



May 1, 2014

VSA Vermont uses the magic of the arts to engage the capabilities and enhance the confidence of children and adults with disabilities.

## Finding Their Voices

Art speaks to each of us, and many of us express ourselves through the arts. Our May newsletter is dedicated to everyone who has found his or her voice through the arts, for discovering your voice is like finding yourself and losing yourself—both at the same time. VSA Vermont (VSA VT) programs help people with and without disabilities use their strongest voices. You'll hear the distinct voices of two board members—Celia Asbell and Geoff Hand—as well as teaching-artist Elizabeth Wilcox. In *News You Can Use*, you'll find out about programs where you can admire the artistic voices of others or programs where you can express your own artistic voice. Read on.

[Celia Asbell](#) | [Geoff Hand](#) | [Elizabeth Wilcox](#) | [News You Can Use](#)

### Celia Asbell

#### *Music and numbers...*



Celia Asbell, Board Treasurer

For Celia Asbell, Bach orchestral works are *comfort food*. An accountant by day and a musician by night, Celia finds her voice in numbers and music. During the work week, Celia is the Small Business Supervisor of Gallagher, Flynn, and Company's Small Business Group. After hours, Celia is the Music Director at Burlington's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception where she plays the organ, directs the choir, and sings solos at weddings and funerals. Celia is married to music as well; her husband Paul is a jazz and blues musician.

VSA VT definitely benefits from Celia's love of numbers and accounting; she has served on the Board of Directors and as the Board Treasurer for the past 7 years. As Celia notes, *I was recruited for my*



Childcare provider and toddler playing a guitar.

*accounting skills because VSA VT was looking for a Board Treasurer. Just as she has found her own voice, Celia loves that VSA VT helps people find their voices. We raise the quality of the community through our work in inclusive arts. It's kind of a funny story as to how Celia ended up a C.P.A. For many years, Celia was the Director of the Flynn Center's Box Office. She had wanted to take a computer course at U.V.M., but ended up in an accounting class instead...the rest is history!*

Growing up in a musical family with nine siblings, Celia was singing at her church by the time she was 9 years old and playing the organ at 12. Her background is in theater and music, and she has performed in musical theater in Pennsylvania. In an already full work and volunteer life, Celia manages to squeeze in yoga, running, gardening, and cooking. Travel is up there too and while you're reading this, Celia is down in New Orleans at the Jazz Festival, bopping to some cool cats now that tax season has ended.

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## Geoff Hand

### *Serving Little Children...*

The voices of children speak to Geoff Hand, VSA VT's Board Vice President. Not only the words of his own two little ones—7 year old Liam and 4 year old Eli—but also the voices of the children at the Boys and Girls Club where he serves on the Board and the voices of VSA VT's preschoolers in our [Start With the Arts](#) (SWTA) program. An attorney and partner with Dunkiel Saunders, Geoff was asked by a former neighbor to serve on our Board and donate his legal skills.

Like Celia, Geoff also comes from an artistic family; his mother is an artist and his father is an architect. Geoff grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, but chose to go to school in New England where his father has family. He did



Board VP, Geoff Hand

his undergraduate work at Wesleyan University where he met his wife, Marina Tal, D.V.M. Geoff completed his law degree at the Vermont Law School, believing that he would only spend a couple of years in the state. To our benefit, he and Marina have been here ever since.

Reaching out to rural childcare providers with professional development training and bringing art and literacy activities to the preschoolers in isolated areas are two VSA VT services that Geoff wants more people to know about. Geoff's own son Liam is a budding artist and a big reader. Geoff's happy that other children in our state get to experience, create, and learn through the arts and good literature. It's been said that children are *uncut diamonds*, and Geoff's commitment to shaping precious lives through his volunteer work will pay off for all of us in the future.



A Start With The Arts pre-schooler smiles.

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## Elizabeth Wilcox

### *Spotlight on the Performing Arts...*

Each year from January to May on the Spaulding High School's stage, you'll find VSA VT teaching-artist Elizabeth Wilcox leading high school students in theater games. The students are part of our

[performing arts program for high schoolers](#) receiving special education services. The 18-week arts program uses theater games and stories to give students the skills and confidence needed for job interviews, self-advocacy for services, and other aspects of adult living.



Elizabeth Wilcox

Spaulding's program serves 8 to 15 students each year. Elizabeth is passionate about the program's need, relating stories about the long-term impact of the performing arts on individual students, some of whom she has worked with for 4 years. *I had one incredibly shy girl with speech difficulties who had to use a pad to communicate. Fast forward four years and now she is belting out a Miley Cyrus song on the stage.* Elizabeth believes that the 15 to 22 year olds whom she works with choose singing as their



A young man performs in our theater arts program.



Elizabeth Wilcox performs in *The Vagina Monologues*.  
Photo by Kris Weir.



Two boys work on the set for last summer's production of *Annie* at Lost Nation Theater.  
Photo courtesy of Stefan Hard, *The Times Argus*.

artistic mode because of such television shows as *The Voice* and *American Idol*. As Elizabeth notes, *these kids get pulled out of regular classes all the time. They rarely get to be in the spotlight for their talents. They blossom from the undivided attention they receive for what they can do on stage.*

Elizabeth herself has flourished in the performing arts. Born in New Jersey, Elizabeth was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a toddler. For many years, she went to a special school, but later switched to the public school because she never wanted to be told that she couldn't do something. In high school, she discovered a love for theater, finding joy in losing her self-consciousness on the stage. She majored in theatre at U.V.M. Elizabeth, who lives in Montpelier, not only continues to perform in local theater, but also teaches in VSA VT's Start With The Arts program and works as an audio and verbal describer.

One of the places that Elizabeth performs is with Montpelier's [Lost Nation Theater](#), most recently in *The Vagina Monologues*. Lost Nation Theater will be one of VSA VT's collaborative partners helping us increase the impact and long-term effectiveness of our high school performing arts program. Many of Elizabeth's students have expressed a desire to continue their involvement in cultural and artistic organizations after they graduate.

Recognizing the need to bring these young adults into the cultural heart of their communities, VSA VT is establishing a pilot mentorship program that pairs these students with volunteer, employment, and/or internship opportunities. As Kim Bent, Founding Artistic Director of the Lost Nation Theater, notes *Theater is essentially storytelling and the dynamics of its expression quite naturally speak to that within us that is common to all of us—the experience of life itself. At Lost Nation Theater we strive to incorporate that ideal in the daily process of running our company, as well as in the creation of our work. The more inclusive we can be, the larger, richer, and more resonant our creative work will become.*

The students in Elizabeth's program already volunteer in their community, working at a soup kitchen at Barre's Hedding Methodist Church. On May 14th, the church will be lending them the kitchen and stage for their final performance. Over a hundred

family, friends, and teachers will be present and ready to welcome these young people into their communities as contributing adults. Elizabeth will be cheering them on, knowing that the performance skills that they have learned and practiced will give them confidence for future success. Now that's something to sing about!

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## News You Can Use

**Final Celebrations:** Every VSA VT adult arts education program includes a community exhibit or performance. Three adult arts programs are ending in May; you are invited to attend the performances:

- May 5th, 10 to 11:30 AM, Howard Resource Center (31 Swift St., So. Burlington): Celebrate the accomplishments and joy of the adult participants in *Adventures in Singing*, taught by teaching-artist Mickey Pekar.
- May 23rd, 1:30 to 3:00 PM, Howard Resource Center (31 Swift St., So. Burlington): Experience *The Power of Poetry* with adult writers at their final poetry class celebration, taught by teaching-artist Leslie Freeman.
- May 28th, 12:30 to 2:00 PM, Army Reserve Center (199 Barnes Ave., Colchester): Listen to *The Power of Poetry* with adult writers, taught by Leslie Freeman.

For information about these programs, go to our [website](#) or contact Heidi Pfau, Adult Arts Education Coordinator, at [heidi@vsavt.org](mailto:heidi@vsavt.org) or 802-238-5170.

**Volunteer Spotlight:** We are looking for a volunteer to serve as the [BOOM VT](#) drum festival Prize Coordinator. Join our planning efforts as we dream up.



Mickey Pekar



Leslie Freeman

reach out to, and organize prizes for the October 18th festival. Put your communication and organizational skills to work drumming up fun. Contact Heidi Pfau, Volunteer Coordinator, at [heidi@vsavt.org](mailto:heidi@vsavt.org) or 802-238-5170.

**I am my Neighborhood:** VSA presents a unique opportunity for student-artists with disabilities from around the world to display their artwork side-by-side in an online exhibition. Children with disabilities are invited to create a portrait that illustrates themselves in their neighborhood! What makes their neighborhood awesome? Cool houses? Fun neighbors? A great park or playground? The deadline for submissions is July 1, 2014. Parents or educators of children with a disability, ages 5 to 18 years of age, may also submit entries. For information and an application, go to the [VSA website](#).

**Calling Poets and Artists:** In celebration of the 24th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Institute for Human Centered Design in Boston is seeking New England poets with disabilities to participate in a Poetry Slam and artists with disabilities to submit original artwork for a special exhibition. Poets and artists, ages 14 and up, should submit their poetry and art by May 15, 2014. The art exhibition will take place from June 26th to July 28th at the Institute for Human Centered Design, 200 Portland St., Boston. The Poetry Slam will take place at the Institute on July 23rd from 7 to 8 PM. For information, go to the [Institute's website](#).

**The Address:** *The Address*, a 90-minute documentary by filmmaker Ken Burns, aired on PBS in April. The film tells the story of the Greenwood School in Putney, VT; the school serves 11 to 17 year old boys with learning disabilities. Every year Greenwood students are encouraged to memorize and recite the Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln's most powerful speech. The film explores how Lincoln's



Filling out raffle slips.



A drawing by a Kenyan 1st grader of her family.



words motivate and inspire these young men. In conjunction with VT Public Television, VSA VT will be sponsoring an upcoming showing of the film with a panel discussion. Watch for your invitation in mid May. Until then, you can see the film [online](#).

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VSA Vermont  
The Woolen Mill  
20 W. Canal St.  
Winooski, Vermont 05404  
US

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