

Local Communities

Most of the projects and activities that we propose now establish a working nerve center or "central headquarters", if you will. The Internet makes it possible for anyone, anywhere, to be a part of that effort. But in the long run the local S.O.U.L communities everywhere, and the local projects they sponsor, will be vastly more important. In fact, the most important function of the "central headquarters" is to connect the local communities and to facilitate their work.

As soon as a local community has formed, it will be listed under this heading, along with names of designated contact persons, and how to get in touch with them. When a local community sets up a website or Yahoo group, a link to that site will be included. Local websites will become increasingly important as the community becomes more involved with different projects. While local S.O.U.L communities will have almost total freedom, we will publish some guidelines to ensure that they remain true to the few defining principles of S.O.U.L, and that they will follow sound business practice.

If you want to join a local S.O.U.L community, but there isn't one near you, you're urged to establish one, even if you're its only member. That way we can direct other interested people to you. You can recruit members by "spreading the word". Please read the first article under Projects and Activities for ideas. In addition, you may want to consider holding talks in the local library or the community center. If you need more books than you can afford to buy, we may be able to give you some on consignment, but only if our revenues allow it.

S.O.U.L ROCHESTER, NH

more people to energize the organization. The proposals described below present an excellent opportunity to energize people in the Rochester area into the type of sustainable community service that can transform our area and ultimately, the world. Please get in touch and let's talk about these or any other ideas you may have.

The first step to implement any proposal is to do exhaustive research and to form a sound business plan. I have started to do some research for the projects outlined below, but much more needs to be done. Even if you have very little time to spend, you can have a tremendous impact. Each project will have a project leader, who will divide up the research into small bits that are just right for any amount of time per month that you may be able to spend on this work.

I: PEACE ROOM

We need to acquire some real estate to house this, and the next project. The most visible, street-accessible portion of the building will be the Community Resource Center, or the Peace Room. There will be an administrative office/ resource center, where people can be directed to whatever Rochester area resources they may need.

The "great room" will have books, DVD's and other media for sale, and perhaps a selection of fair-trade goods. A public reading room with comfortable couches, and a room suitable for small to medium sized meetings round out a starter community center. With more resources, perhaps we can open a café and a fair-trade store.

The Peace Room makes a large variety of resources and information available to the public:

1: Diverse religious and spiritual organizations and their resources.

2: Existing governmental or other public resources, including education, healthcare, employment, recreational, alcohol and drug rehabilitation, pregnancy and childcare, hospice, mental health counseling, and whatever other resources our research may uncover.

3: Peace, Human

Rights and Environmental action groups and their resources.

II: BOOTSTRAPS, A YOUNG ADULT COMMUNITY RESIDENCE:

MISSION STATEMENT:

To allow young adults, single parents or couples with small children to step back from an over-stressed life situation. Many single parents and young couples don't have financial, educational or emotional resources to get out of a rut. The difficult tasks of bread winning, child rearing, and upgrading one's educational and job skills, not to speak of wholesome recreation, often gets the best of our struggling young people.

A community residence setting allows for a more efficient and supportive pooling of available resources. That, and an efficiently built and run physical facility will drastically lower the cost of living, making more time and money available for the participants to enjoy life, and to improve their education and job skills. Once they have achieved that, they will be much more prepared to set up their own households. A spiritually uplifting environment in close proximity to a public community resource will allow adults and their dependents to flourish.

GUIDELINES FOR FORMING AND MAINTAINING LOCAL S.O.U.L COMMUNITIES

These guidelines will be revised and added to when legal, financial, and other pertinent expertise become available. Anyone who believes that he or she has something to contribute to the improvement and focusing of these guidelines is urged to contact us. We strive for maximum freedom within the following few defining attributes of S.O.U.L.:

1: The local community must be philosophically based on unconditional love, emanating from the spiritual reality of our unity with each other and with the All that Is. People of all religions and philosophies may become members, but the community cannot advocate beliefs about the "wrongness in God's eyes" of some or all other beliefs. We would certainly encourage mainstream Jews, Christians, Atheists, Hindus or Muslims to start communities like ours, and we will gladly work with such communities on projects that we can agree on. But S.O.U.L communities must, by definition, be in alignment with the above-mentioned unitive spirituality.

2: The community must be based on nurturing spirituality, rather than rank materialism

and cutthroat competition. Our perceived spiritual unity implies that all members are equally entitled to the benefits of the community's spiritual, social, economic, educational, medical and recreational structures. All members should take ownership, and pride, in the community's assets, as well as responsibility for its liabilities. Different wage levels may exist as incentives for members to increase their professional skills and their ability to take charge. These wage differences must never become so great as to create different economic classes.

3: Since all

communities and projects need to be, or quickly become, financially self-sustaining or better, everything that's done or built, every project undertaken, must be State of the Art. This may mean different things for different circumstances. Ambient economic conditions and availability of resources will demand different approaches to community building in different regions. Nevertheless, all substantive plans must be researched thoroughly and executed professionally. All findings whether from research or from actual implementations of projects, are to become part of the S.O.U.L Community Building Database, available to everyone.

4: Local,

regional and national communities must disavow violence as a means to accomplish their goals. The only allowable use of violence is in the immediate defense of lives and assets, when attacked. This does not include retaliation, or pre-emptive violence. For such non-violence to work, or even be maintainable, all of us must become trained in presenting a neutral, non-threatening demeanor to all parties in conflict. It might benefit our cause and the cause of peace, to search for ways to be of true benefit to all parties in conflict. S.O.U.L has to remain known across the world as a sponsor of Peace that has compassion for all.

5: S.O.U.L

communities must abide by the laws that prevail in the respective countries, even when these laws may seem arbitrary, unjust, unnecessary, archaic, or merely stupid. Not to do so would be an open invitation to dissolution of the community, and opposition to our cause elsewhere. Innovation may cause the community to run afoul of laws and regulations. It is therefore very important to research and test the soundness of innovations, and to work carefully with regulatory organizations. It would also help to recruit some good lawyers to the cause. If a country's lack of democratic freedoms prohibits some or all activities we stand for, S.O.U.L enthusiasts are encouraged to contemplate the true spirit of our global mission and how it relates to their specific circumstances. Such spiritual contemplation will guide them into a specific format of activities that is both permitted, and supportive to the cause. Activists inside and outside the country in question can also petition the authorities for more freedom, explaining how such expanded freedom is beneficial to all. In cases of severe repression, the global S.O.U.L community will give full support to carefully thought out campaigns of civil disobedience.

6: Check

excessive ego at the door! The only way this revolution works is for each

person we encounter to be empowered to be a potent force for change; to him or her self, to the community, to the nation and to the world. When humble, unconditional love flows through us we're links in a chain, facilitating a chain reaction of mass empowerments. That's so much better than alleged leaders sucking up all the glory and energy till their heads swell and they become obnoxious.