



# Connect!

Freedom Project Newsletter

Supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers

November 2015/ Issue 8

## Freedom Project aims for racial equity

by Emanuel “Mano” da Silva



Emanuel “Mano” da Silva, a recent UW graduate with an M.A. in social work, joins the Freedom Project staff as investments and partnerships coordinator. He is responsible for outreach, building lasting relationships to bolster Freedom Project’s viability and financial security.

Freedom Project recognizes that it needs to address racial equity in its board, staff and volunteer corps in order to work effectively within a racist criminal justice system. As we know, our current prison system incarcerates a higher percentage of blacks than South Africa ever did during Apartheid. It has become clear that Freedom Project must engage in racial equity work so that we don’t perpetuate racist practices.

As a skinny nine-year-old I was hassled by police officers while walking down an alley; they laughed at me when they saw how afraid I was. I still experience this scenario quite often. This kind of thing never happens to my white friends, and if I tell them of my hassles they are incredulous or, worse, they think I exaggerate. The fact is that in the United States one in three black men will be imprisoned in their lifetime, compared to one in 17 white men.

It is not one individual or one policy that is responsible for this difference in outcomes for blacks and whites. Disparities are woven into the social fabric by a dominant culture of privilege, power and economic prowess. And once you’ve been imprisoned and return to society, it is difficult to find housing and work so that you can prosper.

In our racial equity work we are educating ourselves about the inequality we perpetuate individually and as an organization. Freedom Project’s first step in this endeavor to address racism is to participate in workshops that involve the whole organization, its board, staff and volunteers. Together we are developing a framework that can help us deal with racial inequality as we strive for social justice. Come and join us in this vital and exciting work!

## Board of Directors

Emily Lundell

Anne Barnes

Martha Comfort

Daniel McInally

Fran Howard

Gailen Baber

P. Keenen

## Staff

KC Young

Jenny Goodwine

Brian Chang

Mano da Silva

Kim Nonen

Joanie Ingles, intern

Zackery Driver

## Staff Changes:

Kim Nonen joined

our team in

September as the

volunteer services

manager. She previously

managed the volunteer program

at Elizabeth Gregory Homes in

the University District.



After a year of  
interning in the  
prison programs,

Jenny Goodwine

takes the helm as

prison programs director.



Zackery Driver

joins Mano da Silva

part-time in his

work as

investments and

partnership coordinator.



Our intern, Joanie

Ingles, a MSW

candidate at the

UW, focuses on

community

outreach and racial equity.



## Prison families learn to listen deeply

by Fran Howard

During a workshop at the Monroe prison over a year ago we used role-play to demonstrate how Nonviolent Communication (NVC) could be used in difficult exchanges. One of the role-plays involved a prisoner and his visiting wife. Instead of a happy experience, the conversation soon deteriorated into a blaming session. The wife lamented the hardship of being a single parent; the prisoner lamented the loneliness of being incarcerated. The dialogue was loaded with “if only you hadn’t...”, “if only you would...”.

Watching this I wondered whether, instead of role-playing, we could have this conversation between the actual persons involved. Could Freedom Project expand its prison program to have workshops for visitors? Could we offer a crash course in empathic listening and how to express feelings and needs without blaming? I shared my idea with our staff and Department of Corrections officials and felt encouraged by the positive response. A flyer was sent out in the prison to share with family members to determine interest. Soon we were making plans.

On the weekend of June 27-28 we conducted our first family seminar at Monroe. On Saturday morning we met with visitors only between 8:30 and 1 p.m. in the visitors’ room, a comfortable space with small tables. The prisoners joined us for the 4-hour Sunday morning session. About 20 wives or partners attended. We were fortunate to have Sura Hart, a certified trainer and volunteer, as lead presenter. We structured the program around Sura’s *No-Fault Zone Game*, an interactive board game that guides participants through self-awareness towards connection. KC Young and Jenny Goodwine were our co-facilitators.

Seated around small tables each family had its own board game, quickly learning the basics of NVC. Soon couples and families were observed listening deeply to each other, diving head-on into their relationship, sometimes with tears, often smiling, as they worked through their issues. We facilitators moved around the room, coaching as needed.

I was deeply moved hearing words of endearment and support as couples expressed their commitment to each other in difficult times. We all shared lunch together, provided by the prison, and afterwards the prisoners and their visitors spent the afternoon together in the visitors’ room.

The feedback we received was all positive. Most participants asked for more opportunities to grow together. In due time, 95 percent of prisoners will return to their families and communities. We believe that NVC family workshops could enhance a safe and happy return. It is our hope that this pilot program will gain momentum and eventually include support groups for families and friends on the outside.

**Following is a thank-you letter from K.L., a prisoner's spouse who attended the family workshop.**

**We need volunteers** to help our work outside and inside prisons.

With some training you can assist in prison classes and workshops; outside roles include committee work, office assistance, community circle stewardship. If interested, please contact [office@freedomprojectseattle.org](mailto:office@freedomprojectseattle.org). We welcome you warmly!

I felt nervous before I met the volunteers and other inmates' family members, but during our first day of working together I became very comfortable and excited to learn some of what my husband had been learning in the classes you offer at TRU (Monroe).

The second day, with my husband and the other men in attendance, it seems like the real work began. It wasn't until he and I played the *No-Fault Zone* game that I really began to understand his experience in prison. He was able to express to me something we had not been able to connect about before. When he shared with me some of the feelings he was having and I was able to guess some of the needs behind them, it was a very moving experience for both of us.

The NVC "Language of Life" communication process has a way of opening up the heart, so we can hear each other through all the filters we have established in the past. I am looking forward to the day my husband is home and we can practice NVC in our daily lives together.

Thank you, volunteers, for offering this valuable tool for families. I am certain our relationship will be stronger as a result.

## **Building hope behind walls**

by Kevin Spangenberg

### ***Interested in NVC?***

To find out about courses offered in your area, please contact [info@nwcompass.org](mailto:info@nwcompass.org), call 206-653-4265, or visit the Northwest Compassionate Communication website [www.nwcompass.org](http://www.nwcompass.org).

There are 23 of us in a circle looking at each other. For 15 weeks now we have sat together, sharing our struggles at a weekly NVC class at Clallam Bay Correctional Center, holding 850 men in medium, closed, and maximum custody.

We've studied Marshall Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication* chapter by chapter and now we review our time together. With tears at times, we've acknowledged our shared humanity and our vulnerability in just living and being present in this world.

Speaking from a place of honesty, I acknowledge each member of the group. "I remember you speaking passionately about learning for yourself how to truly listen to someone else without judgment," I tell one man.

"You rarely spoke in the large group," I remember another man. "But I passed by you once when we were working in pairs and was moved when you said to your partner, 'I am so grateful to be alive. I want to contribute to people's well-being, especially those who are hurting a lot. And I love the person I am today.'"

And I remember a third man: "You talked about how transformed your life has become since being with this group. And while those sitting beside you were teasing your seriousness, you said, 'No, hear me out. Stop and listen to me for a second. My life is changed. I have found a way to see myself and others that transcends all I ever knew.'"

During the last 15 weeks we've explored what it means to live interdependently, sharing our truth and listening with compassion. In this final circle we celebrate our accomplishments and how our hearts have been moved. Together with my co-facilitators we've built a community of hope that transcends walls.

**Seattle's** Community Circle meets every 4th Thursday (except Dec 17) 6-8 pm at the University Christian Church, 4731 15th Avenue NE, Seattle 98105.

**Tacoma's** Community Circle meets every 2nd Thursday 6-8 pm at St. Leo's Catholic Church, 710 S. 13th St., 98405.

# Freedom Project

from prisoners to peacemakers



PO Box 31191  
Seattle, WA 98103



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

Visit us on the web at  
[FreedomProjectSeattle.org](http://FreedomProjectSeattle.org).

## Please join us in giving thanks

by KC Young, executive director

At this time of thanksgiving we review accomplishments of the past year with gratitude. Here are some highlights:

- \* Attendance at our monthly Community Circles in Seattle and Tacoma has doubled;
- \* We've added two-and-a-half new staff positions;
- \* We've participated in the Department of Corrections Pilot Reentry Program;
- \* In September we started monthly orientation sessions for new volunteers;
- \* Over the past 8 months we have conducted racial equity training with the board, staff and volunteers;
- \* We have joined other organizations concerned with safety and quality of life in the University District.

As we give thanks we encourage you to partner with us so that more prisoners can learn Mindfulness and Nonviolent Communication, making our communities safer.

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.

We appreciate your participation!