

2019-10-15 Pay as Led Advance Report for Fall Sessions

At Summer Sessions 2017, we (NYYM business meeting) decided to take a big risk and change the economic structure of how people pay for their stays (meals and lodging) at Summer Sessions. Rather than ask each person or family to pay the exact cost of their stay, we decided that at future Summer Sessions we would give people flexibility to decide to pay for their stay with an amount appropriate to them, to pay as led (PaL). It is an act of trust in each other. It is a way of acknowledging that the resources of the world we live in are not distributed evenly, that our community is stronger when more of us are present for sessions, and that finances are a barrier to some being present.

For logistical reasons, Sessions Committee was not able to implement PaL in 2018. At that time Silver Bay, our host, still assigned rooms and collected payment for stays. It was not appropriate for them to take on the additional administration of PaL and Sessions Committee and NYYM staff were not ready to take on the role of assigning of rooms and collecting of payments which is also known as Master Billing. With an additional year to prepare and the planned transition to Master Billing, we tried PaL in the Summer of 2019.

How did it go?

Attendance was up and financially we were about the same as the previous year.

Attendance

Overall, approximately 480 people stayed overnight at least one night. Based on trends from the last few years, we would have expected roughly 410. Another big story is that 72 self-identified young adults attended. While we don't have attendance numbers from previous years specifically for young adult friends, this was a significant increase. The six-weekend Young Adult Spiritual Nurture Series also contributed to the increase in attendance. The count of people who identified as first time attenders or first time in a long time attenders was 81. Though we don't have records for first time attenders at past Summer Sessions, experienced staff believe this is also a significant increase.

PaL and Master Billing

Pay as Led and Master Billing are separate but we started both at the same time. Pay as Led is fundamentally about how we ask each other to pay for Summer Sessions. We can choose to continue or not. Master Billing, paying the venue on one master bill instead of the venue charging each person separately, is here to stay. We are the last group for whom Silver Bay assigned rooms and collected payments. Master billing is the standard process for groups of our size at most venues. The extra work associated with Master Billing took a great deal more time than previous Summer Sessions for existing staff and an unsustainable amount of time for a few volunteers. Sessions Committee, YM staff, and volunteers are exploring ways to improve this.

Finances

NYYM was able to pay the bill from Silver Bay for our stays, in full, with funds we took in for Summer Sessions. With Pay as Led, many more people contributed and we were able to help many more people. The total bill from Silver Bay for all of our stays, including their discount for a group our size, was about \$250,000. The amount NYYM paid from budget lines including JYM Volunteer Support, Sessions Committee Program, Staff Travel, and other budget lines was about \$23,000. While people registered as individuals, families typically paid together so our financial counts are in terms of payer groups. Some payer groups were one person, some were multiple. In total, we had about 260 payer groups. Roughly 80 payer groups paid a total of \$23,000 less than the cost of their stay and therefore did not make the voluntary registration contribution. Their registration contributions would have been roughly \$5,000 under the non-PaL system. Roughly 110 payer groups paid \$28,000 more than the cost of their stays plus registration. This generosity covered the stays and registrations for those who paid less. In prior years, and still for Spring and Fall Sessions, we use the Equalization Fund as a method for people to contribute and receive financial support.

Recommendation

The Sessions Committee recommends that NYYM use the Pay as Led model for Summer Sessions for 2020. The committee does not recommend making a longer term commitment to the Pay as Led model at this time.