

# Freedom Project

from prisoners to peacemakers



# CONNECTION

Winter, 2008

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

## SPOTLIGHTING: 2007 Highlights

By Jay Jackson

**Peacekeeping:** Nineteen people, including returnees, board members and training team members, participated in a nine-month-long “Peacekeeping” training led by Lucy Leu. These trainings in NVC and mindfulness were held on one weekend each month at the Freedom Project office.

**Board Governance:** The Freedom Project board of directors grew from seven members to 11, bringing more diversity and skills to the board. We anticipate adding at least one additional member during 2008. Our board now includes two members who are officers of the Washington State Department of Corrections, two who are former prisoners and another who is a prosecuting attorney for the City of Seattle. It also includes both victims and perpetrators of crime.

**Fundraising:** In 2007 Freedom Project raised more funds from the general public than ever before – over \$50,000 from 206 donors. In addition, a record-breaking \$90,000 was received from four foundations and over \$10,000 from 10 organizations. This financial support enables Freedom Project to expand programs both inside and outside prisons during 2008.

**Finances:** During 2007 Free-

dom Project made significant efforts to reduce costs while maintaining the quality of our programs. The combination of cost-cutting and increased fundraising measures allowed Freedom Project to end the year in the black for the first time ever without dipping into the original start-up money. Thus we entered 2008 with the same amount of seed money as we had at the beginning of 2007.

ceived NVC and mindfulness training and are about to be released. The objective of this pilot effort is to help returnees make a successful transition from prison back to the community by supporting them in finding housing and employment. The success of this re-entry effort is leading Freedom Project to expand this program during 2008.

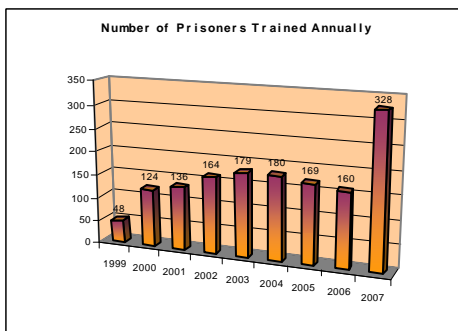
**Community Circles:** In February these gatherings resumed their twice monthly schedule (first and third Mondays of each month). A total of 156 persons participated in this program during 2007, attending 19 meetings.

**Training Team:** We now have a total of 26 trainers providing training for our Inside Prison program. Their efforts and dedication enabled Freedom Project to reach more prisoners and provide more hours of NVC and mindfulness training than any previous year.

**Volunteers:** In addition to the training team and board of directors, there are several other volunteers who support Freedom Project on a regular basis. One volunteer, Dennis Hanson, is creating a database software program of King County resources available to returnees. As we launch our new outside program during 2008, there will be opportunities for volunteer mentors to work with and support inmates as they prepare to be released and re-enter our community. If you are interested in being a volunteer mentor with this new program contact us at [info@freedom-project.org](mailto:info@freedom-project.org).

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**Inside Prison Program:** 2007 saw an all-time record of 328 prisoners receiving 8,091 hours of NVC and mindfulness training.

**Pilot Mentoring Program:** Volunteer Companis Worker to Freedom Project, Tom Serie, piloted a mentoring program to assist prisoners who have re-



*Carol Battistoni*  
**President**  
**Board of Directors**

*“Compassion does not come from wanting to help out those less fortunate than ourselves but from realizing our kinship with all beings.”*

Pema Chodron

## President's Perspective

This beautiful quote from Pema Chodron (left sidebar) has resonated with me from the first moment I read it. The quote seems to so eloquently and succinctly describe what I feel when I go into prison, meet with a client, talk with a friend in need, basically live in the world. It explains where the compassion that I feel towards other human beings comes from. How alive I feel when I realize my “kinship with all beings”, when I share myself with others and they share themselves with me. Since recognizing this in myself I have heard so many others express similar feelings. I have heard many different versions of this feeling from Freedom Project volunteers, returnees, board members, all said in ways unique to each individual saying it.

## Celebration and Gratitude

By Dow Gordon

Freedom Project's prison volunteer team lies at the heart of our continuing success in contributing to the world we all dream of living in – a world where each person is valued for their intrinsic humanness and their ability to cultivate harmony within themselves, their families and their community.

This growing team comprises a diverse group of people dedicated to sharing Nonviolent Communication and mindfulness practice with prisoners. Their determined efforts have resulted in the steady expansion of our programs in both the number of prisoners participating and number of hours of trainings. Without the thousands of hours our volunteers spend facilitating in prisons, driving to and from prisons, creating an increasing variety of curriculum materials, and cultivating a consciousness of connection and community in their own lives, Freedom Project would be serving a far smaller number of prisoners.

We recognize that it's not easy to find time and energy to

I want to take this opportunity to let the Freedom Project community know how grateful I feel for our kinship. Rusty shared with me spontaneously (in the middle of a conversation we were having about something unrelated) that Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is the birthday of Freedom Project. He recalled sitting in prison with Lucy Leu, Mark Goodman and others celebrating over snacks (back when you were allowed to bring food into prison) the birth of Freedom Project! I was touched by Rusty's joyous recollection of that moment. We also shared a moment of sadness that we as a community were not celebrating Freedom Project's birthday on a larger scale. So, I would like to take the opportunity now to wish Freedom Project Happy

Birthday and express my deep gratitude to our community...I am thankful for the brave, committed individuals who followed their vision to the creation of The Freedom Project...I am so grateful for our volunteers, returnees, and staff whose compassion for their “kin” seems tireless and keeps Freedom Project alive...I am grateful for the courageous new volunteers whose presence is like a breath of fresh air...I am grateful we all have each other and may we always know that our compassion for ourselves and others is fueled by our kinship with all beings.

*Carol Battistoni is President of Freedom Project's board of directors. She is also Psychotherapist/Counselor in private practice in Seattle.*

support Freedom Project's work. Our prison volunteers live full lives, with work, family and community responsibilities, and have countless calls for their time and heart energy. It is gratifying and enormously reassuring that these folks offer so much to Freedom Project and the prisoners we serve. Without our volunteers' support, energy, creativity and commitment, it would be impossible for Freedom Project to accomplish a fraction of what we do.

Within our volunteer team we can point to people like Tuere Sala, whose 'day job' is as a Seattle City prosecutor. Tuere offers a unique perspective of Freedom Project's vision in her training of prisoners as well as facilitating trainings in our outside community, all the while serving on Freedom Project's board. Or like Kathleen Macferan, a busy mother of two young children with her own business, who somehow finds time to lead prison trainings regularly. Every one of our prison volunteers can be singled out for their unique

and distinctive gifts. Many volunteers work 40-hour work weeks, and then go into prisons weekly for evening classes or weekend workshops or both. This level of dedication allows Freedom Project to nurture, deepen and expand our programs while connecting with more people in more prisons every year.

All of us in Freedom Project value and celebrate our prison volunteers! In my work with Freedom Project I experience an overflowing sense of gratitude and reassurance in recognizing the quality of life-serving energy that flows through the people I get to work with daily. My needs for fellowship, support, creativity, contribution and commitment to social change are met every day. This directly enhances the quality of my life and allows me to experience being part of a community whose collective hearts and minds serve others through offering learning, community and the chance to live from their hearts.

## Freedom Project Adds Four New Board Members

By Matt Gras

Freedom Project is pleased to announce that Gator Goodlow, Fran Howard, John Page, and Rick Pribbernow have accepted invitations to join our Board of Directors. All bring sterling credentials and a passionate commitment to social justice, and together they add depth and breadth to our already vital community.

**Gator Goodlow** found his path while serving time in prison



for a crime he still mourns: “For years I had suppressed my own needs. The pent-up frustration and fury I experienced escalated into violence and led to the injury and death of another human.

“Today I still mourn that loss and the pain I inflicted. Yet I am also able to celebrate seven years of being a contributing member of society. I am a husband, stepfather, grandpa, Freedom Project volunteer and now also a board member, doing what I can to support young people in creating a peaceful world.” Gator is also the successful manager of a local gym, a certified personal trainer and a certified nutritionist.

“Like me,,” he adds, “most returnees lack a network of close family support. Freedom Project served as that family for me as I walked across the threshold from prison to society. Now I look forward to holding that door open myself as we invite others to join us in a world based on the life-affirming practices of nonviolent communications and mindfulness.”

**Fran Howard** first came to Freedom Project when she at-



tended a fundraiser four years ago, an experience that changed her life.

“I knew immediately that

Freedom Project, with the work it does to facilitate the learning of Nonviolent Communication and Mindfulness, was something I needed to learn more about. I became a volunteer immediately, and soon realized I had a new family, both inside and outside of prison. Accepting the invitation to serve on the board seemed the natural next step in my own transformation and the perfect place to further promote something I so strongly believe in.

“My involvement in Freedom Project is an extension of a lifelong spiritual journey to live with a commitment to justice for the poor and those without a voice, and to provide services to those with more than their share of challenges. I am grateful for the opportunity I now have to use my lifelong experiences, my energies and my gifts in service to my community.”

**John Page** brings to Freedom Project board a wealth of re-



search and analytical skills combined with a commitment to social justice and equality. As a community organizer and

trainer for The People’s Institute Northwest, John coordinates the organizing activities of the regional office and co-facilitates Undoing

Racism training workshops.

As a Transitional Counselor at MCC/MSU and WSRU in Monroe, John helps prisoners develop effective release plans and identify goals that will allow them to successfully transition back into their communities.

John also serves as an organizer and board member of Seattle’s Village of Hope, serves as a facilitator for Bellevue’s A Framework for Breaking Barriers, and was President of the Minimum Security Diversity Committee while at MSU in Monroe.

**Rick Pribbernow** comes to Freedom Project with 14 years



experience as the coordinator of the Parenting and Life Skills Education Program with Compass Health. He

brings with him a lifetime of experience working with children, youth, families and senior adults in education and counseling. Rick has a particular knack for quickly communicating difficult concepts in easily understood ways, and thus helping individuals get in touch with their feelings so they can make life-affirming choices.

“I particularly enjoy empowering youth and adults to create and manage their own community and service programs,” says Rick. “And I love offering peace, hope and love to individuals who have too often felt like they’ve fallen between the cracks and were being overlooked. I now welcome the opportunity to contribute to Freedom Project’s work of helping people transition from prison back into community.”

**“The solution to human destructiveness does not lie in trying to regulate or eradicate it but rather with connecting to a dimension within ourselves in which such behavior does not make any sense.”**

--Sandra Maitri

## Safe

By Katie Talbott

In January I spent my first weekend volunteering in prison, assisting Fran Howard with the NVC Basics class at the Twin Rivers Unit of the Monroe Correctional Complex. When I got in the car that morning with Fran, I took one look at my tiny white-haired companion and decided that I had no idea what I was getting into so I might as well stop thinking about it and start paying attention. Well, I don't know if it was the prison, the people, or just the fact that I was awake, but from the first moment that our circle formed it was a living, moving thing, a crucible of sharing and growth, openness and transformation. I was deeply awed by my experience as a member of that circle and still feel its resonance weeks later.

The most striking effect of that weekend is that I feel more “safe” in my daily life. Some of this comes from feeling more strength in my own being as a result of going somewhere that seemed frightening to me and finding that it was not scary at all but a place where I felt engaged and at ease. Some of this comes from the knowledge that behind the label of murderer, rapist, sex offender, or thief is a real person that I can talk to, and that the language of NVC gives me skills for being able to connect with that person in a way that could diffuse a violent situation. But most important—and most difficult to convey—I came away with the feeling of “safety” even in the face of the real possibility that in the ordinary course of my life I could be attacked myself—that I could be robbed, injured, raped, even murdered.

There is something in each one of us that is so much more beautiful and awesome than our physical bodies, than our thoughts and emotions, than our accomplishments or failures in the world. I have no thoughts about the “nature” of this something—all I know is that I felt it in the room when I sat in that circle of men and women. I felt it *in* each one of us and surrounding us, permeating all of our actions. It was behind all of our words, behind our ability or inability to connect with each other, behind our compassion and our fear, behind our willingness to be alive or our shrinking back. It was a quality I could never describe in language, yet something about feeling it so strongly in our circle allowed me to know it also in myself—this thing in me that could not be injured or taken from me in a crime.

Sitting in this circle of people who have hurt others and been hurt themselves I could also feel how there was no difference between us; in spite of all the superficial distinctions, we all shared the same needs, the same feelings, the same essential experience of humanness. Sharing in this circle I realized how all things are linked together in a vast web; how all beings are part of a much broader picture; and how victim, perpetrator, prisoner, jailer, citizen are all part of an awakening and a being that no one person could possibly apprehend. I left feeling trust in the face of an unpredictable world; safety in the midst of uncertainty and impermanence; joy despite all the betrayals and injuries and terrible ways we

can die; and hope in the face of the seeming logic of revenge. It is a mystery to me that I should be saying this now; it is certainly not that I have no fear of death or disease, injury or attack. But now that's not *all* I have. I also have the awareness of joy, and having experienced it once I want more of it. I want this joy in every part of my daily life, and in desiring it I find that I make room for it, I look for it, I create it. It is this joy that makes me want to look for the humanity in every person. It is this joy that inspires me to connect with who I am. It is this joy that is at the center of Life in every moment. This joy feels more desirable than just the safety I wanted in the past — safety of mind, body, or possessions. And as terrifying as it is to consider, somehow in this joy I am beginning to find a broader, more vulnerable idea of what it means to be safe.

I left the workshop feeling enthusiasm not only for doing more work in prison, but for my life just as it is already, for all the wonder in it of which I had not even been aware. I am so grateful to every person in that circle for their presence and awareness. And as I feel the shape of this new safety when I walk to the store, or talk to a stranger, or go about my work, I think, “Well, I have no idea what I am getting into, so I might as well stop thinking about it and start paying attention...”

*Katie Talbott is a new member of Freedom Project's prison training team. If you are interested in volunteer activities with Freedom Project email us at [info@freedom-project.org](mailto:info@freedom-project.org)*

## Story of Hope from Prison

By Kathleen Macferran

This past October I was scheduled to go into the men's prison in Monroe, WA to lead a NVC basics workshop with a Freedom Project team. I was bringing a guest, and after 4 hours of traveling there, the guest was not allowed to enter the prison because the paperwork could not be found.

I sent the rest of the training team inside and I drove the guest back to the ferry, returning to prison two hours later. I walked into the most amazing scene. There were 25 inmates sitting in groups of five offering each other the gift of presence and deep listening. How had that happened when only a few of the men had any idea what NVC was two hours before and they had spent months or

years avoiding each other on the prison grounds?

They were playing "NVC poker," a game where one person tells a story about a time in his life, the rest listen while holding a handful of cards with a need written on each. After the story is told, each player lays down the need cards they think apply and ask, "Were you feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because you were needing \_\_\_\_\_?"

Example: Were you feeling discouraged because you were needing support?

The storyteller just listens until all cards are down then picks up the ones that resonate the most.

What was amazing to me was the level of presence these men were giving each other, the sincerity of their guesses about needs and the

profound look on the faces of those who were having their stories heard in this way for the first time ever. A sense of hope rushed through me that within two hours such change could occur.

I was flooded with gratitude to know a practical, useable process that has the power to awaken our natural sense of compassion. Sometimes it's hard to believe that in my work I get to experience so much beauty over and over in places few people think beauty resides. This was one of those times. Kathleen Macferran has been volunteer trainer with Freedom Project since December 2004. See her website for other trainings that she offers: [www.StrengthofConnection.com](http://www.StrengthofConnection.com)

***“Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.”***

Martin Luther King, Jr., Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Stockholm, Sweden, December 11, 1964

## Freedom Project in the Community

### Community Program Being Redesigned

Last December the Freedom Project Board appointed a committee to look into designing a comprehensive program for returnees. The committee consists of both Board and non-Board members, both returnees and other community members. The committee will be presenting their recommendation to the Board at its February 28<sup>th</sup> board meeting. It is anticipated that the new Community Program will start in April.

### Training Opportunities

In addition to the many NVC and mindfulness classes that Freedom Project offers in prison each month, we also offer two classes in Nonviolent Communication to the greater Seattle community. One is a full day theme-based class led by Tuere Sala, held the third Saturday of each month (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) at the Seattle First Baptist Church, 1111 Harvard Avenue (at Seneca), Capitol Hill, Seattle. For further information about these classes contact

Tuere at [Tuere.Sala@hotmail.com](mailto:Tuere.Sala@hotmail.com).

The other is an Introduction to NVC class led by Janice Eng, normally held the fourth Wednesday of each month from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. held at the Freedom Project Office, 544 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue (off Cherry), Central District, Seattle. For February and March only, the class is being held on Thursday March 6<sup>th</sup> at the above address. For further information about this Introduction to NVC class contact Janice at [JaniceEng@msn.com](mailto:JaniceEng@msn.com).



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## Make an Investment in Freedom!

Freedom Project changes lives for the better. We have already helped hundreds of inmates and returnees to the community. And we are just getting started.

You can help. If you are reading this newsletter, you are already aware that Freedom Project is a promising solution to the “revolving door” on our court and prison system. So take the next step: make a financial contribution or volunteer. While the IRS will treat your cash donation as a charitable gift, we think it is a powerful investment that will return us all dividends in the form of productive lives and stronger communities. We'll report back to you on just how your “investment” has moved this critically important project forward.

Thank you — because together, we can do great things.

## 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. Freedom Project offers a new vision of what is possible.