



# Connect!

Freedom Project Newsletter

Supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers

July 2015/ Issue 7

## Feedback from Mindfulness class at men's prison in Monroe:

*"Freedom Project has absolutely changed my life."*

*"I now take time before reacting when triggered."*

*"The course helped me to come to terms with my crime and how it likely affected the victim."*

*"I have learned to cope with the stress of separation from my family."*

*"I have learned to take time to reroute my trouble thoughts."*

## New weekly NVC class at Gig Harbor

by Valerie Kreutzer

Giving from the heart was the first lesson, and a woman in the circle remembered how she once received such a gift. "A neighbor saw me crying because I couldn't pay the rent. She gave me \$100, no strings attached. Later, when I left, she also wrote me a note of encouragement."

We were meeting for the first class in a course that aims to create a core group of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) practitioners at the women's prison in Gig Harbor. Twenty women had shown up, eager to learn or refresh NVC basics.

"Over the past decade our workshops and classes at the women's prison have been less regular than those at the men's prison in Monroe," Sue McCarthy, the organizer of the class, explains. "One reason for this is the longer travel distance from Seattle to Gig Harbor. But it's the availability of ongoing classes that have so benefited the men in Monroe, we realize. It's the weekly, regular study that shapes new habits and builds support."

"We wanted to offer the women similar training. While women constitute only seven percent of the prison population, two-thirds of them have children under 18; new insights and practices could impact whole family networks."

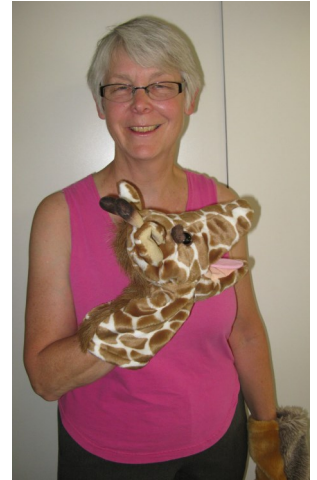
"Since we have a new cadre of volunteers recently trained by Rena Patty, we decided to engage them as guest facilitators for the initial eight-week course starting in May," Sue reports.

Brian Boyd, an organizational consultant from Tacoma, was the lead facilitator for the first two months, backed by Sue and ten volunteers who joined in on different dates.

I volunteered for the first class, when each woman was loaned a copy of Marshall Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication*. When I returned four weeks later the group had shrunk to a dozen learners and advanced to the fifth chapter in the book. By now they had absorbed the vocabulary of feelings and needs and especially enjoyed telling stories based on a "Needs" card drawn from a deck. After each woman recounted an incident from her life, the group had a chance to guess the need behind her story.

"My mother was a drug addict and growing up I never knew what to expect—life was chaotic," one woman recalled. "You had a need for dependability," a classmate suggested. "Right," nodded the story teller.

Sharing personal stories requires safety and trust. "Today I sensed for the first time that the group has become a community," Sue observed after class. Her suggestion to extend the course through mid-August had been welcomed with enthusiasm.



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Tim Conbere  
Jenny Goodwine, intern

## Staff Changes:

Tim Conbere is heading to University of Oregon Law School after 18 months as administrative assistant and producer of the newsletter.



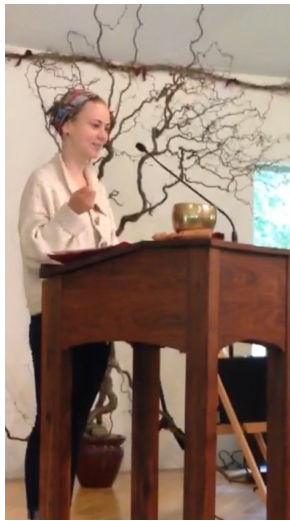
Brian Chang is the new Director of Community & Organizational Development. He will be building partnerships and helping Freedom Project grow as an organization.



## When prison walls crumble

by Jenny Goodwine

During the past year of volunteering for Freedom Project I've gone to prison more than 50 times. When I mentioned that to one of the guys on the inside, as we like to call them, he asked, "Oh yeah? What were you in for?"



Joking aside, I explained that I go into prison with Freedom Project to help put on workshops on NVC and Mindfulness. NVC, as you may know, uses empathy and heart-centered honesty both to express yourself clearly and to listen deeply and compassionately to others. In Mindfulness classes we share practices for greater awareness and self-reflection, which can also help heal and transform painful past experiences.

But let me tell you a little more what it is exactly that Freedom Project strives to co-create with the men and women on the inside.

The Sufi poet Rumi once wrote, "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."

One wouldn't immediately think of prison as the field Rumi talked about, since it is, by definition, a place where people are sent for having done "wrong." Right?

But when folks on the inside and folks from the outside come together in prison classrooms, we co-create Freedom Project. I've seen prison classrooms turn into safe, sacred spaces, where defenses fall away and the quality of connection is so high that labels like felon, violent offender, teacher and volunteer fall by the wayside, and we all come together as humans.

One of our active insiders had this to say about his NVC experience:

"Freedom Project helps me to reconnect by showing the importance of empathy, inwardly to myself and outwardly toward others. I have learned that everyone's needs matter, not just my own. I didn't know or understand this before. I was so focused on judging people and not living in the present. I was projecting onto them what others had done to me, judging them and punishing them with violence and blame and hurting innocent people. NVC has taught me to see the goodness in people instead of staying fixated on the bad, to accept responsibility for the thoughts and feelings I choose to have. I'm proof that it is worth the effort Freedom Project makes to touch and change our lives."

Now, prison is far from perfect, and that is a huge understatement. But I've heard several participants in these workshops and classes say that prison is what it took for them to change. And so, while the system is imperfect, I am inspired to work in a program that helps create opportunities for incarcerated men and women to create peace within themselves, within their communities on the inside, and eventually within the greater community on the outside.

*(Jenny gave this testimony on May 10 at Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Church; that Sunday's plate collection was donated to Freedom Project.)*

## Giving NVC a chance

by Rachel Bryan

**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 [seattlefreedomproject@gmail.com](mailto:seattlefreedomproject@gmail.com). We welcome you warmly!

I was raised violently. I was trained to wear a mask no matter what. Growing up I was an angry child, medication and therapy did nothing for me. When I got older and released from the “cage” my mother had locked me in, I became rebellious, got into drugs, dropped out of school, miscarried at 17, and ran away.

I lost my son at 19 and was arrested and brought back from California to Washington unwillingly. When I entered prison I was furious and confused. I heard about NVC and thought it would be a joke. It would be funny, yet interesting, to see what prison had to say about nonviolence.

At first I repeatedly quit going, yet continued to come back. Three years later I’m staying. I’ve learned there are people who aren’t violent. There are people in the world who won’t hurt me. I became calm and content with my surroundings. I slowly took off my mask and let people become close.

I have learned my true self to be caring and generous. This prison’s classes and the prison itself have saved my life. I am independent, kind and new.

## “My goal is to help healing,” says returnee

interviewed by Valerie Kreutzer

Jeremy Patrick—who goes by his last name—was released only six months ago and already has his own web site: [www.soscommunity.org](http://www.soscommunity.org).

Through the See Our Situations page Patrick offers “resources to ANYONE with questionable desires to help prevent possible offending.” He also offers to help returnees with integration back into society.

Patrick is well versed in NVC, studied it during the last two years of his five years in prison, went to classes and workshops, and became an NVC peer-mentor.

“In prison I learned to stand up for myself. It takes time to know yourself and accept yourself without looking for approval. Now I want to help others.

“There were times when I forced my needs on others, insisting on fulfilling my needs by hurting them. Now I ask myself, ‘What need am I trying to meet?’ I’m trying to find healthy ways to meet my needs; there’s always a healthy way.”

At the coffee shop where we are talking Patrick takes his time to survey his choices, eventually settling on something cool, tall, and creamy; a spinach wrap on the side.

He knows about sandwiches, delivers them daily on his bike from a shop in the SoDo District. “Tips make it a pretty good job,” he says, “and biking gives me this sense of freedom.” Starting from his Seatac home and delivering within a one-mile radius, he pedals some 50 miles-a-day.

Biking aside, Patrick feels passionate about starting his own nonprofit for counseling, teaching and speaking publicly. “I want to help a person stop offending and not go to prison,” he says. “Prison is for a person who cannot stop offending, harming and damaging.”

He corresponds with persons who suffer from bad choices. “Marshall Rosenberg talks about ‘tragic expressions of unmet needs.’ Once you understand that, you can help yourself and others.”

### 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).

**Seattle’s** Community Circle meets every 4th Thursday 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  
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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 [FreedomProjectSeattle.org](http://FreedomProjectSeattle.org).

The Puyallup Tribe



of Indians



## Votes of Confidence

*by KC Young*

The small but mighty staff of Freedom Project often talk about ways to have our programs grow both inside and outside of prison. Sometimes we long for more resources to help this growth occur. In the last two weeks of May we received some votes of confidence and support to ensure that we can expand some of our outside Mindfulness and Nonviolent Communication (NVC) programs.

One such vote came from the Puyallup Tribe. Through their Charity Trust Fund, Freedom Project has received money to provide books and training services. In their native language the name of this Northwestern tribe means “gracious and welcoming behavior to all people (friends and strangers) who enter our lands.” This collaborative gift helps further Freedom Project’s mission in changing our community through compassion and understanding – we strive to make our community more gracious and welcoming.

Another gift has come to us from the Tulalip nation through their Charitable Contributions Fund. This money shall be used to provide more programs for returnees after their release from prison. We are eager to provide more Mindfulness and NVC practice groups.

And a third vote of confidence comes from the Lucky Seven Foundation who awarded us money to insure the new prison program at Clallam Bay can solidly begin and sustainably grow.

Thank you for collaborating with us now and into the future!