

## **Ashland Culture of Peace Commission explores peace education**

**By Patricia Sempowich / Ashland Culture of Peace Commission**

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Among the eight sectors of the Peace Wheel that define the outreach of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC), education is key to developing a culture that promotes peace. Maria Montessori believed education is the most powerful and universal way to reconstruct society and said, “Averting war is the work of politicians; establishing peace is the work of education.”

Peace is a learned behavior. The process of learning to be peaceful is a path of discovery that never ends. Engagement with others in the community through caring, compassion and empathy provides an environment of trust in which peace education thrives.

Peace education promotes knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that create change. It encourages living in harmony with oneself, others and the natural world. The Ashland Culture of Peace Commission has joined a growing international movement of people and organizations who are bringing forward active peace-building programs.

The ACPC Peace Education Team consists of two educators, two mediation professionals and a filmmaker. We recently met with Patty Michiels, the Director of Instruction & Human Resources for the Ashland School District (ASD). We discovered that the ASD is dedicated to peace building through the use of MindUp, developed by the Hawn Foundation.

MindUP teaches social and emotional learning skills that link cognitive neuroscience, positive psychology and mindful awareness training utilizing a brain-centric approach. It is a research-based training program for educators and children. This program is composed of 15 lessons based in neuroscience.

Students learn to self-regulate behavior and mindfully engage in focused concentration required for academic success (for more, go to [thehawnfoundation.org](http://thehawnfoundation.org)).

The MindUp curriculum supports social skills and emotional health through a framework known as Positive Behavior Support. PBS offers peace education tools that encourage listening and compassion and promote an environment of understanding. These tools, along with other strategies, teach students how to deal with difficult emotions and conflict.

Another peace-building expression found in area schools is brought by Medford-based Resolve Center for Dispute Resolution and Restorative Justice.

Resolve describes restorative justice as “a philosophy and practice based on a core set of principles that emphasize healing and repair over punishment, inclusion over exclusion, and individual accountability with a high level of community support.”

Restorative practices are increasingly being used to improve school climate and culture and to address student behavior. Resolve has been active in four area school districts this year, and the number of school-based projects will double next year. Students, staff and parents of the John Muir and Ashland Middle Schools benefit from these practices.

The ACPC Peace Education team meets twice a month to discuss strategies, develop programs and plan educational events. Current plans are to follow the lead of the StarShine Academy Charter School in Phoenix, Arizona, and establish Eleven Days of Peace in September. Beginning on 9/11 and culminating on the International Day of Peace 9/21, Ashland will celebrate peace in our community and in our schools.

Plans already in development for the Eleven Days of Peace include essays and poems by middle and high school students and singing, dancing, art and circle games for elementary students. The essays, poems and artwork will be collected into a book — a culture of peace treasure created by Ashland students.

In the coming months, the Education Team will be inviting special guests to share a variety of Peace Education programs, art and activities with the community. If you would like to participate, please contact Patricia at

**comco219@ashlandhome.net.**

With active peace building programs in our schools and community, Ashland is working to help our young people understand and value a peaceful society. The powerful tool of peace education will help our youth resolve problems by developing self-responsibility and respect for others, which engenders leadership.

*Patricia Sempowich is a retired educator and a co-commissioner on the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission Peace Education Team. Email comments and questions to **ashlandcpc@gmail.com**, or drop by the commission office at 33 1st St., Suite 1. The ACPC website is **www.ashlandcpc.org**; like the commission on Facebook at **www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission.***



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