

“My whole life I’ve been fortunate to be helped and to help people. For me, growing up in a family of 10 children helped me learn how to get along with people. But more importantly, recognize the importance of helping each other ... I’m the executive director of PEACE, Inc. ... Dedicated to PEACE, Inc. since 2001.”



**Joseph E.  
O'Hara**



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**PLEASE TALK ABOUT YOUR ROLE AT PEACE, INC.**

**O'HARA:** I see myself as the coach of a team. Team members have different strengths. My role is to recognize their strengths and use them in a way that will help us be a championship team. My role is to create a culture where people feel valued and respected and are able to do their jobs. I am not a micromanager. I view a leader as a server. As a leader, my job is to make sure people have what they need to do their jobs. A leader is also a giver. A leader is also a listener - listening to people's opinions and then as a leader I'm a decider. Often the people I am listening to make their own decisions. But there are times when I need to make the decisions. Then, after there's a decision, I need to execute - put into action what was decided. And, how the decision is executed is important because I want people to feel part of the process. I believe people at PEACE, Inc. are unique, committed, and that is because they feel that what they do is special.

**YOU'VE MET DIFFERENT PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS. HOW HAS IT HELPED YOU IN YOUR ROLE AT PEACE, INC.?**

**O'HARA:** I started as a caseworker with Onondaga County Department of Social Services. Then, I was a probation officer. Then, I served in governor Mario Cuomo's administration as a deputy commissioner and director of the New York State Fair. I worked at Catholic Charities and served as councilor-at-large on the city council. I ran for mayor - and lost. But I met a lot of people from the process of running. Then, I was appointed to my current role at PEACE, Inc. In terms of meeting people, I've really been fortunate. It's been my honor to meet a lot of people. People come in all shapes and sizes, from all life experiences, and they all have something to bring to the table. I try to recognize and appreciate what each person brings to the table. I really value people and how they help PEACE, Inc.

**WHY DID YOU JOIN THE PEACE, INC. ORGANIZATION?**

**O'HARA:** My whole life I've been fortunate to be helped and to help people. For me, growing up in a family of 10 children helped me learn how to get along with people. But more importantly, I recognize the importance of helping each other. I was the third eldest child and I'd change a diaper or two when I got home after school some times - something as simple as that. It helped me realize we all need help. That's the beauty of PEACE, Inc. The other jobs I have had have helped me to build a team at PEACE, Inc. and coach it so we are champions in service to others.

**WHO ARE AMONG THE PEOPLE ESSENTIAL AT PEACE, INC.?**

**O'HARA:** At PEACE, Inc., we have the CLP - Comprehensive Leadership Program. It is made up of mostly program directors and support staff. They really carry out the functions and make sure we do what we are supposed to do. Our programs are geared around the PEACE, Inc. mission statement - Helping people in the community realize their potential for becoming self-sufficient. The PEACE, Inc. program leaders are really key because they provide day-to-day leadership in achieving our mission.

“Being humble is really important. I realize what we have tried to accomplish and what we have accomplished. I couldn’t do it on my own by a hundred miles.”

**PLEASE SHARE A MEMORABLE MOMENT IN YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE AT PEACE, INC.**

**O’HARA:** I was nominated to be the grand marshall of the St. Patrick’s Day parade. A tv station wanted to interview me and wanted to do it at a PEACE, Inc. program. We met at Merrick - one of our bigger Head Start programs. The cameraman and reporter did the interview and we walked down the hall and entered a classroom. A group of students had just finished reading books. Behind them were pictures of U.S. presidents because it was presidents month. The reporter asked how I knew Head Start works. I said Head Start works and I’ll show you how I know. I pointed to a picture hanging up and asked a student who the man was. The student said “That’s George Washington. He was our first president.” I asked another student who another man was in one of the pictures. The student said “That’s Abraham Lincoln - they call him Honest Abe.” Then, I asked who another man was in one of the pictures and the whole class said “That’s Obama - and, he’s still president.” Well, he’s not anymore. But they were just so proud of all of our presidents and I was proud of them. And, it was obvious that Head Start does work.

**DO YOU HAVE A HOBBY?**

**O’HARA:** Yes. Reading - I really enjoy reading biographies. I find it really relaxing. I think because it’s quiet. I enjoy reading biographies about anyone, but I really like political biographies of presidents and different leaders in the history of the world. I read about Ulysses Grant recently - he was really underrated in his time and now he’s recognized for the great general he was. The first biography I read was “Profiles in Courage” - a compilation of several stories about men, United States senators who had to take a controversial vote that impacted their lives. The compilation was written by John F. Kennedy. Currently, I am reading a book a week to a Head Start classroom as a challenge for the 50th Anniversary of PEACE, Inc. By the end of the year I expect to have read about 70 books - the goal is 50.

**HAVE YOU CHANGED AS AN INDIVIDUAL AS A RESULT OF WORKING AT PEACE, INC.?**

**O’HARA:** You know, I think I’ve become more patient and maybe more empathetic. I know I’ve become more humble. Being humble is really important. I realize what we have tried to accomplish and what we have accomplished. I couldn’t do it on my own by a hundred miles.

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU THINK IS IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO KNOW?**

**O’HARA:** That one person can make a difference. Someone asked me how do you solve poverty. I said I don’t know how to solve poverty. I expect that poverty may not be solvable for everyone. But, I believe what Mother Teresa said - you begin to solve poverty one person at a time and one family at a time by doing good deeds.