



Toronto tour using words to ‘bring humanity forward’ in kids



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Students on board the Tour for Humanity bus, a mobile classroom that aims to eradicate hate. Contributed

A Toronto group is using recent current events to teach young people about the dangers of hate and intolerance.

Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies started the Tour for Humanity last year, visiting schools across Ontario on a bus and talking to youths about genocides like the Holocaust.

Now, they're wrapping recent terrorist attacks in Paris, news of young people joining terrorist organizations like ISIL and the Parliament Hill shooting into their discussions.

"Young people are being radicalized and going to fight overseas for various terrorist organizations," said Avi Benlolo, president and CEO of the organization. "The question for us is, 'How do we prevent these things from happening, or try to prevent them?'"

Part of the answer is open discussion, Benlolo said. Along with teaching students about people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Anne Frank, the tour creates a safe environment for discussions among students of different faiths, different ethnicities and from diverse backgrounds.

"The whole focus is about improving the world and fighting against racism, hate, intolerance and anti-Semitism," he said, explaining the program has reached about 150 schools and more than 50,000 students.

"They've learned to be problem solvers in their schools," Benlolo added. "They start talking to one another about these issues."

The centre had been offering Toronto-based workshops on the history of the Holocaust and other universal genocides with the aim of helping people — especially youths — understand the root causes of such tragedies and how to prevent them.

The bus tour was launched to reach a broader audience and, ultimately, shape a better world.

"We have to do our best to bring humanity forward," Benlolo said.