

# Pam Ferguson

[Celebrating Life »](#)

## 3 R's

05/22/10 10:06 ,

38 computer monitors  
34 computer towers  
25 printers/copiers  
22 televisions (2 very large flat screen televisions)  
13 cell phones  
12 radios  
10 phones  
5 microwave ovens  
4 scanners  
4 laptop computers  
2 electronic word processors  
1 video camera  
+ Boxes full of computer parts, transformers, chargers, a sewing machine, an iron, a mixer, an ice crusher, a shredder, a digital scale, a calculator, a blender, a can opener, 2 way radio equipment.....the list goes on and on.

We live in a disposable world. Computer too slow? Buy a new one. Cell phone too big? Buy a new one. Radio not digital? Buy a new one. Television too old? Buy a new one. Of course, many of the above items that now reside in my garage simply quit working and no one was able to fix them. Knowing what to do with old, broken, or used electronics is a difficult thing. Landfills are not acceptable for the above items. They are not biodegradable and they contain toxic metals.

In a week or so, *Workforce, Inc.* will drive a truck to Winchester to collect this garage full of E-waste. These items will go to a warehouse in Indianapolis where they will be dismantled. Gold, silver, and palladium will be collected, plastic, aluminum, and steel will be recycled, and toxic materials will be properly disposed of where they won't pollute water or soil.

For the last six months, Winchester Friends has been the collection point for E-waste from our county and Quaker meetings in our Quarterly Meeting. Eight different monthly meetings brought items that were old, used or broken to be stored in our garage until collected for recycling. The project's goal was to highlight the 3 R's of the 21st century -- recycling electronics, reclaiming what is valuable, and restoring lives. From the list of items collected above, it appears this is a needed project in a disposable world.



I have been surprised by life. I never expected life to be so full of experiences and blessings. I've seen the pygmies dance, awoken to the Muslim call to prayer, and been to the source of the Nile....I've smelled incense from sandalwood, frankincense, and myrrh, and I've smelled open sewers, burning trash, rotting flesh, drying fish, and camel dung....My husband, Ron, and I co-pastor a Quaker meeting in eastern Indiana

For me, the real value of the project is the third R: restoring lives. My husband and I spend a lot of time in jail leading worship services in addition to spending time with people recently released from incarceration. We experience first hand how difficult it is for ex-offenders to find work. Finding a job is difficult in a good economy, and now almost impossible in a struggling economy. The United States with 5% of the world's population consumes 25% of the world's resources. The US also has 25% of the world's prison population. *Workforce, Inc.* connects those two numbers by increasing recycling and reclamation of electronic resources that would often end up in landfills and providing a place of employment for ex-offenders. At times, I wonder if our disposable society considers ex-offenders disposable people. This warehouse in Indianapolis reduces the need to dig and drill for precious resources through recycling electronics and ex-offenders find a place of employment to provide them with meaningful work and a way to keep from re-offending and returning to prison. *Workforce, Inc* does an incredible thing in our world.

*Workforce, Inc.* matters greatly to me these days. I received a letter recently from the young man I'm writing to in prison. Over the years of his incarceration, we've developed a good relationship. To be honest, I expected to be living overseas when this young man - a man who broke into my home and held me hostage - finished serving his 14-year sentence. I did not prepare myself for the possibility of his presence with me one day in meeting for worship. In his recent letter, I learned of an upcoming sentence modification and he expressed hope to one day join me in worship with our faith community. This means the possibility of a reduced sentence and the reality of a personal, face-to-face relationship with this 35-year-old man. This young man has spent a majority of his adult life in prison for burglary, perjury, possession of cocaine and escape. I am not afraid of my friend, and I am not afraid of his presence in my life. I am not afraid of how my faith community will receive this young man if and when he comes to worship.

I fear a broken heart.

I fear the changes he made in prison won't be sustainable once he's out. I fear for the struggle it is for ex-offenders to start new lives and find dignified employment. I fear for the difficulty of breaking ties with old friends and family members who encourage destructive addictions and ways of living. I fear the loss of hope for a different and better life for my friend and for his family.

Several months ago my husband and I visited *Workforce, Inc.* We are impressed with the emphasis on dignity and work, on community building and accountability. *Workforce, Inc* impressed us by paying ex-offenders to spend the first hour of each workday together, sharing and supporting one another. Few ex-offenders have this type of support system and few have the opportunity to work. I am thankful for *Workforce, Inc* and their work and ministry to recycle electronics, reclaim valuable metals and to restore lives. Chances are slim my friend could find such work and support upon his release. But knowing there are men in the world who choose a vocation and livelihood providing ex-offenders a place of work gives me hope. The owner creates opportunities and support for ex-offenders to change their future and provide a way of restitution in their lives. Ex-offenders are a part of our society greatly at risk and desperate for change. I believe it is a high calling for the owner of *Workforce, Inc.* to invest in ex-offenders and offer them hope. Having a full and messy garage is a very small price to pay for such hope.