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Freedom Project Newsletter

P. O. Box 31191, Seattle, WA 98103 • 206-325-5678 • www.FreedomProjectSeattle.org

Supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers

April 2014

GiveBig campaign May 6—making a difference!

Many of you know what Freedom Project achieves. If you have been a friend of ours you have read many stories about how Freedom Project classes and workshops have changed people's lives, resulting in healing, reconciliation with families, and safer communities.

Freedom Project's lifeblood is its volunteers. They give their time and talent when they go into Washington's prisons to share with men and women their enthusiasm and knowledge of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and Mindfulness meditation. They also absorb the cost of travel to the prisons.

Though Freedom Project's operating costs are kept low through conscientious attention to efficiency and frugality, we depend on your donations to sustain our programs.

We ask for your financial support during this major Spring Appeal, built around the Seattle Foundation's one-day online GiveBig campaign. On May 6, between midnight and midnight, you can go to www.SeattleFoundation.org to post your donation.

This year all donations to Freedom Project will be matched 2:1, in addition to the GiveBig “stretch”. Put another way, everything that you donate through GiveBig will more than triple.

Please mark May 6 on your calendar. Think about how much you can donate, and know that three times that amount will come to Freedom Project. We appreciate your generosity!

News from the top

By Martha Comfort, president of the board



It is my honor to serve Freedom Project as the new president of the board. These are exciting times and I am thrilled that you are part of the community.

Here's the top news: On April 1 KC Young joined Freedom Project as executive director. KC comes to us from our partner organization

Companis and was last with Sojourner Place, a shelter for women in transition. She has a strong background in nonprofit leadership, working with diverse populations.

Companis has also made available an experienced, professional grant writer who has crafted a template that will help us obtain funding from local and regional foundations. She has already identified promising prospects for us. Among other good news: Community Circle is again meeting regularly at our partner organization Nyer Urness House, which is just steps away from our Ballard office.

And on March 15 Kathleen Macferran, Freedom Project's training director, presented a TEDx talk at the Monroe prison. It was well received and Kathleen was approached by administrators, including the superintendent of the Walla Walla Penitentiary, requesting that we bring Freedom Project programming to their prisons.

We have had several changes to the board: Monica Wood, who served an amazing 12 years, stepped down at the end of last year. Her wisdom and strength are greatly missed. This year Sue Weinheimer will step down as well, though she will continue to facilitate NVC classes in the prisons. We welcome aboard Daniel McInally, the new program chair, Anne Barnes and Pamela Taylor South, each to two-year terms.

I am always inspired by the people I meet around Freedom Project. Last winter we celebrated Fran Howard on several occasions as she stepped down as president of the board, after 6 challenging years. As emeritus, this dedicated and inspiring leader will continue her outreach for our organization. If Fran should come calling on *you* about service to Freedom Project, I hope you will seriously consider her invitation!



Houses of healing

By Kathleen Macferran

What if our prisons were houses of healing? What if incarcerated men and women returned to our communities as peace-

makers with tools to restore safety to the streets? What if you and I joined those in prison to make that vision a reality?

Imagine: Transforming prisoners into peacemakers. Restoring genuine safety to communities. Thousands of people working behind bars and beyond bars to stop the cycle of violence.

Is it possible? I believe it is. I wouldn't have thought so 10 years ago before sitting with men and women who are living that vision every day. I've watched in awe as inmates have transformed patterns of harm into life-serving behaviors of accountability, integrity and care.

Steven, a former inmate who has returned to his community as a peacemaker recently attended an NVC workshop. He told the group he had spent time in prison for a violent crime. "I don't feel safe being here now," said Jennifer, another participant. "I have had a lot of abuse in my life."

Steven looked down at the floor for a moment, then said, "What can I do to help you have a greater sense of safety? When I went behind bars, I swore that the violent man who walked into prison would never walk the streets again. I've kept true to that promise. I don't just want you to feel safe when you are with me; I want you to feel protected." With tears Jennifer said, "I've never had anyone say that to me before."

"When I was inside and went to Freedom Project workshops," Steven continued, "I experienced empathy for the first time in my life. It was different from anything I had ever experienced. I wanted to learn how to empathize with others. I had never cared about anyone until then. I've been on a roller coaster of feelings and it has been an exciting ride. Caring for people comes at a cost. I'm exhausted and I wouldn't trade it for anything."

How did Steven become a peacemaker? While in prison he had support through the study of NVC. It gave him a chance to take a good look at himself, to reach out to others with understanding, and to reorient his world toward responsibility, compassion and restoration.

Will you join me in turning our prisons into houses of healing? Let us leave a legacy of safer communities for generations to come.

This is an excerpt of Kathleen's TEDx talk; you can view her entire presentation on our website: www.FreedomProjectSeattle.org.

From the classroom

"You've saved my marriage," confided an inmate to Kathleen Macferran during a break at a workshop at the Monroe Correctional Complex. During a recent prison visit, he explained, his wife had shown up with divorce papers in hand.

Instead of reacting with anger and fear, the prisoner was able to listen to his wife with the empathy she needed at that moment. By the end of that visit the couple had reconciled, and the wife shredded the divorce papers. Without the skills he had learned in Freedom Project courses, the prisoner said, "I could never have connected with my wife in this way."

New professional development series



Freedom Project is launching a quarterly professional development series with a program "Recognizing and working with prisoners living with trauma," facilitated by Tuere Sala. It will explore the nature of trauma and how to recognize the signs. The program is designed for those who work with prisoners and returnees.

The training will take place on Monday, May 19, 9 am-12 pm at the Freedom Project office, 5228 20th Ave NW, Seattle 98107. Please register via e-mail at SeattleFreedomProject@gmail.com or leave a voice mail at 206-325-5678 with your name and telephone number. Fee is \$20, free for prison badge holders.

Interested in NVC?

To find out about courses offered in your area, please contact info@nwcompass.org or visit the Northwest Compassionate Communication website www.nwcompass.org or call 206-653-4265.