



KEWANEE HORIZONS

SPECIAL

CIRCLE KEEPER

ISSUE

Curiosity

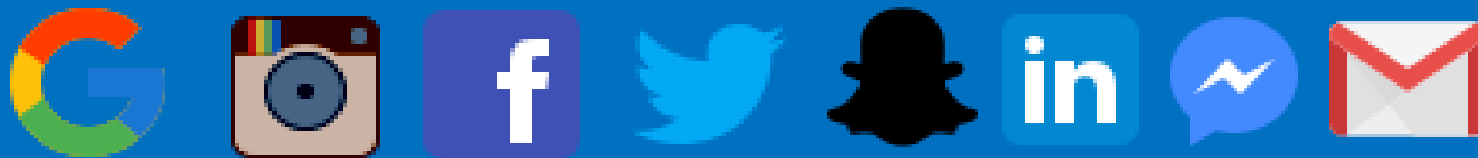
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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

KEWANEE LSRC has agreed to allow us to engage in more **Restorative Practices**. In the Horizons newsletter you will see the terms **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE** and **RESTORATIVE PRACTICES** very often.

The aim of **Restorative Practices** is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships. **Restorative Justice** in general, is a process involving the primary stakeholders in determining how best to repair the harm done by an offense. The three primary stakeholders in **Restorative Justice** are: the victims, the offenders, and their communities of care; their needs are respectively: obtaining reparation, taking responsibility, and achieving reconciliation.

The **Kewanee Horizons** team believes creating a better community here is Restorative. By indirectly repairing damages and by giving back to our current community and with greater communities at large, we are engaging in **Restorative Practices**.

Community: A group of people with a common characteristic
Or interest living together with in a larger society.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Eleventh Edition

MISSION STATEMENT

Kewanee Horizons has adopted the **Restorative Justice** and community theme. Partly because this has been the fight of our lives, those of us who have sought not only freedom in its many forms, but, also a way to give back, rebuild, and uplift our communities.

We give back because of what we have been given. We rebuild, by restoring back to a state of before our offenses. We uplift, by a conscious and consistent effort to better ourselves as well as those around us.

Kewanee Horizons will work to highlight the achievements of our community both on campus and off, inside facilities and outside. Whether individually or collectively and no matter the uniform we wear. We're going to look into the daily lives on our campus and across the state to other facilities on a regular basis. We are hoping to open the eyes to the limitless potential there is in our population, to advocate for more participation in programming, and to give recognition to those who succeed. We want to remain as interactive as possible so **Kewanee Horizons** will be picking your brains for ideas and accepting submissions to make this as interactive as possible.

This publication is put together for the purpose of uplifting mind, body and spirit.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello everyone! I hope and pray that you are reading this in good spirits. This is a well deserved and **LONG OVERDUE** special Kewanee Horizons issue. Here at Kewanee it is no small task to create a welcoming environment for us that are incarcerated. When we arrive here at Kewanee we are not alone. Although we are sent with two property boxes and brought with a busload of other individuals, that is not what I am referring to. What I am referring to is the mental and emotional baggage that we have accumulated over time living within the carceral setting. Although many of us are overcome with joy to finally arrive at what some consider to be “*Prison Heaven*” underneath all that joy is a mountain of trauma and pain that a majority of us haven’t even started to process. Unfortunately, that leads us to believe that the greetings that we receive come with ulterior motives or that there must be a hidden agenda behind every kind gesture. This is where Circle Keeper Training and Circle Keepers fill in a large gap in the process of rehabilitation. Through *CIRCLE KEEPER TRAINING* we are given the tools to talk to individuals in custody not as fellow inmates but as people...as humans. Through indigenous practices we are able to start having conversations that allow individuals in custody to be humans again. With this training we are then allowed the opportunity to host orientation circles for every new transfer that comes to Kewanee within their first month here. This gives us the ability to allow people to air their anxieties out and talk about some of the demons that incarceration allows to possess us. Orientation circles have become a staple here at Kewanee and since I have arrived at Kewanee it has allowed myself and countless others the chance to start to unpack all of the trauma that followed us here. Circles are not only important and essential for those of us who are incarcerated but there are those individuals that are free who also understand its importance. They are taking advantage of the opportunity that they are presented with to do what's not often done in our society and take a dive into the realness of humanity. They are creating safe spaces for themselves and their loved ones including the incarcerated. In this issue you will read articles from the trainers, trainees, and people on the outside impacted by incarceration who are all proud advocates for rehabilitative change and prison reform.

The Circle Keeps Growing: Restorative Justice, Peace Circles, and What We Built Together at Kewanee.

By: Eric Anderson, Restorative Justice Practitioner & Circle Keeper Trainer, Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation

There is something that happens inside a circle that is almost impossible to describe until you've felt it. You sit down as individuals — separated by your stories, your pain, your defenses — and somewhere in the hours that follow, something shifts. The armor starts to come off. The silence between words becomes safe. And by the end, you've become something together that none of you were walking in. I know this because I felt it myself, inside these very walls. I co-founded Kewanee Horizons in 2022, while I was still incarcerated at Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center. At the time, our mission was simple and urgent: to amplify the voices of people across IDOC — to show the world, and each other, that we were more than our worst moments. We were builders, thinkers, writers, artists, fathers, sons, and community members in the making. Horizons became a vessel for that truth. What I didn't fully understand then — but understand clearly now — is that the newsletter and the circle work I would go on to do were part of the same living philosophy. Both were acts of restoration. Both were ways of insisting that human beings, no matter where they are, deserve to be heard and seen.

From the Inside Out

I was released in April 2023. Within months, I was back inside — not as someone who had failed, but as someone who had come home to do the work. Today, I serve as a Restorative Justice Practitioner and Circle Keeper Trainer at Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR), and in close partnership with Sister Janet Ryan, OSF, I have been returning to IDOC facilities — including Kewanee LSRC — to facilitate our 4-Day Peace Circle Keeper Training program. That's 28 hours over four

days. Twenty-eight hours of sitting in circle together, sharing things we've kept locked away for years. Twenty-eight hours of learning to listen — really listen — to each other. Twenty-eight hours of becoming Circle Keepers. Since August 2023, Sister Janet and I have completed more than 25 training cycles, reaching over 700 participants across facilities including Kewanee LSRC, Stateville CC, Logan CC, Illinois River CC, Sheridan CC, and Graham CC. These numbers are meaningful. But they don't capture what I've witnessed in those rooms.

What I've Seen

Kewanee holds a special place in this work. It was where the seeds were planted. And the testimonials that have come back through these pages — through Kewanee Horizons itself — are some of the most powerful evidence I have that the circles are doing exactly what circles are supposed to do. Elbert Conway wrote about his training experience and said plainly: *"Peace Circles can be life changing if you're open to the experience."* He described sitting with sixteen other men for 32 hours, bonding over intimate details of their lives — the kinds of conversations that almost never happen inside a correctional facility, because vulnerability is dangerous in environments built on control. But the circle changed the equation. He concluded that Peace Circles should be offered in every correctional facility in Illinois. Adisa Wheeler wrote about watching me walk into the room as a formerly incarcerated person who had come back to do this work alongside Sister Janet. He wrote that seeing my story and transformation *"is pure joy and inspirational... Not only did he get out but immediately he continued the fight for the people he knew but he also doing it for people he don't know."* That hit me hard when I read it. Because that's exactly why I came back. Not for a paycheck. Not for recognition. But because I know what it means to be in that room, and I know what it means when someone shows up for you. Steven Ford put it in terms I will carry with me for the rest of my life. He wrote: *"Eric, having you in the Circle was big because it gave me something to model. Your participation also showed me that you care about change."* That's the entire philosophy in one sentence. The circle isn't something we do *to* people. It's something we do *with* people. The keeper is not above the circle — the keeper is *in* the circle, bringing the same openness and vulnerability they're asking of everyone else. That's what makes it work.

What the Circle Does That Nothing Else Can

I've worked inside a lot of different program models. I've seen good work being done across IDOC. But I've also watched men sit through programming that talks *at* them — that treats transformation like a curriculum to be delivered rather than an experience to be lived. The circle is different. Victor Ramos described it this way: *“Every wound I have; I healed it with duct tape and continued on my path. But in the Peace Circle, the duct tape was ripped out of every wound... In return I was given the proper medicine to heal with loving compassion.”* Jesse Meyers wrote about one of the most stubborn problems inside any correctional facility — the “us vs. them” dynamic between incarcerated people and staff. He described having a mental health professional sit in the circle alongside everyone else, as an equal participant. *“I have always been aware that in IDOC there exist an Us verse Them mentality,”* he wrote, *“But many of them throughout my sentence have shown me that we are all capable of compassion, empathy, love.”* This is what the circle is capable of doing. Not just healing individuals, but healing the relationships between people who share the same space — and often, the same wounds — on opposite sides of a system that was never designed for any of them to be whole. Kelly Bennett, who participated in a combined Credible Messenger and Circle Keeper training, wrote that after more than two decades incarcerated, *“I have never ever felt freer, after this experience. Mentally, spiritually also physically free.”* He added that IDOC should consider making this training standard — part of orientation — for both incarcerated people and staff alike.

Why I Keep Coming Back

I want to be honest about something. Coming back inside isn't always easy. There are days when I drive to a facility and I feel the weight of the place before I even walk through the door. The smell, the procedures, the particular kind of institutional silence — it all lives in my body. I carry my own history everywhere I go. But I also carry something else: the memory of what it felt like when someone showed up for me. When someone sat across from me in a circle and said, without words: *you matter, your story matters, and you are capable of something more than what brought you here.* That's what Sister Janet did for me. That's what the circle did for me. And that's what I'm trying to offer now to every person who comes through that door. Tyrone Delaney, who participated in a second cohort of training at Kewanee, described watching his peers in circle and wrote: *“I saw*

these brothers shed pounds and pounds of pain, grief, regret and loss. That's the power of the circle." He's right. And that shedding doesn't stay in the room. It goes home with people. It changes how they show up for their families when they're released. It changes how they treat the person in the next bunk. It changes what they believe is possible for their own lives.

The Work Ahead

Kewanee Horizons has always been built on the belief that creating a better community *here* — inside these walls — is itself an act of restoration. That by rebuilding, giving back, and uplifting each other, we are engaging in restorative practice even before anyone calls it by that name. The circle work is the next chapter of that same story. More than 700 people trained. More than 25 cohorts completed. Facilities across Illinois where something new is taking root — where people who've been told their whole lives that they're problems to be managed are discovering that they are, in fact, healers. That's not a program outcome. That's a transformation. I came home from Kewanee. And then I came back — because the work is here, the people are here, and the circle is never finished. ***IT ONLY GROWS.***



BLIND SIDED

By: Demarcus Jaynes @ K.L.S.R.C.

The peace circle blindsided me with a tremendous amount of relevant substance toward embracing individuality, communication, self care, integrity, and respect in a community environment. I was placed in a space with distinguished ladies and gentlemen including staff and facilitators that allowed each and every person to be comfortably vulnerable enough to surface their personalities past present and future with vision, perspective, and most importantly accountability.

The implementation of ritual practices from our indigenous ancestors revealed respectable traditional concepts that enlightened our group on a variety of ways to help ourselves help others and be an asset within any environment. Most importantly not only finding but being driven by your purpose.

I'm forever grateful for the individuals behind the scenes whom selected me to participate, Kuster, the Precious Blood Ministry, and especially the selfless services that Sister Janet and Andrea provided. Their energy is unmatched. **THEY ARE LIFE CHANGERS.**
THANK YOU.



SUPPORT

By: Mari Gonzalez

Back in 2025, my future son in law Julian Alequin or A.J. was constantly suggesting that I sign up for a 4 day Peace Circle Keeper training. Then I had Wendell Robinson (the Executive Director of Restore Justice) also asking me to sign up for that same training. Since 2019, I've been facilitating support groups for people living with autoimmune illnesses. After receiving the circle training the quality of my support groups have been so much better.

I was educated about the special articles to bring to the circle and how using the talking piece teaches us to listen more to each other and value one another's feelings. I love that this training taught us many types of circles, not just one. I use the steps, values, icebreakers, tips, guidelines and closings now in my support groups, as well. I'm looking forward to the day that A.J. is home with our family to have a Support Circle with him and our family. We need to learn how we need to support him to integrate him into our family and in the world that continued while he was on the "inside." He also needs to learn what we expect and need from him.

I'm so grateful that A.J. and Wendell knew that I would benefit by taking this peace circle training. It's helped me and now I can use it to help **SO MANY OTHERS.**



DEAR READER...

By: Julian Alequin @ K.L.S.R.C.

Dear reader,

If you have never been incarcerated allow me to give you a small glimpse into the world that many of us live in. It is a universe all its own. Saturated with antiquated ideologies and toxic masculinity with a splash of homophobia and a thick layer of hyper aggressiveness, it is not necessarily the easiest place to try and grow or evolve, let alone be a “normal human being.” There are some individuals that have the blessing of not staying in so long that it begins to affect them, they are able to “hop in and hop out” without being drenched in the muck that flows through many of these institutions. Unfortunately, there are another select few that have been living in the muck (*even when they weren't incarcerated*) and this is more of their natural habitat, so this has more of a feeling of home. Then there are the “other guys” the individuals who don't really fit in to the mold that the incarcerated world tries to fit them in no matter how hard it tries to bend and twist the individual. It is not easy trying to do everything that you can possibly do to make it home without allowing this environment, which has consumed so many innocent lives, consume your own. Incarceration puts **EVERYTHING** on the chopping block: innocence, personality, beliefs, character, hope, and especially **HUMANITY!** it's up to the individual what he or she allows to be cut. The sad reality is that it is a constant battle to not allow so many different negative mindsets influence your own because you have to constantly be hyper aware of every conversation and event going on around you because if not, you can start to ingest someone else's life lessons and beliefs without even realizing it. I have been incarcerated for over a decade now and there has been more than one occasion where I have said or done something only to realize that it was something that I would have never done or said if I weren't incarcerated. My story isn't exactly a “normal” one. Even though I am from Chicago gang affiliation was out of my league, so my only loyalty was to my daughter and my future. I was a teacher's aide and I had never been arrested or in trouble with the law. I didn't use drugs or drink excessively, I was a guy that was okay with a 9 – 5 and going home at the end of the night. Unfortunately one night of drug use cost me everything.

I smoked something that I believed would do nothing but make me a little hungry but it instead contained something that completely altered my mind and ruined too many lives. I woke up in a hospital, being told that my daughter was hurt and it was my fault. I have been blessed with forgiveness but forgiveness from me has taken time and is still being sought. I didn't enter into the incarcerated world with the slightest amount of preparation for the toxicity that does its best to not only survive but **thrive** inside of these walls. Over the years I have done my best to speak to the community at large about remembering our humanity and the norms of society; where feelings are okay to have without having to resort to violence but, I am only one person. There is also the current rehabilitative and cognitive behavioral push that has been helping but there is always that "icing on the cake" so to speak concerning the changing of minds and hearts. **CIRCLE TRAINING** is that icing. Over the years many of us have accumulated so many different layers from so many different events and just the day to day of prison life that we can barely recognize ourselves at times. The circles and circle trainings give us the ability to start to remove those layers. In the beginning of the circles some of us can start off standoffish or very introverted as we learn to be. Then as we start to pass a

talking piece around and our given the ability to be heard and appreciated and not only tolerated, something amazing happens. We start to be humans again. We start to talk about things that we have had hidden under inappropriate jokes and manly banter for years or decades. Different emotions start to surface and they give us a sense of realness. When we are given the ability to speak without interruption or judgment or when we are asked about our lives and not just our I.D. number, we start to remember that there is a human being under all those layers that has been fighting relentlessly to get to the surface. I have been blessed to be a part of many circles and the shedding of pain and anger that happens **EVERYTIME** not only surprises me but gives me hope. Not that I had lost complete confidence in humanity but the reality is that after so long you can



MEANINGFUL

By: Yamari Gonzalez

My name is Yamari. My fiancée is Julian Alequin or A.J., who is incarcerated at Kewanee L.S.R.C. Naturally, for us, we speak daily about what we are up to. I kept hearing about “Circles” and being trained as a “Circle Keeper.” I had never heard of this before. AJ explained to me the basics and the importance of what circle is and what it means. He was trained by Sister Janet and Eric Anderson from **Precious Blood Ministries** and since then has been asked to be part of circles for those who are new to Kewanee and participate in training others.

My mother, Mari, and I heard of the opportunity to become trained by Ms. Pamela, also from Precious Blood Ministries. I learned that “Circles” means to have a sacred space and to be a “Circle Keeper” is to create that space. Not even knowing, I've been part of circles through organizations like **Restore Justice Foundation**, **Mud Theatre Project**, and **Walls Turned Sideways**. Having the full understanding now, it makes all group meetings more meaningful.

Those who join the space are respectful of the center piece and the “talking piece.” The center piece is made up of meaningful notes, objects, and such that get added as you go along. This way, the center piece becomes meaningful for everyone involved. The talking piece could be any item that will be passed around clockwise. The utilization of the talking piece is to allow each person the opportunity to say all they are comfortable sharing, without interruption. This is a concept I admire and believe to be important. **We ALL want to be heard and understood.**

If you ever get a chance to be part of a circle or become trained as a circle keeper, I say **“GO FOR IT!”** You could then incorporate this practice within your own communities. I enjoy any circles I am part of and cannot wait to host circles of my own with my love, AJ.



FREEDOM

By: Andre Jackson @ K.L.S.R.C.

First giving thanks to sister Janet, sister Andrea, brother Kuster and any other staff of Kewanee life skills reentry center who gave me this opportunity to join the peace circle keeper training, where I found it wasn't just a peace circle training. It was more of a safe space for me as well. It was a structure to create possibilities for freedom. Freedom to be present as a whole human being. Freedom to reveal our deepest longings. Freedom to act in accord with our core values.

Sitting in a circle with a group of people I didn't really know speaking actively was challenging, but through group activities and discussions things were made more joyful. The physical format of the circle symbolizes shared leadership, equality, connection and inclusion. It also promotes focus, accountability, and participation from all. Using very intentional elements like a talking piece from the middle of the circle., which indicate a person having their turn to talk and for everyone else to listen. It also aims to create a space where everyone could be their authentic selves without judgment. This was an inspirational experience and again I greatly appreciate the opportunity.



THE POWER OF THE CIRCLE

By: Ed 'Yahkhah'yil' Willingham @ K.L.S.R.C.

My introduction to a circle was initially through the brothers here at Kewanee, and then I was selected to be a part of Circle Keeper Training, it gave me the opportunity to be in a circle myself. Speaking honestly, when I say it was one of those experiences that you have in your life time that you will never forget, the circle training was just that, something that I pray to never forget. Within minutes of meeting Sister Janet I felt in my spirit why everybody spoke and still speak so highly of her and it is my hope that we will continue a lifelong friendship. Eric Anderson was someone whom I have already known from being a justice impacted individual and someone with whom I have done time with. The days in the circle allowed me to see Eric in another light. I saw a **MAN** who was living his truth doing so through the circle training that he and Sister Janet were having throughout the state. I've taken and taught numerous classes throughout my 30 years of incarceration and when I say that the circle changed me it is still hard to this day to fully explain how and why, but what I would say is, that it is just a special event that you have to experience in order to understand why we all speak so highly of circles and circle training.

My next experience with circle training came when I was blessed to be a part of facilitating a circle myself. Still full of the circle energy that I had just experienced I stood with a couple of brother's and did an **ORIENTATION CIRCLE**. Leaving that circle that day I was just as full as I was leaving the one that I was in. I can't say this enough, "Circles are just something that you have to experience in order to understand



its impact.” Three days after the orientation circle a brother came up to me and thanked me, and when I asked him what he was thanking me for, his reply was, “I thought having to be a part of the circle was going to be corny!” And how he hadn’t stopped smiling or seeing his life differently since he took part in the circle. I simply said to him what was said to me, **“It’s just the power of the circle.”** I close with this: It’s not every day that you have the opportunity to meet a public servant, or legislator. Thankfully Sister Janet and Eric added another type of circle, **THE LEGISLATOR CIRCLE**. The legislator circle came to Kewanee and again I was blessed to be a part of it as well. We all vowed not to speak on what happens in circles that you are in

so I won’t speak on what happened. What I will say is this, once you enter a circle it will move you in ways that you could never imagine. Having James, a brother that we call “Swan” bring legislators to a prison so that they may have the opportunity to see us as a **human** instead of just an inmate is powerful within itself, and then you add that they have come also to be a part of a circle, and you just know, that the power of change is about to happen, because of the power of the circle. The circle training has been nothing short of a blessing to me and I would love for more individuals to have the opportunity to be a part of a circle whether in a prison setting or someplace else.



Sincerely,
Ed ‘Yahkha’yil’ Willingham

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

By: Lewis Bell @ K.L.S.R.C.

The peace circle experience was something different for me and at the same time it was intriguing. I was able to forge a bond with some brothers that I **NEVER** would have spoken to. We have seen each other everyday since we have been here at Kewanee. The peace circle brought us together and we shared personal stories and feelings over a short period of time.

By the end of the week we embraced each other like brothers. We learned that the peace circle is a safe space and it was not only welcoming but non-judgmental. Its about community building, connecting, and healing through indigenous culture. It has been passed down from generation to generation and now that I am a part of the circle I will pass down these teachings I have learned here at Kewanee. I want to give a special thanks to the friends who still remain anonymous for selecting me for this opportunity. I want to also thank Mr. Kuster, Andrea, and last but not least Sister Janet and the **Precious Blood Ministries.**



OUR CIRCLES...

By: Brandon Wilds @ K.L.S.R.C.

What's going on everybody? First and foremost I hope and pray as you begin to read this you and everyone you love are well.

I began this Kewanee journey a little over 2 years ago and I have taken full advantage of nearly every program and class here to not only better myself but to also reach back and try to help others. Amongst the many great opportunities I've had here, I come to you to discuss my experience with CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)/Circle Training. I can go into every detail about what, where, how, and why this amazing thing exists but I am sure other gentlemen already discussed the origins, so I will say thank you to them and not repeat what they have said. Much appreciation to Sister Janet, Eric, Mr. Kuster, Mr. Ross, Precious Blood Ministries, and the administration here because they were all absolutely amazing and without them this amazing opportunity wouldn't exist. I must also say thank you to all the gentlemen that were in the training with me and allowed me to be the authentic, "vulnerable Brandon" that unfortunately doesn't get to come out too often. You embraced me without hesitation and for that I will forever be grateful and remember our experience together.

Upon entering Kewanee you at some point are asked to do an orientation circle and I still remember how amazing and grateful I was walking out of said circle. I also remember thinking to myself "I've gotta get involved!" The ability to create an environment and safe space for men and or women to share everything and or nothing without judgement is in my opinion priceless. So when I was asked to participate in training to be a circle keeper, you bet you're A%\$ I IMMEDIATELY said yes! For four straight days, eight hours each day we shared everything. For each one of those days I felt no longer in prison but free. Free from these prison fences but most importantly free from my internal prison. I remember getting choked up when I was asked who was a hero of mine growing up because truthfully at that moment I struggled to answer. As other men answered and or didn't, some of them had similar answers as myself and it was in that I no longer felt stupid but, more importantly I

didn't feel alone. We are taught not to be vulnerable and that vulnerability is weakness, especially in prison. But I promise you that is **ABSOLUTELY WRONG!** What I had seen in those men (and Sister Janet) in those four days was nothing other than strength, courage, and vulnerability. It takes a real person to open their closet and invite you to look at their skeletons. I've always believed the goal in life is freedom. Freedom from pain, hurt, anger, and sadness but my question to you is what are we without these things? Pain gives us clarity, it gives us perspective and on the other side of pain is **GREATNESS!**

Upon completion of your training, you are asked to conduct an orientation circle with new guys coming to Kewanee and within me being my own worst critic I felt a sense of responsibility and a expectation to give those gentleman everything I was given. Each circle is different and that's what makes them so unique and special! I once again was embraced by a



whole new group of gentleman just as I embraced them. I will remember all of these different roles I have played in this chapter in my life. I wish our world in here and out there was one big Circle! I am truly grateful for everyone that has helped me along the way in this circle of mine and I pray you get an opportunity to find your Circle. I will leave you with five questions and hope they spark a thought, but more importantly a conversation:

1. What would happen if we could really look at who we are, what we've done and where were going?
2. What if we rethought things like kindness, love, and openness?
3. What if we faced our feelings and named them?
4. What if we traded anger and violence for vulnerability and compassion?
5. What if we reconsidered what is strength and what is weakness?

Thank you for your time and God Bless...



PRISON PEACE

By: Ronnie Fobbs @ K.L.S.R.C.

First and foremost I want to thank Allah. God allowed me to be in the position to where I am able to be here today as a changed man. Kewanee and a proud member of the peace circle community gave me an opportunity to participate in this wonderful circle of peace. I was able to enter this circle and for the first time in a long time I didn't feel like an inmate. I felt wanted and happy to be around brothers just like myself. No matter the race or age we are all similar and I was able to see that we were even more similar in this training. As funny as it may sound the peace circle opened me up to peace. Sitting down like there was no concern in the world with Sister Janet and Sister Andrea felt **GREAT**. We talked about how we can bring happiness and a sense of comfortability to each other and to different brothers throughout the facility. I can say that as a member of the circle keeper training it felt unreal to experience that feeling. I also want to thank Mr. Kuster for being a part of that amazing moment. I will also strongly encourage any brother that gets the opportunity to participate **PLEASE DO!** To really experience peace in jail I never thought it existed but it does. I enjoyed every moment and I hope the next group after me gets to enjoy the moment as well.



CONFIDENTIALITY
LISTENING



TRUTH
RESPECT

MY CIRCLE

By: Nicholas Barfield @ K.L.S.R.C.

When it comes to writing articles I try for two things. The first is to convey a way for anyone reading this to actually do whatever it is I'm writing about. I waited 5 years to get here to experience Kewanee only to realize only with a little effort and knowledge I could of participated in the Kewanee experience **WHEREVER** I was incarcerated at. So I'll do my best to supply the knowledge where ,if you want to put in the effort, everyone can have a piece of Kewanee.

The second thing I try to do is give a shout out to everyone involved in making these things possible, because without them I really have nothing to write about. I have missed a few people who are working behind the scenes but without them, you wouldn't be able to read this. First thank you to Melvin and Brandon for stopping and not running away when you see me. Because you know I'm about to drop a million questions about Horizons **EVERYTIME** I see you. Also I would like to shout out AJ. Watching him is like seeing a professional safari wild life photographer for Nat Geo back in the 90's. He's got his camera standing on a table to take a shot, belly crawling under chairs, he's just everywhere.

I also have to give a shout out to Mr. Kuster for being the go to between Kewanee and **Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation** (P.B.M.R.). Mr. Kuster is part of the mental health staff duo. *"Who is the duo, you ask?"* Well...if you can imagine Jack Black in school of rock sprinkled with a little Bruce Lee in 'Enter The Dragon', you'll be able to picture Mr. Kuster. For all of you who were fans of the Tv show 'Small Ville' and wondered whatever happened to Clark? He's under the pseudonym "Mr. Ross" making up the other half of the Mental Health duo here at Kewanee. *Flannel accessories included!* For our friends from **P.B.M.R.** I'd like to thank Sister Janet who makes Whoopi Goldberg in 'Sister Act' look lame. She's the most engaging story teller I have ever met. For four days she kept me hanging on every word, and I'm extremely ADHD. I also have to thank Mrs. Andrea, every time she spoke it brought out a complete belly laugh. For me the belly laugh is extremely rare, so I really appreciated that. I also want to thank Eric who wasn't able to make it but I promise your presence was felt. I also want to thank Cole Stevens and Giovanni Glover. Two very incredible Circle Keepers who volunteered their time to help me and my

Friends through the process of becoming Circle Keepers ourselves. To all the guys who went through the circle training with me It was an honor to go through this process with you. It was crazy the more I learned about each of you the more it helped me learn more about myself. Truly honored!

Now it's time to talk about Circle training, a practice we use that originates with North American indigenous peoples. As a Circle Keeper, we're not only trying to create a safe space, but to use that safe space to build strong healthy relationships. You see there's all sorts of different reasons for a circle, circles for community building, celebration, grief, conflict resolution, and so much more. It doesn't matter how what the circle is being used for, its heart is always the same. Its heart is creating and maintaining a safe space to build those relationships. Here at Kewanee we have a community building circle during our

orientation called a "Welcoming Circle" that to me is the life blood of this place. Because it turns you and the guys you came on the bus with into a class of sorts. Because the circle keepers are helping us build real relationships here. I want the people that came in with me to succeed just as much as I want to achieve myself. Does it work? Here's a real life experience. I came to Shawnee with quite a few people, I have no idea who any of them were, except the one who was my celly. Then I transferred in a packed van to Vienna and even was housed with all those guys on a receiving wing. Again except for my celly I have no idea who they were. But here I know not only everyone who was on that bus with me but everyone who was bussed in that month. Because it's the class of August 2025 that matters the most to me. The ones that were directly in my welcome circle and even those that weren't. Because the ideals behind the circle perforate this entire facility. But enough about how I do it here, I said I wanted to share how you can have your own circle and its time to get to that.



Unfortunately you're not going to have all the props of the circle. And sadly I'm not going to convince anyone to play an icebreaker like duck, duck, goose in your dayrooms. All you need is a minimum of one friend and the willingness to have a real conversation. If you and your friend or friends can make a real commitment to have four principals guide your friendships. It will be a game changer for you because you will have your own permanent circle wherever you are. The four principals are extremely simple:

- 1) Truth. Be real to another.
- 2) Respect. Value your friend or friends.
- 3) Listen. Don't interrupt one another, give everyone a voice.
- 4) Confidentiality. Your conversations are trusted to one another. Its **NOT** for the deck or **ANYONE ELSE**.

The way to make this a Circle is not by just assuming everyone is on the same page. Its discussing these guiding principles and coming to a consensus and agreeing on them. It's how we can change having an acquaintance you "met over a state tray" to a friend that you can lean on during this rough period of your life. I hope you try giving this a chance, and hope you see the positive changes where your at just as I see here.

I try to find a good quote to end all of my articles. The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz is always my main go to because its my favorite book. This quote is actually a dedication of that book. However I haven't read the dedication in years, even though I read a page of this book daily. I do get to leave this article with the perfect quotation because I was blessed by Lewis Bell reintroducing me to this passage when he read it to us during the closing ceremony of our circle. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed listening to it. I think its extremely fitting I close this circle with...

" To the Circle of Fire, those who have gone before, those who are present, and those who have yet to come." Opening page of " The Four Agreements" By Don Miguel Ruiz.



SAFE SPACE

By: Cole Stevens @ K.L.S.R.C.

The orientation circle is just a way for us to say what's up to the new guys, a way to get everyone comfortable with one another, to build comradery and to begin to shed some of the prison mentality we've all built up over the years at other facilities. We try to create a safe space to allow guys to open up if they want or need to. We want to help everyone get in the right mindset coming to Kewanee. To talk about how Kewanee is different from other facilities. We understand sometimes it may be a difficult transition at first. We want to show guys that we are all here to help build a community that we can all be proud of. Its an experience that helps guys really think about the main things that they need to work on while they're here, the things that mean the most to them and their lives.

Its an environment that most guys probably have never been through, but it is honestly life changing.

Afterwards you will have a connection with the people that were in the circle that you would've never had otherwise.

I urge you to do the right things and the orientation circle helps all of us here send that message in a way that everyone can truly understand. I want to give a big thanks to Eric, Sister Janet, and Andrea for taking the time and letting us experience this training. ***It was life changing.***



GRATITUDE

By: Marco Canas @ K.L.S.R.C.

I was blessed to be a part of a circle in Graham C.C. and our circle keepers name was Ms. Fuson. It was a great experience and one that I did not want to end. Unfortunately as we all know things happen and I ended up transferring to Vienna. There I was fortunate enough to end up in an even greater situation and was allowed to join Project Phoenix, which was also a great experience. I always thought about the circle that I had been a part of in Graham and was always curious if I would ever be a part of one again. Then I was once again blessed to have the opportunity to transfer to Kewanee and here I was invited to an *ORIENTATION CIRCLE* and just like in Graham I was in a circle again. The emotions that you go through in a circle can help you grow and heal. So when I heard that Sister Janet was coming to Kewanee to hold circle keeper training I was like, ***“Yeah, I need that in my life!”***

So what are circles? Circles come from an ancient Native American tradition where a talking piece is used to grant you the ability to be the only speaker while holding it. Circles acknowledge that we are all in need of help and that helping others helps us at the same time. Circles are for us to be able to speak our truth, be who we are, reveal things that you normally wouldn't. You reveal any wrongs you have committed to self or others. We can reveal all these



things because circles are a safe place where we connect as a community with trust, respect, empathy, bridge building, intimacy, and most of all **NO JUDGEMENT**. Circles also help bring down walls that we have created in order to protect ourselves. Circles allow us to be vulnerable and help others understand us while we simultaneously understand others. With that we can change ourselves for the better and relationships that we have with others. Its about balancing every part of us the emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical. While in this circle keeper training I met and interacted with people in ways that you don't in prison. I opened up myself and others did as well. I've built relationships with people who I never talked to but now when we see each other it is always, "Hey how are you?" It's knowing that I can go to any of those people and feel comfortable talking to them because we had the privilege to share a space where we created a safe zone and built relationships. We were comfortable letting go and understanding each other. What better experience than to attend an actual circle whilst training to keep one yourself at the same time? I will always be thankful to the circle keepers who helped train us and also opened themselves up to be vulnerable with us. Sister Janet, Andrea, Mr. Kuster, Cole, and Gino **THANK YOU** for your time and effort that you all put into this. You were all amazing and there aren't enough words to convey my gratitude. To all my fellow trainees I want to thank all of you guys for allowing me the privilege and honor of being a part of this group and being genuine with everything we said and did in that circle. I will always see you all as friends and know that you will always have a friend in me.



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