



**Alliance for
Peacebuilding**

AfP Recognizes Jesse Morton and Patricia Shafer with Melanie Greenberg U.S. Peacebuilding Award of Excellence

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 27th, 2022

CONTACT

Nick Zuroski | (202) 822-2047 | nick@allianceforpeacebuilding.org

Washington, D.C., USA. – The [Alliance for Peacebuilding](https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org), the leading nonpartisan global network of 150+ members working in 181 countries to end violent conflict and build sustainable peace, is thrilled to announce the recipients of the Melanie Greenberg U.S. Peacebuilding Award of Excellence, **Jesse Morton (posthumously) and Patricia Shafer.**

Jesse Morton (1978-2021), a former Jihadist extremist, co-founded [Parallel Networks](https://www.parallelnetworks.org), a nonprofit dedicated to preventing and reducing violent extremism. **Patricia Shafer** is the Executive Director of NewGen Peacebuilders and the initiative [Youth & Peace in Action](https://www.youthandpeaceinaction.org), and also an AfP Senior Fellow for Peace Education. Patricia and her organization are dedicated to building peace education and peace programs in high schools and communities across the U.S.

The U.S. Peacebuilding Award of Excellence honors AfP's former President and CEO, Melanie Greenberg, and was established in 2018 to recognize innovative peacebuilding efforts addressing increasing conflict dynamics driving instability and the erosion of democracy in the United States. *"Unfortunately, we lost Jesse Morton, a true peacebuilder, when we needed him the most, but I am confident his work to reduce and prevent violent extremism with a focus on trauma will continue with the dedicated staff of Parallel Networks and many of us who believed in his brilliance and vision,"* **said AfP's Executive Director Liz Hume.** *"Additionally, at a*



Alliance for Peacebuilding

time when school issues are now being used to divide us and where students can face violence in their daily lives at schools, Patricia and her organization are working with students and educators to put peace in action and be part of the solution in the one place nearly all youth in America have in common—high school. I am thrilled to honor these two exceptional peacebuilders.”

*“I am honored beyond measure that Patricia Schafer and Jesse Morton (posthumously) are the recipients of this year’s Melanie Greenberg US Peacebuilding Award of Excellence,” said **Melanie Greenberg**. “Both Patricia and Jesse represent the purest and most beautiful ideals of hope. Patricia’s brilliant work with students equips a new generation to manage difference and polarization with creativity and compassion. Jesse was taken from us far too soon, but he lived every day demonstrating that new paths toward peace are possible, even for people who had once committed the most extreme forms of violence. He will live in my heart forever.”*

On Jesse’s receiving of the award, **Parallel Networks Co-Founder and Co-Director Mitch Silber** said *“I am honored to be receiving this award on behalf of my friend and partner, Jesse Morton, who sadly we lost too soon. Jesse was all about transformation—both his own and others and he demonstrated that change was always possible, no matter the circumstances. That is the way he lived his life.”*

Additionally, **Parallel Networks Board of Directors Ryan Lo’Ree** stated *“the Melanie Greenberg U.S. Peacebuilding Award of Excellence is given to those that dedicate their lives to peacebuilding, and Jesse dedicated every minute of his life to this work. He believed in a world where everyone could understand and empathize with each other and also forgive. He didn’t care about how you fell down but rather the actions you took to get back up. Jesse was humble, hardworking, and compassionate and believed in the need for a whole-of-society approach to address violent extremism that included understanding trauma and health. Jesse will forever be missed but never forgotten, and we will ensure his work lives on through Parallel Networks by those of us honored to receive this award on his behalf.”*

*“The Melanie Greenberg U.S. Peacebuilding Award of Excellence is an honor to receive and a call to all of us to focus on continuously building a culture of peace,” said **Patricia Shafer**. “In 2018, a poll of 100,000 people in 15 countries asked what—with the support of governments—are the most effective ways to build peace. ‘Teach peace in schools’ emerged as one of the top recommendations. Every day, I have the honor of*



Alliance for Peacebuilding

connecting with students, educators, and community supporters who believe the same. Young people are essential leaders and colleagues in peacebuilding as a practice. We work together with a view that peace requires empathy and compassion, but peace is also a process and way of solving problems. I am fortunate to support peace education in many countries, and especially in the vast U.S. system of education founded on principles of democracy and civic engagement as keys to sustainable peace and security."

Jesse Morton was a former jihadist extremist who helped to bring the narrative of Al-Qaeda and Salafi-jihadist ideology in America. Jesse was arrested in 2011 and began his journey out of jihadism and toward working on preventing and reducing violent extremism in the U.S. He was the co-founder of [Parallel Networks](#), which combats extremism through innovative and creative mechanisms that make counterterrorism and counter-extremism more holistic and multidimensional. Jesse became America's "First Former Jihadist" hired by George Washington University's Program on Extremism. Jesse was included in Foreign Policy Magazine's 2017 'Global Thinkers' listing and was a certified substance abuse and mental health counselor in New York State. He held a Bachelor's Degree in Human Services and a Master's in International Relations from Columbia University, with a concentration in the Middle East and nonprofit management. He lectured at Imam Muhammad ibn Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and Sunderland University in Casablanca, Morocco, and was widely read in classical Islamic theology and jurisprudence and historical relations between the United States and Middle Eastern nations.

Patricia Shafer is the Executive Director of NewGen Peacebuilders, a peace education program that emphasizes the role, value and impact of young people ages 14-24 in achieving a peaceful world, the Executive Director of the initiative [Youth & Peace in Action](#), and a Senior Fellow for Peace Education at AfP. This past year with the support of AfP, NewGen Peacebuilders launched the [Youth & Peace In Action Initiative](#) in the United States, which engages and equips young community peacebuilders through peace education curriculum and motivates them to "repeat the peace" in their communities and schools. The initiative began with 300 high schools and youth clubs/organizations across the eastern U.S. and Caribbean that together represent 300,000 students and the communities where they live. Patricia



Alliance for Peacebuilding

is a Rotary Peace Fellow, Rotary Positive Peace Activator, and Global Peace Ambassador for Rotary strategic partner Institute for Economics & Peace. In addition to her official peacebuilding work, Patricia is Chief Catalyst and Executive Director of international nonprofit Mothering Across Continents that manages several peace education programs internationally including in South Sudan, Lebanon, and in East Africa. The organization was nominated by the government of South Sudan for the inaugural UNESCO Prize for Girl and Women Literacy. Previously, Patricia held senior positions in change management, communications and corporate affairs in two global Fortune 100 companies. Patricia holds an MSc in Consulting and Coaching for Change—a joint-venture of Oxford University, UK, and HEC France; an MBA, Northwestern University Kellogg Graduate School of Management; and MA, Journalism from The Ohio State University.

The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP)—named the “[number one influencer and change agent](#)” among peacebuilding institutions worldwide—is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit, nonpartisan network of 150+ organizations working in 181 countries to prevent conflict, reduce violence, improve lives, and build sustainable peace. At our core, AfP cultivates a network to strengthen and advance the peacebuilding field, enabling peacebuilding organizations to achieve greater impact—tackling issues too large for any one organization to address alone.