CPO Spring 2018 Newsletter

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Cummings Foundation Grant

We are grateful to share that Concord Prison Outreach is a recipient of the $100K for 100 Cummings Foundation Grant! Representing CPO, Kaia Stern, Executive Director and Karen Baratta, Chair of the Board of Directors, joined 300 other guests at a reception on June 7th to celebrate the $10 million infusion into Greater Boston’s nonprofit sector.

CPO will use the grant funds to hire a Volunteer Coordinator who will train prospective volunteers and place them in prison programs.

“We are indebted to the nonprofit organizations like Concord Prison Outreach that have a meaningful, positive impact on the local communities where our colleagues and clients live and work,” said Joel Swets, Cummings Foundation’s Executive Director. "We are delighted to invest in their important programs and services."

The complete list of 100 grant winners is available at www.CummingsFoundation.org.

CPO 50th Anniversary Gala

Please help us update our contact information so that we can keep you informed about the Gala. If we don’t have your preferred email address, you can send it to us either by returning the completed Newsletter Insert (enclosed) or by notifying us directly on our website concordprisonoutreach.org

Check back on the website for further details about the Anniversary Gala.

Invitations, ticketing, RSVP instructions and other information will be sent to your email address that we have on file.

We hope that many of you will join us to celebrate this milestone anniversary!
Path of Freedom®

What is freedom? What is power? What is the meaning of responsibility? These are some of the questions we contemplate and work with in the Path of Freedom program.

“The Path of Freedom® is a mindfulness-based, emotional intelligence (MBEI) model for at-risk and incarcerated youth and adult prisoners developed by Kate Crisp and Fleet Maull. The curriculum includes training in: mindfulness meditation, emotional intelligence, communication, conflict resolution, and various resourcing and resiliency building skills. The program is presented in a non-sectarian manner and is open to participants of any faith and/or those who do not identify with a particular faith tradition. The curriculum has received very positive reviews from experts in the corrections field.” (Excerpted from prisonmindfulness.org.)

Having explored and role-played dysfunctional habitual patterns of behavior, we notice the negative environment that is thus created. Who wants to live in that miserable environment? We explore the possibility of choice based on awareness and taking responsibility for our actions, which leads to better outcomes. Later, we look at how we communicate with others and the difference that can make in our lives and the lives of others around us.

Here are some snippets from the Art of Communication session:

We practice emotional literacy by having everyone check in by identifying how they really feel, using a comprehensive list of the many emotions we all experience in our lives. A participant noticed how his habitual way of expressing how he feels is very limited. After the listening dyads, a participant expressed appreciation for being able to speak and not be interrupted by the listener.

We did a self-empathy meditation. A participant expressed his realization of the importance of self-empathy in order to better understand others and therefore be able to really listen, and “get” what someone is saying to him.

We learned that communication through observation can decrease the potential for conflict, whereas judgement can increase conflict.

At the end of each class, we share our takeaways. We often hear expressions of gratitude that this class is offered. We as volunteers feel the same way.

I have been facilitating or co-facilitating this 12-week program twice a year since 2014 at Norfolk CI. Over the years, I have learned a lot in presenting this program. What it requires is the ability to present the content in a way that brings it alive. This includes not using too many words and allowing for responses and participation from the participants; a certain amount of challenging them; spontaneity, humor, patience, and so on. There have been times when I felt I have not done a good job in presenting a topic but, at those times, I figured out ways to do it better next time. What is great is that the participants bring their own wisdom and observations that help enliven and enrich the class. Ultimately, it is a curriculum that takes us all on a journey that is not so much goal-oriented as discovering the resources we all have within us and being given tools that allow us to access those resources whenever needed for the rest of our lives.

Nealy Zimmermann, CPO volunteer

Why They Write

"Why I write" may be one of the most overused writing prompts, but with good reason. Terry Tempest Williams, along with countless others, inspires writers and future writers with her thoughts on the matter. She writes “to remember,” she writes “to forget,” and she writes "as an act of faith."

There are writers behind the walls of MCI-Concord as well. They have their own reasons for writing.

"I write to inspire myself and others."
"I write to remember and to move forward."
"I write to deepen relationships with friends and family."
"I write because it calms me down."

Our 9-week session was largely based on prompts, some single words or phrases, some poems. As is often the case, the time ends too quickly, just as some of the men are really becoming invested in the process. Towards the end of the program, a student who initially only wrote a few lines now writes a page, opening up, learning things about himself, and sharing himself with his fellow classmates.

And what did they like about the class? On our last day, one man said it best.

“What I liked about this class was that...those who thought they couldn't write found out they could write and found some form of healing in their writing and this helped them grow as individuals.”

Sonia Holley, CPO volunteer and Board Member

Have you noticed our new logo?

Many thanks to the generous and talented Nicola DosSantos for her work with our Logo Committee to capture the essence of Concord Prison Outreach in her design. You can see more of Nicola’s work at www.artnicolastudio.com/portfolio/
Program Update

I am pleased to share recent highlights in program development. Since our last newsletter, CPO has expanded our restorative justice programming; created family programs for the women at South Middlesex; implemented writing programs; and offered a new course on Difficult Conversations born of Harvard Law School’s Negotiation Program. We are also working with the DOC at MCI Concord to begin a Music Program as well as partnering with the DOC at MCI Concord and NECC to grow our Pathways Home Project. Further explanation follows.

We are deepening our work to repair harm through our growing Restorative Justice Program (formerly called “Victim Impact” and now called “Repairing Harm”). The program has expanded to a 33-week course that includes Phase 1 and Phase 2. It is running at both MCI Concord and NECC. (Daria Lyman, new to the CPO Board, is leading this initiative, Karen Baratta is volunteering at MCI Concord, and I am volunteering at NECC.) It is deeply powerful and transformative work. Each phase culminates with a victim impact panel, wherein a victim/survivor from the community comes to the prison to share his or her story. DOC officials participate in the class with the community survivor; they are moved and the course is clearly valued. The DOC at MCI Shirley is also interested in developing this program there.

Women who are confined to prison, most of whom are single mothers with children under 18, long for programs that unite them with their children. Thanks to CPO volunteers, Kat McKee and Beverly Smith, we have had success in establishing the Kids’ Corner and a workshop series (Each One, Teach One: Creative Activities to do with Your Children) at the South Middlesex Correctional Center in Framingham. The workshop series is in two parts. Part I includes the mothers, and Part II, the companion workshop, also includes their children and visitors. In addition to offering more family programs, (many of which Allison Alter, also new to the CPO Board, is helping to develop) and the Career Pathways Program, I will also be working with the DOC and a Harvard Divinity School Student next academic year to explore the possibility of developing more spiritual programming at South Middlesex and MCI Framingham.

Based on The New York Times best-selling book, Difficult Conversations: How to discuss what matters most (Stone + Heen + Patton, 2000), Difficult Conversations is intended to support learning and growth in communication, difficult conversations, and conflict management. The pedagogy involves a combination of interactive exercises, small group scenarios, individual analysis and facilitated discussion. The course provides students with alternatives to past behavior. Its goal is to introduce frameworks and language around difficult conversations that help describe the underlying challenge and provide prescriptive steps that can help participants manage their most difficult conversations. The course content empowers participants to approach their most challenging conversations and relationships with more confidence and skill. With 30 students, we completed the first 4-week session at the beginning of this year and look forward to expanding. (I co-facilitated this course with a new CPO volunteer, Whitney Benns.)

The Pathways Home Project began as a conversation series that aims to assist men with civic reintegration after release from prison. In partnership with Chip Harrington (the Volunteer Services Coordinator for the DOC), we are now offering a “Career Pathways Workshop” at MCI Concord. It is a 7-week course that began in May. We are actively recruiting volunteers to offer the workshop at NECC, South Middlesex, and MCI Framingham. We are also working with the Work Release Program at NECC to identify local employers (there are close to 30) who are willing to speak publically about their positive experiences in hiring people with criminal records.

Governor Charlie Baker recently signed into law the most progressive, extensive, and sweeping overhaul to the Commonwealth’s criminal legal system in decades (S.2371 & H.4012). Thankfully, there is increased appetite in Massachusetts to support prison education and Concord Prison Outreach is well poised to help.

Kaia Stern, CPO Executive Director

Who We Are  

**Staff:** Kaia Stern, Executive Director • Laura Registrato, Program Manager  

**Board of Directors:** Karen Baratta, Chair • Debbie Dormitzer, Vice Chair • Jay Luby, Corresponding Secretary • John Pallies, Treasurer • Julia Woodward, Recording Secretary • Allison Alter • Raju Datla • Larry Green • Sonia Holley • Daria Lyman • Don Miller • **Advisory Council:** Hilary Binda • Paul Caswell • Ginny Conway • Lea Delacour • Beverly Duncan • Mark Fingerle • Lynn Holbein • Holly Lapp • Francine McGrath • June McKnight • Ken Meltz • Bruce Nickerson • Judy Otto • Karen Paradise • Linda Plunkett • Linda Reynolds • Kal Shaner • Nancy Shippen • Phyllis Wentworth • Win Wilbur  

**With Gratitude to Our Supporting Faith Groups:** Acton Congregational, Acton • Acton Monthly Meeting, Quaker, Concord • Carlisle Congregational; Carlisle • Church of the Good Shepherd; Episcopal, Acton • Concord Bahai’s Community, Concord • Congregational Church, UCC, of Littleton • Congregational Church, UCC, of Weston • First Church of Malden Congregational • Faith Community, Hopkinton • First Parish, UU, in Bedford • First Parish, UU, Chelmsford • First Parish, UU, in Concord • First Parish, UU, in Framingham • First Parish, UU in Lexington • First Parish, UU/CC, in Lincoln • First Parish, UU, of Stow and Acton • First Parish, UU, of Sudbury • First Religious Society, UU, in Carlisle • First Unitarian Society, UU, in Newton • Framingham Friends Meeting, Quaker, Framingham • Friends Meeting, Quaker, at Cambridge • Grace Baptist, Hudson • Grace Chapel, Lexington • Hancock UCC, Congregational, Lexington • Harvard UU Church, Harvard • Holy Family Parish, Catholic, Concord • Kerem Shalom, Jewish, Concord • Newton Highlands Congregational, UCC, Newton • Park Avenue Congregational, UCC, Arlington • Second Church, UCC, in Newton • St. Anne Parish, Catholic, Littleton • St. Anne’s-in-the-Fields Episcopal, Lincoln • St. Bridget Parish, Catholic, Maynard • St. Catherine of Alexandria, Catholic, Westford • St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, Catholic, Acton • St. Irene, Catholic, Carlisle • St. John Evangelical Lutheran, Sudbury • St. Matthew’s United Methodist, Acton • St. Paul’s Episcopal, Brookline • St. Peter’s Episcopal, Cambridge • South Acton Congregational, UCC, Acton • Sudbury United Methodist, Sudbury • Trinitarian Congregational, Concord • Trinity Episcopal, Boston • Trinity Episcopal, Concord • United Church of Christ, Congregational, Boxborough • United Methodist, Newton • United Parish, UCC/Methodist/Baptist, in Brookline • West Concord Union, UCC, Concord
A Message of Gratitude from Kaia Stern: "Students give me positive feedback all the time; I can't picture NECC without Concord Prison Outreach programs," said James Mitchell, Director of Treatment at Northeastern Correctional Center in a recent conversation. “The impact of CPO volunteers’ time and efforts is amazing,” he explained, “and it is not isolated to an individual— it touches countless people—the students, their families and communities. We are so appreciative of CPO volunteers!”

Indeed, CPO volunteers are inspiring and so are our students. This summer will mark my third year as Executive Director of Concord Prison Outreach and I keep thinking about the three words we have recently chosen to place under our new logo: Education. Connection. Transformation. In the last newsletter, I wrote that the transformative power of human connection is the soul of our collective work and my gratitude for being part of Concord Prison Outreach keeps growing. Every day I give thanks for being entrusted to help lead the oldest volunteer-driven prison education program in Massachusetts.

Words feel inadequate to express my appreciation for the extended CPO family of volunteers, faith communities, and other donors for your dedication and support. So, I will keep it simple. Thank you! Your time, care, and generosity help to make a transformative difference in many people’s lives. I would also like to extend my personal thanks to Laura Registrato for her invaluable contributions as CPO’s new Program Manager. Laura, I am grateful to be working together! Thank you to our astounding CPO Board, for your gifts and commitment to this inspiring organization. Of course, none of our work would be possible without the efforts of Department of Correction administrators and staff, including those at MCI-Concord, NECC, South Middlesex Correctional Center in Framingham, MCI-Shirley, MCI-Norfolk, Old Colony, Pondville, and Souza-Baronowski Correctional Centers, Middlesex House of Correction, and the DOC Director of Volunteer Services. Many thanks for their commitment to the populations they serve and their support of CPO programming. Thanks to you all, Concord Prison Outreach is working diligently to offer compassion, education, and opportunity to those behind prison walls.

“We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Communications: In the interests of conservation, we are hoping to go paperless in the near future. In addition, we would like to keep you informed via email about our planned 50th Anniversary celebration (scheduled for October 27, 2018 from 4pm to 7pm at Trinity Episcopal Church in Concord, MA). Invitations and important details will be sent to you at the email address we have on file. We do not have email addresses for many in our community. We would be so appreciative if you would either enter your email address through our website or complete and return this form.

Donations: Thank you for supporting our volunteer-led programs. Your donations help to pay for books and teaching materials that support our volunteers. Please consider supporting us so we can continue to offer and grow our CPO programs. Because we are a volunteer organization, your donations go a long way toward providing these services. If you choose to make a donation, please make your check payable to Concord Prison Outreach, Inc. and mail it to 23 Bradford Street, Concord, MA 01742. Concord Prison Outreach, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. We appreciate your tax-deductible support!

CPO WEBSITE: www.ConcordPrisonOutreach.org

--Please return this section to either update your contact information or to accompany your donation or both--

Your name: __________________________________________________________
Address: _____________________________________________________________
Phone number: _______________________________________________________
Email address: ________________________________________________________

When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.

Maya Angelou