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Oakland Tribune, The (CA)

Youth Uprising's director receives California Peace Prize

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Cassie Harwood Oakland Tribune

OAKLAND — Olis Simmons, co-founder and executive director of Oakland's Youth Uprising, has been a dedicated promoter of violence prevention and youth leadership in Alameda County. Thursday night she was awarded for her efforts by The California Wellness Foundation, which issued three \$25,000 California Peace Prizes to community leaders for their contributions to preventing violence in their communities.

"The honorees are representative of thousands of unsung heroes who work with youth to prevent violence in communities throughout California," said Gary Yates, TCWF president and CEO. "This year's honorees also show that perseverance through hardship can help build essential leadership that makes our state healthier and safer."

Simmons has received a number of awards since Youth Uprising's inception, and has dedicated subsequent funds to her organization, but the California Peace Prize is unique in that it is a personal recognition and cash award.

"I have to say it's a little bit different for me because this award is really about me," Simmons said.

Simmons will use the award toward purchasing a house in East Oakland, where Youth Uprising is located. "I'm really committed to East Oakland," she said. "People are afraid of Oakland in general — and East Oakland in particular — so I decided I would move into the neighborhood that I'm committed to."

Youth Uprising, in conjunction with Mayor Ron Dellums and the Oakland Police Department, recently sponsored For a Safe Town, or F.A.S.T, a daylong event to foster community relations with police and to provide entertainment and employment opportunities for residents.

"When you take away violence, you don't have peace, you just have nonviolence," Simmons said. "There's a big gap between violence and peace and that thing in the middle is love. My organization has taken the risk of loving young people, and I do it every day."

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