

Consultant's Report from Ruth Benn May - November 2011

The summer was not too, too busy, so I tried to catch up on things around the office, cleaning up, filing, re-filing, moving papers from one pile to another, cleaning up computer files, updating the website, updating finances, producing reports for the fundraising committee, and such. There are many things to do just to keep the org up-to-date and functioning. But now that Fall has hit and "Occupy" has become the movement of the day, there seem to be more things tugging at me. I expect at our November meeting we can talk more about how WTR can fit into all this new activity (or not). Over the summer some dangling projects got dealt with, others are still on "the list."

Administrative Tasks

- Picking up mail at the PO every few days and corresponding with some folks as needed. Email is most time consuming. More questions come by email than phone. It piles up but hopefully I don't miss the important things.

- Wrote/edited June/Jly, Aug/Sept, and Oct/Nov newsletters; Rick Bickhart does the design/desktop publishing; Jerry Chernow prints and mails to our list; I send copy to Peter for web; email to e-list announcing issue online; bulk issues to those who ask.

- *Dangling*: I finally shifted the 400+ names on our e-list to a free email service called Mail Chimp (mailchimp.com). Some of you are on that list. I was using 6 different email groups, but this service makes it much more manageable. We have a ways to go before we outgrow the free service and would have to pay a monthly fee. We'll see how it goes in the next year.

- Keeping in touch with Charles Carney about the KC meeting in November, posting info on website, getting registration info out, and keeping a list of registrants, making travel plans, etc.

- Office volunteer Jon Stubbs got caught up in family issues early in the summer and has not been able to come for some months. I hope he'll be back. Meanwhile, Neena Das comes about once a month and helps with mailings and such.

- As per above, I did try to get some cleaning up done over the summer. The office is slightly more under control but it's an ongoing struggle. I guess I always comment on piles of email – *Dangling*: clear out inbox, again. It's not so much counseling stuff or things others can deal with – just correspondence about things like the meetings, finances with fiscal sponsors, some lists from other groups, people in our network writing about this and that – just email.

- *Big annoyance*: Oh yeah, my computer, which started developing problems in the late summer and led to a few days of cleaning the hard drive, messing around, putting programs back in, etc. I did not lose any files, but it was a bit of a setback. It is basically in working order again.

Finances & Fundraising

- Picking up mail at the PO, getting tax deductible checks to ROSC and Resist as needed, getting deposits mailed to bank, keeping up QuickBooks accounting, participating in fundraising committee conference calls and trying to keep up with needs of committee members.

- Ginny Schneider had to stop coordinating the fundraising committee, but Erica Weiland took over. I participate in the Committee phone calls also (once a month approx) and try to keep up with the info that the committee needs to keep going. Everyone is so busy, we seem to work in fits and starts.

- I contacted Julia Butterfly Hill about writing a short or long letter for the November appeal, which she said she would. Contributions have been just a trickle in the last couple months, so I will try to get that appeal out before the meeting.

- Drafted a new budget and contacted FR committee and AdComm about that. Will be on agenda.

More....

Outreach & Literature

- The Rapid Outreach Working Group created at the May meetings has been somewhat active by email, trying to be in touch with national organizers about upcoming events. One on the agenda was the October 6 - ? Freedom Plaza call, which has turned into an occupation on that plaza. With ROWG contacts we did get a workshop set up, which I did one morning and about 8 people came and others listened for a while. I spent 3 days down there and tried to get others to make a real “WTR” contingent in DC but that did not come to pass. I’ve been at some of the Occupy Wall Street actions and intend to do some kind of WTR workshop there before long. I’m sure we will talk about NWTRCC and the occupy “movement” at the Nov. meeting.

- Updated the web page on frivolous penalties with review by Peter Golberger. Generally trying to keep lit stocked, fill orders, and keep up necessary updates. Rick redesigned the “What is NWTRCC” brochure to match our other brochures so we are looking coordinated.

- I try to add some new things to the website off and on, but not often enough I know. Erica wrote the piece on anarchism and we got that on the web; Dave G had drafted various pieces on “other taxes” and it took me ages to edit it for the web but it is up now; Ed wrote a “5 things you can do” page that is also posted.

- Social networking/Facebook – I post something now and then; Dave Gross does the most and others comments or add things here and there. This Mail Chimp mailing list (per above) integrates with Facebook and Twitter and will also format a sign up to the e-list form for our website. I have not tweeted, but am considering that we may need to do that. All this “occupy” is FB, twitter promoted and we probably need to do more of it.

- *Death and Taxes*: Ages ago I got a UPC number for the DVD so that we could market to libraries and sent a review copy to *Library Journal*, the only real way to market to libraries. Much to my surprise I got an order from a distributor in early October who had seen the review in LJ’s September issue. Since then I’ve gotten a few other orders from that. Otherwise it is a trickle also. I placed a couple classifieds in Sojourners so we’ll see if they produce anything. Ed was working on setting up the Thoreau packet pieces for the web – will get that done.

Network & Counseling

- Edited the minutes from the last meeting and posted and emailed out notices. About 30 people still get them in the postal mail also. Sent out the notice for the Nov. meeting and the postcard for updating the network list. Each time some people respond who have not been in touch for ages.

- Respond to counseling questions by phone or email. Not a rush these days, but the frivolous penalty business goes on. I try to report that in the newsletter.

- Larry Bassett and Rod Nippert of the FR committee have committed to trying to expand our affiliates though both have been busy. We did add Nonviolence International and Washington Peace Center. A few counselors have dropped off. We could not fit a counselors’ training into this KC meeting, but Ed and I are doing one in Rochester, NY in mid-November.

In general I am not sure about the state of our network, or, maybe I am sure that many of our groups are small and getting smaller. I was disappointed that we could not get a real WTR group to be visible in DC, but I know people who thought they might come got active locally. It feels like we are at a time when many people are individually doing war tax resistance/refusal, but more of the organizing energy is focused on other groups or issues. I am not sure if this is a problem from this office or just how it goes in this line of civil disobedience. I think we will talk about this in Kansas City – especially in light of Larry Rosenwald’s “Manifesto” in the newsletter and in relation to “occupy together.” Within the occupy actions here in NY we are trying to push the antiwar angle and need to bring in WTR. We’ll see how response to the Nov. appeal goes to gauge how the next year is going to shape up for NWTRCC.