

Creating and Nurturing a Culture of Truth, Peace and Nonviolence

Moments of Impact



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Upcoming Events

Actions for Peace Workshop, September 21, CCAC Allegheny Campus
Annual Gandhi Day, October 4, Carnegie Mellon University

Message from the President

sOm Sharma, Founder & President, AHINSA

AHINSA has continued to deliver an impressive array of programs and initiatives, keeping our community energized, engaged, and united in purpose. In July 2025, the Consul General's office reached out to AHINSA with a request to help organize several high level engagements in Pittsburgh — including a gathering of key leaders from the Indian community, meetings with the top leadership of the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University, and a session with prominent Indian business leaders.

This responsibility was entrusted to AHINSA because it has become the most visible, respected, and unifying organization serving as a bridge among the many religious, cultural, and community groups within the Indian diaspora. Working at a rapid and high intensity pace — and supported by several long time champions of AHINSA — our team assembled a tightly coordinated three day program for Consul General Sri Binay Pradhan. In addition to meetings with University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Joan Gabel and CMU Provost Jim Garrett (President Farnam Jahanian was unavailable), the Consul General also visited AHINSA's Mahatma Gandhi bust, currently housed in Hillman Library, where he offered rose petals in tribute.

Another major milestone was the generosity of Grammy Award-winning artist and philanthropist Chandrika Tandon, who agreed to perform a charity concert in support of AHINSA and its peace building mission. After coordinating key logistics and forming a collaboration with Pittsburgh's own Grammy winning jazz ensemble, MCG Jazz, we organized a unique fusion style fundraising concert — Music for Peace — on September 7 at the iconic Carnegie Music Hall. This first of its kind event in Pittsburgh was warmly received and deeply appreciated by all who attended.

Our annual Gandhi Day program, held in collaboration with CMU, took place on October 5, 2025. Dr. Joseph Alter of the University of Pittsburgh delivered the keynote address, followed by a diverse set of cultural performances. The event concluded with an interactive peace pledge session and the singing of the peace song.

The year 2026 began on a strong note for AHINSA. In February, we participated in the Racial Justice Summit at CCAC. In March, we presented a program on Mahatma Gandhi: Life, Legacy & Lasting Impact at Shaler Area High School in collaboration with school staff, LIGHT, and CCAC Honors. In April, we attended the Global Problems, Global Challenges conference hosted by La Roche University. We continue to engage with colleges and community partners to plan workshops and events. AHINSA formally participated in the Vigil outside the ICE office (3000 Sidney Street, Pittsburgh) on Friday, May 8, from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Also stay tuned for details on our annual Gandhi Day celebration at CMU on October 4, 2026.

AHINSA is pleased to welcome two new members to its Board: Srujana Kanjula, Professor at the Community College of Allegheny County, and Aaron Erb from the Violence Prevention Network. We continue to seek volunteers who share our mission and values. AHINSA has much to offer and much work ahead — and we look forward to your continued support.



An Evening of Music, Inspiration, and Community

by Geetika Tandon

AHINSA proudly hosted a memorable fundraising concert at the historic Carnegie Music Hall in Pittsburgh, featuring Grammy Award-winning artist Chandrika Tandon. The evening brought together supporters from across the community for an inspiring celebration of music, culture, spirituality, and service.

The event was the culmination of seven months of planning and collaboration among dedicated AHINSA volunteers, Chandrika Tandon's team, the Carnegie Music Hall staff, audiovisual professionals, and many others who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to create an unforgettable experience.

Guests enjoyed a pre-concert reception before the performance, while sponsors were invited to an exclusive reception with Chandrika Tandon in appreciation of their generous support.

A special highlight of the evening was the extraordinary collaboration between Chandrika Tandon and renowned jazz guitarist Marty Ashby. Their seamless fusion of Eastern and Western musical traditions created a truly magical performance that captivated the audience from beginning to end.

Chandrika Tandon's uplifting performance filled the hall with incredible energy. It was a beautiful blend of music and spirituality that touched hearts, inspired the audience, and created a profound sense of connection. More than just a concert, the evening demonstrated the power of community coming together in support of AHINSA's mission.

The event welcomed 418 attendees and raised approximately \$76,500 through sponsorships, donations, and ticket sales. With event expenses of approximately \$22,300, the fundraiser generated net proceeds of approximately \$54,200 to support AHINSA's programs and mission.

These figures do not include the significant contribution made by Chandrika Tandon, who generously covered the costs of her troupe of musicians, their travel, and audiovisual expenses. Her extraordinary gift enabled more of the funds raised to directly support AHINSA's work and reflected her deep commitment to advancing the organization's mission.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Chandrika Tandon, Marty Ashby, our sponsors, volunteers, partners, and every attendee whose generosity and support made this extraordinary evening a resounding success.





Peace Begins with Me: The Gandhi Day Ceremony

By Michael Lott, Student (Computer Information Systems), Community College of Allegheny County

The Gandhi day ceremony was a deeply enriching cultural experience. This event, held at Carnegie Mellon University, celebrated the birth of Mahatma Gandhi and the work he did for peace worldwide. Throughout the event there were several profoundly elegant dance performances that were blended with various speakers who discussed the countless ways that Mahatma Gandhi fought for peace and non-violence over the course of his life. There was one anecdote from Gandhi's life that stuck with me the most: when asked to convince a child to quit eating so much sugar, he delayed his response until two weeks later, during which he had quit sugar himself, portraying how he believed that he must live the changes he wishes to see others make. Towards the end, all members of the audience wrote and shared a peace pledge they wish to fulfill going forward. Everyone's pledges were incredibly beautiful and sharing them together as a group was an undeniably special experience to have. I am truly thankful to the organizers and Carnegie Mellon University for putting together and hosting such an astounding event.



Building a Beloved Community Summit

By Shubhada Bhamre & Girija Rajgopal



From left to right Ed Gainey/Pgh Mayor, sOm Sharma.

It was an honour to be present for the award ceremony for sOm Sharma, the founder of AHINSA at the annual event on Building a Beloved Community Summit (sponsored by The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work's Centre on Race and Social Problems and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission) at the University of Pittsburgh. This was an event organized by the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work (CRSP) and PA Human Relations Commission (PHRC). Their mission is to develop a transformative approach to creating social change through peacebuilding and nonviolence activities amongst the community members. Their vision thus focuses on bringing members together with a common goal of nonviolence and building inclusive societies wherein individuals from all walks of life flourish.



From Left to right: Jazmyn Rudolph (Educational Innovator Award), Dr. Persis Naumann (Community Collaborator Award), Chad Dion Lassiter (Visionary Leadership Award), sOm Sharma (Individual Leadership Award), Jordan Costley (Emerging Student Leader Award), Alena Chulick (Emerging Leader Award)

Building a Beloved Community: A Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Summit was held on November 17th, 2025. During this summit, several members from the community were recognized and received the Champion award for their personal commitment and advocacy in advancing equity and inclusion. Amongst several other awardees, sOm Sharma the founder of the nonprofit corporation AHINSA (Alliance for Humanitarian Initiatives Nonviolence and Spiritual Advancement) was one of the recipients of the award. sOm Sharma started AHINSA in 2000, and the initiative has been flourishing under his tutelage. sOm is widely recognized for his extensive work on building interfaith community relationships with diverse religious organizations throughout the Pittsburgh area.

His vision for AHINSA is rooted in Mahatma Gandhi's principles of nonviolence and peacebuilding. His commitment to sharing Gandhi's message is reflected in initiatives such as the Gandhi Mural in Squirrel Hill and the Peace Pole in Monroeville Community Park.

We couldn't have been more proud to attend sOm's award ceremony. He has been a true inspiration guiding us to uphold Mahatma Gandhi's principles and working towards a shared goal of bringing communities together, resolving conflicts through non-violence, and serving as mentors and advocates for younger generations to embrace non-violence and focus on peace building initiatives.

Act Now for a Peaceful World: Peace Walk in Pittsburgh

Jaden Razum, Student (Culinary Arts), Community College of Allegheny County

The International Day of Peace was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1981 to promote peace worldwide. On September 21, 2025, in observance of this day, CCAC Honors students and faculty, along with members of the Alliance for Humanitarian Initiatives Nonviolence & Spiritual Advancement (AHINSA), participated in a Peace Walk through Allegheny West and the Mexican War Streets. As we walked together, we engaged in meaningful conversations about peace and its many dimensions in our daily lives.

The theme of the Peace Walk was “Act Now for a Peaceful World.” Following the walk, the group gathered at CCAC’s CEIT building to reflect and deliberate on practical ways we could take action to help create a more peaceful world.

My experience at this event was truly wonderful. I learned about AHINSA’s vision, goals, and contributions to the community, and I found it deeply gratifying to connect with new people and learn from one another. The event was especially meaningful because it gave me the opportunity to share my own thoughts on peace while also gaining insight into what peace means to others. This was a memorable and enriching experience, and I would gladly participate again.



Peace Begins With Me: Gandhi Community Day Peace Pledge Activity

By Srujana Kanjula & Bhavini Patel

As part of **Gandhi Community Day on September 28, 2025**, participants gathered for an uplifting interactive session led by Srujana Kanjula and Bhavini Patel titled “Peace Begins With Me: Embracing Gandhian Values in Daily Life.” The session invited everyone to pause, reflect, and embody Mahatma Gandhi’s timeless message that peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but a way of life that begins within each of us.

Quoting Gandhi’s words — “The greatest power in the world is that of the Soul and Peace is its highest expression” — the facilitators reminded the audience that peace starts in our thoughts, words, and daily choices. The interactive activity encouraged participants to form small groups, discuss what peace means to them, and create **Peace Pledges**—personal or collective promises to live by Gandhian principles such as nonviolence, compassion, empathy, and truth.

Using simple materials—paper, markers, and plenty of open-hearted conversation—participants expressed profound insights and commitments. Groups eagerly shared their pledges with one another, creating a moving tapestry of human connection, mindfulness, and hope. The pledges were then displayed on a vibrant **Peace Wall**, symbolizing the community’s shared vision that peace truly begins within each of us.

Some of the pledges reflected gentle self-awareness:

“I will try to really listen to others and not just hear.”

“I will protect the peace that I have built within myself and my family.”

“I pledge to respond, not react.”

Others emphasized compassion and empathy:

“I pledge to be the kind of person people can talk to without fear of being judged.”

“Give people grace and the benefit of the doubt as you never know what someone else is going through.”

“I pledge to help promote Gandhian principles in our community.”

Still others highlighted collective and creative expressions of peace:

“We pledge to be less judgmental and respect everyone’s opinion.”

“I will dance for peace, as those who dance together find peace together.”

“We pledge not to be so serious and have fun in life.”

From mindful listening and forgiveness to promoting kindness and unity, the over sixty pledges collected during the event captured the heart of Gandhian philosophy—living peace as a daily practice.

As the session concluded, Bhavini and Srujana thanked participants for their heartfelt reflections, inviting everyone to carry their pledges beyond the room:

“Let us put these pledges into action—in the way we listen, the way we speak, the way we treat one another, and the way we honor the values Gandhi lived for.”

The Peace Pledge Wall now stands as a living reminder that when individuals commit to peace within, they inspire harmony in families, communities, and the world.



AHINSA Founder sOm Sharma's interview at NPR Station – Sept. 3, 2025



In the Studio



At the entrance, with Priyanka Tewari

It was a very pleasant surprise to receive a call from WESA 90.5, Pittsburgh's NPR Station, in late August 2025 inviting me for an interview about AHINSA's Music for Peace concert scheduled for Sept. 7. As I learned later, it was in response to an informational email and flyer distributed to various media outlets to promote the concert. Evidently the outreach had had the desired effect.

The interview was scheduled for Sept. 3, with the morning newscaster, Priyanka Tewari.

On arrival at the South side office and studios of Pittsburgh Community Broadcasting (owner of WESA 90.5 and WYEP stations), I was greeted by Priyanka and her technical producer and taken to the recording studio.

After the preliminaries and introductions, the recording and editing process was explained to me, and voice and sound tests were conducted.

It was a great opportunity to share AHINSA's journey from its humble beginning 25 years ago, with the first Gandhi Day celebration in Monroeville with the support of the Rotary Club of Monroeville, to its growth into a viable registered not-for-profit charitable organization, resolutely spreading the message of Mahatma Gandhi and other peace leaders among school and college students and the general public through a variety of programs, and the popular, annual celebration of Gandhi Day at various universities – mainly, Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon.

The next major topic was AHINSA's first ever fundraiser, 'Music for Peace' concert featuring the Grammy winning vocalist of Indian origin, Chandrika Tandon, joined by Pittsburgh's own Grammy winning Jazz band, MCG Jazz, to be held on Sept. 7 at the prestigious Carnegie Music Hall. It was a wonderful opportunity to inform and invite the listening public to this unique fusion presentation.

The interview was aired next morning, Sept. 4, during the morning commute hours.

Following the very pleasant and friendly interview, I got an opportunity to meet the CEO of Pittsburgh Community Broadcasting, Terry O'Reilly, a seasoned and respected media professional. Terry visited India during his earlier avatar at ABC News.

Shaler Area Students Explore the Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi

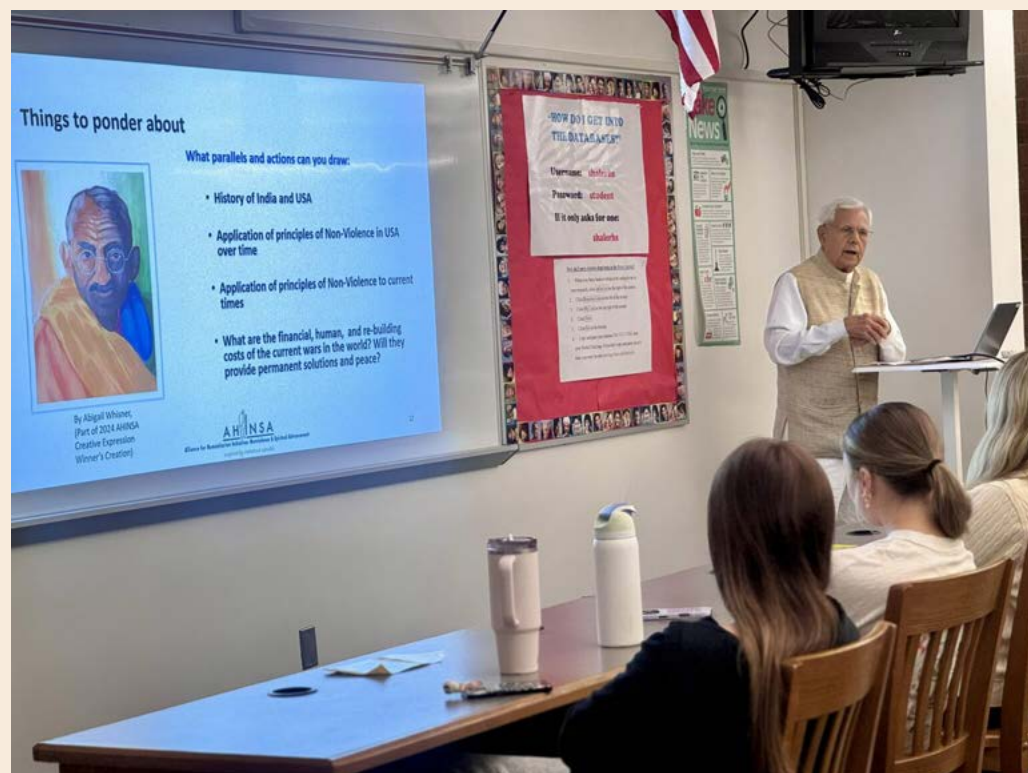
By Shaler Area School District

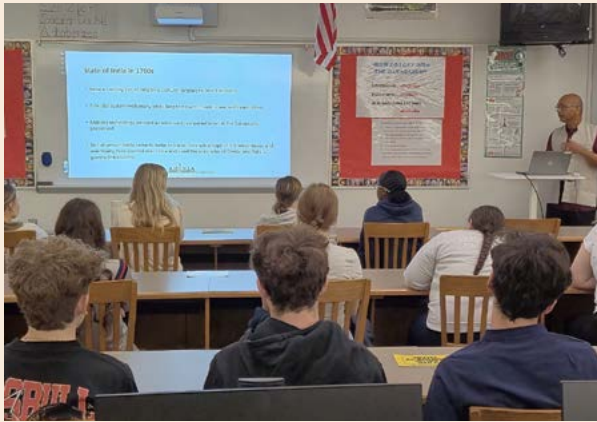
A remarkable learning experience unfolded in the Shaler Area High School library this March 10, as three organizations — LIGHT, the CCAC Honors Program, and AHINSA — joined together to bring a special program to our students. Titled “Mahatma Gandhi: Life, Legacy, and LastingImpact,” the event was open to all tenth-grade students enrolled in a World Cultures class and drew 29 students who gathered during third and fourth period for an engaging morning of history, personal storytelling, and reflection. The collaboration was a testament to the power of community partnerships in enriching student learning beyond the traditional classroom.

The program opened with a fifteen-minute historical overview delivered by Jignesh Shah, a member of AHINSA, who guided students through the arc of Indian history from its earliest civilization through the independence movement. Shah’s presentation centered specifically on Gandhi’s life and the guiding principles that shaped his philosophy and his movement. Following that foundation, Som Sharma — the founder of AHINSA — offered something perhaps even more powerful: his own personal memory. Sharma, who grew up in India during the freedom movement, shared vivid recollections of hearing Gandhi speak on the radio and reflected on the profound impact Gandhi’s message had on him as a young person. His firsthand account brought history to life in a way that no textbook could replicate.

The discussion then took on a contemporary dimension as a group of CCAC students, Emma Keenan, Jaden Razum, Marci Demaio, Sharlyn Barrett, and Will Griffin, along with faculty mentors Dave Manel and Srujana Kanjula, who had traveled to India on a study abroad trip in January shared photographs and stories from their experiences. Their reflections wove together the historical context that had just been presented with the living, breathing India they had encountered firsthand — drawing meaningful connections between past and present. The event then shifted into an open dialogue, with a question-and-answer session that invited Shaler Area students to engage directly with the presenters and to consider how Gandhi’s principles of nonviolence, perseverance, and human dignity might apply to their own lives and communities today.

The morning concluded on a warm and welcoming note, as students enjoyed traditional Indian snacks provided by Tamarind Restaurant in Cranberry and browsed tables displaying artifacts and photographs from India. The informal setting gave students the opportunity for one-on-one conversations with the presenters, deepening the connections made during the program. It was a fitting close to an event that embodied the spirit of cultural understanding and curiosity that Shaler Area works to cultivate in all its students.





AHINSA: Alliance for Humanitarian Initiatives, Nonviolence and Spiritual Advancement



Drawing inspiration from the lives of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and other Peacebuilders, AHINSA promotes **peace and non-violence** while addressing **humanitarian issues** and the existential needs of all.

AHINSA Shares Gandhi ji's Message at ICE Vigil

On May 8, 2026, AHINSA sponsored the weekly Friday morning vigil at the ICE offices on the Southside. A few hymns from Mahatma Gandhi's prayer book were played on the occasion, among them, "Is-var Allah tere naam, sabako sanmati de bhagvaan".

sOm explained the meaning of Namaste (I pray to the Divinity in you) and invited the 125-150 attendees to fold their hands together and say 'Namaste' together. He then proceeded to offer the English translation of 'Sabako sanmati de bhagvaan', with emphasis on the message of wisdom and good sense to ALL.

Bhavini Patel spoke briefly about Mahatma Gandhi's message of Nonviolence and love.

Copies of AHINSA Trifold were distributed.



sOm Sharma at the ICE Vigil

The vigil concluded with the usual practice of facing the ICE building and sending a silent message of love, and praying for 'good sense' while performing their duties.

AHINSA EVENTS

- Actions for Peace Workshop, September 21, CCAC Allegheny Campus
- Annual Gandhi Day, October 4, Carnegie Mellon University

***AHINSA members with
Tim Stevens
at 2026
Racial Justice Summit***



Oslo Peace Congress: An Opportunity of a Lifetime

Srujana Kanjula

I had the honor of attending the Oslo Peace Congress, a gathering dedicated to global peacebuilding in partnership with the Nobel Peace Center (NPC). Held in Oslo from May 27–30, the Congress brought together international leaders, educators, and advocates committed to advancing peace. Highlights included a welcome reception hosted by Anne Lindboe, Mayor of Oslo and Dr. Kjersti Flogstad, director of NPC, a private tour of the Nobel Peace Center with NPC Education Director Bendik Egge, sessions on the history and elements of the Nobel Peace Prize led by Dr. Henrik Syse, a former member of the Nobel Committee, a guided visit to Utøya with Jørgen Frydnes, the current chair of the Nobel Committee, and tours of Oslo's key civic institutions. The program also featured forums for institutions to share progress on Partners in Peace (PIP) initiatives.



With Anne Lindboe, Oslo Mayor

PIP is a collaboration between the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and the Nobel Peace Center, supporting students and faculty in studying and applying the practices of Nobel Peace Laureates. As a faculty member of the Community College of Allegheny County's Honors Program and an active PIP member, I presented on From Classroom to Community: Curricular Innovations and Best PIP Practices at the Oslo Peace Congress. As part of our PIP engagement, I taught a new course, Honors Cross-Cultural Exploration of Peace and Social Transformation, in Fall 2025 that culminated in a field experience in India focused on cultural understanding and community engagement. The course examines peacebuilding in India and the United States through the work of Nobel Laureates and includes a service-learning component in both countries.



With Jørgen Frydnes, Chair, Norwegian Nobel Committee

Engaging with faculty from universities across the USA, Germany, the Netherlands, and Oslo; sharing my course innovations; learning from experts at the Norwegian Nobel Committee and the Nobel Peace Center; and exploring Oslo's islands, parliament, city hall, sculpture parks, museums, and Nobel institutions has left a lasting impact on both my academic work and personal growth.

MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Aaron Erb

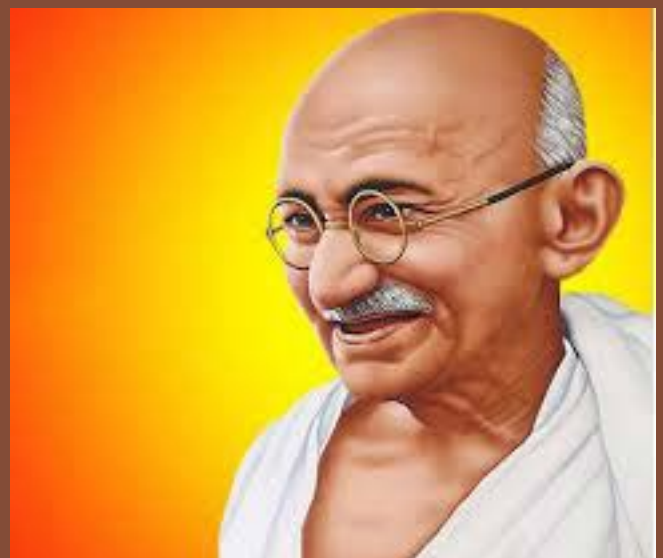
Aaron Erb is a mediator, facilitator, and restorative justice practitioner dedicated to conflict transformation at a systems level. He serves as Program Director at Violence Prevention Network USA, where he operates an extremism prevention program across Southwestern Pennsylvania. Prior to this, Aaron co-founded and served as Executive Director of Just Mediation Pittsburgh, a nonprofit organization that provides community mediation services focused on eviction prevention and housing stabilization. Earlier in his career, Aaron managed restorative justice programs in partnership with the juvenile justice system at Center for Victims and in the public school system at the University of Pittsburgh's Just Discipline Project in the Center on Race and Social Problems. Aaron holds an M.A. in Conflict Transformation from the Center for Justice & Peacebuilding in Harrisonburg, VA, and has lived in the Pittsburgh area for 10 years.

Srujana Kanjula

Srujana Kanjula is a professor at the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), where she also serves as the director of the Honors Program. As part of the Honors Study Abroad initiative, she leads students and faculty to India every two years, creating immersive global learning experiences. She is also the faculty advisor of CCAC's World Cultures Club. She is an active member of the Partners in Peace (PIP), a collaboration between the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and the Nobel Peace Center (NPC), Oslo, Norway, that enables institutions to study and implement practices used by Nobel Peace Laureates. Srujana presented at the 2026 Oslo Peace Congress in Norway. Since 2021, Srujana has been an active volunteer in Cranberry Township and now serves on the Township's IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Advisory) Leadership Team. She has also been volunteering with AHINSA. She has earned master's degrees in political science and sociology, followed by a PhD focused on the role of South African women in the struggle against apartheid. Her field research in South Africa remains one of the most meaningful experiences of her academic journey.

"My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop nonviolence. The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms your surroundings and by and by might over sweep the world."

Mohandas Gandhi,
Essential Writings



AHINSA BOARD

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Ravi K Sharma: Vice President
Manzoor Mohideen: Secretary
Jignesh Shah: Treasurer
Shrabani Basu: Member
Aaron Erb: Member
Srujana Kanjula: Member

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Srujana Kanjula
Geetika Tandon
Shubhada Bhamre
Kushal Ganesh
Girija Rajgopal
Dharma Siddhan

International Day of Non-Violence, Oct 2nd, 2026



“Non-Violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.”

MAHATMA GANDHI

ABOUT AHINSA

VISION

Creating a peaceful global community where nonviolence, spiritual growth, and humanitarian action inspire a culture of compassion, empathy, respect, and harmony.

MISSION

Fostering and nurturing a culture of peace and nonviolence through education, training, spirituality and service to diverse communities in Western Pennsylvania.

GOALS

- Facilitate inclusive dialogue on peace and non-violence
- Advocate for interfaith exploration and spiritual growth
- Inspire young minds to creatively express peace perspectives
- Tap into diverse networks and host innovative fundraising events
- Honor Mahatma Gandhi's legacy and his principles

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Actions for Peace Workshop, September 21, CCAC Allegheny Campus
- Annual Gandhi Day, October 4, Carnegie Mellon University

[“JOIN OUR TEAM”](#)

[“WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU”](#)