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Stopping Youth Violence

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Domestic abuse, child abuse, homicide, assault, dating violence, rape and sexual abuse, it seems all these tragedies may have something significant in common; - youth. Is violence in America first and foremost a youth thing? Is violence predominately a youth problem? Perhaps this is so. Youth is described by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as persons being age 24 and younger. It is not until the age of 24 when our brains are fully developed. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) nearly 50 percent of offenders who commit homicide in the U.S. are 24 or younger with 19 to 24 ages by far the largest demographic for this offence.

It appears this offending age range is the same on all acts of violence. If you add young adults up to 30 years of age, you then account for nearly two-third of all violent offences. Youth may also be the common dominator among violent victims as well. For example, nearly 80 percent of women who have experienced sexual assaults were victimized before the age of 24. Overall, youth are three times more likely than adults to be victims of violence.

It seems that if we really want to move-the-dial substantially in reducing unjustified violence in America, we must concentrate on youth. I know that is what our organization is doing. And, the earlier the better. It appears from our experience that the 12 to 17 - age group seems easier to reach than the 18 to 24 age group. This group in turn is easier to reach than the 25 to 30 year old young adult age group. In addition, focusing our peace message to males will no doubt pay off huge dividends since 1 out of 10 inmates in federal prison are male. Many young males seem alone in this world and sometimes there is no one to blame. That probably explains why mentoring has the strongest evidence based research of doing good.

We also must give extra attention to black youth in America. Although violence is the number two cause of death of a youths in America, it is the number one cause of death among black youth. This has been too unfair for too long. We must first close the "Bereavement Gap" in order to close the achievement gap with black youth.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the cost of interpersonal violence in the U.S. is 3.3 percent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which amounts to almost 500 billion dollars annually. That is almost as much as the entire U.S. Defense Budget and well above the 193 billion dollars illicit drug use costs us. We adults need to give all youth in this generation and future generations a crystal-clear message to reject violence and substance abuse. A message that all youth may not have fully understood yet. I believe adults greatest power is not that over science or nature but the ability to influence our youth. This united positive message to youth is using our greatest power to its greatest use. When youth voluntarily turn way from these youth "Identity Killers" I think we adults can then say with confidence, the world is officially saved. I think that is the legacy we would all like to leave.