately two city blocks from the treatment center. If you wish to walk to the pontoon boat ride, bring comfortable walking shoes.



We are located about 9 miles west of Wayzata in western Hennepin County. Call 763.479.3555 with questions or if you want us to send you directions electronically. Free open parking.

<https://www.vinlandcenter.org/registration-link-for-this-junes-open-house-is-here/>



# WITH GRATITUDE AND ADMIRATION

By Alex D., Vinland Intern

*As I pack up my things and prepare to step out of these welcoming doors for perhaps the final time, I am met with a bittersweet mix of emotions. Gratitude, appreciation, respect, along with a subtle melancholy, a yearning to return to a place I have not yet left—these words fall piteously short of capturing the spectrum and depth of my feelings for this place that has become so dear to me.*

Every day at Vinland has been a masterclass in resilience, courage, empathy and the indomitable power of the human spirit. I've witnessed firsthand the struggles our clients face, the invisible scars etched by trauma and desperation. Yet, amidst the darkness, I've seen a flicker of defiant light—a spark of hope rekindled in their eyes, fueled by the life's breath that is the unwavering support and compassionate care of your incredible staff.

For many of you it was a standard four months, but for me it was my first internship. I'll never forget the laughter echoing through the hallways, the quiet moments of shared understanding, the gentle hands offering comfort and guidance. You, the staff of Vinland, are more than caregivers; you are architects of hope, builders of bridges across the depths of despair. Despite the magnitude of the difficulties presented by the task at hand, you weave a tapestry of compassion and acceptance. A sanctuary where vulnerability finds strength, and birds with broken wings are heard, seen, tended to, and given the strength and courage to fly again.

The world is often a harsh and jagged place filled with rejection for the people we serve, Vinland, but within your walls, I've borne witness to a different world. A world where barriers are not the isolating walls they appear to be, but are, instead, stepping stones. My time at Vinland has been proof to me that even among the darkest corners of our human experience, good will find a way to shine through. Carried by the tender hands of those who dare to believe in the inherent worth of every single soul. Those with the courage to hope. The Helpers.



My time at Vinland may be ending, but its impact will forever be etched in my mind. I carry with me the lessons learned, the stories shared, the lives touched. I carry the memory of Vinland not just as a place, but as a testament to the power of love, acceptance, resilience, and the kindly, giving spirit of humanity. You have shown me what it truly means to make a difference, to be a place of hope in a world so desperately needing it. A place where those who have become used to being given up on can find empathy and compassion.

Thank you, Vinland. Thank you for the memories, the lessons, the inspiration. Thank you for reminding me that even the smallest acts of kindness can ripple outward, creating a world where healing and hope bloom even in the most unexpected places and people.

May your light shine on, you crazy diamond. Saving lives and mending hearts, one soothed soul at a time.

# CPRS EXTRAORDINAIRE

Ben was a client who attended treatment and graduated from Vinland three times. He was involved in a horrible fall down a flight of stairs which left him with such a severe brain bleed that the doctors he was seeing did not think he would survive the surgery needed to repair it. This accident put in motion a series of events that would eventually put this outdoors-loving guy in a wheelchair; leaving him without the use of one arm and one leg. But I'll let him tell you about that in his story, below.

I sat down to interview Ben as one of the “power trio” of our three, residential, Peer Recovery Specialists (PRS), and to find out what motivated him to become one. (See related story on page 7).

Two and a half years ago, Ben was in sober living surrounded by people he valued and admired, who were encouraging him to take Peer Recovery training. Because he respected their opinions, he decided to go ahead and try—it was scheduled as one full, 40-hour workweek. Then he'd have to pass the state exam. The catch? This was one of the very first training groups to be held solely online due to the pandemic. Looking on the bright side, that meant Ben didn't have to worry about getting transportation that would assist him with his wheelchair, so this suited him well! He could do this from the comfort of his own home!

## **What motivated you to become a PRS?**

“Why not? I just wanted to do something meaningful with my time, and to give something back. People who were essential to my recovery suggested I do this, so I trusted their opinion and faith in me that I could. I thought, how cool would it be to actually be able to say to a new client, ‘I've been there,’ and be able to validate their feelings/emotions? I spend a good amount of my time now telling clients, ‘Yes, that sucks, so how about we put our energy into staying away and out of these places?’”

## **Was it hard?**

“It wasn't easy. Let me put it this way: If you attended all the groups at Vinland for one week, and pay super close attention to everything being taught, you will get a lot of the same education. Still, you have to have that essential

piece of lived experience coming into it—if you've been through treatment, you could likely take the state test and do well—maybe not pass—but do well; at least better than someone who's never experienced addiction/treatment/recovery!”

## **What's the best part of the job?**

“I like when I leave at night and feel that I might have helped someone. Just talking with the guys reminds me of where I've been and how far I've come. I mean, it is SUPER trippy to have an office directly across from one of my former counselors at Vinland (Mick!) I tell the guys (clients)—‘Just look at this, you guys! I have an office, with lamps in it—and I get paid to hang out and talk with you guys! And I've managed to get here from a wheelchair, so I'm pretty sure you could get here, too.’”

I'm a three-time graduate of Vinland—and now look at me! I actually reached out and called Vinland for a job—there wasn't even a job posting. I was having a hard time finding a treatment center that was wheelchair accessible, but I knew one place that was! So I called. I told whomever I first talked to here that I was so ready to be employed, that I was willing to post myself next to the client refrigerator and make sure no one stole anyone else's food, if that's what they wanted me to do! Now that I've started my career at Vinland, I know that I can go absolutely anywhere from here. This is the top of the pile! And everyone knows who Vinland is and the good work we do.”

## **What were some of the more lasting lessons you learned while here as a client that you have taken with you and practice in your life now?**

“All of them. Seriously. But the two that rise right up to the forefront are my former case manager, Mick's,



*Ben*



grounding technique and meditation. This is something I utilize daily. I remember one of Mick's favorite poses was the Mountain pose and the emphasis on breathing in—breathing out. As I still can't get over, I sit across from his office and get to see him weekly! This just blows my mind!

A close third would be Mark's drumming class. Before my accident, I used to be a musician, but with the loss of the use of one of my hands, I had sort of lost hope in ever finding joy in it again. But in his class, I found some real joy in playing the bongo, so I found a little one at a sale and recently decided to bring it into Vinland with me to possibly help some of the guys. I just loved that Friday afternoon music club he used to have—it provided a weekly wind-down afternoon group.

Since I started bringing the bongo to Vinland, the clients have been super receptive to it. I hope someday to be able to start a drumming group here for the clients, like Mark did for me while I was here. It taught me so much.

Other lessons I learned here that I still have to work on every day include increasing my patience, dissipating my anger, working on my too-quick reactions, and getting away from my black and white/all-or-nothing thinking. I also learned how to ask for help, a very hard lesson for me, just to even admit I can't do it for myself is a daily struggle. That, and to have more humility. But hey, just LOOK at me. I KNOW I'm hard to forget!"

### **What would you tell someone who had never been to treatment before, to expect when coming to Vinland?**

"If you have a disability of any kind, go to Vinland. I love that it addresses mental health AND physical health, as well as focusing on evidence-based recovery. There are so many ways to address what's going on with someone. If you need something in particular, you will find what works for you at Vinland. Just get in line and keep going through the buffet until you find something that fits for you. I use that buffet analogy all of the time. If I couldn't do something; for example, some of the mandatory spirituality groups in previous treatment places caused me more anxiety and frustration than they would ever help me, and at Vinland they understood that and let me tailor my treatment toward more of what might actually work with me versus against me or my belief systems. I'll never make the 1,000 minutes on the treadmill Hall

of Fame—and you cannot imagine the number of times I wanted to get up to that board with a piece of tape and put my name at the very top just for laughs! But here, I was taught how to do a wheelchair workout and a bedside workout—they let me help design a program that would fit ME. They worked with my personal and physical disabilities and got me through the treatment program sane and not feeling down about myself. This place truly tailored itself very much to my specific needs. Of course, they could set up all the supports around me, but then they definitely made me do the work myself."

### **What was one of the most memorable events or "awakenings" that took place while you were in treatment at Vinland?**

"Enjoying being outside again. I used to be an outdoor enthusiast. The wheelchair took that away. Instead, I started by just sitting in the upper parking lot and looking at the beautiful prairie, forest and lake—and breathing in the fresh air. All three times I was here were during the same three months of the year. My relapse usually would follow the anniversary of the accident, right around Halloween. So around late winter I would find myself back in treatment again.

Being able to appreciate nature again in a positive way—allowing me to roll through a park and appreciate kids on the swings and birds in the trees, was SO different from the drunk/high hippie in the chair looking like a nuisance around kids!"

### **What are your strengths as a Peer Recovery Specialist?**

"I can connect with anyone at any time on any level. I can read when someone is feeling sad or mad—and they trust me. And I am super proud to say that, in the year I've been here, I am batting 1000 helping new clients wanting to run to stay at least until Monday. I'm able to help them to slow down enough in their decision making—I really don't want them to die, and I tell them this.

I also rely on humor a lot to connect with the guys. Probably establishing a more...base connection. Ha, ha—but hey! I'm closer to the median age here—so it's another way to relate and identify. Then, once we get that established, I figure, let's get some real feelings out here."

# THANKS TO OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS!

We are super grateful to Vinland's Board of Directors for their recent, generous contributions that have allowed us to provide clothing and shoes (especially athletic!) to the clients who are in need. Many of our clients come to us directly from jail or from being unhoused, and the gratitude they express in this being an option for them is immense.

Having said that, every once in a while, we need to adjust and flex in order to keep a client clothed and shoes on their feet. That may mean we put out a plea to our staff to rummage through their closets at home for any possible donations and if all else fails, I (Molly, Director of Business Development and avid shopper) go to Goodwill or another secondhand store for warmer/or cooler clothing.



*Hey guys, did you know we now do shoe repair here at Vinland Center?*

## Speaking of our Board of Directors...

Vinland's wonderful board president, Jerry Seck, and his wife Candace, treated what seemed like an entire township to attend one of their favorite live performers, Joyann Parker at Crooner's Supper Club in Fridley. One of the things Joyann is famous for, is her renditions of Patsy Cline songs. Stunning.

We had tables full of board members and friends of Jerry's and Candace's singing along with their favorite songs and enjoying a lovely meal.



*Board member Rachel Wobschall and her date.*



*Jerry in the red bow tie, surrounded by some Vinland staff, from L to R, Molly Gilbert, Jeff Willert and Mary Roehl*



*Just at the Vinland table we had friends and family alike, including from Left, Peggy Martin, Director of Mental Health Services (and former Paralympic!), then, at the very end of the table we spy Mr. Tracy Beckman (with the goatee), former legislator and Vinland friend, talking with his guest; then 2nd from right next to Rachel, is Debbie Larson, Director of HR & Accounting.*



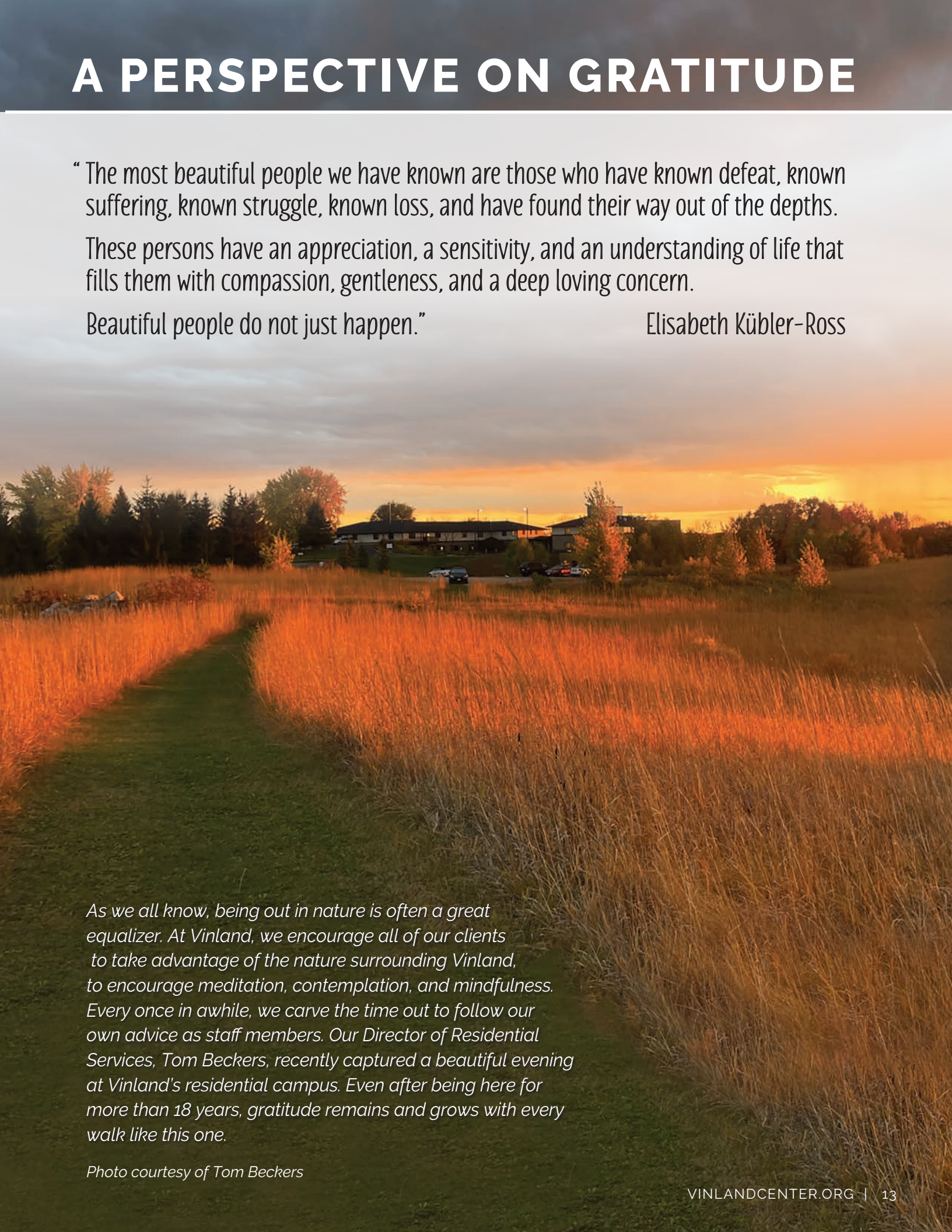
# A PERSPECTIVE ON GRATITUDE

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths.

These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern.

Beautiful people do not just happen.”

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

A photograph of a grassy field at sunset. A path leads from the bottom left towards a building in the distance. The sky is orange and yellow, and the grass is illuminated with a warm glow. The building is a long, low structure with a dark roof, surrounded by trees and parked cars.

*As we all know, being out in nature is often a great equalizer. At Vinland, we encourage all of our clients to take advantage of the nature surrounding Vinland, to encourage meditation, contemplation, and mindfulness. Every once in awhile, we carve the time out to follow our own advice as staff members. Our Director of Residential Services, Tom Beckers, recently captured a beautiful evening at Vinland's residential campus. Even after being here for more than 18 years, gratitude remains and grows with every walk like this one.*

*Photo courtesy of Tom Beckers*



# ALUMNI UPDATES

*Our staff loves to share all of the notes and calls they get from Vinland graduates telling us how they are doing!*

I experienced a very special moment as we were loading all the clients into the van to go from the lakeshore to the residential treatment center, I reached into the bottom of my front left pocket for the keys. I didn't realize that the cash in my left pocket got pulled out and had fallen on the ground when I took out my keys—and it was dark out! One of our clients, Antonio, was seated behind me and was closing the door and saw it. He got out of the van, picked up all the bills, and said "Someone lost some money."

As I'm reaching into my pocket, he put his hand on my left shoulder and said "Romney, this must be yours." It was \$307.00 made up of hundreds and twenties. This was a very special moment for me, witnessing such honesty in a human being. I have spent a lot of time with Antonio. I told him he's growing. Grateful I am. Vinland WORKS.

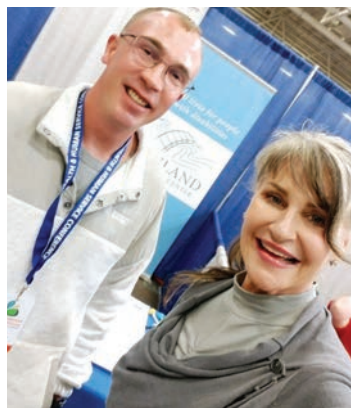
I just wanted to pass on an update on a former client, Austin. His father called regarding a bill and wanted to provide an update that Austin is doing wonderful. He has enrolled/re-enrolled in the College of Illinois, and is currently working on completing his thesis! The family is extremely grateful for Vinland, as Austin was in several other treatment facilities and nothing worked until he came to Vinland. He wanted us to know Vinland changed his son's life and their family's life and they are all so happy. He asked me "What did you do to my son?" They just can't believe the change.

I was just talking to the manager of some group homes that have some of our clients. She called to thank us for the holiday card we sent her. She reports they have Jeff, Roger (older guy that was here almost six months a few years ago), Chris, who was here earlier this year, and LaShawn, who was the first client to live in the home in 2021. Jeff is still working at a movie theater and is driving a car now. He goes to AA meetings and I suggested he should come to Vinland on a Friday evening to share his story. Rodney, who was here about a year ago, is in their house that is for 55+ clients in Savage, and doing well. Dee says there is a bed open at the Savage home if anyone is looking to place an older client with a CADI waiver.

This made me smile and I wanted to share some good news with everyone!

Hi all, I had to share what just happened in our parking lot a few minutes ago! Christian's wife and two kids just came to pick him up! They were all four hugging as Briski was banging the drum and several other clients gathered around! I call this, "A Great Vinland Moment!"

A graduate of Vinland, Melissa, was here many years ago, and she just reached out to say that she is 1,461 days sober! She said "I'm four years clean and it does get easier!"



*Molly with Matthew, a graduate of Vinland.*

Tom and I were at the St. Louis County Health & Human Services conference in Duluth, and a young man, Matthew E., approached the Vinland table to tell me he graduated from our residential program a few years ago, then went to Kinnic Falls afterwards where he "got really into 12-step meetings," and for the past two years has been a sober house manager for Onyx Sober Living in New Richmond, Wisconsin! He's enrolled in his 2nd year at Northwood Technical

College and is moving towards becoming an LADC. As a final twist, he was the person introducing Tom's presentation to the masses at the conference! Full.Circle. Moment. Recovery does happen.

He asked me to share this with everyone at the residential program and to tell everyone he could have never done it without Vinland! His counselor was Kevin.

Here's another good story. Hayden, who admitted today, said his Dad was here years ago and is still clean and sober!! I think he said his Dad's name is Joseph (same last name). Cool story.

I just got off the phone with probation officer with Wright County who had one of her "clients," Taylor, just successfully graduate with us. I was calling to thank her for her role in allowing him to come to Vinland. She then came out with a stunner of a statement. She said:

"I absolutely love the Vinland program. In fact, in my 15-year career as a P.O., my most successful example of a client going to treatment was one of your graduates, Jeremy."

He came to jail in November of 2022—his last date of use, then we got him to you guys in April of 2023. After graduating with you, he went to Project Turnabout to deal with his gambling problem, then to Lakeplace for sober housing. He is doing "so" well—beyond my wildest dreams. I really want to thank you guys for the work you do. It's unbelievable the change in him."

We all need to be reminded that we do have some wonderful outcomes with some of our clients.

I speak with a LOT of P.O.s, and I will tell you they are rarely this effusive in their language; so GREAT JOB EVERYONE! You deserve to hear this!



I'm in my office, when outside of my door I hear Keith approach Mikey and say, "I love you, brother. So proud of you for actually speaking up!" Then he gave him a big hug. Keith then said, "You are one of the best peers we have here, and we are all struggling with the same issues, and I am so glad I met you and have been able to get to know you."

At this point I asked if Mikey was about to graduate (as they were literally right outside my door) and Keith said "No, it's just that Mikey is one of the best parts of this wonderful place we call Vinland, and I just wanted to let him know how loved he is." Mikey looked just stunned (but smiling). Pretty amazing gesture from someone so new in recovery. I just had to share. Miracles do happen here!

I just got a phone call from a former client, Alec, who is 10 months sober. He was here last summer. He went to Kinnic Falls and is still in River Falls working at Jimmy Johns. I asked if he would be willing to come to Vinland as a speaker in the future. He said yes. I think he would be a good candidate. He is on the autism spectrum which I think would be good for clients to see that sobriety is possible for people with all different types of disabilities.

Have to share a great story, Jerome was here in 2019. He came to see us last Thursday, completely sober since he left Vinland. He shared with us that he is starting employment with the U.S. Air Force as a RECON specialist in December!!

Those of you that know Jerome, know that alcohol had saturated his life and he was very hopeless when he arrived at Vinland. We are so proud of the human he has become! He told me to tell everyone who worked with him, THANK YOU!

Justin M. is graduating from Vinland and leaving for Gull Harbor. He said he is happy to be moving forward to the next step but very sad to be leaving Vinland because it is the "Best place he has ever been and it is beautiful here." He is very grateful for the healing process he was able to undergo while here: physically, mentally, and spiritually. Maddy was his case manager. Great job everyone!

Hello all, Isaac was here in 2016, and he just stopped in to say hi and that he is seven years sober! Love this!

I just spoke to our alum, Shane, on the phone. If your hope bucket needs to be filled up, I suggest you give him a call! He just completed outpatient and is doing well. He is staying busy, attending meetings, being of service to others, working on his relationships and maintaining a general level of gratitude despite life's challenges! He would like to come and speak for our current clients.

I was just finishing with a new assessment, Everett. I introduced him to Darnell who happened to be in the hallway getting coffee. Darnell said, "You will love it here. The staff genuinely cares for you and your future. I've been to many treatment centers and this is by far the best! This place has inspired me to go get my peer recovery specialist certificate and work in the field." Darnell leaves Friday. What a way to start the day!

Daniel, who graduated in June of 2023, just left a message today that he was doing well and wanted to thank everyone who worked with him. Way to go Danny!

Just an anecdotal story— I recommended your treatment facility to a colleague of mine when I was working at the hospital, for her adult son who's neurodivergent and had substance use issues. Apparently, he'd been through a ton of programs before and nothing seemed to work/stick. Their relationship had been strained for years due to his substance use issues. She came up to me in tears and hugged me before I left the hospital to tell me that he's doing remarkably well, for the first time ever, and their relationship is being repaired. She was so appreciative of the recommendation and I just wanted to share a success story with you and how appreciative she was of your program and team! Keep up the great work!

### From Our Clients

*I just wanted to give you an update and let you know that on January 6 I just hit my six-month mark of sobriety here in River Falls. And I just had to thank you again for helping me realize that I can still grab life by the b#@s and that I can still have a good life, even with all the scars from my prior addiction. Then helping me to figure out or realize that I could still be a good man. That's what stuck with me still, and that's what I'm working on every day now. It's something no one else ever talks about, and after those groups, everything else just clicked, so I do just want to say thank you again!*

*Hey Melissa, this is Chris. You taught me how to make paracord bracelets. I was there in March and April. Near the end of my time there I told ya I'd let you know how I did/was doing.*

*I made them for a lot of different people at Kinnic and sold a ton of them as well, along with keychains and lanyards. I did well, making close to \$300! At the end of my time at Kinnic I made all the staff their own keychain to say thank you. Thanks for getting me into it, I enjoy making them.*

*After Kinnic I am now at Vinland outpatient and doing well. It's unbelievable how my cravings after treatment are just gone like the wind. I couldn't not drink for a day, let alone nine months. I had no control. But, thanks to y'all it's really like I'm a new person.*

*Hey there, Jessica—it's been a long time since I had a chance to talk with you. Thank you so very much for the start of a great and wonderful journey of my life. My commitment ends April 11, and I get my social security hearing on May 9 this year. I step down to two days a week at outpatient treatment next week. Blessed that you have helped me out with the things I needed for this journey of a life that's worth living.*

*Hello all, Krista and I would like you to know that our friend Keith N. is 18 months clean and sober! He said on the phone today, "I finally got it!" WE are all super proud of him!*

# A TURNING POINT

By Nicholas Patrick, Vinland Graduate



Nicholas Patrick

## Two Years of Recovery and Finding My Way Back to Life

Hello, dear readers. As I embark on this journey of sharing my experiences and memories with you, I'd like to provide an overview of where I am in my life and in my recovery. It's been over two years since I last entered treatment at

Vinland Treatment Center in Loretto, Minnesota. Over a decade of drug abuse had taken its toll on me, and my drug of choice at the time was Fentanyl. This potent and dangerous drug, often used to counterfeit 30mg Oxycodone/Percocet pills, was cheap and easy to find. I had overdosed several times, lost many close friends to overdose deaths, and severely damaged the relationship with my teenage daughter.

## A Turning Point—Reflections on My Time at Vinland and the Road Ahead

December 22, 2020

Tomorrow marks my completion date from Vinland, and although I've spent a lot of time in treatment, this past month has been an eye-opening experience. When I first got here, I was coming off two years of Suboxone and had relapsed on Fentanyl. To put it mildly, I was very dope-sick.

During my first days at Vinland, I met with the nurse practitioner to discuss my situation. But after the meeting, I started reflecting on my life and the position I had put myself in. My family's trust in me was nonexistent, and I had let my daughter down again. I decided this time had to be different.

I made a choice to suffer through the withdrawals and stop my med-seeking behavior. Thanksgiving weekend was hell, but the staff at Vinland truly cared and helped

me tremendously. With their support, I was able to endure the withdrawals without Suboxone.

I also made a genuine promise to listen to all advice and do all the things I didn't want to do. I participated in every group, worked out every morning, and stopped using audiobooks as a crutch. As the days went by, I started to feel better and began experiencing genuine emotions, both positive and negative.

I've realized how much my emotional intelligence was hindered by Suboxone and Vyvanse. Now that I'm off them, I'm processing guilt, shame, regret, but also hope, happiness, and optimism.

Despite my initial reluctance, I've decided to follow the recommendations given to me and enter a sober living program while attending an outpatient program. I know there's a long road and a lot of work ahead of me, but I have every reason to work on myself with all my heart.

As drug addicts, we tend to have short memories when we're in treatment. The world outside waits for us, and it can be a cold and vicious place for someone in addiction.



No tree,  
it is said,  
can grow to heaven  
unless its roots  
reach down to hell

— C.G. Jung



# PROBLEM GAMBLING CEU

*Vinland's Outpatient location hosted a Problem Gambling Continuing Education event for staff.*

We were excited to have so many staff attend a CEU event with the Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling at our Intensive Outpatient facility in northeast Minneapolis recently. Not only were there newer staff members that haven't yet had the opportunity to visit that location, but there are staff who have been at our residential program for years that also haven't been able to make it there! Our residential staff are very... in-demand while at our residential program. Facts.

We offered two separate sessions in order to accommodate our residential programming, so half of the staff attended in late January, and the remainder in mid-February. It was great to be able to meet the outpatient staff they often speak with on the phone, and just to experience Vinland's IOP location.



*Pictured counterclockwise, left to right: Sonja Mertz, Community Educator, Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling; Katie Richard, Outpatient Services Manager; Gretchen Fernelius, intern; Dr. Willie Garrett, Psychologist; Collins Nesbit, Peer Recovery Specialist/Administrative Associate.; Nicole Eldridge, Services Associate; Grace Sohn, Case Manager; and Tim Felegy, Case Manager.*



*For our second CEU session for residential staff held at our Outpatient location we had, left to right: Scott Paul, Clinical Supervisor; Jessica Tester, Case Manager; Kevin Gominsky, Case Manager; Katie Richard, Outpatient Services Manager; Krista Tomford, Case Manager/Treatment Coordinator; and Elias Rochas, Lead Case Manager.*

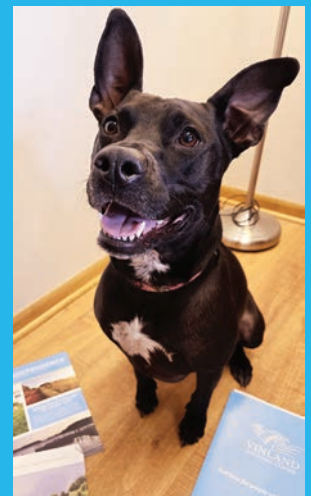
# PET CORNER

*These two sisters make a great pair of client-loving, canine visitors at Vinland!*



*We had this lovely 13-year-old brindle pit bull named Maggie visit with her dad (new Vinland residential case manager, K.G.) as we were getting ready to pack up our exhibitor booth for a conference. She looked so pretty sitting next to the flowers. She is a super gentle, sweet girl who loves the clients, and they (AND the staff) love her!*

*Then, a few days later, her younger "sister," Koko, came along with dad K.G. and she was so proud of how well she had studied up on all of the Vinland literature!*



# A SEMI-FAREWELL TO PATTI!

*Have you ever heard of those people who retire, then unretire, because they miss their work so much? Well, that's our beloved Patti Schwartz!*

Patti has been stationed at the reception desk of Vinland's residential treatment facility location for 18 years! She is often looked at as the heart and soul of the place, by both clients and staff. You have never met a more pleasant, patient, and calm person who happens to sit in the middle of chaos for eight hours per day! When I sat down to interview Patti for her retirement announcement article, I found out how and why she possesses these valuable skills.

Patti started out as a clinic supervisor at Lakeview Clinic in Waconia, spending 10 years there. She also was a 911 operator! That's it! Right there! If you can handle that, you can handle the front desk at Vinland!

All joking aside, when I asked Patti how she first learned of Vinland, she said she was working a similar position at River Ridge Recovery in Minnetonka with a couple of clinical folks there who had wonderful things to say about us. After about five years of being with that organization, she learned of the opening at Vinland and took the leap. The two clinical folks who told her of Vinland followed her within about a year.

When asked what made her decide to come to Vinland, she said she heard it would be a super busy position, and she (obviously) thrives on that level. One of the more lasting lessons she learned from the clients at Vinland was not to view people as one-dimensional. She learned that everyone has a story, and how important it is to not make a snap judgment. She learned to tell the difference between those clients who really wanted what we have to offer, and those who might not be as serious about their recovery. Through this, she concluded that although many of our clients need a lot of attention, often, in part, due to mental health needs, she preferred that type of client than a more manipulative/not-so-serious client any day.

I inquired what made this such a successful, long-term work environment for her, and she said that it was mostly because "everyone wants what is best for the clients. In order to work here, you have to truly be compassionate."

She had two really memorable events or occurrences with clients that she shared with me. The first was whenever she was having a bad day, she walked in and inevitably a client was very happy to see her. One in particular always said, "I love to see you smile!" Additionally, she said she could really tell how impactful it was for a returning client to see a familiar face.

The second instance was when a middle-aged client told her "You make a down-and-out guy feel like a champ." She said you can really tell the clients who are sincere versus those who might be "blowing smoke." Patti also learned quickly that many Vinland clients don't notice or "read the signals" when she was preoccupied—like when she was on the phone, or trying to work out a schedule for a driver, so that took some getting used to. We also see a lot of clients who might look up to any number of our professionals, whether administrative or clinical, as a mother/father or older sibling figure. And once they find you, they tend to want a lot of attention. When I asked how she dealt with that, she said she would sometimes say, "Ok, well, I need to get some work done here," but more often than not, Mary (Roehl, our Executive Director) or Tom (Beckers, our Director of Residential Services) would overhear a particularly persistent client, so would make it a point to walk by and remind the client that they needed to get to group. In the client's defense, though, she could really tell that some just simply needed a break from groups or one-



*Patti Schwartz*



on-ones, and just really benefited from decompressing near her desk with her. She found that to be valuable time for some clients and actually enjoyed when they were able to sit down and chat with her.

Clients weren't the only ones needing to take a break near Patti's desk! Because she managed all six of our drivers, they were often there to work out schedules for picking up or dropping off clients. It was a unique position to manage, as drivers really don't know their schedule until the day before they might be asked to work! She said it could get really busy pulling people together—days when we might have 10 rides to give and only three drivers, but it all worked out! She gave most if not all of the credit to our drivers being willing to be so flexible.

We also have colleagues who just liked to sit there over their lunch break and chat. When I asked her if *she* ever got a break, her response was, "I'm a good multitasker."

Other duties Patti performed included working with our pharmacy provider, going through the billing spreadsheet of monthly orders with Merwin's Pharmacy to be sure we are re-billing once a client is actively on medical assistance, which they might not have been when they first came to us and needed their medication.

Patti also paired new clients with their mental health therapist, which she seemed to really enjoy, as she got to know the clients enough to pair them with who she thought would be the *right* therapist for that client. If a client was returning, she would try to get them assigned to that same previous therapist.

Patti was also in charge of sending out medical records when requested. What will we do without her? As a matter of fact, she has an excellent partner in Nicole, her brand-new replacement, whom she is training! And because Patti simply cannot completely leave Vinland, she has decided to work for us one day per week in her retirement!

When I asked what else she planned to spend her retirement time on, she let it drop that she has TWELVE grandchildren, ages two to eighteen, and four children. Everyone lives within about 40 minutes of each other, so she plans on attending even *more* sporting/extracurricular events, and really enjoying being able to focus on the two- and five-year-olds! Her eldest grandchild is a finalist National Merit Scholar who has

scored a FULL scholarship to the University of Alabama (Roll Tide!), and he hopes to pursue a career in medicine after that. As someone who used to recruit National Merit and Presidential Scholars for the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, I questioned why Alabama, as (typically) National Merit kids aren't particularly interested in the more heavily-focused sports culture while at some colleges, and Patti said that's exactly why he chose 'Bama! For the football culture! Turns out he is a three-sport student at Minnetonka High School! Some people are just too talented for their own good...

In addition, her mom is a (very spry!) 88-year-old, who loves to go on shopping trips—the last of which included Walgreens, grocery shopping, Walmart, Menards, a Goodwill for good measure, a Dollar Store and finally, lunch at Culver's! She hopes to spend more time doing more things with her.

When Patti's dad passed away from cancer, Patti and her husband bought the small, seasonal cabin that her mom and dad had for so many years, so she looks forward to spending more time there—another thing that's just 40 minutes away! Then she'd like to travel within the U.S. more and see the mountains, D.C., Maine, etc.

As a final note, Patti wanted to tell me about something that was very near and dear to her heart that happened while she was at Vinland. When her father was fighting cancer, he was having to be taken to a LOT of medical appointments, for chemotherapy, radiation, etc. She said he was a real fighter so wasn't going to go easy, and this lasted into his hospice, as well. Patti had never really used any of her personal time off (PTO), but she ran through it quickly during this time, and the appointments and need for her to miss work to be with her family was huge. But it was looking like she would have to take the time off with no pay once her PTO was up—and she said that SOMEONE at Vinland donated about two weeks of PTO to her account! As she said this, tears welled up in her eyes. She still doesn't know who did this, but she will be forever grateful for that time given to her that allowed her to spend her father's last days with him and the rest of her family. Now THAT, is Vinland in a nutshell.

*Congratulations on your (semi) retirement, Patti! We are so grateful for all you have given to our clients and staff over the past 18 years!*

# MANY THANKS TO OUR TRANSPORTATION TEAM!

Because we travel all over the state to pick up/drop off clients, I asked Patti (Schwartz; see story on previous page) how often it happened that we drove to Thief River Falls (or some other destination seven hours away) only to have the rider not show up? She said it happened every once in a while, but more often it happened within the Twin Cities metro area. She said that our Intake office would call the day before, and sometimes our drivers would call ahead of time, too. But if a client is unhoused, for example, it makes a pickup more challenging when the pickup point is in Minneapolis behind a Super America gas station at a picnic table (real example). That also brought up the subject of safety for our drivers. It can get pretty sketchy out there when you're asked to pick up a client at a remote motel, for example. They have to remain aware of their personal safety at all times, because one can never be sure what state of mind someone might be in when deciding to be picked up to go to treatment. Some might change their mind at the last minute due to a recent use that "dulled the momentary pain," or they might decide it's more important to obtain money for their next use, and not want to go to treatment anymore. It's a delicate moment.

We have also had our fair share of seizures and other, medical emergencies take place while clients are being transported, and one particularly interesting incident a few years ago while transporting two clients. One of them told our driver that he thought he felt sick. But that seemed to pass, and the client started to take a nap. Many tend to use "one last time" just prior to being picked up, and it turns out, that's just what this client did. No one knew anything was wrong, including the incoming client sitting next to him, but when they arrived at Vinland, the one client was completely unresponsive. One of our nurses ran out to the van and immediately took the patient on, calling 911 at the same time. So many of our clients just sleep the whole way in, everyone thought that's what was happening! The client almost died of an overdose, and ended up spending a solid amount of

time in the hospital, then finally was returned to attend treatment at Vinland. A very scary experience for all involved.

We also have to consider the dangerous situations they are put in when someone is asked to leave Vinland (At Staff Request/ASR). Many times that means they have to go back to jail, but are not told this when they get in the van. Sometimes they run as soon as the door is open. Often, they can be angry once they figure it out. But, Patti said, most expect it. A lot of it is managing emotions in the moment, and our drivers do an excellent job of this. As you can see, our drivers have an important job: they are the first face that a client sees representing Vinland; they answer thousands of questions, and will confide in the drivers in ways they won't with other staff. Often, they are also the last contacts from Vinland they might have in-person.

Because so many of our drivers have been with us for a long period of time, they have really learned the ropes: Jim Tripp is our G.O.A.T. of the drivers, having started within one year of Patti's arrival to Vinland 18 years ago! He did move to Florida for a bit, but then he got sensible (lol) and moved back, starting right back up with Vinland! Another driver, Marty, has been with us for 13 years and is our only full-time driver. We then have Larry, who's been with us for 10 years, Carl has been with us for four years, and Charlie for one. We are SO lucky!

So many of our clients treasure their connections with our drivers—just imagine having 3-8 hours going one way to treatment and all the questions that are asked of them, starting with, "What's it like there?" Many clients feel a real bond with the person who brought them to us, and often request the same driver to bring them back home. Many thanks to Patti for successfully managing the logistics for our drivers for all these years, and for Nicole's new assumption of these very important duties! Thank you drivers, for all you do, every day, to help others find their way to and from Vinland!



I was born and raised in a little town in Wisconsin (NOW it's all starting to make sense, right?) in the late 70s to loving parents and extended family. I was soon followed by my little sister and brother and had a perfectly happy home. I wanted for nothing. Ever. This always confused me during my early attempts at sobriety, shortly after my traumatic brain injury (a SOBER fall down a flight of stairs) and stroke, followed by a surprise heart attack, as I heard LOTS of "reasons" people drank or used other drugs the way they did. I just felt I had no good "reason" in comparison. I was the way I was. I had a happy home, privileged more than most, loving people around me, tire swing in the yard, dogs ... you get the picture. I just simply (in my mind) "liked it more than most," and for 27 years was even PROUD of my ability to drink and be basically wasted 24 hours a day, sometimes for a week or two at a time, and NOT lose a job or my house or my family. All these years later, I see how I DID lose all of those things and more...but I have redefined "loss" through years of mental health therapy and 24 trips through hospitals with BACs\* that SHOULD have killed me (per the very concerned doctors in the ER who, unfortunately, knew me by name). This led to inpatient treatments such as Vinland, then typically to an IRTS\* program or sober living, where I'd eventually LOSE myself again and start the cycle all over from step one.

We all (addicts) have the same story, just different details. The same goes for recovery. I have yet to meet a peer in this field that wasn't made strong by first being broken to the point of where sobriety wasn't even a choice anymore. It was then, Live or DIE...it's really that easy for me.....now.

I have dodged death more times than most, and after the heart attack (that I didn't realize I even had) I finally got scared enough to realize that I HAVE to be out of second chances or "medical miracles." My successful brain operation made news at Yale University's Medical & Health Sciences Department, as there was zero expectation of me living. My parents were called, last rights given; the works.....the point is, I feel like I'm always living on borrowed time, and it's because of recovery gained at all those aforementioned places and programs and peer specialists I met during the process, that I now do what I do at Vinland. Though I have a hard time describing (as would Tanya, My Tech Supervisor) what it was that was instrumental to me and my recovery during my time at Vinland as a client, I will still try.

I try my best to provide a place for my boys to come and "get real" while keeping things as light as possible and

somewhere they feel safe to FEEL again. You want to come and be mad? Let's be mad...but let's work through it! Want to be sad, frustrated or aggrieved in any way? COME ON IN! I can often be found in my dimly lit office with some music playing, a desk full of sugary snacks (IYKYK\*), a few comfy chairs and ALSO, HEY, there's a guy that's "been there, seen that" to LISTEN to them. They come to laugh some nights, and come to cry on others... it's always different, but it's just details, and details can be "dealt with" while you are in my Zen Den.

Plus, WE get to figure out the problem and possible solutions to the soothing sounds of meditation music (thanks, Mick\*) Or some AC/DC or whatever THEY want. This tool gives our guys a little piece of ownership in their recovery, as I encourage them to "set the mood," so to speak. Also, gummy worms are a HELL of good way to strike up ANY conversation! Bribes. The candy is a bribe, lol...buuuut, it works!

I often find myself amazed at where I am in just under three years of sobriety. I PROMISED myself I'd "NEVER come back to Vinland (or anywhere)" each time I graduated, and LOOK at me now...I'm now a rolling billboard for Vinland (brain injury, mental health, disabled AND addicted).... and its amazing approach to WIPING OUT ADDICTION!

Sorry, got a little excited there and yelled. I get loud when I talk recovery.

That IS what WE—peers and all of the other wonderful staff—DO HERE! Bet on it!

Long story short, I figured it out, and therefore, ANY of our clients can...I'm just willingly along for the start (or restart) of their ride to sobriety....and I LOVE it!

#### *Editor's Note:*

*Steve just completed the training and received his CPRS (Certified Peer Recovery Specialist) with Forensic Endorsement, which focuses on working with those with a justice-involved background. In our next newsletter, we'll get to hear more about this and how it will be used to support our recoverees at Vinland, as well as an interview with our third CPRS, Romney.*

\* Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) refers to the percent of alcohol (ethyl alcohol or ethanol) in a person's blood stream. A BAC of 10% means that an individual's blood supply contains one-part alcohol for every 1000 parts blood.

\* Intensive Residential Treatment Services (IRTS) and Residential Crisis Stabilization services (RCS) provide a safe and supervised environment in a community based residential program setting. These intensive mental health treatment services may be needed following a hospital stay or to prevent hospitalization.

\* IYKYK – for the Boomers among us = If You Know, You Know. So now you know!

\* Mick McClellan – one of our long-time case managers – and former case manager of Ben!



# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

*Vinland's residential location is a grateful recipient of grant monies with the help of several legislators who are supporters of Vinland. We are celebrating with an open house on June 12 to allow folks to see all of the improvements! See page 8.*

*Molly Gilbert, M.Ed., Director of Business Development*

Please RSVP for our Open House by clicking [here](https://www.vinlandcenter.org/registration-link-for-this-junes-open-house-is-here/) or go to our website:  
<https://www.vinlandcenter.org/registration-link-for-this-junes-open-house-is-here/>

Spring—and soon to be summer—conference season is alive and well, and Vinland is a supporter and exhibitor at all of the various behavioral health events:

## MARCH

- Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance's Brain Injury Support Conference
- Minnesota Social Service Association Annual Conference
- Clinical presentation at Mind Matters, North Dakota Brain Injury Alliance's annual conference
- Vinland presentation to Medica's behavioral health team

## APRIL

- Clinical presentation at MARRCH (Minnesota Association of Resources for Recovery and Chemical Health) Spring Conference
- Kandiyohi County Health & Human Services Vendor Fair
- Minnesota Sheriff's Association Jail Programs and Services Conference
- Clinical presentation at Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance Annual Conference

## MAY

- Walk for Mental Wellness

One of our main outreach focuses is to educate others on the prevalence of brain injuries, specifically in the justice-involved populations. There was a study done within the past few years at Minnesota Correctional Facility—Shakopee, where 96% of the women surveyed had suffered a traumatic brain injury. Sadly, most of these are as a result of domestic violence, as the assailant is often aiming for the head and neck. I haven't seen any recent studies on incarcerated men, but one can assume the numbers are even higher, considering the amount of drug deals gone wrong ending in fights/pipes/bats

over the head, not to mention other high risk-taking behaviors, often ending in motorcycle/auto accidents or drug overdoses. Further, when we take into account high-contact sports backgrounds, the number grows exponentially. Numerous people I've met during visits to jails tell me they have no history of brain injury until I ask them if they ever had a concussion. One of them actually responded, "Oh my gosh, about 19!..." Multiple concussions = brain injury.

There is so much more education needed out there. We've learned at Vinland that when people understand their brain injury, they are much more prepared to recognize what might be causing their impulsivity, for example, versus having it simply be attributed only to their craving for a drink or drug.

I spend three days per month in Anoka, Hennepin and Ramsey County jails speaking with the inmates about brain injuries and explaining the work that Vinland does. It is some of the most rewarding work I do, as watching "light bulbs" go off right in front of me—those "A-Ha!" moments—can be really helpful for clients with brain injuries to understand some of their acquired behaviors.

Please reach out to me if your organization, hospital, court, treatment center or other behavioral health organization could benefit from a learning opportunity about working with clients with substance use disorders and traumatic brain injuries. Just this basic knowledge seems to enable professionals to work more effectively to not only help identify whether they might be working with someone with a head injury, but it gives basic interventions we have learned over the years at Vinland that can be very effective in helping these clients, instead of mistakenly punishing them for having an "invisible" injury. I can be reached directly at [mollyg@vinlandcenter.org](mailto:mollyg@vinlandcenter.org) and 763.479.4525. Happy Spring!



# 2023 DONATIONS

We are so grateful to our donors who annually step up to the plate to be sure Vinland has what it needs to keep our clients in clothing, quilts, and the like! We are especially grateful to our board president, Mr. Jerry Seck, who has been on the Vinland National Center board of directors since its inception! His generosity in so many areas is something for which we are eternally grateful.

## Monetary Donors

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(beloved Vinland chef)

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A HUGE THANK YOU  
to the numerous  
anonymous shoe  
and clothing donors!

## Memorials

Jeff Willert<sup>2</sup> for  
Richard Willert

Patti Reynolds for  
Duane Reynolds

## Tributes

Matthew Gulseth  
in honor of  
Thomas Knutson

Steve Majjala  
(beloved Vinland chef)  
for Friends who still  
suffer—Peace to All

<sup>\*</sup> Vinland Board President

<sup>1</sup> Vinland Board Member

<sup>2</sup> Vinland Staff

Photo courtesy of  
Tom Beckers



# THERAPEUTIC FITNESS FEEDBACK

*Our clients continue to amaze us with how hard they work in our Therapeutic Fitness Center and the outstanding results they accomplish!*

- **Jason:** Perfect attendance with us! Exercise became very important to him while he was here. He plans to keep it up as part of his recovery!
- **Darren:** Also perfect attendance, will join Anytime Fitness as part of recovery.\*
- **Ryan:** Model client, worked hard, perfect attendance, is excited to get home to his wife and 19-month-old boy.\* TTAT (*Editor's note: TTAT = Top Ten of All Time – Jeff has lots of these....) for sure!*)
- **Brian:** Also perfect attendance, came in using a wheelchair and walked out of Vinland completely capable of ambulating without assistance!

\*Ryan and Darren both came in with back pain and left without any!!

- **Mike:** Perfect attendance and he achieved nearly 2,000 minutes of cardio and has great aftercare plans that include Beyond Brink. I talked with them a couple of days ago and they have a YMCA really close to them that Mike will be attending. He came in here after a left total hip replacement. He was using a walker and a cane. Mike worked really hard here and is now ambulating nearly perfectly! We are super proud of him and wish him the best!
- **Jon:** Perfect attendance. 1,175 cardio minutes. Will join a health club in Shakopee. Jon started out slow and really engaged and starting reaping the benefit of regular exercise! Great client!
- **Victor:** Another strong client with us. He also had perfect attendance! Is transitioning to Lake Place which has weights and other equipment he can use.
- **Robert:** Really started out slow, missed many sessions. BUT he finished strong never missing fitness once he got engaged. Plans to exercise in River Falls as part of joining Kinnic!
- **David:** Also perfect attendance! Plans to join a fitness center in Pequot Lakes.
- **Joseph:** Perfect attendance! JP came into the program with moderate pain from bilateral leg neuropathy and left Vinland WITHOUT pain! He poured himself into the program and got superior results. We wish him well. Exercise and better nutrition will be a big part of his recovery!

## CLIENT SURVEY RESULTS

### What did you like best about the Therapeutic Exercise or the overall program at Vinland?

- The patience of Kirsten and Jeff, and that they weren't too pushy (but they did push).
- It couldn't have been better for my physical and mental health.
- Being able to stay truly active while in treatment, and just being with some of the best staff in the world.
- I did something which I don't usually do—which is to work out!
- Working out the proper way instead of pushing more weights.
- I liked that it was a daily requirement to attend therapeutic exercise, with extra sessions offered throughout the day, every day. The knowledge of the instructors was phenomenal.
- Jeff and Kirsten were both very motivational, and I loved that we could come in the gym for multiple sessions per day!
- Probably the encouragement towards cardio fitness. Traditionally, I have ignored cardio.
- I liked it all, but most of all the people who ran the program. They made me want to come back every day.
- Fitness and groups and the good counselors.
- The encouragement and support of Jeff and Kirsten; cardio—immediately seeing the results of my efforts.

### How did you hear about Vinland?

- Gateway Detox in Inver Grove Heights (Thanks, friends!)
- Courage Center (Thanks, friends!)
- From a friend.
- Word of mouth how great it is.
- From a chemical assessment.
- Someone from Vinland visited us at Hennepin County Jail.
- Previous client.
- From Andrew, Vinland's day time nurse (Thanks Andrew!)
- Clients who had been to Vinland, and the nurses at St. Cloud Detox. (Thanks friends!)
- A case manager.
- I came here because of Vinland's TBI emphasis.
- My probation officer.
- My Rule 25 assessment and other people that had good things happen here.
- Dumb luck!

### Overall, how would you rate your exercise program experience?

- 10 outta 10.
- Excellent! Thank you for helping me get my physical fitness and health back!
- Staff was awesome, equipment was great; need sauna!
- Top notch. The best.
- I can't express just how great this place really is.
- 1,000/10!
- I was honored to be a client. Jeff and Kirsten were amazing.
- My experience in this program is priceless. I could never repay Jeff and Kirsten for what they have done for me. They have changed my life for the positive; I will carry what I learned here with me forever. My physical and mental health have permanently changed for the better.



But I'm starting to believe in myself again, and I'm doing this first and foremost for myself. I want to change, chase my dreams, and leave behind a legacy. And most importantly, I want to be a man my daughter looks up to. She deserves the world, and I intend to see to it that she gets every opportunity to hold it in the palm of her hand.

Today, I stand here grateful for the progress I've made, the relationships I've mended, and the chance to live a fulfilling, drug-free life. It has not been an easy journey, and there have been many ups and downs along the way. But through it all, I have remained committed to my recovery and to becoming the best version of myself.

### **Embracing New Hobbies, Spirituality, and Finding Purpose in Recovery**

As I continued on my journey of recovery, I realized that finding new hobbies and interests was essential to staying focused on my sobriety and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Along the way, I discovered a passion for producing music, writing spoken word and poetry, and exploring new avenues of thought to keep my mind engaged and my idle time filled with productive activities.

A key component of my success in recovery has been my surrender to a higher power—in my case, God—and finding a purpose greater than myself. I've felt a calling to share my experiences with others, coaching individuals in recovery and even becoming involved in boxing and martial arts training. The philosophy that accompanies these disciplines has played a significant role in my personal growth and understanding of my place in the world.

Throughout this process, I've had many profound spiritual experiences during meditation and prayer. As I've learned to connect with the spiritual powers around me, I've witnessed the order and meaning that seem to be present in the universe. When I talk to God and pray, I see manifestations of His love moving into place in my life.

My concept of God and faith differs from many mainstream Christian beliefs. While I do read the Bible, I also explore other religious texts and don't discount the ideas and beliefs of others. I believe that all religions are connected in some way, and that we all have our own understanding of God, Allah, or Yahweh. In the end, I think there is only one creator, and just as many languages express the same name in different ways, so too do various religions perceive different aspects of the same loving God and the Divine Architect of the universe.

Embracing these new hobbies, spiritual practices, and a renewed sense of purpose has been instrumental in keeping me on the path of recovery. I've learned that staying connected to my higher power, maintaining an open mind, and engaging in activities that fuel my passions all contribute to living a fulfilling, drug-free life. By sharing my story and experiences, I hope to inspire others who are struggling with addiction and demonstrate that there is hope for a brighter future.

Thank you for taking your time to get to know more about my journey.

Keep Shining!

## **NEW FACES**

*We are happy to announce new hires and staff changes that will help us continue to best serve our clients.*

### ***New Staff:***

- Beth Valentine, Case Manager
- Corrine Rucks, HST
- Grace Sohn, Case Manager
- Jenina Hagen, HST
- Kevin "KG" Grams, Case Manager
- Lauren Barberio, HST
- Scott Paul, Clinical Supervisor
- Vicki "Jo Jo" Hammer, HST
- Willie Garrett, Psychologist
- Wyatt Russek, HST

### ***Changes:***

- Ben Knauf, from HST to Peer Recovery Specialist
- Charles Moon, from HST to Driver
- Madison Krings from Intern to Mental Health therapist
- Matt Koch was promoted to Facility Manager
- Nicole Eldridge from HST to Services Associate
- Romney Skarp from HST to Peer Recovery Specialist



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## About Vinland National Center

**763.479.3555**

Vinland National Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that enables individuals with multiple disabilities to live productive and fulfilling lives through a whole-person approach that addresses the mind, body and spirit. Vinland's programs meet the complex needs of individuals living with brain injuries, serious and persistent mental illness, learning disabilities and other neurobehavioral disorders. Our primary focus is on substance abuse treatment including mental health services, a renowned therapeutic exercise program, family programming, outpatient services and permanent, supportive housing for adults with disabilities in recovery from substance use disorder.

## *Earn CEUs with Vinland's Online Webinar Library*

You can watch recorded webinars on Vinland's website and earn CEUs for free. Webinar topics include substance abuse treatment for individuals with cognitive impairments, dual diagnosis, therapeutic exercise, and mindfulness meditation. Vinland offers free webinars as a way to share our expertise with other health care professionals.

➔ To view recorded webinars, visit [VINLANDCENTER.ORG/EVENTS](https://VINLANDCENTER.ORG/EVENTS)

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