

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Member Care Committees,
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends' meetings.*

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How Meetings Can Reach Out to Underserved Children **by Monique Begg**

"Miss Monique, I didn't eat breakfast and I didn't eat lunch. Is there something I could eat now?" The six-year-old looks up at me, her eyes pleading. She says she doesn't feel "too good."

It is three o'clock in the afternoon and children who participate in the Sunday afternoon activities of the Friends Enrichment Program (FEP) of Moorestown (NJ) Monthly Meeting are gathering in the Friends meetinghouse. In a few minutes, we will read and discuss a story about a boy whose father lost his job. But first I must feed the hungry child.

Established in the spring of 1997, FEP is a hands-on, faith-in-action project administered by a subcommittee of the Peace and Social Concerns Committee of Moorestown Meeting. Its mission is to reach out to underserved Moorestown children with a message of love and inclusion with offers of enrichment scholarships and other opportunities for growth and development.

Sources of Help

An annual grant from the D'Olier Foundation and contributions from the Moorestown Meeting Peace and Social Concerns Committee, members of the meeting, and the First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown are major sources of income, along with fundraisers and donations from the community at large.

Donations to FEP come in all sizes. Some people make large contributions. Others give us a few dollars or quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies. One of the largest single contributions we received this year came from a man who lives in

a nearby town and read about us in a newspaper article. One of the smallest came from an 11-year-old girl in our program who walked up to me at a FEP meeting, reached into a pocket of her jeans, and handed me forty-one cents. "That's all I have," she said. "I was saving it for candy."

On another occasion this year, a FEP parent gave us \$200 for our scholarship fund. It was money she had saved over a long period of time. She wanted us to have it because she thought we would be able to make better use of it than she. It was only at her insistence that I accepted it.

Under FEP, qualifying children are given the opportunity to attend summer camp, enroll in art classes or sports clinics, or take private music lessons. Since its creation, FEP has issued scholarships to more than 225 underserved Moorestown children and spent about \$150,000 on those scholarships. Though new names are added to our scholarship list every year, many children receive scholarships year after year.

In 2010, FEP awarded summer scholarships to 23 children. Twenty-one of the children who received scholarships attended day or residential summer camps for a total of 38 weeks. The other two attended art classes for a total of eight weeks. Additionally, six children took private music lessons at Perkins Conservatory of Music (Moorestown, NJ), with FEP paying 25 percent of the cost. Under a partnership agreement with FEP, Perkins Center for the Arts used grant money it received for its conservatory



Monique Begg

program to pay the remaining 75 percent. Generous discounts awarded to FEP in 2010 brought the cost down to half what it would have been at full price.

In the winter of 2011, the number of FEP kids taking music lessons rose from six to fifteen, with Perkins being able to shoulder more than 85 percent of the cost. "The lessons are the highlights of their life," commented the mother of two young boys who are taking percussion lessons.

School Year Program

During the school year, FEP children aged five and up and young friends of FEP may attend the school-year program of activities. Run by meeting volunteers, with help from high school students who participate as leaders, counselors or counselors-in-training, these activities are held in the meetinghouse on Sunday afternoons from 3 to 5:30. Group reading, reading for pleasure, introduction to ballet, arts and crafts, cooking and food preparation, fundraising for FEP and community service are among the activities that we have been able to offer this year.

Four teenagers (two from Moorestown Friends School and two from Moorestown High School) regularly volunteer their services to FEP. They are developing their leadership skills while contributing their enthusiasm, talents, and creativity to the program. It is a win-win situation.

"Throughout my four years of participating in FEP, I have truly become a better person," wrote a 17-year-old scholarship recipient who will be attending Randolph College (Lynchburg, VA) in the fall. "I have gained many skills as a leader and many can be attributed to my involvement with FEP. Although Randolph College is six hours away from here, FEP will never stray far from my heart."

FEP kids who take music lessons at Perkins Conservatory of Music or who participate in dancing activities may perform at our annual Music and Dance Medley fundraiser. This year, 17 of our scholarship recipients were among the 28 children who performed at the medley and helped raise \$550 for our cause.

Since the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, our FEP children worked on two community

Church Women United Shares FEP Work, Honors Founder

Church Women United (CWU) of Moorestown, NJ, has brought women from nine congregations into a fellowship that cuts across lines of income, race, and denomination. We seek to promote equality, unity, justice, and peace.

When Monique Begg, member of Moorestown Friends Meeting, launched her project to help meet needs of underserved children, the first families served were members of local churches. Over the years, the program expanded as Monique met with other women of faith, some of whom were long-standing CWU members.

Therefore it was not surprising that, when the national CWU established a Human Rights Award in 2006 for local units to confer, Moorestown CWU selected Monique Begg. Her work embodies our goals. Thus began CWU's relationship with Monique and FEP.

This program requires both funding and personal involvement. Beyond the support of the Moorestown Friends Meeting itself, the First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown has also contributed substantial financial support annually.

"The program would not have been the same without it," Monique has affirmed.

Church Women United has been involved in more personal ways. Each year since 2006, we have provided hundreds of home-baked cookies for raising funds. We helped publicize and contributed food for the FEP Pasta Dinner in 2010 and made gallons of soup for the 2011 Empty Bowl Dinner.

We also attended and brought more diners with us. At these events, we have met many of the program's children and gleaned a sense of what FEP means to them. I meet monthly with Monique's committee for whatever ideas or assistance I can offer.

Monique and her committee have expressed their great appreciation for the financial and personal support they receive from other meetings, groups, and individuals. FEP is truly a golden opportunity for people from the community to enrich children's lives.

—Charlotte Gillespie
Past President Moorestown CWU

service projects. On one occasion, they baked dozens of cookies for the lunches of volunteers who were building a playground at a Camden elementary school.

On another occasion, they made ceramic bowls for an Empty Bowl Dinner that FEP hosted for the benefit of the scholarship fund and the Food Bank of South Jersey. The children welcomed guests and acted as servers at the event, which drew 141 people and raised almost \$1,900 for FEP and an equal amount for the Food Bank.

As they worked on the Empty Bowl project, kids in our program were reminded that, although they may have very little, there are many people all over the world who have a lot less. After we discussed this topic, an eight-year-old was inspired to write a prayer to thank God for “food, shelter, clothes, family, friends, and school.”

Our school-year program operates on a shoestring, with volunteers donating most of the supplies. The program offers the children enrichment opportunities and provides them with a safe place to meet on Sunday afternoons.

Family Outreach

Some of our families have been threatened with eviction more than once. From time to time, many run out of food or out of money to pay an overdue gas and electricity bill. Though helping FEP families in financial distress is not included in our mission statement, it is something that we do as a matter-of-course. We have a separate family outreach fund for that purpose. We currently maintain less than \$200 in that fund, yet we manage to help every family that may turn to us.

Since September 2010, we referred six families facing eviction to agencies or ministries that combine their resources to pay overdue rent and other bills. We delivered huge amounts of donated food to some of our families. We network with a food kitchen that, upon request, gives us some of the food it can't use. We also issue vouchers for families to get free leftover pizza from a local pizzeria.

In our 14-plus years of existence, one family had to leave our program because of homelessness. The family of seven—parents, four kids, and an unborn child—spent eight days in a motel room before a suitable single-family transitional home was found for them. The family has relocated in Camden and while the kids are no longer eligible for our scholarships, we stay in touch with them.

Questions for Reflection

1. How can we inform ourselves about the needs of underserved children in our broader community?
2. What can our meeting do to reach out to families and children who do not have the means to participate in the arts, recreation and other enriching aspects of family life?
3. What organizations in our community—churches, service groups, government agencies, arts groups—might already be engaged in helping underserved children?
4. How can our meeting take part in this community effort?
5. How can we provide opportunities to our own meeting's youth to reach out to others within our own community/neighborhood?

Roots of FEP's Ministry

Our outreach to these children in our own community grows from Friends' belief that there is “that of God in everyone.” It is rooted in Friends' query on social responsibility and witness. The program has grown and evolved slowly over a period of many years. At first, it was just the germ of an idea, a grain of sand in a sea of thoughts.

FEP traces its genesis to the summer of 1995, when there was a shortage of summer recreational opportunities available to Moorestown's less affluent children. I knew about it, was concerned, but had no solution to offer.

Without enough activities to keep them productively occupied during the summer months, some of the older children were causing trouble and worry in town. While their more fortunate contemporaries were at summer camp or the swim club or sports clinic or enjoying art classes, these kids would watch TV or run out to join other idle kids. Often they attracted negative attention. They made too much noise, or they rode their skateboards on the sidewalk, or smoked, or fought. Some engaged in acts of vandalism, slashing tires or throwing

rocks at cars. Some darted into the streets in front of incoming cars at the risk of harming themselves and causing traffic accidents. On many occasions, police were called.

I kept asking myself: What am I doing to help these children, and what am I doing for the betterment of my community?

The Birthing of FEP

In the fall of 1995, I joined the Peace and Social Concerns Committee and shared my concerns for the underserved youths of Moorestown. By then the inchoate ideas that had been floating in my mind had coalesced into a proposal for a two-step action plan:

- Step One would involve the creation of a Moorestown Friends Cookbook as a fundraiser to provide wholesome recreational opportunities for Moorestown children who did not have adequate opportunities.
- * An appointed Peace and Social Concerns subcommittee would be responsible to manage the writing, editing, publication, and promotion of the book. It would be my responsibility to clerk that subcommittee.
- Step Two would involve the allotment of recreational scholarships to qualifying children. The proposal did not provide guidelines for implementation. Details were to follow at a later date.

The proposal was approved, and *Moorestown Friends Heritage Cookbook*, conceived as a joint philanthropic project of Moorestown Monthly Meeting and Moorestown Friends School (MFS) was published in April of 1997. The book included Quaker history, anecdotes, and photographs, as well as historic and contemporary recipes from the kitchens of Friends and friends of Friends.

More than 50 friends contributed recipes, tested them, sorted and organized them, and proof read pages. Thanks to the support of MFS and the meeting and the support of a local store, which sold hundreds of copies as a service to the community, the books sold well and quickly. It became a local

bestseller and we were pleased to order a second printing. By the end of June, we had made enough money from the sale of the book to enroll eight children in one week of day camp, with FEP paying the full amount of the camp fee.

Many Hands Needed

This was good news, but it was also scary. Step Two represented a baby born prematurely and I wasn't ready for it. Until then I had thought that my involvement with the project would be limited to Step One. I had assumed—naively, as it turned out—that, by the time we would be ready to issue scholarships, another member of the meeting would have stepped forward to help locate possible recipients.

When that didn't happen, I was left to my own devices. Reluctantly, I did what had to be done and took care of the new project as best as I could, while clerking the cookbook subcommittee and

devoting as many hours as I could to my work as a freelance journalist, which was something I had no intention of giving up.

But something had to give and it was my right leg. On Mother's Day, I

fell on the sidewalk in front of the meetinghouse and fractured my hip. Afterward, I was on crutches for a number of weeks. Fortunately, members of our subcommittee volunteered to take on more responsibilities and performed much of the "leg work."

To select candidates for the first round of scholarships, we sought and obtained referrals from local schools and the Township juvenile detective. Our next step was to write to the families on our referral lists, asking them to contact us if they were interested in obtaining recreational scholarships for their children.

When no one replied to our letters, we made phone calls to the families that had telephone service. When no one returned our calls, we knocked on doors. I must admit that most people didn't welcome us with open arms.

Many doors remained closed and some were slammed in our faces. A few were kept ajar and chained, while we explained the purpose of our visit to home occupants who stared at us with undisguised suspicion, if not downright hostility.

Building Trust

They must have wondered: Who are these strangers? And what do they want from us? It didn't help that in these early days FEP didn't have a name and we were introducing ourselves as so-and-so, "member of the Moorestown Friends Cookbook Committee." Eventually, however, a few families responded positively. To them we were godsend. Their school-age children became our first scholarship recipients. I still remember each and every one of those children and their parents, too.

One of the mothers was cradling her newborn baby in her arms. That baby is now 14 years old and a freshman in high school. She has been a FEP scholarship recipient from the time she was six years old. This year, she is one of the counselors in our Sunday afternoon program. One of her older siblings is in a graduate program at Rutgers University and wants to pursue a career as a school social worker.

How would a similar program work for other meetings? We can't answer that question. What works for one meeting at any given time might not work for another. Much depends on how much work one is willing and able to devote to the project. To those who might want to start a program for children whose lives need enrichment, I would make four suggestions:

1. Do it only if you feel led to do it.

2. Work with others. Don't try to do it alone. Be sure enough people are in for the long haul.
3. Start small. Let the project grow at its own pace.
4. Be patient. Don't expect too much progress too soon.

A Guide for the Journey

From the moment I met our first scholarship recipients, I was hooked. From that point on, there was no turning back. I didn't know where this project would take me, but I knew it would be to places where I had never been and I was ready for the journey.

Faith and Practice has been my guide, but it has presented more questions than answers. Not all answers are found in books. We have to search for them in our hearts and souls. Today, our queries on social responsibility and witness are as timely as they have always been and will always be.

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Monique Begg, a longtime member of the Moorestown Friends Meeting and founder of FEP, worked as a certified French-English translator in her native Province of Quebec before she immigrated to the US as a bride in 1959. An American citizen, she worked for decades as a journalist. Her meeting recently established the Monique Begg Scholarship in her honor.

Quaker Voluntary Service: Faith in Action Transforms Lives by Christina Repoley

Imagine a time in the not-so-distant future when a young Quaker is graduating from college and deciding what to do with her life. She knows she wants to make an impact in the world and to seek opportunities to be transformed herself. Consider that she knows many others who have done a year of service in a Quaker Voluntary Service (QVS) community.

She has learned that this provides an opportunity to live together with others, to work for an organization that is committed to justice and transformation in partnership with communities of the deepest needs. She realizes that doing a year of service with QVS will mean participating in trainings and workshops

around nonviolent direct action, anti-racism, Quaker business process, and vocational discernment. Through her placement, she will be in relationship with local monthly meeting or Friends church, where mentors and friends will support her in the year of service.

The QVS experience is not simply about community service but is rather about what Rufus Jones called "prophetic service" that is directly engaging with others, being led by the Spirit and giving one's self fully. Others who have done a year with QVS have gone on to commit their whole lives to the work of service and justice. Our young Quaker looks to these people as

We believe it is time for Quakers to reclaim and re-envision our tradition of spiritual activism.

QVS: Transforming Lives, Living Our Faith

(continued from page 5)

models for the kind of person she aspires to be.

We believe that it is time for Quakers to reclaim and re-envision our tradition of spiritual activism. Imagine that when Quakers talk about our service in the world, we will not be referring to something that happened 50 years ago. We'll be talking about the exciting, dynamic work we are engaged in right now. This is the Quaker Voluntary Service vision for the future. We are laying the groundwork now for that future.

For generations, Quakers found experiences of direct service played formative and transformative roles in their lives. These opportunities have been severely limited in the recent past, for complicated reasons. Our community has a deep need and hunger to deeply engage in healing the wounds of the world through our Quaker faith. QVS is one attempt to respond to this need, striving to strengthen and nurture the Religious Society of Friends by providing members with opportunities to live their Quakerism through direct service and faithful community.

The QVS volunteers may be mostly young adults though older Friends have expressed interest as well. They make a commitment to spend a full year away from their families, living with other volunteers in a "service house." That house becomes the hub of their service ministry as they give their time and energy to projects such working at a center for homeless advocacy, an immigrants' rights organization, or even a local American Friends Service Committee office, depending on the region or city to which they are assigned.

Currently, QVS plans to launch its first service house in Atlanta, Georgia, in the fall of 2012. We hope this house will be the first of many more in multiple locations. We welcome your support in prayer, financial contributions, time, and information.

QVS is new and young—still in its formative years. I have never felt so clearly led in any endeavor I have ever undertaken. The vision of QVS speaks directly to the hunger in our Religious Society of Friends.

In my current job, I work with a wide range of voluntary service programs like Brethren Volunteer Service and Jesuit Volunteer Corps who have programs very similar to the QVS vision. Many of the people who do this work have informed me that their programs were modeled on Quaker service projects and that they have long wondered where we have been.

They are happy to know that we are coming!

(To learn more, please visit our website, www.quakervoluntaryservice.org, or find us on Facebook. You can also email me, christina@quakervoluntaryservice.org)

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Christina A. Repoley, M.Div, is a member of Atlanta Friends Meeting and serves on the ministry and worship committee. She has served on staff in the Peace Building Program of the American Friends Service Committee, and as a co-coordinator of the Georgia Peace and Justice Coalition. She is the lead organizer of QVS and works in the Faith and Service program of the Cousins Foundation.

For more information about the programs described in this issue or, if you wish to contribute, you may also contact:

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