



# Connect!

Freedom Project Newsletter

Supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers

April 2016/Issue 10

## Giving Big with match

by KC Young, executive director

*When we give from the heart, we do so out of the joy that springs forth whenever we willingly enrich another person's life. This kind of giving benefits both the giver and the receiver.*

Marshall Rosenberg



The heart of Freedom Project is connection. In other words, Freedom Project is a “we” program. No single person does this work alone. To prove the point we’ve asked some of our supporters to tell us why they contribute to Freedom Project. Throughout this newsletter you can read their statements of heartfelt giving.

On May 3 the Puget Sound Community celebrates the 6th year of Give Big, sponsored by the Seattle Foundation. On that day many people open their hearts and wallets to support nonprofit organizations; Freedom Project is one of them and counts on your generosity.

*I love having the opportunity to help fuel the mission of the Freedom project, as volunteer and donor. The Freedom project puts into play the powerful combination of compassion and action, shining light behind prison walls where isolation and pain can run high. Each time I've given of my volunteer energy or money to the Freedom Project, my sense of hope for all of us flourishes.*

Brian Boyd

The process is easy: On May 3, between midnight and midnight, you can go to [www.givebig.seattlefoundation.org](http://www.givebig.seattlefoundation.org) to post your donation. This year you can donate as early as April 18 by going to the website, though May 3 will be the grand finale of the fund drive. This year we can match any donation up to \$30,000, a fantastic opportunity! Your generosity will help us extend our programs to more prisoners and their families.

In addition to your own gift you may want to invite family members, friends and coworkers to support our important peace work. Remind them that Freedom Project is involved in making safer communities for us all by supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers.

Thank you for joining Give Big. We look forward to hearing from you and matching your gift on May 3. Please help us transform lives and entire communities!

## Leading Mindfulness is a way of giving back, says returnee

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*I have supported the work of Freedom Project for many years. The underlying philosophy of walking with returnees is so vitally important. It is making our community a much better place.*

Deborah Asavarahapun

*I took a class on Nonviolent Communication. I found it very worthwhile and wanted to pass it on to another who could not pay for it.*

Maryann DiPasquale

*I live in Denmark and I have given to Freedom Project because I so believe in this work of co-transformation and connection.*

K. Bjerke

Rich Blick learned about NVC and Mindfulness as a prisoner at Monroe. For two years he took all the classes Freedom Project had to offer, and found a special focus in Mindfulness practice. Since his return in 2011 he has volunteered at Freedom Project and recently started a Mindfulness meditation and discussion group.

In an interview with KC Young, Rich reflects on his meditative journey.

**KC:** What brought you to your commitment to Mindfulness practice?

**Rich:** I discovered that here was a place where I could be myself. Over time I began to realize that these classes got me out of my self-centered ways and be more understanding and compassionate. These new insights also moved me beyond judgment. In prison I felt stigmatized by the crime I had committed and felt “less than”. Over time I began to bask in the simple acceptance of the volunteers, who held no judgment about what had been but simply accepted me and others as we were. Their unconditional acceptance helped me to believe in myself again. I knew that I could change and be a better person.

**KC:** Why do you want to offer Mindfulness circles?

**Rich:** I knew I wanted to give back to Freedom Project. I had previously led Mindfulness circles at the Seattle Area Support Group on Capitol Hill, and as I deepened my practice I realized that I wanted to become a certified facilitator. Leading Mindfulness groups is one of the requirements of UCLA’s Mindfulness certification program.

**KC:** How does leading Mindfulness circles help your practice?

**Rich:** The collective energy of a circle is powerful. It is my responsibility, as a facilitator, to keep the energy flowing. This strengthens my commitment to practice and deepens my presence with others.

**KC:** What would you say to curious newcomers?

**Rich:** I would encourage them to give it a chance. Not everyone can sit still. We have become so focused on doing rather than on being. The point is not to force yourself. Sit, close your eyes and listen. Listen to whatever comes to you and be with it; just be in the moment. Gradually move into it.

Sponsored by Freedom Project, Rich leads Mindfulness meditation and discussion groups on every fourth Wednesday, 6-8 pm, in the study at University Christian Church. We are looking for volunteers to help members of the staff host the group.

**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@freedomprojects.eattle.org](mailto:office@freedomprojects.eattle.org). We welcome you warmly!

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

Mindfulness meditation and discussion groups meet every 4th Wednesday 6-8 pm in the study at University Christian Church.

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

*I volunteer and donate because I get immense gratification from watching the men in prison grow, change, become free. This work helps to make our world a better place. I need to be part of making our community better.*  
S. Cleaves

## Freedom Project confronts racism

by Valerie Kreutzer

With the help of a grant from the City of Seattle, Freedom Project has launched monthly workshops in the University District to address institutional racism, the undercurrent of the district's many social problems.

"You only need to read about the drug sweeps in the University District to see an example of institutional racism," says Freedom



Project's Brian Chang. "The police are arresting low-income black people for selling, not the predominantly white college buyers who drive the demand for drugs. There is little discussion on how drug trafficking is a symptom of gentrification and poverty in communities of color."

Guided by its mission of healing communities impacted by violence and incarceration, Freedom Project

has started to address structural violence in its own neighborhood, the University District.

"Structural violence is the result of institutional policies and practices that deprive people of basic human needs: housing, education, employment, healthcare and property law," explains Brian, the project's developer. "Institutional racism is an example of structural violence.

"The implementation of the grant covers one year and has four parts," Brian continues. "We started by presenting films and documentaries to encourage dialogue and learning, then moved on to collaborating with activists and community organizers to develop a safety plan. Last month we had a Peacemaking Circle to honor residents' stories of racial injustice in the U District.

"We want to explore strategies with neighborhood associations and maybe even law enforcement. Our goal is to identify issues that are specific and winnable. By the end of the year we hope to leave seeds for a grassroots movement that's sustained by community involvement," says Brian.

Meanwhile, as part of the grant process, Freedom Project has put its own head on the block to examine how racism affects its organizational culture, policies and practices. Based on the analyses of an independent consultant, this work should help Freedom Project create programming that reflects the needs of communities of color.

# Freedom Project

from prisoners to peacemakers



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*I used to volunteer with Alternatives to Violence Project. There I heard about Freedom Project and continue to admire the work they do with individuals who have completed their sentence and are returning to our community.*

Julie Field

*Initially I wanted to support my daughter's involvement. Further, I see that this is a work that needs to be done and it is a work that many of us cannot do. It is incredibly important to provide this opportunity for those in prison.*

Rev. Jan Barnes

*I donate because I volunteer. I volunteer because I care about making a difference for women in prison. Through Freedom Project these women have a better opportunity to resolve both inner and outer conflicts. Then they have the chance to live peacefully.*

Sara Betnel