

ON THE HOUSE

Creating Change conference organizers seek safe space for out-of-towners by Jim Radosta



Melissa Shepherd is on the lookout for 100 spare beds

When the 15th annual Creating Change conference comes to town next month, Portlanders will have a unique opportunity to meet new people while lending a helping hand. About 2,500 community builders and leaders from throughout the United States are expected to attend the gathering from Nov. 6 to 10 at the DoubleTree Jantzen Beach.

Creating Change, the country's largest skills-building and strategy conference of activists who work in the sexual minorities movement, is sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Many of the attendees are college students or employees of nonprofit queer agencies and are on limited budgets, so organizers are making arrangements to provide them with a free place to stay.

An 11-person community housing sub-committee has been charged with the task of finding 100 warm spare beds, cozy couches, comfy pullout sofas, extra guest rooms and even floors for out-of-town conferencegoers. Its efforts are being led by Melissa Shepherd, who works in education and advocacy for Basic Rights Oregon, one of the Creating Change sponsoring organizations.

"It is so important to have free, safe space available for conference attendees," she says. "Many people would not be able to afford to attend this conference without the generosity of community housing hosts."

People who are willing and able to open up their home to an out-of-town guest or two during the conference may fill out a form online or download it and send it to Shepherd. They will be asked for their contact information as well as details on what kinds of guests they would prefer to house—queer or straight, male or female, youth or elder, with or without children, vegan or vegetarian.

Other questions include:

- How many pets do you have in your home?
- Does anyone smoke inside your home?
- Would you be able to pick up and drop off your guest at the Portland airport?
- What transportation is available from your home to the conference hotel in Jantzen Beach?

Applicants also must list which nights they will be able to provide community housing between Nov. 5 and 10, how many people they can take in, what type of sleeping space is avail-

able and other accessibility details—languages spoken in the home, scent-free environment, stairs, etc. All information is confidential and only will be used for the purposes of matching guests with hosts.

Those who offer community housing are responsible for providing a clean, comfortable, safe place for people to stay for the duration of their conference attendance. Shepherd says new hosts are contacting her every day.

"We're about halfway there," she told *Just Out*. "It looks like we have a good mix, and people seem really flexible, so that's what's really most important."

Hosts are not responsible for providing food or transportation for their guest but may choose to offer these as part of their hospitality. Shepherd hopes some Portlanders will have time to show conference attendees around town so they can explore the Rose City and not just spend every day stuck at the hotel.

"Jantzen Beach is not the epitome of the Oregon experience, so I think it's great if guests can see a little bit more of the city," she says. Also, "private housing will provide more peace and quiet than maybe the hotel will—a little rest away from the conference."

Organizers will be matching guests with hosts on a first-come, first-served basis, then sending out letters to both parties with their names and contact information. At that point it will be the responsibility of the guest and host to get hold each other and make arrangements.

Although organizers will make every effort to provide the best match between host and guest, they cannot guarantee compatibility. If safety concerns arise between the parties, they will try to provide a second placement. □

For more information about CREATING CHANGE community housing, call 503-222-6151 or 503-231-9286 (TTY), fax 503-236-6686, e-mail melissa@basicrights.org or visit the Internet site www.nglhf.org/cc/scholar.htm. For more information about the conference, call 503-282-1542 or e-mail creatingchange02@yahoo.com. To register visit the Internet site www.creatingchange.org. The next host committee meeting will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. Oct. 16 in the first floor conference room at 123 N.E. Third Ave. Newcomers should arrive 15 minutes early to catch up on what's been happening so far.

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

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