

## Living Locked Down or Living Locked in: Finding Freedom.

*“To the mind that is still the Universe surrenders – Lao Tzu”*

This sounds highly ambitious but for most of the men I work with it is highly relevant.

In the lives of the men I come into contact with (and for myself personally) the difference between triumph and tragedy is about 90 seconds.

With many of the men the odds have not been in their favour – and in many ways society actually doesn't work for them. Vulnerable communities are more often exposed to the wrong place, and the wrong time; and one poor decision might be all it takes. And in lives where there is very little freeboard, it takes very little to tip the boat and a whole lot to set it right again. We often punish people at the end without ever understanding them at the start.

I'm part of an organization, Changeability, which runs a 16-week men's stopping violence programme – 2 ½ hours in Masterton on a Wednesday night. Most men who are directed to attend are there because of the Dept. of Corrections or the Ministry of Justice (Courts). I also volunteer as part of the Yoga Education In Prisons Trust teaching yoga in the local men's prison. I'm also part-way through my training as psychotherapist with the Hakomi Institute, a therapy based in mindfulness.

I'm fortunate, then, to work with people on the inside and the outside.

About 2 years ago at Changeability, I started introducing a 2min mindfulness practice at the start of class. It came out of my yin yoga practice. Months or years later when I'd talk to men they always remembered “that breathing thing.”

That “breathing thing” enabled many men to get themselves back on-line where normally they would go into auto-pilot and unleash all sorts of hell. That “breathing thing” gave them both time and space to respond rather than react. (Well, we should all learn how to do that!) But fundamentally, that “breathing thing” but also started to give them access to an emotional awareness many had not previously been aware of.

In the group you could hear their language start to change. Rather than shame, guilt, and regret they'd find words like sensitive, gentle, soft, caring, beautiful, loving. They'd find kindness and empathy for themselves and, in doing so, they'd find kindness and empathy for others.

With YEIP I do very much the same thing. While I cue the postures – the physical poses are just the distraction – in the spaces in between I ask them to breathe, I ask them to notice the sensations in their body, and invite them to find softness and kindness.

So what do the programmes offer? Not much – really!!

We invite them to pause, we invite them to breathe, and we invite them to notice.  
But it seems what they get is:

A chance to still the mind.  
And chance to change their universe.

For more information goto:

YEIP: <http://www.yogainprisonstrust.org/>

Changeability: <https://changeability.org.nz/>