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Freedom Project Newsletter

Supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers

January 2015/ Issue 5

Starting the new year with strength and resolve

by KC Young, executive director



Freedom Project ended 2014 in a stronger and more stable place than in years. We were able to add staff to support in-prison programming, and we raised \$12,000 more than in 2013. As you can see from our financial statement, fund-raising remains a top priority, and we are constantly developing more funding opportunities.

Staffing reflects the Project's most visible changes: In April the board of directors hired me to direct the program; Sue McCarthy became programming director, and Tim Conbere lends part-time office support. We've also enjoyed the energy of two productive interns.

The board of directors added two new members and inaugurated a council of advisors. During our August retreat we specified goals for 2015 and began a strategic planning process. The questionnaires we sent out came back with helpful feedback from our stakeholders.

Our new home at University Christian Church has placed us in the midst of like-minded nonprofits, and it also accommodates nicely our different outreach programs, including Community Circle and the Homecoming ceremony.

Our focus, however, has remained the teaching of NVC in prisons. In fact, this past year we doubled our contact

hours with prisoners and standardized our curriculum. We responded to a request from prison mentors and added 36 more hours of mentor training.

Mindful that our volunteers are our most precious resource, we developed a volunteer handbook, trained 20 volunteers in a prison-based Mindfulness curriculum, and offered three classes of professional development.

In summary, last year we conducted 123 classes and 19 weekend workshops at four prisons. Our volunteers contributed a total of 2,897 hours (including preparation, debriefing, and travel time), and we distributed 116 certificates to NVC-course graduates.

In 2015 we hope to expand NVC teaching at two more facilities. We end the year with gratitude and hope for your continuing support.

Board of Directors

Emily Lundell, president
Anne Barnes, secretary
Martha Comfort
Daniel McNally
Pamela South
Jim Yearby
Pax Dawn Keenen

Staff

KC Young, executive director
Sue McCarthy, programming & outreach
Tim Conbere, administrative assistant
Jenny Goodwine, intern
Brian Chang, intern

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your donations are tax-deductible.

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.

Year-end financial statement

INCOME		EXPENSES	
contributions	\$ 89,643.00	personnel	\$ 92,266.00
other income	\$ 3,279.00	other	\$ 24,754.00
2013 carryover	\$ 58,000.00	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 117,407.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 150,000.00	NET INCOME	\$ 33,516.00

Gaining insight through a game

by Sura Hart

“Now I see why I used drugs,” said a young woman in the Washington Corrections Center for Women in Gig Harbor. “I also now know that I can find other ways to meet my needs.”

She had gained this insight through the No-Fault Zone Game, a board game I introduced at the prisons three years ago.

During workshops each prisoner receives a mat and cards. At the start I ask them to take a moment to observe their breath, and then track their feelings on a “feeling thermometer” at the base of their mat. With the help of cards that list feelings and needs, the participants are asked to identify their present situation.

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.

The process leads from self-connection to role-play. One man in the Twin Rivers Unit at the Monroe Correctional Complex volunteered to role-play another man’s mother who had said she’d come for a visit, then didn’t show up. The process guided them through their pain and touched each other’s heart.

“This game is brilliant!” a prisoner exclaimed. “It needs to be in every school.”

“Yep!” I nodded. It was schools we had in mind when Victoria Kindle Hodson and I created the No-Fault Zone Game. We had been sharing NVC with school teachers, staff and administrators for over 10 years and wanted to get tools into the hands of students and teachers for easy practice. It turns out that we invented a game that works not only at schools and in prisons, but also at work, at home, and in business.

At a workshop I conducted last year in India, for example, a teacher and her program director



worked through a long-standing conflict in just 45 minutes, as 70 teary colleagues witnessed the process. At an international organization two department heads worked through a conflict in a circle of 65 colleagues.

Women and men at Purdy and Twin Rivers have gleaned new possibilities for connection through the game and would like to use sets during family visits.

If you wish to donate No-Fault Zone Games to the prisons, contact surahart1@gmail.com; to learn more, go to www.thenofaultzone.com.

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Prisoners mentor fellow prisoners

by Valerie Kreutzer

It is 6 p.m. on a Wednesday and 22 men at the prison complex in Monroe file into the classroom to study another chapter in Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication.

Before they begin they are asked how they are feeling right now. "Tired," says one; "calm," says another. One by one they identify their feelings from a list they had studied early on: they might be upset, content, frustrated, depressed, hopeful.

"I love this beginner's class," says Sue Weinheimer, who has taught it for the past nine years. Early on the men experience different ways of behaving. They change before my very eyes. They become respectful of each other and even attentive to their cellies' needs. That's why the Department of Corrections feels so positive about our program. The men changing has made the prison a more peaceful place for everyone."



Sue relates how men also apply their new insights in interactions with their families. "These men are so used to telling women what to do," she says, "and their poor wives, struggling to raise their children, have to make do without the income and support from husbands. So one of my students decided to try listening on the phone with his wife. After listening to her, he then repeated what he had heard. 'What's happened to you?' asked his surprised wife. 'This is the first time you've ever really listened to me.' Another wife came for a visit with divorce papers and after experiencing her husband's new insights, tore up the documents."

A few years ago Sue decided that the men would be more open to learning from fellow prisoners. Some of her students who had taken additional workshops and had absorbed the NVC process were ready to teach others, she thought. These men became the pioneers in Monroe's NVC mentoring program. While Sue and Steve Cleaves coordinate as outside facilitators of the class, prisoners are the mentors. "I'm their cheerleader," Sue says. "I take attendance, organize, encourage, and sometimes clarify, while Steve takes notes on the teaching and gives feedback."

On this Wednesday, Chapter 10 on anger needs plenty of clarification from Steve and Sue. The two prison mentors who prepared the lesson struggle to explain the difference between a stimulus and the cause of anger. By giving an example— "Three weeks ago I made a request to prison officials and they still haven't responded to it," — the mentors challenge the students to identify cause and stimulus, and while there is initially lots of confusion, gradually all students reach understanding.

Just three more lessons to go, and another NVC fundamentals course will conclude with appreciations and testimonials.

Sue doesn't know what got these men into prison but she cheers them on to get out. At a recent Community Circle gathering, one returnee waved to her with a big grin, "I bet you never thought you'd ever see me on the outside," he said. "I always hoped that I would," said Sue.

A new Community Circle for returnees and friends in TACOMA will meet on the 2nd Thursday of the month, 6-8 p.m. at St. Leo's Catholic Church, 710 S. 13th St., 98405. The meeting will be held in the Casa room at the rectory.

SEATTLE'S Community Circle meets every 3rd Thursday, 6-8 p.m. at University Christian Church, 4731 15th Ave. N.E., 98105.

We have a donor willing to match any donation made through February!

If you've been feeling the urge to contribute, now is the time!

An exercise of empathy at the gym

by Brandon Sutton

I've studied NVC off and on for a number of years. I understand the steps, but they always seem to go out the window when it matters. So let me tell you about a time when I did practice NVC.

I was in the gym working out. While I was standing under the pull-up bar there were two guys right behind me having a conversation. I wasn't really paying attention to them, but when I needed a wooden box to reach the bar and then dropped it, it made a loud noise. The two fellows behind me made a sudden move that startled me. I spun around ready to defend myself.



The two guys moved to the other side of the gym. I continued my workout. I was about finished when I noticed one of the guys still sitting on the bench. He appeared to be angry. I decided to talk to him. I wanted to make sure my actions hadn't angered him. So I asked him if he was ok. He sprang to his feet, "Why did you follow me over here? I'll beat your ass!"

At that moment adrenaline was rushing through my body. It's usually at such a moment that I either fight or back down. This time, however, I remembered my NVC practice. I noticed that my heart rate was rapid. I noticed a tingling in my fingers. I took another moment to empathize with myself, thinking, "Wow, I'm really scared right now." I acknowledged my feelings and became calm.

That inner dialogue couldn't have taken longer than a few seconds while the guy was ranting at me. I suddenly realized that I was practicing NVC and I felt great joy. I began to empathize with him, saying, "So I guess you're pretty mad at me, huh?"

"Yes. I don't know why you followed me over here unless you're looking for trouble, and I ain't walking away."

"So I guess I made a pretty loud noise over there, huh?"

This went on for a while and then, out of the blue and in the midst of an angry rant, he just stopped. His whole demeanor changed from mad to what appeared to be relief. He said, "Wow, you're really cool right now."

"Well, yeah. I just wanted to check with you to make sure you're ok. I don't want us to have a misunderstanding."

He put his arm around my shoulder and shook my hand, saying, "We don't now and we never will again. You're awesome."

Freedom Project starts a year-long apprenticeship program for a dozen volunteers to learn how to share the practice of NVC inside prisons. The program starts with a two-day workshop Jan. 24-25, followed by monthly one-day workshops at the Freedom Project office. Rena Patty, the course facilitator, is a certified trainer who studied under Marshall Rosenberg. If interested, please contact Freedom Project.

We gratefully acknowledge financial contributions made to honor the following:

Fran Howard
Martha Comfort
Gary Caughey

Penny MacElween-Hoehn
Rusty Thomas
Sam Baker

Randy Reed
Sherwood Knight