



Freedom Project Connection

Summer, 2006

A quarterly sharing of inspiration, updates and Freedom Project news and events.

SPOTLIGHTING: You Can Make a Difference: Help Lower Recidivism

By Rusty Thomas

More than 630,000 offenders are released from prison every year across the United States. Half (51.8%) of all released offenders will return to prison within three years. Recidivism affects all parts of the community.

For the past five years, Freedom Project has trained prisoners in Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and mindfulness so that they will have a better chance of succeeding in the community upon their release.

The combination of the practice of Mindfulness and NVC is powerful: mindfulness

practice stills the mind and creates an awareness of habitual thought, feelings, and behaviors so that our actions are increasingly based on conscious choice rather than reactivity, whereas NVC helps people speak and hear in ways that lead them back to their hearts. The two methods combined help cultivate a quality of presence that allows people to experience their connection to all of humanity and to free themselves from habitual life-alienating behaviors.

Freedom Project's prison work has been very successful. The challenge for Freedom

Project has been to follow up with prisoners returning to the community and to provide transitional resources. A Returnee often suffers deficits in life skills as managing money effectively and budgeting for basic expenses; making wise choices around food, exercise, and hygiene; and finding and keeping employment. Without the necessary life skills to function in the community, the Returnee will likely re-offend and recidivate. To address this need, Freedom Project launched a new program named Safe Returns, which

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Freedom Project to Open Office in the Central District

At the time "Connection" is going to press, Freedom Project is in negotiations to lease a house in the Central District for its offices. The building has office space for its

Program Managers, Executive Director and volunteers. In addition, there is a small conference room and space for Community Circles, Returnee Circles and training meetings.

The building is located at 544 27th Street just off Cherry. To celebrate once we've moved in, Freedom Project will hold an open house that will be announced separately.

IRS Approves Freedom Project's Tax-Exempt Status

We are pleased to announce that the IRS approved Freedom Project's 501(c)(3) application giving us our own tax-exempt status. Freedom Project is now able to accept the donations directly and provide Freedom Project's own donor acknowledgement that will be

accepted by the IRS for income tax deduction purposes.

Since 2001, Freedom Project has been able to provide its donors IRS approved tax exemption for all donations because we are a local affiliate of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) which has acted as

our fiscal sponsor. With our own tax-exempt status, we will no longer have to submit donations through FOR. Freedom Project submitted its 501(c)(3) application on April 11, 2006 and the IRS approved our application – in record time – on May 17, 2006

President's Perspective



Susanne Schneider
Freedom Project's
Volunteer of the
Year

“ There are as many different ways of contributing as a Freedom Project volunteer as there are individuals willing to serve.”

I just returned from one of the most important events of the year for Freedom Project – its Annual Volunteer Appreciation. About 25 of us gathered for an evening of mourning and celebration, of being alive and connecting with each other.

As always, I felt incredibly lucky to be part of the Freedom Project family.

As a special surprise to me, I was honored as “Volunteer of the Year”. I am feeling deep gratitude for having the opportunity to be contributing in a meaningful way to the FP’s mission. Having found my particular way of contributing wasn’t straightforward for me. I was originally attracted to the work of the FP by the qualities embodied by the people that make up the Freedom Project – unconditional acceptance, compassion, warmth and the willingness and skill required to enable genuine connection. These were qualities I was yearning to experience, to expose myself to; these were not qualities that I felt were my strengths! As I went about exploring how I could find my place in the Freedom Project, I started out by challenging myself in those areas where I wanted to grow. I went inside prison for a few workshops which was an amazing experience. I started and facilitated an NVC practice group for FP volunteers, which is still meeting twice a month (without me). But it wasn’t until I was invited to serve on the newly formed Board of Directors and was elected President that I found that I could also serve the FP’s mission with my own set of strengths and skills. Suddenly what I contributed came easy to me; I could see that my natural ability to be

organized and goal-oriented and to think strategically was of use, too. I am experiencing the joy of meeting my need for contribution while benefiting from being in a place where I can grow in my areas of personal challenge.

My intention for sharing this personal story of mine is to illustrate that there are as many different ways of contributing as a Freedom Project volunteer as there are individuals willing to serve. You can find your way of contributing to the FP that has the exact mix between offering your strengths and challenging your areas of personal growth that feels right for you. Let’s take the example of serving on the Board of Directors. While I know that, the work of the Board comes naturally to some of the current Board members, for others it is a step out of their comfort zone, an exploration of new territory. And we need all these different people for a well-functioning Board.

The FP Board of Directors is nearing the completion of its first year. Two of its founding members, Cat and Vandana, are stepping off the Board in July, after serving their one-year term.

Vandana Whitney served as the Treasurer and brought her expertise and dedication to this pivotal function. Working with Ruby Phillips, Tanya Baker and Charles Baker (no relation between the two), Vandana established a new and more efficient accounting system for FP. She was also a major contributor to the 501c3 application for our own non-profit status that was submitted earlier this year. Vandana is also a volunteer for the ACLU and is planning to focus her volunteer

time on the coming election year. Thank you, Vandana, for your work and for your presence and voice on the Board.

Cat Gillian’s contributions to the Board include her regular, well-spoken reminders to the board members to also make a financial contribution to the Freedom Project, each at a level that is their personal stretch. Cat was responsible for a successful media campaign to advertise last year’s Annual Fundraiser. She served on many committees and made indispensable contributions to the development of the Strategic Plan and all Board discussions. Cat is stepping off the board to focus her energy on trainings inside prisons and on raising funds and awareness for the FP through performances with Threshold Ensemble like the benefit they performed in June. Thank you, Cat for your work and spirit that you brought to the Board.

This is where you come in. We are currently looking to add several new Board members in order to grow the Board beyond its current size. We are seeking people who are committed to the FP mission and who can enrich the range of skills and perspectives already present on the Board. Given the diversity of the FP’s clients, we specifically want to increase the influence and representation of people of color in the leadership of the FP. If you feel inspired to serve on the Board, are curious to learn more or if you would like to nominate someone you think is suitable, please talk to Jay or myself.

Susanne Schneider
Board President

Compassion and Hope in a Time of Sorrow

By Lucy Leu

We have sad news to share. On May 30, 2006 Freedom Project volunteer trainer Janice Eng was assaulted with attempted rape by Walter Armstrong, former Freedom Project coordinator. Janice was struck several times in the face and she sustained bruises on her face, back and extremities.

As the wave of shock and grief swept over us, the local immediate community gathered in circle to hold our collective pain in silence. Then we each spoke and listened to one another from the heart. We heard *doubt* – doubt about ourselves, about the work we are doing. *Confusion*: How could this have happened? Walter made such a contribution to my life and to many others'. *Despair*: do people ever really “rehabilitate”? *Guilt*: why didn't I challenge Walter more when I saw him less than a week ago? *Fear*: how can we expose ourselves and our volunteers to this kind of risk? *Shame*: how do I face the Department of Correction? (or those family and friends who warned me and thought I was foolish from the start?) *Anger*: how could Walter possibly do this — and to a dear friend who stood up for him a million times! *Anxiety*: if Walter could re-offend, could I do this, could that

happen to me? And is everyone looking at me now and wondering whether they can trust me to be safe? *Resentment*: why is it that this community never heeded the red flags that some of us have been pointing out? *Deep concern*: is Janice doing okay? What will happen to Walter?

Each voice added a piece to the mosaic. With great gratitude for the tools of NVC and mindfulness, we watched our circle grow whole again. Through our grief, we began to discover many things to celebrate, including the fact that within days, over twenty of us were gathered in circle to grieve and heal together.

We celebrate that Janice could stay connected and speak the heartfelt words that finally reached Walter to what he was doing. In addition to other destructive consequences, Janice asked, “...do you also want to make all my prison work meaningless?” At which point Walter broke down: “No, it's not meaningless,” he sobbed; then: “I'm hurting so badly.”

We celebrate that within a few minutes after leaving the scene, Janice had several of us (from as far away as Canada) on the phone with her, supporting her in arriving at clarity regarding the painful

decision to report to the police (especially given the possibility of life imprisonment that another sex offense might mean for Walter).

We celebrate that so many people reached out to Janice, making sure she was never home alone. (As a community, we got to experience the daily fear of being a victim of crime.)

We celebrate that Walter was apprehended almost within a week, we believe in part due to our concerted commitment to everyone's safety -- providing extensive information to police about his whereabouts, patterns of behavior, past criminal history, etc.

We celebrate that Walter did the work (heard the words) that allowed him to stop and step away in the middle of a crime in progress... and that from the visiting booth in the detention center where he is being held, Walter said “Janice did the right thing.”

Our community is recovering, we are regaining balance, and even finding inspiration in the learning and healing that this event has initiated. We know it is not over. We ask for your support, your wisdom, and any words that help us see ourselves and our work in a clear light.



Lucy Leu
Founder,
Freedom Project

“We celebrate that Janice could stay connected and speak the heartfelt words that finally reached Walter to what he was doing.”

Give from the Heart

Freedom Project is making every effort to become a community based, self-sustaining organization. Our work depends on the generosity of donors like you who honor the work that we are doing and want to sustain and support our efforts. As Freedom Project attempts to extend the reach of its programs, we need

your support now more than ever before. If your heart is touched by what you learn in this newsletter about Freedom Project and you haven't given recently, consider a donation now using the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Give generously to the maximum extent that your resources allow so that we

can build safer communities together. All contributions to Freedom Project are income tax deductible.

We will receive your gift from the heart with deep appreciation. We honor the spirit of generosity in each contribution by using our financial resources carefully and mindfully.



Website: freedom-project.org

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FREEDOM PROJECT MISSION

Freedom Project strengthens our community through supporting the transformation of prisoners into peacemakers. We offer trainings in concrete skills of nonviolence leading to reconciliation with ourselves, our loved ones, and the community. Our work addresses the healing of relationships ruptured by violence and the forging of community founded on genuine safety through connection.

FREEDOM PROJECT VISION

We dream of a world where each person is held in the circle of humanity, where every individual experiences a deep knowing that all members of the human family belong to and are connected to each other. We dream of communities and nations dedicated to nonviolence as a soul force for the healing of all relationships fractured by injury, violence, anger, and mistrust. The Freedom Project offers a new vision of what is possible.