



PRISON HEALING WORKS (PHW) TRUST GOES TO NASHVILLE 2012

Theotherapy Project is effective in Prisoner's rehabilitation and reintegration; and Music ministry for Prisoners

By Trudy Stead – Trustee

The reason I undertook this project as a trustee of the Prison Healing Works Trust (PHW) was to fulfill one of their goals, to find out how other countries are doing things compared to New Zealand (NZ) - how they bring a positive change for prisoners, reintegration into the community, and fostering of the spiritual freedom in Christ through prison music ministry.

My first face-to-face meeting with Mark West, Tennessee Prison Project Theotherapy team leader – 26th June - Theotherapy in action at Tennessee Women's Prison. The women were very curious about New Zealand.

I used my spare time from 2pm, to visit the local library called the Z Alexander Lobby, 2301 Rosa L. Parks Blvd., Nashville TN 37228, to do some study on slavery in the south. Around 5pm, Mark West the team leader with his colleagues Megan and John collected me from my hotel and we arrived at the Annex Gate to do theotherapy with the prisoners at Tennessee Women's Prison. About 50 prisoners came out. Mark introduced me to the women and I told them a little about myself, picked up my guitar and played 'This Little Light of Mine', and 'Rimutaka Prison Blues'. The women loved it. They asked questions about New Zealand and I answered to the best of my ability.

Mark drove the team; Megan – Christian Criminologist student (last year of study), John – a psychologist who was keen to use my CD as a form of reaching prisoners, and myself to our various homes.

27th June – I saw where the film 'The Green Mile' was made; the Tennessee Women's Prison showed appreciation of the presentation through a standing ovation.

Mark West collected me at 5.30pm. Megan and John were in the vehicle. On the way to Tennessee Women's Prison, Mark pointed out the old derelict building that was used for the film 'Green Mile'. As we arrived at the prison, I noted the six lots of fences that hosted multi barbed wire over two of the fences. Upon entering the prison, we were all patted down (by female warden), and we walked through the doorway scanner and my left hand with the pad stamp could only be seen under a fluorescent light. This procedure identified my pathway permission of entry. My name was noted on their files about three months ago, when I emailed my documentation to Mark West. Mark worked with the authorities in seeking permission for my entry (two visits).

Once inside the prison yard, I noted that all of the women's tops were tucked into jeans and this is procedural. They must not talk and must walk at all times (not run).

I should like to dedicate my song 'Like a Butterfly' to the Tennessee Prison's Women.

I gave an hour's presentation and the women asked questions about New Zealand and our prison system, 'did we have prisons for murderers', 'yes' I responded, 'Paremoremo Prison'. They asked about gay couples, what was the lowest pay rate, what is the main religion, is there a recidivism level, breakdown in marriages, were there any inter racial marriages to which I answered that I was the result of one. I added that as a social worker I noted that in most cases, solo women are the breadwinners in the families. They were very open and happy to be speaking and listening to me.

I asked the women, 'What programme do you use to come off drugs?' 'Suboxin' said someone. 'Oh not the methadone?' I inquired. 'No suboxin is still another drug but it has less side affects than methadone.' They said. 'What did theotherapy teach you?' They answered, 'How to forgive'; 'acknowledge the problems with self'; and 'how to deal with the feelings of anger'.

I sang the same two songs as the day before that is 'This Little Light of Mine' and I engaged the prisoners, and the song that I wrote called 'Rimutaka Prison Blues'. They gave me a standing ovation – wow that was unexpected. There were about 70 or so women present.

28th June 2012 - The women at Rivera House Transition Home for Women are creative

I met two wonderful ladies who had served sentences in Tennessee Women's Prison: Janice had lived at River House Transition Home for about six years while Cecilia had stayed in River House for about eighteen months. Cecilia was searching for work through 'Career Fairs' on the Internet. The women were intelligent, bright and hopeful. It was a lovely big house and was once owned by Mark and his wife Dana. I was offered a dish of tasty sausage meal that was cooked by Cecilia and it tasted good. I sighted some gorgeous candles that were made by another woman who resided there called Jacinta. Janice talked about her journey through drugs and alcohol, the consequences and the healing through Christ and Theotherapy and the Exodus Programme, a programme that was run in Tennessee Prison.

29th June – The women at Rivera House have experienced trauma and tragedy in their lives – they are ready for positive changes

Sarah collected me at 12pm and drove me to Rivera House. Janice was at her Programme, while Cecilia and Jacinta were going to a Careers Programme. I met Louisa who had a good paying job at a restaurant. I also met Dana, Mark's wife, and Dana's two sisters. Louisa was home and experiencing severe pain all over her body. Louisa said that her GP says there may be a kidney problem or fibromyalgia. Most women experienced some life discomfort that was diagnosed.

The women were well supported by the theotherapy team, and other volunteers in the community that provided transport for the women who needed to get to jobs, doctors, super markets and other places.

The women said that some of their crimes involved driving whilst under the influence of hard drugs and having 'black outs', at the same time they have run somebody down. This is murder and carries a prison sentence of about eleven years. The women were very remorseful.

Some background information about River House

26th June - Rivera House Transition Home for Women

It was built in the 1950's and located in historic East Nashville, the Rivera House Transition Home for Women offers continued therapeutic□ based programming for former female offenders along with practical help in learning job skills, finding gainful employment, accessibility to recovery support groups and a structured environment in which to transition safely. The Rivera House is named in honor of Dr. Mario Rivera Mendez, founder of the Theotherapy model of ministry. The Rivera House is approved by the Tennessee State Board of Probation and Parole and meets the necessary requirements for approved home plans.

Web Address: http://www.theotherapyproject.com/?page_id=1091

Helpful Definitions For The Theotherapy Project - Rivera House Transition Home For Women Nashville:

Services provided at transitional housing facilities vary from substance abuse treatment, to psychological assistance; job training, domestic violence assistance, etc. The assistance provided varies, but it is generally affordable and low cost housing. Read the descriptions of each of the transitional living locations for more detailed information. Transitional housing facilities also may or may not assist with alcohol and/or drug substance abuse treatment.

Prison ministry Songs recorded in Nashville

22nd June – First meeting with Soul Record's producer and songs for prison ministry in New Zealand

I met with producer Eric Cooper and his co-producer Diego from Creative Soul Records. We discussed the rhythm sections for the tracks 'Regular Prison Ministry' and 'Like the Butterfly'. Eric said that Diego was his assistant and that I could be confident in some session work direction from him. Eric had organized a vocalist, a lead/acoustic guitarist, base player, keyboards and drummer for the session work. Eric advised that the musicians would cost between US\$70 to \$100 each plus studio and producer's time. I gave Eric a copy of the CD 'Rimutaka Prison Blues'. Eric said during our conversation, that his wife does court appointed work with the youth. Eric was not the first colleague that I met in Nashville that had some link with people involved in the rehabilitation of offenders.

25th June – The session musicians had backed renowned artists such as Krystal Gayle and Buffie St Marie. Two songs that I wrote were laid down at Sunset Boulevard Studios

I caught a cab from Millennium Maxwell, for Sunset Boulevard Studios in Brentwood, where Cooper introduced me to Steve Dady/Sound engineer and owner of

the Recording Studio, Jeff Roach on Keyboards, and Chris Leuzinger who played rhythm and lead guitar. Chris had formally backed artists such as Krystal Gayle and Buffie St. Marie; Matt Pierson on Base and Dan Needham on drums. I told them about the prison ministry work that I was involved in, in New Zealand, before we were underway with recording. They asked if I could play my songs on guitar. I did so on a borrowed acoustic guitar and the musicians were able to create a unique rhythm section.

The first song we recorded was 'Like the Butterfly (prisoners' rehabilitation through the works of Jesus Christ)'; the song gives the prisoner hope whilst in prison and opportunity to develop spiritually and personally. The song says that 'with Jesus help I'll be easing my way out to be whole and beautiful and free'. The analogy with the butterfly is the initial cocoon state – the prisoner like the caterpillar within the cocoon, develops and grows. Like the caterpillar, the prisoner looks forward to the beauty of freedom in the shape of newfound life. I laid down the vocal for this track but am not convinced that I have 'the right voice' for this particular track. Interestingly, Jeff Roach, keyboardist said that he could hear the band 'The Doors' style in the musical arrangement, hence his playing style for this track. Sound engineer Steven Dady was after particular vocal sounds and expressions and he requested that I record over several times before he came near to satisfaction with the vocal output.

The musicians laid down the full rhythm tracks for two songs, before departing for home or other engagements.

Luke Brown – male vocalist arrived. I sang the song 'Regular Prison Ministry' to relate to Luke, how the words fitted in with the music section. The song was played in a key that suited Luke's vocal range. We finished up around 1.30pm and Steve Dady was left to do some editing. Producer Diego Cardogan drove me to the Seaside Oyster Grill where I had lunch and was later collected by Steve Dady's assistant who drove me back to Millenium Maxwell House (MMH).

IN SUMMARY:

Positive changes can occur with dedicated teams of people like Mark and those in the Theotherapy Project. The Tennessee Women's prisoners respected the Theotherapy team and outside people such as me. The prison visit re-enforced the need for prisoners to have their needs heard and respected. We in New Zealand need to further develop our active listening skills in the prisons and to learn ways in which to engage and to reach the prisoner in order to provide the best means to rehabilitate and reintegrate her/him into our communities. A similar project such as Theotherapy could work in our prisons.

Mark West and the Theotherapy team have supported the women through prayer, guidance and gentle persistence. There have been some remarkable changes seen in the women and I observed that some were keen to get into the workforce; they were ready for changes in their lives and independence.

Nashville project 2012 will enhance the Trust's goal to decrease recidivism through the ministry songs recorded at Sunset Boulevard Studios: 'Like the Butterfly' and 'Regular Prison Ministry'. It was evident that prison music ministry was effective in Tennessee Women's Prison judging by the positive response from the women.

Nashville does boast of some of the world's finest Country style musicians and their talents will add a unique sound to the two pieces of music that I wrote and recorded in Nashville.