



Get social with us!



**May-June 2015**

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

## Make More Art...

### *It's Good for You!*

May is Mental Health Month, the perfect time to reflect on the connections between art, health, and mental health. In a 2010 article in the [American Journal of Public Health](#) researchers examined hundreds of studies about the impact that engagement in creative activities has on one's overall health. The studies included visual arts, music, writing, and more genres in a variety of settings and with numerous groups of individuals. The conclusion of this seminal research review was that creating art doesn't just make you feel better, it also causes positive changes in your mind and body.



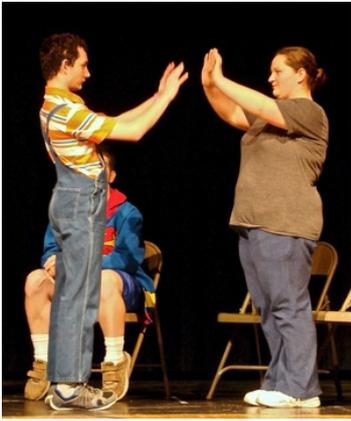
What relevance does this have for each of us? It means that we should all be engaged in the process of making art because it's good for us. Listen to some music, write a poem, paint a picture, take a photograph, express yourself in some way. As spring bursts out around us, let your creativity blossom as well. Create more and consume less. You'll be happier and healthier in both mind and body.

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## Students Take to the Stage

### *A Story about our H.S. Art Program by David French*

Eleven students took the stage in the South Burlington High School auditorium on April 17th before an audience of friends and family. They demonstrated what they'd learned during a semester of VSA Vermont's High School Arts Education Program, which helps students with disabilities make the transition from school into the larger world.



In one exercise, students such as Noah and Michelle paired off to mirror each other's gestures. Later, the group performed a skit they had improvised in which a grandmother going to see country music in Texas encounters Ashleigh, playing the president of the United States, who engages with Thomas, an astronaut who had brought back a giant frog from Mars. (And there was more!) Then Ashleigh and Alysha showed the proper way of making cookies.



This all took place within the context of the Bridging Program, a collaboration of five Chittenden County high schools: Colchester, Mount Mansfield Union, Winooski, South Burlington, and Burlington. Five students from each school meet three times a week throughout the school year for activities such as vocational rehabilitation or volunteer work. VSA VT's contribution is to provide a weekly class during the spring semester with an emphasis on the arts.



The VSA VT's High School Program began in 2003 as Advocacy Theater. More recently, it has embraced other artistic forms as well. In addition to gaining the theater skills students demonstrated on April 17, they visited Vermont Community Access Media (VCAM) for ideas about how to make a video of their work. And with the help of VSA VT intern Shelby Dickenson, they created advocacy posters to encourage various kinds of social action. Makayla's poster urged

people to make pie for the Food Shelf.

At the moment, the High School Program includes the five Chittenden County schools and a course run by Elizabeth Wilcox at Spaulding High School in Barre. The program is likely to expand in the future, possibly in Rutland and Addison County. Overall management of these statewide activities is the responsibility of Toby MacNutt, who is also the principal teacher for the Chittenden County program. Toby is herself an artist of varied interests and skills: diversity issues, dance, choreography, textiles, theater, and a range of visual arts.

Toby's work history has been what she calls a "patchwork," ranging from the Ropes program (outdoor adventures to get people working as a team) to coordination of VSA's VT's Arts Connect program (helping school teachers use the arts to illuminate conventional subject matter). Under an artists' grant at Flynn Space in 2012-2013, she created a six-person performance piece, One Two, which illustrates through dance the various possibilities of embodiment and relationship. Toby brings elements of all these experiences to bear on the High School Program.



Currently, Toby and VSA VT are working to add a mentoring component to the program. Students will be matched with adults with disabilities, and together will connect with local cultural organizations. VSA will help these organizations build their capacity to take on people

with disabilities in various capacities: interns, volunteers, staff members, or artists. As a result, according to Toby, “Our students should be graduating with a much richer palette of opportunities and supports available to them.”



The program will remain centered, however, on activities of the sort the students acted out at South Burlington High School. To acknowledge their achievements, Noah and the others received a “Certificate of Completion” from Toby and Shelby that captured what they had done: “Through discussions, games, homework assignments, dancing, movies, skits, and more, we expressed our likes, dislikes, goals, talents and unique senses of humor.”

As Toby puts it, the intent is that “the students experience an increase in their self-expression and communications skills, and hopefully gain self-confidence and some artistic skills along the way.” The measure of the program’s success might be in the song Laura offered toward the end of the program: “I’m the girl to change the world. Who I’ll be is up to me.” To stand that strong in the world is a gift given to each other by the participants and teachers in the High School Program.



## John Lika

### *A Creative Entrepreneurial Spirit*



VSA Vermont Board Secretary John Lika moved to Vermont in 1990 in order to start a new position with Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream as the Marketing Director. John, a true flatlander from Columbus, Ohio, had grown tired of managing an advertising agency and trying to convince clients to imagine and visualize marketing campaigns. “I wanted to change sides of the table.”

When the New York Times advertised for a Marketing Director for Ben & Jerry’s, John saw his opportunity and sent in a creative application that included pictures from a photo shoot of him and his Springer Spaniel eating Ben & Jerry’s ice cream. Over two months later, he finally got a call to see if he was still interested, beginning a “grueling 9-month interview process.” With over 2500 applicants, John was the leader of the pack and got the job. Neither he nor his wife Anne who was pregnant at the time knew much about Vermont beyond maple syrup and gorgeous green mountains. For two years, John worked as Ben and Jerry’s Marketing Director and with Ben Cohen on his Rainforest Crunch Products.

Then John saw an opportunity to own the whole table instead of switching sides. John’s wife

Anne comes from a highly artistic family. For years, family members had been exchanging unique handmade cat toys at the holidays—a fun and much anticipated family tradition. Given both Anne and John’s love of animals, they started to explore the idea of a company focused around fun pet toys. Fat Cat was the company that resulted, going national and then international. John and Anne finally sold Fat Cat in 2007.

Creativity drives and feeds John’s soul. Currently, John is working with a French Company, Primfil International, which acquired Paul Chaland’s fabulous collection of over 650 crèches, including 10 huge animated theaters, requiring 40 tractor trailers to transport. Just one such mechanical theater experience is a gigantic depiction of the city of Venice. His role as Marketing Director is to plan worldwide exhibitions of this amazing collection. In his spare time, John serves as an advisor to start-up companies through UVM’s technology incubator program.

How did John learn about and become involved with VSA Vermont? Andy Perkins, VSA VT’s Board President, got him involved. “Andy was always talking about VSA VT at social and community events. I wanted to learn more.” As John says, “VSA Vermont is about valuing art and creativity, bringing people together and giving them opportunities to express themselves.” As a “product-oriented” person, John would like to bring an entrepreneurial approach to VSA Vermont, helping us to find something “saleable” that will give us a stable and new funding stream beyond grants. There is no doubt that John is more than qualified to lead that special endeavor and has the passion to make it happen.

“I value that VSA Vermont helps people realize themselves as creative beings. The programs are uplifting and make all of us stronger and more connected, emphasizing our humanity and that which is good in the world.” We value the humanity and goodness that John brings with him to our organization.

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## Reaching Out

### *Finding New VSA Vermont Partners*

VSA Vermont is all about collaborations and partnerships. We get excited telling clubs and community groups about our programs, services, and mission. This spring we began reaching out to a wide variety of groups, offering to come to one of their meetings and make a presentation about VSA Vermont. We’ve been concentrating on UVM student clubs and have



made presentations to Tri Delta, Kappa Sigma, and the UVM Speech and Hearing Club. We've been able to establish partnerships with all three! Tri Delta and Kappa Sigma will be helping us with BOOM VT this fall, collecting recyclables for drum making and promoting the drum festival through special activities on campus. The UVM Speech and Hearing Club collected children's books for our Start With The Arts Early Literacy Program, and one member has completed the paperwork to volunteer with us in our arts education programs. We expect to continue partnering with the Speech and Hearing Club this fall.

We've developed a PowerPoint presentation filled with action photographs, as well as a worksheet that lists ways we can partner on various projects or activities. Then with group members, we explore their interests and our needs, looking for partnerships that are reciprocal. If you know of a group that might enjoy a spirited and passionate presentation about VSA Vermont, contact Marguerite Adelman at [marguerite@vsavt.org](mailto:marguerite@vsavt.org).

## Notes of Interest



**40th Anniversary of VSA:** The International VSA program is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2015. As part of this celebration, the 89 VSA affiliates from 54 countries made a quilt square and 10 young people with disabilities worked with the Human Sciences Department at the Middle Tennessee State University to sew the quilt together. Toby MacNutt, VSA VT's High School Performing Arts Program Coordinator, created VSA Vermont's quilt square. The square was designed so that viewers would be able to read it and feel the texture since each element is defined by different fabric textures and tactile seam work. It is pictured in the second row from the top, fourth square in from the left. The quilt will be presented in Washington D.C. in July.

**Presentation at National Conference:** The third annual Kennedy Center VSA Intersections: Arts and Special Education Conference will take place on August 3rd and 4th, 2015. The conference will explore the intersecting fields of arts education and special education, sharing current information in research, practice, programs, and policy, and serve as a leading catalyst for change. VSA Vermont and its partners will be presenting a workshop session entitled *Pathways to Partnership: How organizations share resources to support inclusive teaching with UDL and arts integration*. Attending and presenting at the conference will be Judy Chalmer, VSA VT Executive Director; Lisa Condino, VSA VT teaching-artist; Kim Desjardins, Burlington City Arts teaching-artist; Stacy Raphael, Associate Director for School Programs for the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts; and representatives from the Vermont Arts Council and the Baird School.





**Celebrating our Volunteers:** In April, we showcased the experiences of our VSA VT volunteers, interns, and board members on Facebook and Twitter. Many of our volunteers talked about what a valuable experience they have had or are having with VSA VT, not only in our programs and with program participants, but also for themselves personally. On April 22nd, we held our second Volunteer Appreciation Event at the Elley-Long Center.

Nick Cannizzaro facilitated an upbeat shaker making session and lesson in playing shakers. Hilary Maslow provided a feast of treats for everyone. If you are interested in volunteering with VSA Vermont, contact VSA VT's Volunteer Coordinator Heidi Pfau at [heidi@vsavt.org](mailto:heidi@vsavt.org). We are looking for volunteers for this fall's BOOM VT drum festival as well as for other programs and services.

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## News You Can Use:

**VSA Vermont is Moving:** On June 1st we will be moving our office to Essex Junction. Our new space is bright and cheery and provides improved building accessibility, private offices, as well as a shared meeting space. Our new address will be: VSA Vermont; 21 Carmichael Street, Suite 206; Essex Junction, VT 05452. We won't have new telephone numbers until a day or so before we move...so stay tuned. You can always reach us at [info@vsavt.org](mailto:info@vsavt.org) if you have questions.



**New Inclusive Tourism Site:** In honor of the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, a new state webpage was launched, making it clear that Vermont is a place for equal opportunity adventure! [www.InclusiveVermont.com](http://www.InclusiveVermont.com) features an interactive Google map of adaptive recreational opportunities and accessible facilities, a link to accessible outdoor events, profiles of

Vermonters who enjoy adaptive skiing, sailing, biking, and more.

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