

Staff Report

Interim Young Adult Field Secretary, Emily Provance

NYYM Summer Sessions 2017

One of the most frequent questions I'm asked as your interim young adult field secretary is, "Why don't more young adults come to [insert meeting event here]." Sometimes people ask this question because they want to complain, but often, people ask this question because they actually want to know the answer, and that's a wonderful thing—because there are, in fact, answers to that question.

Although there are many factors outside the control of Friends that prevent young adults and other younger generations from participating fully, there are also factors within the culture of Quaker society itself that act as barriers for full participation from younger generations. In September and October, I'll be doing a series of interactive video conferences on this very topic—on the ways in which our culture sometimes creates barriers to multiage inclusion and on how we can flip that culture to be more fully inclusive. The six video conferences, each one hour long, will explore these six topics: building a permission-giving culture, using language to empower, understanding joy as sacred, getting outside the meetinghouse, supporting Friends in multiage spaces, and reinterpreting traditions in the light. These video conferences will be fun and interactive and will focus on what we *can do*, right now, so that the beloved community that we cherish can be even more accessible to Friends of all ages. Attend as many of the calls as you can and want to—no need to commit to all six. The Zoom video platform is pretty easy to use. But if you really want the information and really can't do video calls, which I understand, I do have something in writing that will be less fun but will provide some of the same information. Come ask me about it.

I have another exciting initiative to tell you about that has just been approved this week. At spring sessions this year, MCC approved an experiment by which we would use Facebook ads as a form of outreach for local meetings. In coordination with various groups, I ran ads within a twenty-minute travel radius of six local meetings (Old Chatham, Scarsdale, Wilton, Montclair, Albany, and Conscience Bay). I targeted people between the ages of 18 and 40. At the end of fifty days of running these Facebook ads, we had reached over 90,000 young adults. There is an

eighteen-page report on this experiment that you can find on the multiage inclusion table and also online at nyym.org, or I can tell you where to find it on my blog. The report explains the exciting history of the project and also helps you know how you can try this in your own monthly meeting area.

Yesterday, MCC approved funding for a Phase Two of the experiment. In Phase Two, I will be working with up to 18 meetings. This is an opportunity to work one-on-one, a partnership between me and Friends in local meetings. We'll run Facebook ads—now that we've done Phase One of the experiment, we know which types of ads work well—and we'll coordinate that with building a really strong overall Facebook presence for the meeting. By the end of the fifty days, at least one member or attender of the local meeting will have learned how to run a Facebook ad campaign and maintain a strong presence on Facebook. The minimum requirements for a meeting to participate in this experiment are (1) that the meeting must name a member or attender for me to work with who can serve as a co-admin for the meeting's Facebook page and (2) that the meeting must fund 50% of the ads (\$125). The deadline for participation is coming up quickly—you must email me with a commitment to participate by August 13th, and we'll start the experiment just days after that. It's first-come, first-served, except that the six meetings that participated in Phase One will receive priority.

Next, I want to tell you a story about something that happened with the QuED series, which stands for Quaker Exploration and Discourse. It's a story about a guy named Dustin. See, QuED Days are days with three speakers in the morning and open time for connections in the afternoon. Gabi Savory Bailey and I have been doing these one Saturday a month in different parts of the yearly meeting, with monthly meetings graciously hosting and providing food. We also live stream these on Facebook so that people can watch remotely in real time and even ask questions of the speakers through Facebook. In May, we were at Mohawk Valley, and this guy named Dustin started watching. We don't have any idea how he found it—Facebook is like that—but he was really interested and started asking questions, and it turned out he was only about forty-five minutes away from where we were, and at the end of the morning, he asked him to send him the address of his nearest Quaker meeting. QuED is a powerful experience of personal testimony and spiritual conversation. All young adults from anywhere are invited, plus members and attenders of the host meetings, and everyone is invited to watch

online. All the old videos are up on Facebook from January through July, and you don't have to have an account on Facebook to watch them. Please spread the word about these. In August we're at Manhasset, in September at Montclair, in October we're near Lake Chautauqua but hosted by Buffalo meeting, in November at New Brunswick, and in December at Brooklyn.

One of the cultural barriers to multiage inclusion that I mentioned at the beginning of this report has to do with the relevance of being outside the meetinghouse. Surveys of young people across the faith spectrum tell us that one of the primary reasons younger people *don't* participate in faith communities is because they perceive these faith communities as being internally focused and irrelevant to their neighborhood communities. Whether or not this is true, the *perception* that this is true is keeping younger generations away.

To help work with that perception, we have an initiative called Quaker Outside the Lines! Many of you remember that this is an initiative designed to offer financial reimbursement (up to \$200) for projects that involve meaningful service in the neighborhood community. Any project counts, if it meets five requirements: Quakers and non-Quakers doing something together, reflection of Quaker faith, meaningful to the local community, at least part of it happens outside the meetinghouse, and you post about it on social media at least once. This program is funded entirely by an outside grant that I received through a course I attended through Duke Divinity School, but the term of the grant ends soon, and if there's any money left, we have to give it back!

To give you a quick idea of what projects have happened so far: online clearinghouse for meaningful local actions, connecting Quakers with secular groups to work against solitary confinement, multifaith conversation forum, Justice for All Concert, Spanish-language training for immigrants threatened with deportation, interfaith racial justice weekend, interfaith community book study, body-based nonviolence training, presentations on eradicating solitary confinement, community building in a neighborhood in Brooklyn, white privilege conversation series, Quaker worship goes to Burning Man, solitary confinement cell at a county fair, cost of war art installation, butterfly release, urban mural, community garden with mental health organization, and education about women's suffrage.

We can fund at least ten more projects. You can do this as an individual Friend, a group of Friends, or a whole meeting or church, but it has to be finished by the end of October. Can you pass on the word to others in your meeting? Let's not give any of the money back—let's use it all!

Finally, let's talk about NYYM Connect! This is a difficult announcement to make in this setting because it's really mostly for people who are *not* in this room. Those of us who regularly attend sessions already have a pretty good idea how to get the information and announcements that we want. We know to call Helen, or email Melinda or Callie, and we know how to access the website and the Facebook page, and we have a pretty good idea what's available.

But lots of the Friends back in our meetings might not, especially relatively new attenders. New York Yearly Meeting now has regular or semi-regular newsletters on outreach, young adult concerns, and things for children and families, and Powell House has a newsletter, and ARCH has a newsletter, and there's InfoShare and Spark and the global email list. A lot of times, Friends back in our monthly meetings can't hope to keep up with all of this, and they miss things, often things they'd very much like to know about. NYYM Connect! is a super-simple Google form that anybody can go to and sign up for or remove themselves from any of the mailing lists that New York Yearly Meeting maintains, and we've looped in Powell House as well. The address is www.tinyurl.com/nyymconnect . I am asking all Friends who are receiving this information to pass that address on as widely as possible.