Third Graders Study Nonviolent Conflict Resolution

By Suzanne Weishaar, Sustainability Academy Coach

Last February, an eager and excited group of 18 third graders from the Sustainability Academy (SA) bundled up for a chilly walk to the Peace & Justice Center (PJC). They headed to the PJC to participate in the first of a four-part series of lessons focused on learning about peace and nonviolent conflict resolution. The PJC offered to support the students in conjunction with a year-long place- and project-based study called Pedaling for Peace in the Queen City. The SA is the first public elementary magnet school in the nation to have a theme of sustainability where learning experiences are enriched through community partnerships. Working with the PJC created a powerful and authentic connection to our study.

Before meeting with the PJC, our team planned for opportunities for students to explore essential questions like, “What is peace? How can a place help us connect with and promote peacefulness? What makes a place peaceful? How can we create peace in our own lives?” After meeting the lead educator at the PJC, Kyle Silliman-Smith, we revised our lessons to focus on peace and nonviolence. Our new collaboration pushed our school team to elevate our work to include experiences for both adults and students to access their own power, recognize differences, address elements of social justice by talking through conflict, and using conflict as a mechanism to talking about peace.

The goal of the SA is to prepare students to be responsible citizens and agents for change in their community and beyond. The lessons in our study provided a catalyst for our students to employ empathy and grapple with potential situations that would require having the courage to advocate for themselves and for their families, classmates, and community members.

In reflection, the questions posed in our original plans were merely a safe entry point to participate in discussions that offered students the chance to think about peace and justice on a deeper level. When students were asked to reflect on the lessons with Kyle, many of them had strong memories of one lesson that included an art activity used to highlight disparities in access to resources.

One student commented, “I really liked that art project, but it wasn’t that fun ’cuz some people didn’t get enough materials.”
From the Director

Local Inspiration

The world is a filled with ugly realities. It sometimes feels impossible to make a difference. When I see positive change, I cling to it to bolster myself so I can continue to do my part to make the world a safer place for all.

One of my oldest and dearest friends has been successfully facilitating environmental, economic, and social justice through policy change. She is one of the greatest inspirations in my life.

Selene Colburn is many things: mother, partner, librarian, dancer, choreographer, and member of the Burlington City Council. She has been inspiring me for decades: when we started a modern dance company in the 1980s (Contrast), when she convinced me to be in a rock band with her in the 1990s (Muffin), when she suggested we start a statewide abortion fund after George Bush took office in 2000 (Vermont Access to Reproductive Freedom), and most recently in her work as a Burlington City Councillor.

In only two years on the City Council, Selene has put forward harm-reduction approaches to the opiate crisis, worked to preserve endangered pollinators like bees, and most recently, had a big success toward fossil fuel divestment. It is slow work and at times tedious, but through her thoughtful actions, her humble yet assertive style, and her unwillingness to give up, Selene creates change.

As chair of the Public Safety Committee, Selene worked on safe needle disposal. As that process was completed, a member of The Howard Center’s Safe Recovery Program asked her, “Who do I talk to about really save some lives?” (The rate of Hepatitis C or HIV infection from contact with used needles is extremely small.) Selene said, “Let’s talk.” From her there spent hours compiling information about other places who have implemented life-saving measures, and then initiated conversations with members of the Board of Health, the Mayor’s Office and the Police Department. Selene effectively advocated for police officers to be trained and equipped to use Naloxone, an opiate overdose reversal drug. The full police force was trained and equipped in January of this year and within two weeks of the program’s implementation, the first life was saved.

Selene’s collaborative work meant one less person heard that their child, or their parent, had died from a drug overdose. It gives me chills.

Last fall Selene’s daughter Clio, age 11, came home talking about honey bee havens: geographic areas that pledge to provide bees with pesticide-free food, shelter and water. [Special thanks to classmate Zoe Hecht who taught her about it.] Honey bees are responsible for pollinating one in three bites of the food we eat and they are dying [honeybeehaven.org]. Until last fall, Burlington parks were not part of the solution – and you know what that means! Selene was motivated by her daughter and reached out to Leif Richardson, UVM research fellow at the Rubenstein School, to learn more about what we could do as a city. She then took this information to the Parks Department and successfully motivated them to take the pledge to become a honey bee haven. This means they will not spray park lawns with neonicotinoids and other harmful pesticides and, more challengingly, they will source their plants from places that do not treat seeds with neonicotinoids.

Selene’s most recent success started over a year ago when she sponsored a resolution to create a task force to investigate the possibility of divesting the Burlington Employee Retirement System (BERS) from fossil fuel industries. The divestment task force had representatives from city council, BERS, the union, City staff, and a community member with professional experience in socially conscious investment strategies. After laying out the process by which they would collaborate, that group learned about one another’s perspectives and goals and gathered empirical data. They found that the pension fund portfolio is 98% carbon-free already. In June, they unanimously passed a recommendation to BERS to work toward divesting that last 2% and to offset any amount they cannot readily divest with carbon offsets.

We should continue to take to the streets with direct action to protest injustices. We need to continue grassroots organizing and movement building. We need to support direct service workers. We also need to applaud and support the tedious, less energizing policy work of people like Selene, who quietly make a huge difference in both our local community and in the world as a whole.
Another shared the memory of a particular student who “had a hard time – she only got yellow and white. I wanted to give her ideas – it would have been more fun if we could have switched things.”

Our school has an incredibly diverse population with nearly two-thirds of our students living in poverty. This lesson encouraged students to notice when others around them were struggling by recognizing that power differences exist. It was clear that the students noticed inequity and immediately wanted to improve the level of fairness of the situation.

This partnership with the PJC was rewarding in a number of ways including observing students gain new respect for their teachers and classmates as they learned new information about them through games and activities. Students have shared that they continue to use “CLARA” (Calm, Listen, Affirm, Respond, Add information) steps to solve conflict both at school and at home.

As part of our mission to share our learning and work addressing social justice for all people, our students ended the year by taking to the street...by bike. Every third grader learned to ride a bicycle and used their newfound skills to investigate ways to increase access to some of the most beautiful and peaceful places in Burlington. We visited gardens, beaches and parks including some pre-selected “Pause Places” just off the bike path along Lake Champlain.

As a result of our collaboration with the PJC, the third graders at the SA are now better equipped to recognize the need for peaceful solutions and utilize them in times of conflict.

The students have a heightened awareness that there are people suffering from hardship that we can and cannot see. They better understand that it’s everyone’s job to notice these hardships. With practice, they can identify needs and advocate for peace and justice.

Volunteer Spotlight

Healing Through Service

I’ve worked in the Peace & Justice Store for over three years now. I worked with a wonderful woman at Voc Rehab who made the suggestion and it was sort of serendipitous that I came.

Because of oppression in our society, parts of myself were lost and I was struggling in a depression. It was so tough – I was completely lost. I thought that would never happen to me but it did. When I started volunteering here it was part of my healing – a soul retrieval. The PJC helped me call back parts of myself that I had lost – self-worth, self-control, self-love – pretty much anything that starts with “self.” When you experience loss in your life, those parts of yourself disappear. Sometimes you can only fight discrimination and marginalization so long, and then you have to surrender. You either lay down and die or you choose to keep living.

I have continued volunteering because I feel a connection to the community here. It’s valuable for me to know what’s happening in the world and not live in isolation. We live in such a violent society. It’s important to me to have exposure to the peace work here. I also like the fair trade aspect. It makes me feel good that I’m helping people all over the world in my own little way.

I come to the PJC and I feel like I’m with my sisters. It’s a place I feel connected. It’s part of the peace work I want to do in the world. When I first started, I could barely do my job. Now I can not only do it, but I can help other people learn to.

Police Accountability

Fair and Impartial Policing: The State Legislature has passed various versions of bias-free policing bills. The most recent one called for a model fair and impartial policing policy to be adopted by all law enforcement agencies by July 1. The Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council (VCJTC) was to create this policy with Migrant Justice, ACLU, Vermont League of Towns and Cities, and the Vermont Human Rights Commission.

In December, 2015, the PJC, NAACP, and Justice for All were invited to join the process. It was an honor to be at the table with these movers and shakers as we collaborated and met multiple times with police representatives.

After nearly six hours of deliberation, the council passed a much-improved policy on Tuesday, June 14. Unfortunately, it still has some loopholes. The process of working with VCJTC was positive and I look forward to continuing our relationship with them. The PJC will continue to work with the other advocacy groups to monitor law enforcement and work toward bias-free policing.

Help Film Burlington Police Commission Meetings: Recent meetings of the Burlington Police Commission have included discussions about police shootings, community accountability, domestic violence prevention, and the role of the Commission itself. Should these meetings happen in a bubble?

Of course not! And the Commissioners don’t them want to. Are you interested in learning how to use the CCTV equipment to take turns at filming the meetings? The meetings are the fourth Tuesday of each month at 6pm. Please contact Rachel at rachel@pjcvt.org to find out more.
Helping Vermont See Its Whiteness:  
Sowing the Seeds of Racial Justice in the Green Mountain State

By Tim Nyhus

Kyle Silliman-Smith understands that the conversations she’s engaging her community in are going to make some people, particularly white people, uncomfortable. As a white woman speaking to predominantly white audiences in the overwhelmingly white state of Vermont about the shared experience of whiteness and challenging them to consider the implications of white privilege, she’s had her share of difficult moments.

Kyle is the Program Manager for The Peace & Justice Center, a Vermont-based non-profit focused on public outreach efforts to raise awareness about social justice issues. She is a co-facilitator and curriculum builder for the organization’s Racial Justice Program and presents to audiences in community centers, churches, and college classrooms around the state several times each month.

“If I were to break it down simply, I’d say that we offer public education programs that have to do with helping people participate in undoing racism. We’re trying to make whiteness visible to whites,” says Kyle.

After a year in which growing public outrage has resulted in the heightened visibility of the racial injustices of American policing, it might be easy to assume that more conversations about racism are happening. But are they happening where it matters? Kyle isn’t entirely sure.

She acknowledges that feeling outraged over the blatantly racist acts of others is useful on a certain level, but doesn’t believe it’s necessarily effective in the work of helping to create meaningful change. She points instead to the value of creating opportunities for people to turn the focus inward and reflect on the ways in which they benefit from the supremacy of white culture in America.

“When I’m out talking about whiteness, I’m not there to confront self-proclaimed white supremacists. I’m trying to reach people who are racist or perpetuating racial injustice without awareness of it. This is more about encouraging people to understand their privilege and begin finding ways to do meaningful work that they’ll continue day to day.”

It was during an afternoon presentation on the concept of “white fragility” in one of my first-level sociology classes at the Community College of Vermont in Winooski that I first met Kyle. I had never heard the term before then, but was familiar with what it described and was very pleased to have a name for it. I’ve personally seen that fragility surface in countless instances. Family members have been insulted and given me wide-eyed looks of shock and dismay for questioning the prejudices exposed by their behavior or comments. Past friends have put up impassioned but uninformed arguments against my insistence that American society is inherently racist.

Kyle began the conversation by sharing her own experience to unpack in front of her mother brought her and her two siblings along to join The Great Peace March for Global Nuclear Disarmament. They walked from Colorado to Washington, D.C. that fall. Later, during her elementary school years, the family moved to northern California and bought a house in an intentional community made up of all types of people actively working for social change and justice. She spoke about witnessing the non-violent protests that her neighbors were organizing on a regular basis and how that created an early awareness of current events and global injustices that stayed with her as she matured.

“The children of that community played together at recreating what they saw going on around them, and would often construct and perform elaborate stage productions about confronting the most recent issues they’d learned about.

“A meaningful part of my activism as a child was theater. In my adult life I’ve had various jobs and generally they’ve been either theater-focused and I’d input activism into that work, or they were activism-focused and I found ways of exercising my artistic leanings through that work.”

Kyle’s animated demeanor and obvious comfort with sharing about herself in front of strangers are testament to her work on stage and central to her ability to connect with an audience. That afternoon in front of my class, she hadn’t brought a speech to deliver or an indictment to pronounce – she brought herself and her own experience to unpack in front of everyone. The storytelling she employed captured people’s interest right away and her candid description of her own process of learning to question personal perspectives seemed to foster in the audience a willingness to engage. At the point when she acknowledged that, despite her lifelong activism and all of her conscious efforts to confront systems of dominance and oppression in the world, she one day realized she’d never had a serious discussion with other white people about
Reflections on the Fair Trade Federation Conference

By Kristen Connors, PJC Volunteer Coordinator

In April, Amy Crosswhite, Fair Trade Program & Store Manager, and I had the privilege of attending the Fair Trade Federation (FTF) annual conference, held this year here in Burlington. It was an engaging three days of networking with and learning from incredible fair trade wholesalers, retailers, advocates, and activists. We went to ten different workshops between the two of us, and learned new tips and tricks to boost sales and gained insight and advice on how to better train volunteers, communicate to customers about fair trade, and share the wonderful artisan stories.

Part of the conference included an exhibition with 60 FTF member wholesalers. Amy and I had a list of new products to find for the store (including men’s wear, edible products, and hats). The massive ballroom absolutely packed with colorful products was exhilarating and slightly overwhelming. As we wandered through the rows of tables, we got to connect in person with vendors like SERRV, Equal Exchange, and Manish Gupta (the founder of Matr Boomie), who supply some of our most popular products.

We got to meet fair trade celebrities like Rudy Dalvai, president of the World Fair Trade Organization, and Dana Geffner, Executive Director of the Fair World Project. We connected with fellow fair traders who traveled all the way from Swaziland, olive oil from Palestine, and balsamic vinegars and hot sauces from South Africa. Food and product sampling will continue through the summer on select Saturdays.

I personally have made connections that will allow me to continue to improve our volunteer recruitment and training processes. Connecting on such a personal level with people who are deeply committed to the fair trade movement was an extremely valuable opportunity for the PJC. We can now connect with the community in even more meaningful ways, bringing the most up-to-date developments from the fair trade movement to our presentations, our store displays, and you. We are eager to share in more detail all we have learned, so stop by the store and ask us!

Tim Nyhus is a Burlington resident originally hailing from Philadelphia, PA. He is a lifelong student with a primary interest in understanding the systems of control that Eurocentric his-story has embedded in modern life. He dreams of change, believes in Love, and rejects any assertion that, “well, that’s just the way the world is.”

Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.

– Muhammad Ali

July-August-September 2016

peace & justice news | 5

research • policy • action
Robin’s Nest

Preparing for a Just Transition

By Robin Lloyd

At one of the plenary sessions of the People’s Convention & Just Transition Assembly in Montpelier over the May Day weekend, we were asked to turn to our neighbor and find out why they were there. I turned and spoke with Pete Antos-Ketcham, who, it turns out, runs the New Community Project in Starksboro, a group I had never heard of. Commenting on the Convention as a whole Pete said it was “a great get-together…you see others working on the same issue.”

“The same issue” refers to the coming together of the usual separate concerns that animate activists such as worker’s rights, the environment, women’s rights and disability issues, into one concept: Just Transition. This is a phrase developed by a national group Grassroots Global Justice Alliance. The banner across the stage summed it up: “No War, No Warming!” Their mission is to “weave and bridge together US-based grassroots organizing groups and global social movements working for climate change, an end to war, and a just transition to a new economy that is better for people and the planet.”

I was impressed. The 400 participants on that May weekend were taking these words seriously. Young people, women, disabled folks, and representatives from environmental groups (350.org and Rising Tide; the more mainstream groups such as VPIRG and Sierra Club were not present), worked on issues together with dairy workers who make up the nonprofit organization Migrant Justice.

The plight of Mexican worker and Migrant Justice organizer Victor Diaz galvanized the final session and gave spirit to the concluding march to the State House. Victor had been arrested a few days earlier, under somewhat extenuating circumstances, and was facing deportation. We chanted for his release (and indeed obtained it a few days later). The concluding mini-rally at the State House coincided with the separately organized All-Species Day festivities. The artists and dancers added a quality of playful harmony to the end of the Convention: the stag danced with the maiden in a May Day fertility ceremony followed by a maypole dance.

Watch for an article on Migrant Justice’s Milk with Dignity project in the next issue of the Peace & Justice NEWS.

Orlando

“An Afghan-American Muslim walks into a gay club in Florida on Latin night during Pride Month. In my dreams, that is the beginning of another great story of remix, tolerance and coexistence that is possible only in America. In reality, it’s the start of a nightmare massacre fueled by hatred and perpetrated by a man from a group already scarred by a generation of suspicion and surveillance.”

– Bilal Qureshi, a freelance journalist, former NPR producer and editor, and an American Muslim, New York Times op-ed. (Hear Bilal interviewed on the Code Switch podcast.)

“It is with a heavy heart and renewed commitment to a better future that we recognize those whose lives were taken or touched by the senseless murders in Orlando on June 12. We will not forget the lack of safety that so many of us in the Latino, queer, immigrant, and/or Muslim communities feel here in the United States. We will work to educate, advocate and agitate for healthier, more peaceful lives for all. We will not let your lives be in vain.”

– Rachel Siegel, PJC Executive Director
Those who wander are not lost.

By Robin Lloyd

The German word *wanderjahr* gives a name to a custom that is common around the world for young people to take time to wander: to leave home, to meet new people, to see what is happening in the world, to help out, if possible. Providing an international service link to students around the world is the mission of Volunteers for Peace (VFP), whose national headquarters are here in Burlington, Vermont.

VFP was born during the cold war by Vermont activist Peter Coldwell who couldn’t sit idly by while the governments of the USSR and USA put their citizens at risk. It’s clear that the need for dialogue between youth from different countries is as important now as it was almost 35 years ago. Throughout the years, VFP and their volunteers have played an important role in the opening of Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the expansion of voluntary service into Asia, and the development of the first voluntary service projects in Haiti.

I remember the first VFP work camp that was offered here in Burlington in 1984 with the encouragement of Mayor Sanders. The students slept on the floor of the Burlington Friends Meeting House, and helped out at various non-profits around town. I always found it a thrill to pick up a student at the bus station or airport. For them, it was the first step of an adventure into the unknown and sometimes the first journey away from home.

On July 2nd the Burlington Friends will again open their doors to a group from Germany, Italy, Thailand, France, Korea, and the USA. These volunteers will spend three weeks working with Burlington Parks and Recreation and sharing their culture in our community.

Recently, I got a call from the director, Meg Polyte (formerly Brook) that the organization is facing difficult times this summer and needs financial assistance to support the 250 international volunteers who are coming to serve around the northeast US. VFP partially funds their projects in the USA with the $500 registration fee of volunteers who are traveling internationally.

The number of volunteers traveling this year is way down. One reason is the rising fear factor: young people, or maybe more particularly their parents, are hesitant to travel to unstable areas where acts of ‘terrorism’ have occurred, such as France and Belgium, and yes, the US, or where the Zika and other disease have resulted in travel warnings. Secondly, competitive, well heeled service organizations are able to market more effectively, and offer a three week experience with more bells and whistles, but less of a grassroots connection. VFP is unique from all other international organizations because it sends volunteers abroad to serve AND hosts volunteers here in the USA, providing people from around the world the opportunity to become part of reciprocal communities.

Since 1982, VFP has received volunteers from 101 different countries. They have sent over 30,000 volunteers to serve in communities around the world. They are partners of the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) located in Paris.

Please visit the website www.vfp.org, browse around, and then click on the donate button. A contribution to VFP helps break down walls between cultures and nations. And it is tax deductible.

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<th>Wanted: Housing Discrimination Investigators</th>
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Do you think that equally qualified people should be treated fairly? Are you looking for a new way to contribute to your community and earn a little extra money?

The Housing Discrimination Law Project, a HUD-funded project of Vermont Legal Aid (VLA), is seeking housing discrimination testers. Testers are volunteers who can convincingly assume the role of someone seeking housing and then be neutral, objective, and thorough reporters of what they observe during the process.

Testers receive a cash stipend and mileage for each completed test. $

At this time, VLA is in most need of people who are part of a protected class, especially people with apparent physical disabilities, African American men and women, and individuals with linguistic/foreign accents. We are also in need of white men (who are not part of a protected class). Volunteers must be age 18 or older. The time commitment is very flexible. Most testers have full-time jobs or have other educational or service commitments.

To find out more, contact Devon Ayers, Testing Coordinator, Housing Discrimination Law Project, Vermont Legal Aid, Inc. (802) 383-2256 or V/TTY (800) 889-2047 or dayers@vtlegalaid.org. www.vtlegalaid.org.

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*I’ve made my share of mistakes along the way, but if I have changed even one life for the better, I haven’t lived in vain.*

– Muhammad Ali
Fracked Gas Pipeline:
Phase One Phat Lady Refuses to Sing!
By Rachel Smolker

After years of fighting against Vermont Gas’s Addison Natural Gas Project, many activists and people faced with eminent domain “taking” of their property have grown disillusioned. The culmination came last January, when the Public Service Board (PSB) granted Vermont Gas a renewed Certificate of Public Good (CPG) to continue with the construction, in spite of massive escalation in project costs, in spite of rising awareness of climate impacts, in spite of growing concerns about the risks associated with pipelines carrying highly flammable gas, and in spite of ongoing vocal opposition from citizens who had only recently celebrated a ban on fracking in the state.

Groups including Rising Tide, 350 Vermont, Just Power, and Toxics Action had dedicated very hefty capacity to fighting the pipeline for more than two years. The renewal of Vermont Gas’ CPG came as a blow. Since then, some have felt it is time to move on, concede defeat on Phase 1 of the project and move down state to focus on the next phase.

But the situation in Hinesburg offers a renewed opportunity to snag Phase 1 construction.

When Michels Corporation’s construction crews arrived at the edge of Hinesburg last February, people in town started to wonder what was up. The town had discussed the issue a year or so earlier but, so far as we were aware, no agreement had been made and the issue had been on hold while the PSB reviewed the project. Vermont Gas had not said a word to the town of Hinesburg until a prehearing conference was scheduled, even as the equipment was parked at the edge of town. It seemed almost as if Vermont Gas had forgotten about the little town of Hinesburg.

The town’s lawyer, one Select Board member, and one citizen showed up for that event, along with ten or so uniformed police officers, apparently concerned that someone would sing! (Pipeline opponents had disrupted previous eminent domain hearings with music and song.) Vermont Gas lawyers suggested that “since all parties are in agreement” they could expedite matters by finalizing the agreement then and there. No further hearings or fussing would be necessary. Fortunately, that request was not granted and there has, in fact, been a LOT of fussing.

Nobody in town, not even members of the Select Board, were aware that an agreement had been signed by their attorney. Nobody, it seemed, had ever seen the terms of any agreement. The pipeline project page on the town website hadn’t been updated in nearly a year. Questions were asked.

Three months later, the town still has no agreement with Vermont Gas. Citizens charged the Select Board with an open meeting violation for failing to publicly warn a vote on any agreement. Then we circulated a petition to request that the Board not ratify the old agreement. The terms were so wishy washy and non-binding as to be worse than nothing. The compensation Vermont Gas was to offer the town was a pitance relative to what other towns and landowners had received for hosting a massive piece of fossil fuel infrastructure carrying explosive gas.

Geprags Park is unremarkable at first glance from the roadside. An old faded sign and a small dirt parking area is all that marks the spot.
But get out and walk around the place, and the magic starts to reveal itself.

Furthermore, the route of the pipeline was slated to cross the town’s only, and much beloved, public park. Geprags. Vermont Gas wants to lay their pipeline alongside an already long pre-existing VELCO corridor that bisects the park. However, Geprags Park was deemed to the town with a covenant that the town maintain it for recreational and educational purposes only. Permitting a fracked gas pipeline would be a gross violation of that covenant and set a ghastly precedent for any future land donations. And it would damage an ecological gem.

Geprags Park is unremarkable at first glance from the roadside. An old faded sign and a small dirt parking area off the edge of Shelburne Falls Road is all that marks the spot. But get out and walk around the place, and the magic starts to reveal itself. The terrain is largely shrub and grassland, very different from most of the surrounding terrain, with a lovely little stream and fantastically diverse wetland on the western edge. The park is designated by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources as a “Natural Heritage Site,” on the basis of rare plants. It is also breeding habitat for the rare golden-winged warbler. Laughably, Vermont Gas had offered the town one thousand dollars to pay for shrubs to replant and “restore” the warbler habitat following construction.

Many people mistake the mowed VELCO corridor for the pipeline route and assume there would be minimal damage. But in fact the easement is slated to go further to the west, smack dab across that fantastic and diverse wetland area alongside the stream. It is almost as if they took aim at the most destructive path they could find. Members of the Conservation Commission, which is charged with maintaining the park, are seeking to get the easement path shifted over, assuming that if the pipeline goes through, it would be less destructive along the already moved and “maintained” VELCO corridor.

Many people, myself included, have a passionate attachment to this tiny gem of a park. The notion of heavy machinery cutting down the trees, digging up the delicate wetland plants, knocking down the bird nests, leaving the intricate soils rutted and compacted, desecrating this precious pocket of thriving ecosystem.
with a fracked gas pipeline, is simply unacceptable. And the law appears to be
with us. Legal precedent (Middlebury v Central Power) and state statutes (4506)
combine to make a compelling case that Vermont Gas simply does not have legal
authority to condemn an easement across public park land.

The opportunity to argue this case has
now presented itself, on appeal, with the
PSB granting a group of “park users” with
intervenor status. That decision may have
been influenced by increasing pressure
on the PSB to actually represent public
interests (their mandate) rather than the
interests of corporations. We are gearing
up to take the case to the PSB, and if need
be, to higher courts.

Meanwhile, Hinesburg residents are
not sitting still. People are organizing:
attending select board meetings, fundrais-
ing, canvassing, researching and writing,
talking to friends and neighbors, hosting
meetings and events, building trust and
friendships, and fine tuning their commit-
ment and passion.

Not everyone shares the same end
game, at least superficially. There are
some for whom protecting Geprags is the
ultimate goal, while others seek a halt to
all fossil fuel infrastructure everywhere.
But right now we are all paddling down
the same river in the same direction and
doing so respectfully and with urgency.
We know that there have been victories
all around us – with the Constitution and
Northeast Direct pipelines recently can-
celled or postponed. We are drawing our
strength from those victories. We see the
writing on the walls, and smell it in the
wind. We know all that is at stake – from
the golden-winged warblers to the global
climate and our kids’ future. We intend to
work together. Let’s win. Join us!

Please donate to support our efforts.
Donations accepted here: http://350ver-
mont.org/hinesburgs-geprags-park-and-
the-vermont-gas-pipeline/ Or send a
check, marked “Protect Geprags” to the
Peace & Justice Center, 60 Lake St, suite
IC, Burlington, VT 05401. For more
information: info@protectgeprags.org.

What color is justice?
Press your candidates

By Suzi Wizowaty, Executive Director, Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform (VCJR)

A new report from The Sentencing
Project, The Color of Justice1, highlights
the racial disparities in the state prisons
around the country – and Vermont has
one of the worst disparities of all. African
Americans represent less than 2% of the
general population but make up over 10%
of those behind bars. This statistic has
been known for some time, thanks to ex-
tensive data collecting by the Department
of Corrections (sadly now much reduced),
but why aren’t more people paying atten-
tion?

Or rather, what can we do to get policy
makers to pay atten-
tion – especially those
running for office
right now?

The racial dispar-
ities in Vermont’s
and prison have committed non-violent
offenses. About 150 inmates are held sole-
ly for lack of approved housing (at a cost
of $57,000/year), and over 200 Vermont
inmates are housed in a private prison in
Baldwin, Michigan. Vermont has the sec-
ond oldest inmate population per capita
(and not coincidentally the second highest
medical costs per inmate). A significant
number of inmates, male and female, have
not been convicted of any crime but are
“detainees,” awaiting trial or a court date.
Another significant number have been
returned to prison for a non-criminal vi-
olation of their probation or parole. Justice
also depends on geography: what happens
to you upon arrest varies widely from
county to county.

This is what mass incarceration (too
many people) and hyper-incarceration (for
too long) look like in Vermont.

It’s true that Vermont’s prisons are rel-
atively benign compared to those in most
states, and that our criminal justice system
offers significantly more “off ramps” than
most, in the form of diversion to treatment
or community justice centers. It’s also true
that the root causes of poverty, institu-
tional racism, educational failure, addiction, lack
of affordable housing, gender inequality, and
more cannot be addressed overnight. But now is the
time to ask candidates: What will you do to
reform Vermont’s criminal justice system? How will
you address the racial disparities in the
system, from traffic stops to sentencing?
Are you willing to ask, “What do people
need?” rather than, “How severely can we
punish them?” Do you have the politi-
cal courage to increase public safety by
reducing incarceration?

Racial disparities are a symptom of
a larger problem. Now is the time to ad-
dress both. If you would like to talk with
me, call 802-881-5995.

VCJR was a recipient of the PJC’s 2015
Social Justice Activist Award. Learn more
and join at vermontersforcriminaljustice-
reform.org.

(1) http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/
uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-
and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf or
http://tinyurl.com/zonqlor

VCJR
Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform

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CALENDAR

July 12, Tuesday
5:30-7pm, Frederick Douglass Community Reading, Burlington City Hall, Church St side. In 1852, Frederick Douglass, one of our nation's greatest orators and abolitionists, was asked to speak at an event commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In his provocative speech, Douglass said, “This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.” And he asked, “Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today?” Douglass’s speech remains emotionally powerful, thought-provoking, and relevant more than 150 years later. The Vermont Humanities Council is supporting public participatory readings of his compelling speech in over 20 Vermont towns on or close to July 4th. PJC is presenting the Burlington event. For the full list of dates and locations go to www.vermonthumanities.org.

July 16, Saturday
12-5pm, Nonviolent Activism 101 at Pride Center Vermont, 255 S. Champlain St., Burlington. In this workshop, we explore systems of oppression to develop an understanding of how non-violent strategies are effective in taking on violence. Together, we identify oppressive policies, institutions, structures, or practices within our local community. We then practice developing coordinated nonviolent responses to these forms of oppression. We build skills and strategies to lift up local movements and efforts that contribute to a just and peaceful world. Free, but please donate if you can.

August 3, Wednesday
6:30-8:30, Screening of Oriented at Big Picture Theater, 48 Carroll Rd, Waitsfield. This film features three Palestinian friends who explore their national, sexual, and cultural identities in Tel Aviv. They form a non-violent group called Qambuta to represent gender equality. This event is co-sponsored by Outright VT, Pride Center of Vermont, and Vermonters for a Just Peace in Palestine/Israel. $5-$15 suggested donation. No one turned away for lack of funds.

August 9, Tuesday
7-8:30pm, Songs for Hope on Burlington’s Waterfront. Join the Peace & Justice Center for the 71st anniversary of the US bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Community singing of peace and justice folk songs followed by candle boats in memory of those killed.

August 24, Wednesday
6-8pm Frederick Douglass Book Discussion Group at the Peace & Justice Center. This discussion of the life and work of Frederick Douglass is an opportunity to better understand slavery in the United States. We will also consider the Douglass narrative in terms of its continuing implications in the world of contemporary American race relations. For instance, participants might consider reading Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates and compare the way both authors approach the issue of hope and faith in African liberation and survival. Coates’ article on reparations in The Atlantic enables its readers to examine the enduring effects of slavery on African American life. Participants will be sent links to articles on the phenomena of displacement among African Americans who are still struggling to establish a feeling of geographical belonging. Finally, an essay by Robert Stepto, which examines the Douglass narrative and its relationship to Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance, the memoir written by President Barack Obama. This program is designed and led by Dr. Emily Bernard and is supported by the Vermont Humanities Council.

September 13, 20, and 27, Tuesdays
6:30-8:30pm, Building Empathy and Addressing Racial Oppression at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library, 135 Main St, Montpelier. This program gives participants the opportunity to build skills and knowledge to engage in conversations about oppression. Participants are expected to attend all three parts of this workshop. The first session will focus on the concept of white fragility and the struggle for dominant communities to tolerate discussions on race without feeling shame, guilt, or victimization. The second session dives into myths and stereotypes in order to identify subconscious bias and how these bias’ affect our daily lives. The final session offers tools and guidelines for action in order to reaffirm our commitment to creating and supporting an anti-oppressive society.

September 19, and 26, Mondays
6-8pm, Mindfulness for Activists at the Peace & Justice Center. This two-part workshop focuses on ways to cultivate mindfulness in our personal lives and on ways to utilize mindfulness for nonviolent social justice and peace work. Emphasis will be on developing skills in meditation, deep listening, and what Gandhi called soul force. We will explore ways to both see and act on a sense of common humanity which lies deeper than conflict and on the need for self care as activists.

September 24, Saturday
10am-3pm, Nonviolent Activism 101 at Manchester Community Library, 138 Cemetery Ave, Manchester Center. See July 16 for details.

PJC Volunteer Orientations
3-4pm, 2nd and 4th Saturday each month or by appointment. Learn about the Peace & Justice Center and watch a Fair Trade vs Free Trade presentation. We’ll talk about how you can use your skills and interests to help the PJC’s mission in the community. For more information: Kristen Connors at volunteer@pjcvt.org

All PJC programs have limited space. For more information or to register, please contact Kyle@pjcvt.org or call her at 802-863-2345.

If you are interested in hosting or facilitating our educational workshops, contact Kyle@pjcvt.org. To see the full catalog, go to www.pjcvt.org.
**CALENDAR**

**Monthly Meetings that happen at the PJC:**

First Mondays at 7pm: Save Open Space - Burlington.

Second Mondays at 6:30pm: Vermonters for a Just Peace in Palestine/Israel. More information: e-mail vtjp@vtjp.org.


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**Rising to the Challenge: The Transition Movement and People of Faith**

By Vermont author, Ruah Swennerfelt

*Rising to the Challenge* chronicles the history of the Transition Movement (transitioning to a carbon free world) and shares stories from around the world of people involved with Transition, some of whom discuss the how their faith led them to the Movement. Rob Hopkins, the founder of the Transition Movement, wrote the foreword and the book has endorsements by Bill McKibben, Starhawk, Stephanie Kaza, Rabbi Arthurs Waskow, Brian Tokar, and others. [https://transitionvision.org/rising-to-the-challenge/](https://transitionvision.org/rising-to-the-challenge/)

*There will be a book discussion August 18, Thursday 6-7:30pm at the PJC.*

The book is available at the Peace & Justice Store and on Amazon if you want a Kindle version. We hope people will first support their local bookstores and the PJC!

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**Hiroshima**

*By John Hersey, Reviewed by Dylan Kelley*

**Chapter 1: A Noiseless Flash**

“At exactly fifteen minutes past eight in the morning on August 6, 1945, Japanese time, at the moment when the atomic bomb flashed above Hiroshima, Miss Toshiko Sasaki, a clerk in the personnel department of the East Asia Tin Works, had just sat down at her place in the plant office and was turning her head to speak to the girl at the next desk.”

Thus begins the landmark text of *Hiroshima* by John Hersey. Initially published in *The New Yorker* on August 31, 1946, John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* meticulously tells the story of six survivors of the atomic bombing of that city in the previous year. In a slim volume that awakens the consciousness on the brutality and gruesome senselessness of war, Hersey shatters the popular American understanding of the atomic bombings as a celebrated event and set down a new standard for literary nonfiction. The impact of Hersey’s plain and understated prose was such that Albert Einstein personally ordered 1,000 copies for distribution.

By telling the story of the ordinary person’s experience from the moment of detonation, Hersey burns the catastrophe of August 6, 1945 into the modern American psyche as we continue to follow headlines that scream about the dangers of radiation sickness from Fukushima, Vermont Yankee, and countless others.

Reviewing the book in 1946, the *New York Times* writes “Nothing can be said about this book that can equal what the book has to say. It speaks for itself, and in an unforgettable way, for humanity.”

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