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Freedom Project Newsletter

Supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers

July 2014

Did you know?

- With only 5% of the world's population, the United States holds nearly 25% of the world's prisoners, according to a 2014 National Research Council report.
- The 1980s "war on drugs" contributed to skyrocketing incarceration rates; mandatory sentencing laws took away the power of discretion from judges.
- Allocation for corrections has outpaced all other key government services, including education, transportation, and public assistance.
- The report says that the rise in the prison population "is not serving the country well," and recommends that the United States revise its drug enforcement and sentencing laws.

According to a Washington State Department of Corrections report, 37% of offenders return to prison within 5 years of their release. That same report found that recidivism for prisoners who attended Freedom Project training was 21%.

Pursuing new opportunities

by KC Young, executive director



After 90-plus days at Freedom Project I feel very invigorated.

Though I have met some of you already in person, I'd like to introduce myself again in this newsletter. Recently I completed the unit "Who am I?" in a Mindfulness Meditation curriculum, an online course a dozen staff and volunteers are currently taking. There are so many answers to this who-am-I question, but here are a few facts.

I was born and raised in Montana, and the Big Sky country holds a special place in my heart. Over the course of my professional life, I have worked exclusively with nonprofit organizations. I have taught courses leading to GED certification for prisoners in jails. I have lobbied for peace and justice in the "other" Washington, and I have worked

with people infected by HIV/AIDS. As a result of an outreach program for Native American tribes in Billings, Montana, I was adopted by the Crow Nation. I ministered as a hospital chaplain; and most recently, I was the executive director of transitional housing for homeless women in Seattle.

I realize that I have lived an incredibly rich life. And now I get to walk with women and men in prison, alongside generous volunteers who bring their own amazing backgrounds to the task. No wonder I feel so invigorated.

Thanks to my steadfast predecessors, I join Freedom Project at a time of growth in resources and talent. I can rely on a very engaged board of directors. This year's Give Big campaign doubled last year's contributions. Our experienced staff collects data that documents our effectiveness and helps recruit volunteers. Our training programs attract professionals and volunteers in increasing numbers. Our newsletter reaches a widening circle of friends and supporters. Best of all, more administrators appreciate our work and invite us to offer NVC courses at additional prisons.

I feel inspired by Freedom Project's golden opportunities of transforming prisoners into peacemakers. I hope my sense of commitment will be contagious and engage you even more. I thank you!

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Please make your check payable to **Freedom Project** and mail it in the enclosed envelope to P.O. Box 31191, Seattle, WA 98103 or call us at 206-325-5678. Visit us on the web at www.FreedomProjectSeattle.org.



Sharing Mindfulness

On Friday, August 22, 9 a.m. —3:30 p.m., Yarrow Durbin will lead a workshop on Mindfulness Meditation, based on the *Path of Freedom* curriculum, as shared by Freedom Project in prisons.

To register, send an e-mail to seattlefreedomproject@gmail.com with your name and phone number, or call the office: 206-325-5678; free for badged Freedom Project volunteers; sliding scale \$25-\$75 for others.

How NVC has changed me

by a prisoner in Monroe

I've been imprisoned several times. Every time I got out, I held onto the same friends and the same behavior, always landing back in prison. But this time is different: I now have a wonderful wife and children who come to visit me every week.

Because I am tired of living my life in prison, I decided to enroll in every available class to help me turn my life around. I started to attend NVC workshops, and when I began to practice the new insights, I began to change. Here's an example of how I have changed.

Recently I had a heated argument with another inmate. Tempers flared and anger reached such a pitch that we were screaming at each other. When he shoved me I flew backwards onto the ground, sliding on my butt several feet before coming to a halt. In a state of fury I leapt up, intent on smashing him. In the split second it took to push myself off the ground, however, a most amazing thing happened.

In NVC we are encouraged to connect with our deep needs and values. We train ourselves to constantly come back to our hearts. In just that split second of getting off the ground, my wife, my children, my visits, and my future flashed before my eyes. My fists stayed at my side.

That was amazing because all my life I've moved with the energy of those fists. My pride was crushed. There were half a dozen men watching; they had seen my humiliating slide. I was sure that everyone thought of me as a weakling.

I walked out, head down, straight to the track and ran six laps, with tears swelling. I hated what had happened, and I questioned my choice of not fighting. But after a while I felt at peace and realized that I had taken the first step in my new life.

Within a week, five of the six guys who had witnessed the fight expressed their approval of my behavior. What surprised me even more: the man who had shoved me came up and extended his hand in friendship.

Segregation on Tuesdays

by Valerie Kreutzer

"I've had a metamorphosis," says "Royale," pointing to a new diary. From here-on, she says, she'll write when she feels angry. Writing will calm her, she thinks. It's her rages that have gotten her into segregation, the single-cell unit at the women's prison in Purdy where violators are locked up 23 hours-a-day.

"Royale" and another prisoner are chained at hands and feet, tethered to a desk that's bolted to the floor, in a glass-walled classroom observed by two guards. It's Tuesday afternoon and Sue McCarthy, who has been coming here weekly for over a year, unloads her NVC materials, ready to listen to the latest twists and turns in the young women's lives. On the white-board behind her are lists of NVC fundamentals: Observation, Feelings, Needs, Request. NVC is the only class offered in segregation.

"Royale" is eager to learn. During role-play she explores the feelings and needs of her mom and her former employer; she tries to feel empathy towards the people she has disappointed, tries to walk in their shoes. "This is hard," she giggles, clutching her diary. The two-hour session goes fast.

Returning to the class with Sue a few weeks later, "Royale" sits in a room by herself, separated from the three students in the classroom. She has been in verbal fights with "Kassy," a new arrival in segregation. As I settle with "Royale" while Sue starts the class next-door, "Royale" shows me her diary filled with writing and photos of her loved ones. She lets me know that she is conflicted over her closest relationships because they are toxic. Perhaps she should let go, she wonders, but if she does, she will lose the financial support for her telephone and commissary needs. Prison life would be even harder. As she navigates the minefield of her emotions and contemplates her choices, one thing is certain: Sue will be back next Tuesday.

Interested in NVC?

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