



The Peace Alliance

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## **The Leading Edge of Peace: Our Evolutionary Path Forward**

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The news headlines tell us everyday that we live in a violent world. From global violence in places like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and now the build up in Ukraine, to urban and domestic violence -- and school shootings that are growing so frequent they don't always even make the top headline anymore -- there are indeed countless tragic examples.

The prevailing notion and dominant cultural story is that violence is inevitable and there is really nothing significant we can do about it. Luckily, this is a false assumption. Many new methodologies are emerging, at almost every level of society, which are proving to be highly effective ways to address conflict before it erupts into violence -- or to turn it around more quickly when violence is already ensuing. Conflict may be inevitable, but violence does not have to be.

The heroic work in the growing field of peacebuilding offers a prescription for our times. Peacebuilding addresses issues of disharmony, violence, crime, and war by identifying their underlying causes and implementing nonviolent solutions that build an infrastructure for sustainable peace.

*Peacebuilding is our evolutionary course forward.*

### **Sustainable Solutions:**

Over the last few decades we have seen this field and work of peacebuilding emerge more strongly, helping to foster more peaceful solutions in many arenas. Practices and models that are sophisticated, pragmatic, effective and sustainable have been developed and implemented in various settings and locations in our nation and around the world. Teachers are bringing conflict resolution education into classrooms; Community programs are dismantling gang violence; Restorative Justice programs are effectively modeling new methods of dealing with criminal justice; Programs in prisons are helping inmates turn their lives around; Sophisticated policies and practices are averting violence from erupting in international conflict hotspots; and parents are learning new skills and taking daily actions toward being more supportive and connected with their children. There are countless options and examples offering powerful alternatives to many of the more punitive, less effective methods we have traditionally relied upon when dealing with conflict and violence.

And the evidence is on the side of these programs' effectiveness. A few examples:

After the [Longmont Community Justice Partnership](#) (in Longmont Colorado) implemented its Community Restorative Justice Program, recidivism rates among youth dropped to less than 10 percent in its first three years, compared to a county-wide rate of over 50 percent; and in a West Philadelphia High School, within two years of implementing a [Restorative Discipline program](#), incidents of assault and disorderly conduct dropped more than 65 percent.

[Pennsylvania](#) has implemented Multi-systemic Therapy (MST), which is becoming a more widely used treatment-focused program targeting at-risk teens who express chronic/serious antisocial behavior. Trained clinicians deliver comprehensive care over 3-5 months, including crisis care and intensive skills coaching, to change home, school and community environments. Those who have completed the program had 75 percent fewer issue related arrests four years after treatment.

These types of programs are also cost-effective, often saving communities money in the long-term.

A study by the non-partisan Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that [diversion and mentoring programs](#) produced \$3.36 of benefits for every dollar spent, aggression replacement training produced \$10 of benefits for every dollar spent, and MST produced \$13 of benefits for every dollar spent -- in terms of reduced crime and the cost of crime to taxpayers. In 2008, MST produced an estimated \$30 million in savings for Pennsylvania. These are but a few examples of how we could more effectively invest our precious resources. (The [Youth PROMISE Act](#) is legislation that would greatly empower such programs.)

Meanwhile, a new report from the Institute of Economics and Peace puts the [global cost of violence containment](#) at \$9.46 trillion per year, conservatively. Much of which goes towards more punitive and militaristic approaches. This is a tremendous burden and diversion away from spending our resources on the more effective prevention and intervention methods.

Internationally the costs of engaging in war or military-based efforts, or ignoring problems that could be positively impacted by peacebuilding programs, are also more often being seen as ineffective approaches. Recently there have been [victories for peacebuilding growing in our foreign policy](#). The budgets for the U.S. Institute of Peace, the State Department's Complex Crises Fund, and USAID & State Department's Conflict Stabilization Operations Bureau all received modest increases in this year's federal budget (despite being miniscule in comparison to what we spend on Defense). All three of these agencies, while having some need to evolve, are empowering peacebuilding work around the globe. Many NGO's and practitioners are also doing valiant and effective work.

The fields of peacebuilding and violence prevention are not yet at the forefront of our national priorities or conversations. It's time to make such solutions to violence a bigger part of our collective everyday understanding and help take proven programs to scale. If this burgeoning field of peacebuilding is to reach full potential, we must help catalyze and galvanize a movement behind it and create much stronger systems and infrastructure to support it. The deeply entrenched interests working to maintain the status quo of stiffening penalties, building more prisons, increasing our military budgets, etc. -- are as well funded and powerful as ever.

## **A New Peace Story:**

At the center of the human spirit there is a great longing for peace. And we are seeing a new proliferation of the tools we need to help implement it. During this moment in our history, it is imperative that we invest in and prioritize work and practices that can help bring about more of the peace we all desire.

That is where each of our efforts come in as an important part of the growing choir to make this work of peacebuilding a national and international priority. There are many practitioners, peacebuilders and even advocates, like [The Peace Alliance](#) and many others, who are championing and trailblazing these new paths forward.

This is the new collective story we need to share, what our headlines need to better reflect. Let's collectively get it out in ways that will help amplify our understanding that there is a better path forward, and clarify our desire for that path. The more effectively we do it, the sooner the peace we all so long for will begin to flourish.