

Heart to Heart Trains Peace Leaders to Overcome Hate with Compassion - Nonprofit Expanding its Message of Peace and Nonviolence from Prisons to Schools, Families, Workplaces and Churches

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Heart to Heart News
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The answer to the hate, violence and racial divisions that threaten to tear us apart is a multitude of peace leaders.

So believes [Steve Tumolo](#), co-founder of Heart to Heart in Merchantville, whose mission is to educate and train peace leaders, from people about to re-enter society from prison to the parents of at-risk children in poor neighborhoods.

Heart to Heart trains individuals and small groups in how to respond to hate and division with lessons of the heart—to replace judgement with empathy, hate

with love, and violence with peaceful resistance.

Peace leaders are good listeners, whose very presence helps us to heal. Peace leaders nurture healthy, nonviolent relationships with their children, colleagues—and yes, even their perceived enemies.



Steve Tumolo, co-founder and executive director of Heart to Heart, is shown here bringing his message of compassion and nonviolent communication to men in a New Jersey state prison

“Peace is not simply the absence of conflict. It’s also a deep desire we have,” says Tumolo, who brought his program from New Mexico to [South Jersey in 2008](#). “Human beings come into life with core desires of the heart. We all want to be loved, to be respected, to have freedom. We are hard-wired for peace.”

[Tumolo personally has counseled](#) thousands of men and women who were incarcerated in three states in the ways of peace to prepare them for re-entry and reintegration into the world that locked them up. With his help, many have not only healed, but thrived and become peace leaders themselves.

Heart to Heart Families

Now Tumolo and his small team of employees and volunteers are expanding their program beyond the Delaware Valley and beyond the confines of prison walls and into schools, faith communities and workplaces.

They are especially interested in bringing their message of nonviolence into the homes of families traumatized by poverty, unemployment, inequality, prejudice and the emotional disruptions of their own lives.

One new initiative is called [Heart to Heart Families](#). That initiative is being launched with pilot programs in Quincy, MA and Baltimore, MD.

Approximately 20 parents and caregivers from these families will receive introductory workshops and parenting-skills training in mindfulness, empathy, decision making, and conflict transformation (MEDC). These MEDC skills, always important, are now vital for parents amidst all the challenges of a global pandemic.

They will learn how to accept and heal the traumas of their own past and will be supported in their desire to raise their children with love, compassion and emotional support. Many parents must first heal themselves in order to break the cycle of generational trauma.

Heart to Heart describes this process as moving “From Chaos to Calm.”

Parental skills development is supported through formation of “empathy circles,” regular meetings giving parents and caregivers the fellowship and support they need to approach themselves and their children with the healing quality of compassion. Empathy circles are designed to become long-term and self-sustaining.

Nonviolent Communication

Tumolo has personally witnessed the transformation of many people into peace leaders. He has seen them emerge from the mental prisons of judgment and condemnation to become “wiser, gentler and fiercely committed to the well-being of children and people everywhere.”



The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, the 1960s US civil rights leader, embraced a philosophy of nonviolence and peaceful resistance that inspires the work of Heart to Heart.

The basic principles of the Heart to Heart program draw on the Nonviolent Communication writings and practices of psychologist Dr. [Marshall Rosenberg](#), who drew his inspiration from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, leader of the 1960s US civil rights movement, and Mahatma

Gandhi, leader of India's peaceful resistance to British rule in the first half of the 20th century. Both men were assassinated.

To expand its reach, Tumolo's group recently launched a [Peace Leader Fundraiser](#) to coincide with the 63-day Season of Nonviolence, which annually celebrates the lives of both men.

The core tenet of nonviolence was perhaps best summed up by Dr. King in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1964:

"Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."

Or, as Tumolo said to men incarcerated at the Bayside State Prison, in a 2015 [counseling session reported by NBC News](#): "I want a world in which each of you guys, your needs matter, and I want a world in which you treat everyone else like their needs matter. Because we're all human beings. And that's a world in which we relate not head to head, but heart to heart."