



# Annual Report 2025



Heart to Heart Comienzos East Inc.  
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# Table of Contents

|                                                                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Letter From the Chief Executive Officer                                                     | 01 |
| Introduction                                                                                | 02 |
| Our History                                                                                 | 03 |
| Theory of Change, Research & Evidence                                                       | 04 |
| Our Programs                                                                                | 05 |
| Our Impact in Correctional Facilities                                                       | 06 |
| Correctional Facility Programs                                                              | 07 |
| Communities Practicing Radical Hospitality, & Earth Empanty                                 | 08 |
| Why Our Work Matters                                                                        | 09 |
| What Happens after Reentry - Meet Khalil                                                    | 10 |
| Program Support: Thank You to Our Program Partners and Community Champions                  | 11 |
| We thank our Generous Donors, Partners, Volunteers, Board of Directors, Trainers, and Staff | 12 |
| Continue the Work in 2026 and Beyond                                                        | 13 |

# LETTER FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Dear Friends,

Heart-to-Heart equips people who are incarcerated with the relational skills needed to rebuild their lives, sustain freedom, and prepare for employment. We believe that people who have experienced incarceration and trauma can do more than survive—they can heal, thrive, and become leaders who strengthen their families and communities.

Our programs are rooted in Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication, which helps participants recognize emotions, listen with empathy, and respond to conflict constructively. At a time when violence and division are affecting locally and around the world, these skills are more important than ever.

In 2025, Heart-to-Heart facilitated Nonviolent Communication learning in three correctional facilities, strengthening participant communication, decision-making, and conflict transformation—skills that support employment readiness, healthier relationships, and successful reentry.

We also delivered short-term community-based trainings through our Earth Empathy, Train-the-Trainer, and Communities Practicing Radical Hospitality programs, supporting the development of diverse leaders, including those who are formerly incarcerated.

We are grateful to the donors, volunteers, and partners who make this work possible.

With gratitude,

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**Steve Tumolo**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

# Introduction

## Our Vision

Restorative Justice is the norm in the United States, centering healing & restoration for all parties to crime and violence.

## The Mission

Heart-to-Heart helps people affected by incarceration to heal, thrive, and become the leaders they are called to be.

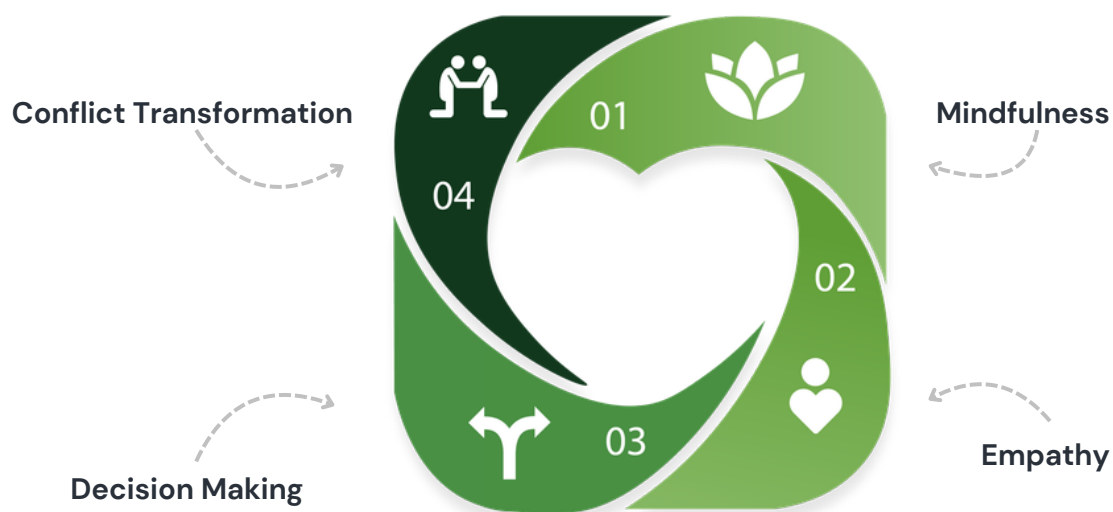
## Key Skills

### HEART-TO-HEART'S MEDC MODEL

#### The Skills We Teach -

**We teach practical relational skills** - soft skills that help participants sustain freedom, succeed in employment, and strengthen their families and communities.

**Nonviolent Communication skills** help learners break destructive habits and achieve healing. We've identified four core capacities central to Nonviolent Communication: Mindfulness, Empathy, Decision making, and Conflict transformation.



# Our History

Heart-to-Heart traces its roots to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where two Catholic sisters created Comienzos (“beginnings” in Spanish) in 1988, after several years of researching best practices in educational, therapeutic programs in U.S. jails and prisons. Their program was designed to bring dignity and lasting freedom to incarcerated men and women at Albuquerque Metropolitan Detention Center.

Steve Tumolo joined this effort in 1998, and after 10 years as a teacher and leader, brought the Comienzos model of transformative education home with him to Southern New Jersey. With the help of like-minded people, he founded “Heart-to-Heart: Comienzos East” in 2009. The newly-formed organization began offering classes at Bayside State Prison in Leesburg, New Jersey, and was soon recognized for its significant impact, garnering the attention of NBC News, the Philadelphia Inquirer and commendation by the New Jersey legislature.

Heart-to-Heart now teaches weekly classes at Bayside State Prison in New Jersey, and at the Boston Pre-Release Center and Pondville Correctional Facility in Massachusetts. Heart-to-Heart also offers transformative education for faith communities, schools, nonprofit and for-profit businesses, and individuals seeking to lead and serve.

# Theory of Change



## Research & Evidence

Heart-to-Heart uses evidence-informed and research-backed methods to help transform lives and create lasting freedom.



### Our Evidence-Informed Methodology

The Heart-to-Heart training program is based on Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication (NVC).



### The Reentry Reality

1 in 100 people are incarcerated; 95% will eventually return home.



### The National Recidivism Gap

Nationally, 30-50% of those released from incarceration are rearrested within just 3 years.



### Our Research

Research showed that after three years, 92% of those who completed fifty hours of Heart-to-Heart learning have kept their freedom.

# Our Programs

## 01 PRISONS & REENTRY

In-prison training is the core of Heart-to-Heart's work to help people who are incarcerated to heal, thrive, and become leaders both in prison and after reentry into local communities. In 2025, we provided communication skills training in 3 correctional facilities. Each cohort received 24 hours of training (1.5 hours per week over 16 weeks). These training programs were offered throughout the year to groups of inmates.

In addition, we began two initiatives to help expand the capacity to bring services to more individuals. We began piloting a new train-the-trainer program and began developing a peer-trainer curriculum to allow peer leaders to train their fellow inmates. See the next page for our Prisons & Reentry impact numbers.

## 02 COMMUNITIES PRACTICING RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Our work in communities continued to thrive with the launch of this new initiative. In 2025, we partnered with 3 faith communities on Boston's South Shore to pilot this program, providing training in radical hospitality, increasing community capacity to welcome and support formerly incarcerated and other excluded people.

Through this pilot program we served 3 communities, providing a series of 4 training sessions, for an average of 40 participants per session. Advanced training continues in 2026.

## 03 EARTH EMPATHY

Heart-to-Heart impacted more than 12 organizations and communities by engaging community and organizational leaders and supporting their growth in skill, awareness, and spiritual grounding. Our most significant achievement was bringing together diverse climate justice leaders from across the state of Massachusetts.

Our Summer Earth Circle cohort was diverse in age, ranging in age from 15 to 75, and diverse racially, ethnically, by gender, wealth, and geography. Participants travelled from all over the state to learn, grow, and connect.





## Our Impact in Correctional Facilities

3

Number of prisons in  
which we operate

139

Participants  
engaged

75

Participants graduated

1,710

Participant learning  
hours

*Why this Matters : These numbers reflect people in our Correctional Facilities Program building the relational skills needed to sustain freedom, succeed in employment, and strengthen their families and communities.*

# Correctional Facility Programs

Professional facilitators, trained in Nonviolent Communication, mediation, and other healing modalities facilitate Heart-to-Heart's unique educational therapeutic approach in correctional facilities and community settings. We have ongoing, year-long programs at:

## **Boston Pre-Release Center**

Roslindale, MA

## **Pondville Correctional Center**

Norfolk, MA

## **Bayside State Prison**

Leesburg, NJ

## Heart-to-Heart's Reentry Program



*"You gave me the language I need to really connect with people. I did not have it before. That is what made the difference."*



*"I take what I learn in here every week and apply it the second I leave."*

# Communities Practicing Radical Hospitality

It is not only important to prepare our returning sisters and brothers with skills needed for successful reentry. It is just as important that our communities be welcoming. Toward this end, we have begun our Communities Practicing Radical Hospitality initiative. In 2025, we began a partnership with three committed communities in Boston's South Shore. More than 65 people participated in four sessions at three locations



## Earth Empathy

Heart-to-Heart impacted more than twelve organizations and communities by engaging community and organizational leaders and supporting their growth in skill, awareness, and spiritual grounding for leadership in climate justice.

Our Summer Earth Circle cohort engaged 20 climate justice leaders with a rich diversity in age, ranging in age from 15 to 75, and diverse racially, ethnically, by gender, wealth, and geography. Participants traveled from all over the state to learn, grow, and connect.



# WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

The U.S. incarcerates more people than every other nation on the planet. One in every 5 prisoners is imprisoned in the U.S., and nearly 1 in every 100 Americans is a prisoner. People of Color are disproportionately incarcerated. The lifetime incarceration rate for black men in the United States is roughly 1 in 5. Over 58% of all prisoners are parents with children aged 18 or younger.

The effects of this mass incarceration extend beyond prison walls. Children, spouses, families, and entire neighborhoods are suffering along with those who are living in prison. The roots of mass incarceration are in a culture of punishment that pervades our criminal justice system, and can be found in our educational institutions, families, and treatment of one another.

Heart-to-Heart seeks to replace a culture of punishment with a culture of relationship. We cultivate this in the very places where punishment is most prevalent — America's jails and prisons.

We offer training in essential skills that enable people to relate compassionately and effectively to peers, family members, and even those we struggle to love. By forming Heart-to-Heart learning communities on both sides of prison walls, we help people discover new, positive, and successful pathways to healing.



## What Happens after Reentry

The core of Heart-to-Heart's training takes place during incarceration. While still in prison, participants often experience healing and personal transformation. They learn Nonviolent Communication and leadership skills and begin applying them immediately—strengthening relationships and positively influencing their prison communities, families, and others.

But what happens after they return to society? Research shows that 92% of participants who completed at least 50 hours of training and were released to the community remained free after three years. Sustained freedom is strong evidence of lasting change. Many graduates continue using their Nonviolent Communication skills to strengthen relationships and contribute positively to their communities. Khalil's story shows how these skills continue shaping lives and communities long after participants leave prison.

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## Meet Khalil

Khalil is a formerly incarcerated graduate of Heart-to-Heart's in-prison training program in Nonviolent Communication. Today, he is a community leader working in youth gang violence prevention. He brings Nonviolent Communication into his work with gang-involved youth. He is expanding his transformational leadership by helping train his colleagues in these practices. [Read more about Khalil here.](#)



Heart-to-Heart graduates become leaders who contribute to transformation both inside prison and beyond it. After release, they strengthen families, communities, workplaces, and organizations by building healthier relationships, supporting lasting employment, contributing to economic vitality, sustaining freedom, and helping create safer, more connected communities.

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# PROGRAM

## *Support*

### **Thank You to Our Program Partners and Heart-to-Heart Community Champions**

Heart-to-Heart program partners and community champions help us to advance the vision of a restorative justice system with healing for all people affected by trauma and violence.

In November, a Heart-to-Heart team including a staff member, graduate, prison volunteer, and volunteer community champion returned to Boston College's Jenks Program to share leadership lessons with students. More than 20 students filled the room to hear volunteer Julia Franco, Heart-to-Heart graduate John Paul, and CEO Steve Tumolo share stories that brought servant leadership to life.

The group was welcomed by former Heart-to-Heart Board Director Monetta Edwards, now Director of Boston College's Winston Center for Leadership and Ethics.



Pictured above on the Boston College campus are Volunteer Julia Franco, Graduate John Paul, CEO Stephen Tumolo, and Colleague Anthony Graziano.

# **We thank all donors, volunteers and partners for your generous ongoing support!**

**Heart-to-Heart is funded entirely by charitable contributions and program partners.**

## **Foundations, Partners, & Funds**

The Bergey Family Foundation Fund  
Boston College Jenks Program  
Boston College PULSE Program  
Esther R. Sanger Center for Compassion  
Franklin Square Foundation  
Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation  
The H.C. Gemmer Family Christian Foundation  
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## **Facilitators and Volunteers**

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Brynn Elcock Smart  
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Julia Franco

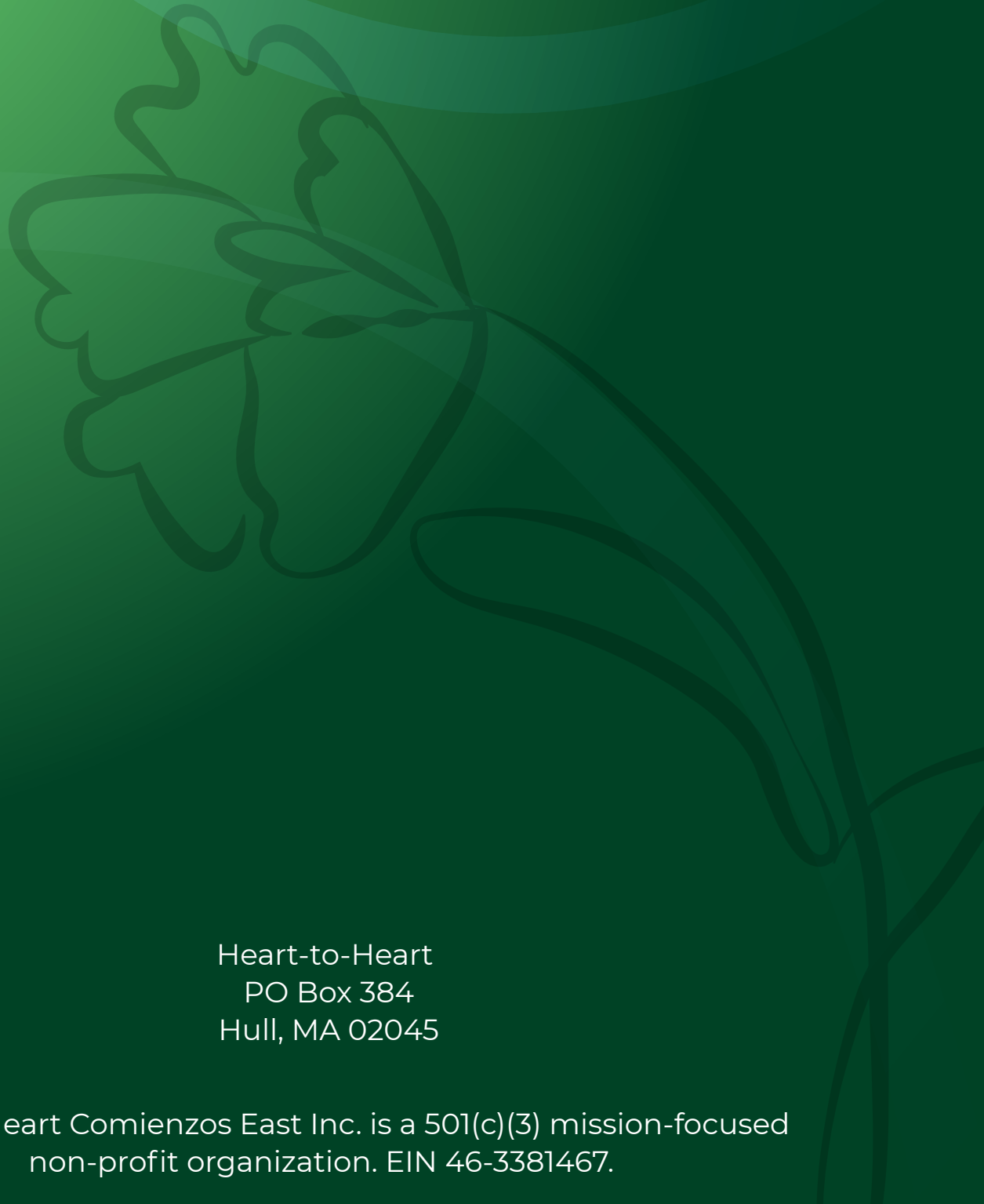
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Chris Gipple  
Anthony Graziano  
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Tulsi Patel

John Paul  
Val Sinzdak  
Bob Sliney  
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Steve Tumolo  
Philip Walker  
Khalil Williams

## **Staff and Board of Directors**

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Nancy Samya  
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Heart to Heart Comienzos East Inc. is a 501(c)(3) mission-focused non-profit organization. EIN 46-3381467.

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