


## Healing communities: Harnessing tension through Hate2Hope

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*Participants in the Rosedale program.*

**EDITOR'S NOTE**—After a decade in publication, ReadTheSpirit magazine is proud of our dozens of contributing writers and authors who have shared thousands of columns ([and more than 50 books](#)) that inspire readers and contribute to healthier communities. This year, as we approach [the Jewish New Year 5777](#), we invited our Jewish writers to send updates about the work they are doing. One of the most dramatic projects is [Brenda Rosenberg's Hate2Hope](#), a program that grew out of the book she co-authored with Samia Bahsoun: [Harnessing the Power of Tension](#).

**By BRENDA ROSENBERG**



*Detective Brad McKenzie helps a student experience a drunk-driving simulator.*

Here's a scene you're not seeing on your newspaper's front page: A group of teenagers, black and white, spend time inside a suburban police station—and they leave, *asking to spend more time with the police officers.*

Over the past year, I have been surprised by the places I have traveled with the book I published in 2015 with Samia Bahsoun, which took the seemingly vast gulf between us as Jew and Arab and transformed that tension into a new kind of working relationship. Far from the Middle East, I found that our process for bridging almost impossible divides was sorely needed in communities right here in the U.S. So many cities and towns are trying to establish new relationships between police and both young people and people of color.



*McKenzie helps another student use a distracted-driving simulator.*

One unlikely place I wound up this year was inside that police station with teens who had experienced little or no connection with police officers—other than seeing the ongoing tensions in hotspots across the U.S. in TV news or social media. Instead of tension, we found strong relationships could form.

**Here are a few of the reactions you could be feeling right now.**

**Are you intrigued?** Well, one way to learn more about what we're doing in this pilot program is through [my own professional website](#)—or through the [new Tectonic Leadership Center website](#). Share this story on social media.

Talk to friends and community leaders wherever you live in the world. We're eager to hear from you and to connect in positive ways.

**Are you frustrated or frightened?** We understand. Society is changing rapidly. Every day, we see tragedies that take place in communities, not much different from our own, and we are often left with questions that go unanswered. Our goal is to use the tension around us to be sure that we know how to work together with law enforcement in a way that is peaceful and productive.

## 'It's not my job!'

A third reaction to our work is to say: Thanks, but that's not my job! So, I want to tell you how I got involved in this important work with law enforcement officials, teens, educators and community leaders.

I was attending a memorial service for a dear friend, peacemaker and interfaith champion here in Michigan: Dan Krichbaum. With Dan's help years earlier, I brought another national program to life, called *Reuniting the Children of Abraham*, and Dan also invited me into the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion.

Years before that, I had a long career in national retail, design and marketing. My skills included a veteran's sense of cultural trends and effective ways to respond—mainly through retailing during that part of my career. Then, after the attacks on 9/11/2001, I discovered that my job had transformed. I reassessed my skills from business and realized that I had a talent for bringing people together, despite their differences—sometimes painful differences.

For more than a decade, I traveled and worked and learned a lot about interfaith and cross-cultural relationships both in the U.S. and in the Middle East.

But, in late 2015, what did I know about law enforcement? Surely, that wasn't my job! If that's the way you're thinking—the truth is: It was my job. Bringing people together is my job. Healing communities is my job. And it's your job, too, isn't it?

How I made this leap is how I approach all my work—through connections with people in the community. After that memorial service, another colleague—Steve Spreitzer, the current head of the Michigan Roundtable—invited me to attend a meeting of a group called ALTPACT (Advocates and Leaders for Police and Community Trust). ALTPACT was looking for programs to combat hate and tension within troubled communities.

That was my connection—combatting hate and transforming tension into healthy working relationships is the whole theme of the book I had just published and the related workshops I was leading. The new watchword became even more focused: Hate2Hope.

I wound up at a meeting of law enforcement officials and community leaders in New Baltimore, Michigan. And I started where I always start when encountering a new group of people. I simply told them what I was hearing from them—and from people in similar communities: Too many ordinary people feel unheard, disrespected or harassed by police. There is too much bias still painfully affecting relationships with minority families. Police feel that stereotypes about their profession complicates the situation. All sides have experienced losses. All sides have fears.

And, as most worthwhile projects unfold, that night did not resolve major issues. Our path to peace was not clear, but we had a direction. Clear communication, harnessing the power of tension in the room, seemed to help. People went home saying that tension just might be a turning point, not a deal breaker.

Our work had only begun.

From this conversation, Chief James Berlin of Roseville and I initiated a 10-week pilot series in partnership with Roseville Police and Roseville Community Schools in January of this year. Detective Brad McKenzie, our liaison to

the Roseville police, played a key role in shaping our students' experiences in the following weeks.



*Amari Taylor presenting her "What is Justice?" art project. Students were asked to express in any art form their expression of Justice to share with peers, educators, law enforcement and parents. Art projects included rap songs, video, poems, essays and posters.*

In this program, students experienced tours of police facilities, where they participated in drunken-driving simulators, texting-and-driving simulators, and even firearms-training simulators. Students also had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with members of the law enforcement team and the administrative team at their school district to create protocols and procedures for responding to interactions with police officers and violent situations in their communities.

Throughout Hate2Hope—or, as we usually refer to it, simply H2H—students continuously had the opportunity work alongside FBI agents and other law enforcement officials to engage in discussions surrounding local, nation and international issues that plague their local communities.

What was the outcome? Surprisingly, nearly 90 percent of students' evaluations asked for more one on one time with the police and FBI.

We were—we **are** making a difference.





*Left to right: Bushra Alawie MSW, office of public affairs FBI Detroit, who participated in part of the Roseville program; Brenda Rosenberg; and Nicole McGee, Victims Specialist FBI Detroit.*

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