

**Youth Engagement Report**  
**Fall Continuing Sessions**  
**Philadelphia Yearly Meeting**  
**Saturday, November 3, 2018**

I'd like to lift up four images in this report to you: a wish list, a calendar, a canvas tote bag, and a telephone switchboard.

During the morning Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, the Facilitators and Assistants for the three youth programs — Children and Families, Middle School Friends, and Young Friends — will not be with the body because they are in program with young people. As the youth will experience, this staff brings many gifts, and collaborating with them in our shared work is a gift to me. Among their gifts, I would lift up:

- leadings to nurture the spiritual lives of young people
- tools and resources to support parents and Quaker Parenting
- knowledge of Quakerism as an experiential faith
- concern for social witness, including racial justice
- commitment to inclusivity and honoring the leadership of youth
- making space for the needs of LGBTQ youth in community
- playfulness, and joy in their work with children and adolescents

If I had to make a **wish list** of what we might hope to see represented in youth workers, from my perspectives both as a colleague and as a parent I would make a list that looks much like what I've just named. We are also blessed to have adult volunteers who support the staff and youth in programs, giving their time and energy to be in community with our young people over weekends and gatherings. Wish lists and gifts received then require thanks, and Friendly Adult Presences are among those to whom we extend deep gratitude. Perhaps you have wondered about volunteering with a youth program? We welcome you to be in touch with one of the youth staff to discuss that leading.

Since Annual Sessions in July, we have hosted the first four youth events on our program **calendar**. These included a late summer gathering for Young Friends at Camp Onas, the Middle School Friends Fall gathering at Germantown Meeting, a Family Meetup that same weekend in September, and the Young Friends gathering in support of the Bucks Peace Fair. Programs for the rest of the year, through Annual Sessions 2019, are planned and on the PYM website and calendar. A program flyer will be available in the display area at Arch Street during Sessions. Please take copies home to your meeting and share with young people and their families. We've added a Quaker Family Meetup in April at Princeton Meeting, and program planning for next year is already underway.

Since the summer, my role as Youth Engagement Coordinator has taken me on the road to visit meetings and events hosting by Friends. When I head off to lead a workshop or do a presentation, I take books and resources and handouts with me wherever I go. My trusty canvas **tote bags** have been to Third Haven Meeting to speak on nurturing the spiritual lives of children and what Quakerism has to offer families today. I packed up and attended the Bucks Peace Fair, where youth staff and I set up a table and shared with fairgoers information about PYM youth programs and how Friends welcome children and families. In October, youth staff and I facilitated a children's program for the Newtown Meeting retreat.

Working with the adult program's theme and queries around spiritual deepening, we used story and art to explore the same. A parent at the retreat later said, *"It felt so good to be held up -- to know you had us. It was uplifting, freeing. It allowed me to be a part of my community."* Isn't this what we want for all families in our meetings? To be held up, and included. My tote bags were also packed up in August to attend the 5th annual gathering of the Quaker Religious Education Collaborative, with other PYM participants, and to lead a Godly Play/Faith & Play workshop at Pendle Hill that was attended by several PYM Friends, including three youth staff members. I'm scheduling visits to meetings in coming months, and hope that you will consider extending an invitation to worship with you and hear about your programs for young people — including what's working well and what you need.

The final image I'd like to share to illustrate the work happening in Youth Engagement is a **switchboard operator**. I answer a lot of email each week, and the ones that are most fun are when someone writes and asks a question like, "What resources are there for our First Day School program to explore issues of gender identity?" Or, "What exists for learning about Margaret Fell with children?" This is an opportunity for me to listen and share. As a workshop facilitator, I always believe there is more wisdom in the group than from any single voice, and sometimes the thing you're seeking has been developed by another meeting. So part of the Youth Engagement Coordinator's role is to be a "RE switchboard operator," connecting Friends with one another and nurturing collaboration and a shared tool box. Each time someone tells me about a great idea they're trying, a new resource they're using, I imagine a new light on the switchboard, now ready to share to other Friends. I am hearing stories all the time, about wonderful programs in meetings: the Wednesday evening gathering of youth and families over pizza, a nature camp on the meeting's grounds that serves as outreach to the wider community, the innovative approach to being ready for children visiting, a thoughtful program developed for older youth as they age out of First Day School. This metaphor for sharing across the Yearly Meeting will take a new shape in coming months, as we seek to form a Religious Education and Youth Work Resource Friends practice area. We're also looking at the resources for First Day programs on the website, and hope to update and add new material that speaks to issues and concerns we're encountering in youth ministry today. Finally, I want to lift up that the Youth Programs Advisory Committee (YPAC) has been approved by the Quaker Life Council, and we are working to populate that group, including its four youth members. A deeply moving powerpoint presentation on the vision and mission of YPAC is posted on the PYM website, with gratitude to the Youth Sprint III who articulated this vision grounded in community, accessibility, Quaker faith and values, and meaningful participation.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve.

*Melinda Wenner Bradley, Youth Engagement Coordinator*