

Movement for U S Peace Department

As alternative to war

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FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Portland activists have joined a nationwide movement to foster non-violent solutions to wars and other violence by creating a U.S. Department of Peace.

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PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Community activists Clare Cleveland (left) and Peggy Mala gather materials in their grassroots effort to create a U.S. Department of Peace. The proposed government agency would provide practical, non-violent solutions to the problems of domestic and international conflict.

Movement for U S Peace Department

continued ▲ *from Front*

The proposal is currently before the U.S. House of Representatives (HR 808) and would create a government agency that would be responsible for researching, articulating and facilitating solutions for domestic and international conflicts.

The local volunteers, including people who specialize in conflict resolution, also see a Peace Department as an avenue for addresses ongoing issues like overcrowded prisons, lack of healthcare and poor education.

Peggy Mala decided to join the movement through her frustration with the government's negative responses to social issues and international conflicts. She was complaining about the Iraq war when her son said to her, "Why don't you stop complaining and do something about it?" and so she did. She has been volunteering for the campaign since February.

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that are building blocks for negotiation.

Clare Cleveland volunteered for the movement after attending a local peace conference in February. She believes that peace is missing from our culture and government.

"It really is upsetting to know that war is glorified in our culture," says Cleveland, "people see peace as a weakness but what a peaceful resolution is saying is that we are above war and fighting."

One of the objectives of a U.S. Department of Peace would be to set an example for children to positively handle conflicts through negotiation techniques.

"Bullying, racism and economic tension between kids cause a lot of problems for our schools. These kids are affected by fighting at a young age and are filled with so much anger. The Department will teach kids how to peacefully resolve their conflicts," says Mala.

The Department of Peace could help states like Oregon create

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simply put them in jail. There are peaceful ways to handle situations and resolve them. This process has proven to be successful. Countries like Canada apply very sophisticated peaceful techniques for resolving conflicts," says Mala.

On U.S. soil, the Peace Department would develop policies and allocate resources to reduce the levels of crime, violence, child abuse and other forms of societal discord. Internationally, the department would assist the President and Congress on the most sophisticated ideas and techniques to resolve conflicts and create peaceful solutions among nations.

"War is not a way to move into the future," says Mala, "our children will be left to cleaning up the mess."

Conflict-resolution techniques are especially skilled tools for negotiation. Those who practice conflict resolution use specific criteria to analyze and resolve the situation and encourage the growth of the relationships between the negotiating parties.

The techniques include focusing on openness, remembering that all people want to be heard and understanding that all humans have common basic needs

rehabilitation programs for prison inmates.

"America has some of the highest number of people imprisoned in the world. The Department of Peace will focus on rehabilitating inmates so that they don't come out of prison worse than when they went in," says Cleveland.

Tom Hastings, a professor at Portland State University and a volunteer activist, believes that people have to use negotiation as an objective to find ways to resolve conflicts and protect people, even if the parties refuse to like one another.

"Conflict Resolvers never quit," says Hastings, "the challenges are enormous and the children today are the first generation that will be exposed to these new ideas of resolving conflict."

Like the women's, civil-rights and environmental movements before it, advocates for a Department of Peace see that the time has come for a new evolution to prevent suffering by wars and other conflicts.

The local advocates urge others to speak out in favor of the movement, to call or write your local member of Congress, and to join them by visiting thepeacealliance.org.