



Connect!

Freedom Project Newsletter

Supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers

February 2016/ Issue 9

Our outreach increased and our budget doubled in 2015

by KC Young, executive director



It is with gratitude and a sense of accomplishment that I can report facts and figures of the past year:

In order to strengthen racial equity in our social justice work, we began last February to address institutional racism in all aspects of Freedom Project's work and programs. During monthly meetings 15-20 women and men have been examining how privilege and power of the dominant culture affect minorities and people of color.

With partial funding from the City of Seattle we began the University District (UD) Racial Equity Project last September. On a monthly basis 30-40 UD neighbors gather for lively conversation with the goal of establishing a UD Racial Equity Advisory Council. Two community workshops have attracted more than 40 persons interested in an ongoing study of issues that affecting racial equity and the safety of our neighborhood.

Last year over 500 prisoners were issued certificates after completion of workshops and courses in Mindfulness and Nonviolent Communication. We now have 59 volunteers with prison-issued badges allowing them to facilitate our ongoing work in 5 Washington state prisons.

Attendance at the second Community Circle in Tacoma has increased by 76 percent.

It's a mystery and a miracle how our modest finances have supported all of our activities and programs. Luckily, small checks and several generous donations doubled our budget from 2014. At year's end we were notified that we had received a 3-year, annual grant of \$25,000 from the Satterberg Foundation. We feel honored by the Satterberg Foundation's recognition of our transformative work.

Last year's total income was \$174,137.31. Our expenses, including staffing and operating costs, come to \$163,978.85. We start the new year with \$18,508.46 in the bank, plus the first installment of the Satterberg grant.

The enclosed envelope is a reminder of our need for your ongoing support. We love receiving your gifts! In fact, writing thank-you notes is one of my favorite activities!

When we use NVC to express appreciation, it is purely to celebrate, not to get something in return. Our sole intention is to celebrate the way our lives have been enriched by others.

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Your donations are tax-
deductible.

Visit us on the web at
FreedomProjectSeattle.org.

“I put myself out there in every encounter,” says returnee

interviewed by Valerie Kreutzer

We were to meet at a bookstore on Capitol Hill, strangers who would recognize each other by our short white hair. But on this Sunday morning the place is crowded and too public for the intimate conversation we had planned. So we end up in the little office at my home, with birds feasting from the feeder on the French doors, a bowl with tangerines between us.

“When I look into someone’s eyes, I connect with that person and establish trust,” he says sitting on my sofa. And for the next hour we two practice trust, as he tells me of his sex offender designation and an earlier murder charge. He returned from prison 6 years ago.

He talks about his present life. Up at 4 am at the shelter, where he is surrounded by 60 men in bunk beds. “For safekeeping I sleep with my phone in the pillow case,” he says. In the morning he walks to a temp agency, and if he is lucky he works in construction or landscaping 3 or 4 days a week. On Wednesdays he has to report to the sheriff. He used to work in radio and the music field, “but those doors are all closed now,” he says. Jobs that require background checks usually exclude felons and former violent offenders.

By 6:30 pm he’s back at the crowded shelter where his easy hello opens conversations. ““Oh, let me talk to you,” they say—even members of the staff. “There’s a real need for compassionate listening out there,” he says.

He learned about NVC from Janice Eng and practiced Mindfulness with Ruby Phillips during his time in Monroe. “Those listening skills helped bring about reconciliation within my family,” he says. “I opened my giraffe ears and I could listen to my brother who had cared for my ailing parents for 12 years. I could hear his initial anger without defensiveness; first we talked over the phone, and then, once I got out, in person. Our meeting was very emotional and brought about an understanding born of love. When we experience with the heart, bad feelings evaporate. Now my brother and I are very close.

“It’s so quiet here,” he says as we bid each other farewell in the doorway of my residential neighborhood. He’s heading back into the Sunday bustle of Broadway—a peacemaker on the move.

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. We welcome you warmly!

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.



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,

Why I volunteer

by Anis Gisele

Growing up, I had severe, trauma-related depression and never answered the question "How are you?" honestly. My grandmother enrolled me in private schools and made me promise not to tell anyone about my parents. She told me my teachers and classmates would think I was disturbed if they knew about the people I come from.

When I was 24, I learned that my mother had been arrested. I was unable to feel a straightforward sadness because she had, after all, disowned me when I was 19. I was reluctant to talk about her incarceration with any of the wholesome people in my life. Still, I couldn't stop thinking about her.

I started volunteering at the women's prison in Purdy. What I love best is the women's honesty. You ask a woman in Purdy, "How are you?" and you'll learn about their mother, their grandson, their girlfriend, their cellmate, their sister who is taking care of their children, their husband who doesn't love them anymore.

These women have more empathy to offer each other than most people in my life are able to offer me. They have been through more than most people, for better or worse. When I check in with them at the beginning of class, whether I'm reflecting on my family estrangement or a near-fatal car crash, they always meet me with complete understanding: *Yes, we've been there. Yes, we see you too.*

Renting to returnees

by Patricia Layden

A number of years ago Sr. Patrice Eilers, chaplain at the King County Jail, invited my husband Tom and me to be regular facilitators of religious services at the jail. Later on she asked us to help an inmate by picking up his van from the DOC parking lot. He had been rearrested for a minor offense and was in danger of losing his van, which served as his living quarters and also held his tools for work. We parked his van on our property and when he was released we invited him to stay with us until he found a place of his own. As it turned out, he couldn't find housing and ended up staying with us for 5 years. During that time we became involved with the Freedom Project and started attending Community Circle, NVC workshops, and the Welcome Home events.

Our property includes a cottage and a garage apartment. As we became aware of the returnees' difficulties in finding housing we decided to rent to them when our cottage and apartment became available. That was a number of years ago. Currently we have four returnees as tenants and we couldn't be happier.

Until landlords can no longer refuse to rent to men and women with prison records, returnees—especially those with a sex-offender designation—will continue to have problems finding housing, even when their offense is in the distant past. Based on our positive experience I would like to urge people with available rooms or apartments to consider renting to returnees. They need and deserve a safe place to call home as they reenter the community. Freedom Project keeps a roster of available housing, and Tom and I would be glad to talk to potential landlords about our personal experiences. (You can contact the Laydens through Freedom Project.)

Freedom Project

from prisoners to peacemakers



PO Box 31191
Seattle, WA 98103

Abundance of thanks for NVC

by W.P., Monroe

Thank you for the tools you provide,
Thank you for all that you share.
Thank you for encouraging me to reach out
Not knowing if anyone there.
Thank you for your kindness,
Thank you for your time,
Thank you for continuing to come back
And for not leaving me behind.
Thank you for your examples,
Thank you for your games,
Thank you for your attention,
Thanks for remembering my name.

Thank you for encouragement,
Sometime I want to give up.
Thank you for your empathy
I appreciate it so much.
Thank you for your friendship,
Thank you for your design,
Thank you for giraffe hearts,
All of you are forever in mine.
Thank you for helping me become
The better man I am.
Thanks for the end of my search,
Thanks for being my fam.

Thank you, Jenny, for being the first volunteer to really see me. Thanks Jason, Lloyd, thanks Brandon and Rena, thank you Tara, thank you Kathleen, Rebecca, Akiko, Ann and Kristina. I wish I could give you all the biggest hug ever.