

Final Activity Report

1. Purpose of the Research/Activity

Zen Peacemakers is currently in the early stages of the creation of a Residential Training Program at our headquarters in Montague, Massachusetts, USA. Our vision is a new model of Buddhist practice in the world, bringing Socially Engaged Buddhism directly into the inner cities of America.

One manifestation of this concept is Hospice work, finding an enlightened approach to compassionate care for the terminally ill.

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2. Content and method of the Research/Activity

The grant from the Niwano Foundation helped establish the first wave of formal training for practitioners in compassionate care, done over an eight-week period in the Cancer Center at Mercy Medical Center, in nearby Springfield, MA.

The training was part of a program called “Companions on the Journey,” established at the hospital through a two-year grant from the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

We also hosted a workshop in Montague, MA, called “Being with Dying”, led by Joan Halifax Roshi, centered around End of Life care and awareness¹. Another workshop, entitled “Surrendering to the Sacred, was to be led by Frank Ostaseski², but was

¹ Program Description: “This revolutionary and practical training program for health care professionals gives essential tools for work with dying people and their families. The training covers core issues related to dying, death, and grieving; ethical issues in end-of-life care; community building around dying persons and relationship-centered care; cross-cultural and family concerns around religion and ethnicity; approaches to psychological and spiritual care of the dying; the relationship between pain and suffering; peri-death phenomena; and care of the caregiver. Over the years, this program has been a key resource for hundreds of health care professionals in the U.S., Canada, and Europe who are dedicated to transforming the environment around dying. The learning process is rich with seminars, direct teachings, exploratory processes and reflective practices.

² Program Description: “Dying is an opportunity to uncover what is hidden. To see the sacred is to gradually remove the obscurations, the perceptions that block our capacity to recognize the truth of what was always present. Dying is at its heart a sacred act. It is itself a time, a space and a process of surrender and transformation. It reminds us not to waste time, lending a power, grace and fullness to every moment. Within the Buddhist tradition a regular reflection on impermanence is considered a life affirming practice providing an extraordinary opportunity for growth and freedom. Frank will draw on 25 years at the bedside to illuminate the relevance that the lessons learned near death have for all of us in living a more loving and compassionate life. This program will feature discussion, experiential exercises, inquiry and meditation practice. It is open to all and may be of particular interest to professionals or those who anticipate caring for family

postponed indefinitely. We hope to reschedule for later this year.

Our preparation for the Residential Training Program has continued uninterrupted throughout the year; despite obstacles in finances and recruitment, we remain enthusiastic about our proposed September 2008 opening.

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3. Course of actual events

- 3-4 March 2007: “Being with Dying” workshop, with Joan Halifax Roshi, in Montague, MA, attended by 45 people.
- March – May 2007: Eight-Week “Companions on the Journey” Internship in the Cancer Center at Mercy Medical Center in Springfield, MA.
- Throughout 2007 – 2008, various activities relating to the establishment of the Residential Training Program. In April, we will hire an Executive Director of the Maezumi Institute, to begin concrete planning for the arrival of our first residents, including interviewing applicants and the creation of a course curriculum.
- We will also begin a capital campaign in the upcoming weeks, raising money to complete the construction of the residential facilities here.

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4. Achievements of the Research/Activity

We received an overwhelmingly positive response to the workshop led by Halifax Roshi from all those who attended.

The Companions on the Journey program, at Mercy Medical Center, has logged over 600 hours of volunteer time since its inception. Participants in the Zen Peacemaker program completed an eight-week ‘culturally sensitive’ training program in compassionate care, led by Beverly Matekitis, Chaplain with the Sister of Caritas.

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5. Future areas to be pursued

As mentioned above, most of our efforts are currently focused on the Residential Training Program, which we hope will begin in September 2008. Those involved in the program will be training to become Buddhist Ministers – many of whom will, upon completion of the program, go on to open what we’re calling Zen Houses. Similar to the Christian Missions in the Franciscan tradition, these will be located in places as diverse as the inner cities to the forgotten rural corners of the countryside, serving suffering individuals in whatever way they seek help. In some places this might manifest as a counseling and meditation center, in another a place to feed and care for the sick and dying.

members or friends facing life-threatening illness.”