

The Boston Globe

With ‘Love and Luck’ fund-raiser, Cambridge nonprofit aims to help parents

By **Adam Sennott** Globe Correspondent,
Updated March 16, 2023, 10:26 p.m.



Eve Sullivan, a retired senior editorial assistant at MIT, started the Parents Forum from her Cambridge home in 1991. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

After her husband was murdered in El Salvador in 2011, Elizabeth Neely didn't know how to tell the news to their teenage son, with whom she struggled to communicate.

She found help through the [Parents Forum](#), a Cambridge nonprofit, which was offering a workshop at the Dimock Center in Roxbury. The forum's founder, Eve Sullivan, helped her find the right words.

“She said that it's hard to break down the news, but you just have to make sure that you're there to keep them safe, keep them safe when you tell them and make sure he doesn't hurt himself,” Neely said in a recent interview. “It [helped] a lot.”

The Parents Forum, founded in 1991, is hoping to continue helping parents learn to communicate and manage conflict within their families. Its annual Love & Luck fundraiser -- which started on Valentine's Day and usually ends on St. Patrick's Day.

But this year the fund-raiser will go until April 1 to help reach its modest goal [to raise \\$3,200](#) to help hire staff for the all-volunteer organization.

“We don't have a staff,” said Sullivan, a retired senior editorial assistant at MIT. “We have managed all these years with volunteers, and we really need to get organized, and we need money to hire a staff.”

The tiny nonprofit relies on pro bono support, such as from Linguistic Systems, a translation service, Sullivan said.

She also hires freelance professionals, including a graphic designer and web developer, she said.

“The program is offered to individuals for free,” Sullivan said. “Partner agencies who license our curriculum pay a modest fee.”

The program's curriculum provides “thoughtful examination” of nine original questions about family life issues outlined in Sullivan's book, *Where the Heart Listens*.

“We don’t specifically target an age range or a family situation,” Sullivan said. “We ask questions, and our workshops bring these questions up to parents and let them respond and discuss amongst themselves, what they like about their families, what troubles them, how they manage situations and ask for help within and for their family.”

The forum currently has two partners, Sullivan said, a counseling center in North Africa and the Confess Project of America, an Atlanta-based [organization](#) that trains barbers and stylists to become mental health advocates.

In the past, the forum has worked with inmates the MCI-Norfolk state prison. In 2003, Robert Wojcik was serving a sentence for second degree murder when he wrote to the forum, seeking guidance on communicating with then-young children

“I didn’t have, really, a good idea of how to handle my kids from behind prison walls,” Wojcik, now 51, said.


Sullivan responded to his letter and started teaching a program there, he said.

She taught him to think carefully about words. He learned to use adjectives to explain his feelings, particularly when he had something

hard to share.

“ I have a really good open communication with my children [now],” Wojcik said, who is no longer incarcerated. “And to this day I still use the skills that I learned in Parents Forum when I have to talk to them about something tough.”

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