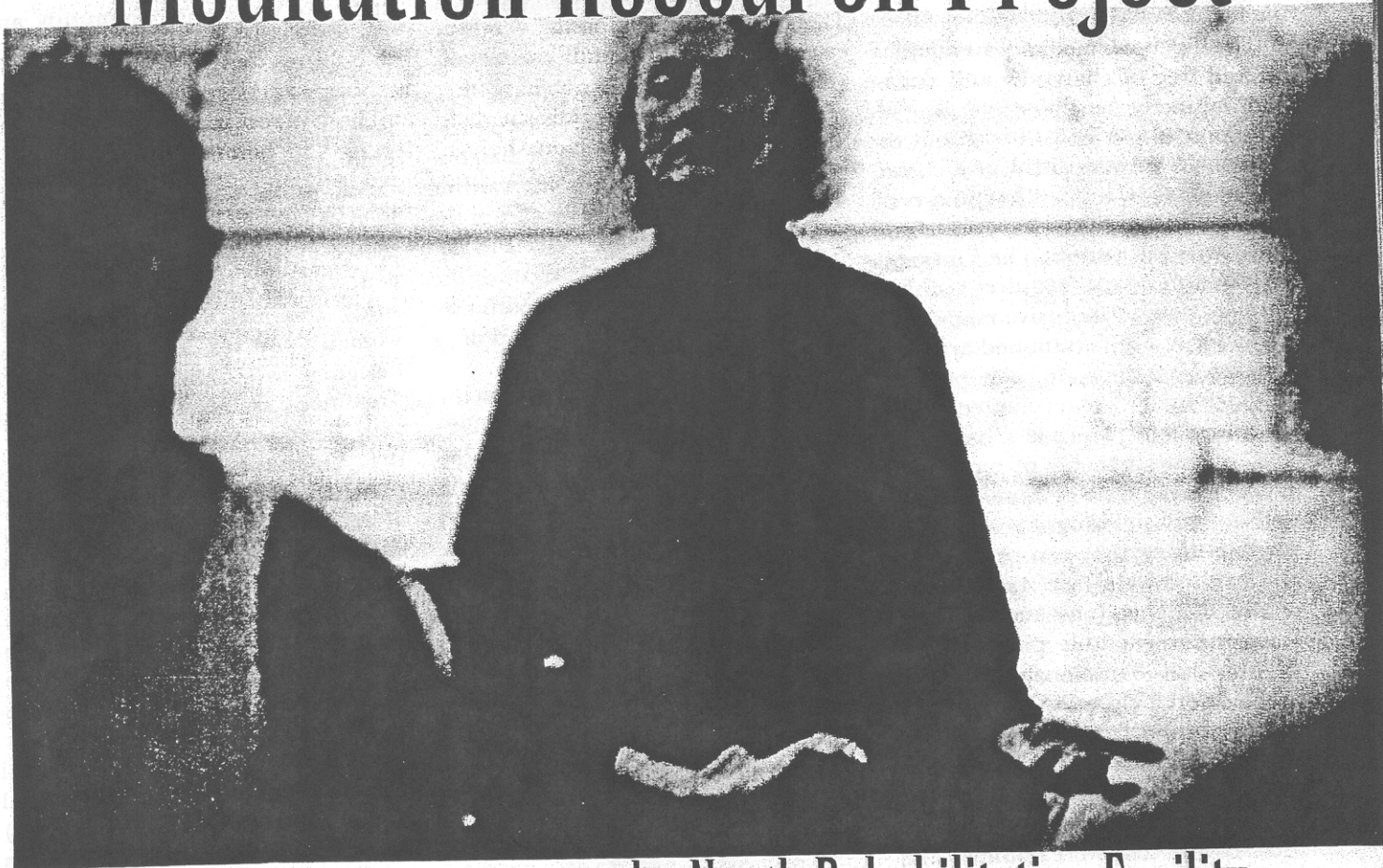


The University of Washington Vipassana Meditation Research Project



GEORGE A. PARKS, Ph.D.
G. ALAN MARLATT, Ph.D.
SARAH W. BOWEN
TIARA M. DILLWORTH
KATIE WITKIEWITZ, Ph.D.
MARY LARIMER
ARTHUR BLUME, Ph.D.
TRACY L. SIMPSON, Ph.D.
HEATHER LONCZAK, Ph.D.
LAURA MARIE MACPHERSON
DAVID MURPHY
LUCIA MEIJER

at the North Rehabilitation Facility

In November 1997, the King County North Rehabilitation Facility (NRF) cautiously opened its doors to a meditation program for inmates. NRF, located just north of Seattle, Washington, was already committed to a rich menu of offender change programs and services. Most of the 273 “long-term” inmates at NRF were recidivists characterized by significant involvement with alcohol and other drugs, and often, with one or more co-occurring mental disorders as well.

Today, meditation often has esoteric or "new age" connotations, but the meditation course initiated at NRF, Vipassana meditation, is not a religious or mystical practice, not a relaxation technique, or an escape from reality. Vipassana meditation, as taught by instructor S.N. Goenka and assistant teachers under his direction, is a systematic process of mental training and ethical conduct in which sustained self-observation leads to increased awareness, self-control, and inner balance (Hart 1987).

The Vipassana meditation course is offered free of charge by well-qualified volunteer teachers and course assistants in communities all over North America and throughout the world. To be successful in a correctional context, it takes a serious commitment from both the inmate and the penal institution. The Vipassana meditation course requires ten continuous days of intensive meditation training in a self-contained area segregated from the main jail population in which inmates and volunteer teachers observe a rigorous schedule of eleven hours per day of meditation practice and a code of moral conduct, and inmates are taught a method of mind training they can practice the rest of their lives (see *American Jails* magazine article, July/August 1999).

After considerable planning and preparation, Vipassana meditation courses were held at NRF every three to four months from November 1997 through August 2002 using multipurpose program space. In total, 20 courses were conducted at the facility. Total start-up costs were minimal, and the largest ongoing expense was for additional hours of security coverage for the ten-day period of the course. The Vipassana meditation courses at NRF were successfully implemented due to model collaboration between security, program, and food services personnel. A vegetarian menu for courses was developed that required no additional staffing to prepare and serve. Program classroom and office space was modified for rapid conversion to residential use by meditating inmates. Procedures for course set-up, (security clearing and training volunteers, notifying health services and

classification units, risk management protocols, inmate orientation, etc.) became routine over time.

In order to evaluate the outcome of the Vipassana program on post-release criminal behavior, the NRF Programs Manager completed the Vipassana Recidivism Study (Murphy 2002) which included data collected from courses one through eight. The study consisted of a two-year criminal history preprogram review and a two-year recidivism postprogram review. The sample size of Vipassana course completers for this study was small (n=75), and NRF did not have the resources to review recidivism data outside King County. Nonetheless, this study provided valuable baseline information that led to the awarding of a two-year research grant from the National Institutes of Health to the University of Washington to study the effects of the Vipassana meditation program at NRF on alcohol and drug relapse and recidivism.

Final outcome results from the recidivism study (Murphy 2002) revealed that approximately half (56 percent) of the inmates completing a Vipassana course at NRF recidivated as measured by returning to King County Jail (KCJ) custody within two years, compared with a 75 percent rate of recidivism in a NRF General Population Study (Murphy 2000; n=437). Moreover, the average number of bookings for Vipassana course completers declined from 2.9 preprogram to 1.5 postprogram. Fifty-four percent of women who completed the course returned to KCJ, as compared to 57 percent of men. This is remarkable given that the criminal histories and presenting problems were more severe for women than men admitted to NRF.

Using the encouraging results from NRF Vipassana Recidivism Study (Murphy 2002) and their experience studying meditation, alcohol problems, and criminal conduct (Marlatt and Kristeller 1998; Parks and Marlatt 1999), a team of researchers at the University of Washington (G. Alan Marlatt, Ph.D., principal investigator) received funding in October of 1999 to conduct a two-year study on the effects of the Vipassana meditation course at

NRF on alcohol and drug relapse, psychosocial functioning, and recidivism.

The University of Washington (UW)-NRF Vipassana Research Project was funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (under the National Institute of Health), in association with the Fetzer Foundation of Kalamazoo, Michigan. From the start, the UW-NRF Vipassana Research Project involved close collaboration among University of Washington researchers, North Rehabilitation Facility staff, the Vipassana community, and the NRF residents who volunteered their time to take part in the study.

The UW research team began collecting data before the men's course held in January 2000 and continued through the last Vipassana course held at NRF, a women's course completed in August 2002. In total, nine courses were included in the research study, five men's courses and four women's courses. The research was designed to systematically compare Treatment as Usual (TAU) at NRF with Treatment as Usual plus taking the Vipassana meditation course (TAU+V). TAU included a rich array of rehabilitation programs, such as chemical dependency treatment, alcohol and other drug education, mental health services, cognitive-behavioral programs, adult basic education and GED testing, acupuncture, housing case management, and vocational programs.

For research design and ethical reasons, a randomized clinical trial (with a no-treatment control group) was not possible, so the study used a quasi-experimental design in which Vipassana meditation course completers were compared as a group to all NRF residents who did not take the course, but who completed the same precourse and postcourse assessments. When the 3- and 6-month follow-up assessments are collected, the Vipassana meditation course completers will be matched to those NRF residents most similar to them who resided at the jail at the same time, but who did not take the Vipassana course. These case-matched pairs will provide comparative outcome data for the final research report. Data collection for the project is ongoing and this article

reports only preliminary results. More comprehensive results will be available in an upcoming chapter by Marlatt et al. (in press). Overall, the preliminary data are suggestive of a clear trend favoring the Vipassana meditation course completers, although TAU at NRF was also shown to have significant positive effects. Final results of the research are expected to be available by autumn of 2003.

The data collection for the study began with a precourse assessment, occurring within one week of the beginning of each Vipassana meditation course, which asked residents about the last 90 days they lived in the community before their current incarceration. A postcourse assessment, occurring within one week after each of the nine courses ended, was completed by research participants who were still detained at NRF during that time. To complete the longitudinal study, former NRF inmates filled out two additional follow-up assessment questionnaires at three and six months after their release from NRF. They were assessed at follow-up whether they were living in the community or in jail at the time of each assessment. Research participants were paid five dollars for assessments completed while incarcerated and 30 dollars for assessments completed while residing in the community.

UW-NRF Vipassana Research Project Preliminary Results

The preliminary results of the UW-NRF Vipassana Research Project reported here compare Vipassana meditation course completers (n=29) with the TAU control group (n=59) on a variety of measures at 90 days prior to incarceration and at the three-month follow-up after release into the community. Of 306 inmates who consented to participate in the study, 88 participants completed precourse, postcourse, and three-month follow-up assessments. The following analyses refer to this subsample. Statistical tests demonstrated that there were no significant differences between the TAU+V and TAU groups on drug or alcohol use, psychosocial measures, or NRF program participation at the baseline assessment.

A series of statistical analyses (analysis of variance or ANOVA) were used to determine differences between the Vipassana meditation course completers (TAU+V) and the treatment as usual control group (TAU) on alcohol and drug use, psychosocial outcomes, and recidivism between precourse assessment and three-month follow-up. The results reported here are preliminary in several ways. First, they represent a subset of the entire NRF study sample that has completed both the precourse and three-month assessments.

Additional research participants will complete questionnaires at three-month and six-month follow-up assessments before final results can be analyzed. Second, the results reported were calculated before case matching could take place. Final published results will include only Vipassana meditation course completers and their case-matched controls. Last, all dependent measures have not yet been analyzed and, therefore, reported results in this paper are partial.

Given these limitations, the following results provide support for the

It's your CHOICE

T-NETIX Prepaid Calling

Calling Solution with the power to...

COLLECT or PREPAID... T-NETIX DOES THAT.

The T-NETIX Prepaid Calling offers:

- An Alternative to Collect Calls
- Inmate or Called-Party Paid
- More Affordable Rates
- Domestic & International Dialing
- Security-enhanced Call Processing

T-NETIX®

NASDAQ: TNTX

800-559-1535 www.t-netix.com

2155 Chenault, Ste 410, Carrollton, TX 75006

Figure 1.
Self-Reported Peak Marijuana Use
Estimated Marginal Means

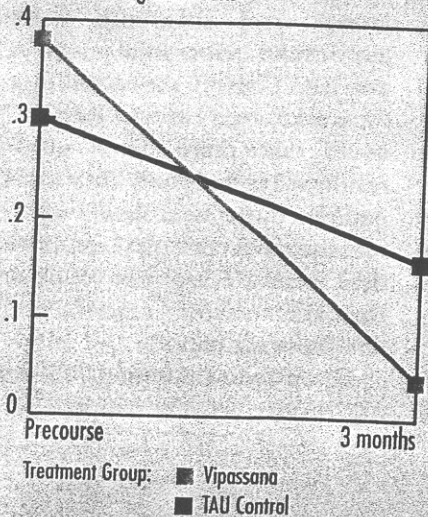


Figure 2.
Self-Reported Peak Crack Cocaine Use
Estimated Marginal Means

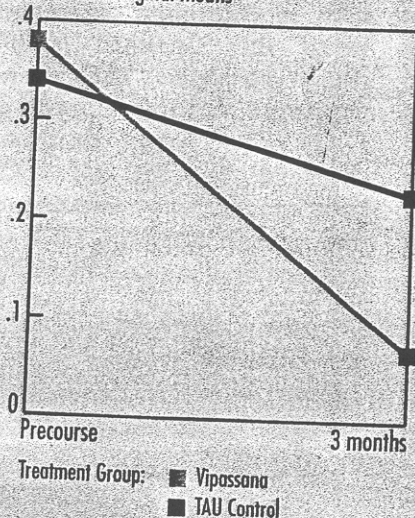
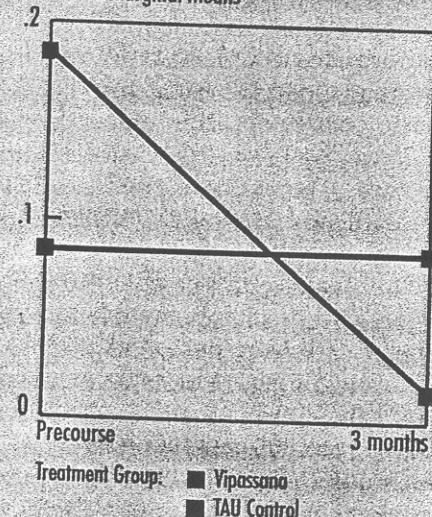


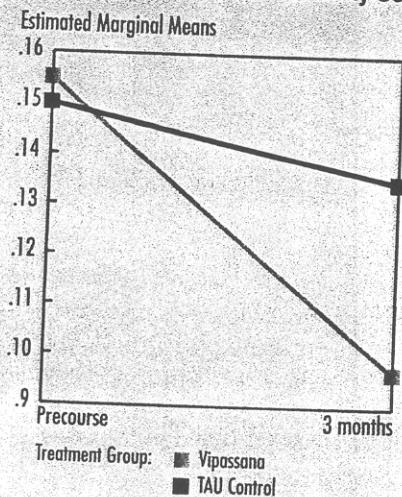
Figure 3.
Self-Reported Peak Powder Cocaine Use
Estimated Marginal Means



overall positive impact at the three-month follow-up assessment for TAU at NRF, and more strongly for TAU plus the Vipassana meditation course (TAU+V). The rehabilitation programs offered at NRF had an overall positive impact in general on all inmates participating in the study. Data analyses revealed significant reductions at three-month follow-up on tobacco use, peak drinking episodes, alcohol-related problems, and weekly heroin use for both groups in the study. On the psychosocial measures, psychoticism was significantly lower in both groups.

However, several of the study's results favor the Vipassana group over the TAU group. Vipassana completers experienced fewer adverse drinking-related consequences and demonstrated greater perceived control over their drinking behavior. Together, these results suggest that the Vipassana participants were being more thoughtful about when, where, and how they were consuming alcoholic beverages. In addition, they used significantly less marijuana, crack, and powder cocaine in the three months following release. Drug abuse severity scores for the use of all illicit substances of the Vipassana meditators were also significantly lower at the three-month follow-up, reflecting not only less drug use, but less drug-related negative consequences. Since many of the offenses committed by NRF inmates were alcohol or drug

Figure 4.
Self-Reported Drug Abuse Severity Use
Estimated Marginal Means



related, these results may also contribute to reduced recidivism.

Regarding psychosocial measures, the levels of depression and thought suppression in the Vipassana course completers were significantly lower than in the TAU group. While not statistically significant, hostility and anxiety were also lower for the Vipassana group. Finally, Vipassana meditators scored significantly higher on their level of optimism, indicating they were more hopeful about their future.

The study found no significant differences between the groups for recidivism based on the number of days incarcerated or new charges at the three-month follow-up, although Washington State-wide arrest data

have yet to be analyzed. Participants in both groups had an average of less than one recidivism event within the three-month follow-up window compared with the two-year time frame in Murphy's study (2002). Consequently, there was not enough variation in criminal conduct to detect any difference between the two groups. State-wide arrest data and recidivism at six months will be analyzed to determine if any group differences exist for the final report of the study.

Figures 1-4 illustrate selected study results for marijuana, crack and powder cocaine use, and severity of drug abuse.

Given the present trend toward increased incarceration of individuals who have problems with alcohol and substance abuse, often co-occurring with mental disorders and physical health problems, there is a growing need for the availability and implementation of effective, low cost substance abuse treatment interventions for jail-based correctional populations. Jail-based substance abuse treatment programs offer an opportunity for inmates to change long-standing habitual behavioral problems such as psychological functioning, addictive behavior, and criminal conduct.

The preliminary results of the UW-NRF Vipassana Research Project as well as the NRF Vipassana Recidivism Report (Murphy 2002) are noteworthy because of the potential ability of a mindfulness practice, as taught in

the 10-day Vipassana meditation course, to significantly impact problem behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse which are often associated with reoffense. The preliminary results suggest that a 10-day Vipassana meditation course offered in jails or prisons could provide a relatively low cost and effective rehabilitation program for some substance abusing offenders. (Additional information regarding the research can be obtained by contacting the first author.)

NRF closed its doors after 21 years on October 31, 2002. Its deteriorated pre-WWII structures could no longer be used or replaced. Fortunately, NRF is not the only correctional facility in North America that has offered Vipassana courses. In addition to courses at the North Rehabilitation Facility, one course has been conducted in the San Francisco San Bruno facility and two were completed at the W.E. Donaldson Prison in Bessemer, Alabama. Other correctional facilities are in the planning phase. Additional information about correctional courses here and in other countries can be found on the Vipassana prison Web site www.prison.dhamma.org. The Vipassana Prison Trust is also available to answer questions and provide assistance to correctional personnel who are interested in learning more about Vipassana: Vipassana Prison Trust, P.O. Box 877, Port Hadlock, WA 98339; (360) 379-8292. ☎

References

- Hart, W. (1987). *The art of living: Vipassana by S.N. Goenka*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row.
- Marlatt, G.A., and Kristeller, J. (1998). Mindfulness and meditation. In W. R. Miller (Ed.), *Integrating spirituality in treatment: resources for practitioners*. Washington, D.C.: APA Books.
- Marlatt, G.A., Witkiewitz, K., Dillworth, T.M., Bowen, S.W., Parks, G.A., MacPherson, L.M., et al. (In press). Vipassana meditation as a treatment for alcohol and drug use disorders. In Hayes, S., Linehan, M., and Follette, V. (Eds.), *The new behavior therapies: expanding the cognitive behavioral tradition*. New York: Guilford Press.

Murphy, D. (2002). *The NRF Vipassana recidivism study: final report*. Unpublished Manuscript.

Parks, G. A., and Marlatt, G. A. (1999). Relapse prevention therapy for substance-abusing offenders: a cognitive-behavioral approach. In Latessa, E. (Ed.), *What works: strategic solutions: the international community corrections association examines substance abuse*. Maryland: American Correctional Association.

George A. Parks, Ph.D., Research Coordinator, Addictive Behaviors Research Center, University of Washington, (206)

616-5765, geoparks@u.washington.edu, G. Alan Marlatt, Ph.D., Director, Addictive Behaviors Research Center, University of Washington, (206) 685-1395, marlatt@u.washington.edu, Sarah W. Bowen, Tiara M. Dillworth, Katie Witkiewitz, Ph.D., Mary Larimer, Ph.D., Tracy L. Simpson, Ph.D., Heather Lonczak, Ph.D., Laura Marie MacPherson, Addictive Behaviors Research Center, University of Washington, Art Blume, Ph.D., University of Texas at El Paso, L. David Murphy, (425) 482-6219, ldmurphy@covad.net, Lucia Meijer, (360) 379-5178, imeijer@aol.com.

Inmate Calling

Let T-NETIX Answer
Your Most Challenging
Inmate Calling Needs

**WE'VE GOT THAT...
UNDER CONTROL.**

The T-NETIX Advantage:

- Proven Experience
- Patented Technology
- 24x7x365 Customer Support
- Complete Inmate Calling Solutions

T-NETIX®

NASDAQ: TNTX

800-559-1535 www.t-netix.com

2155 Chenault, Ste 410, Carrollton, TX 75006