

THE YOUTH PROGRAM CORNER

FROM PACIFIC YM'S YOUTH PROGRAM COORDINATOR & SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

Not so long ago, I resolved to eat more vegetables. It's not that I don't like vegetables. In fact I love them... especially when they come fresh from the Woolman garden when I'm there for a board meeting. But somehow I still find myself having gone days (days?!) on a diet of egg tacos, cinnamon apple gluten-free oatmeal with hemp milk, a can of organic free-range turkey chili, and a couple of dried fruit bars (and definitely some dark chocolate — fair trade and slavery-free of course.) But vegetables? Well now, that takes some intention.

Committing to being an adult ally to youth, or an ally to any marginalized group when you come from greater power and privilege, is kind of like promising to eat more vegetables. It's good for society, it's good for the planet, it's good for you, but when it comes down to it, sometimes it's just easier to resort to a comfortable (albeit socially and environmentally conscious) diet of meat, beans, fat, starch, and sugar. I am a good person! I try! I'm a Quaker!

We give up seeking to find teen or young adult members for our committees because it's too hard to hear 'no' over and over again, or the schedule doesn't seem to work, or the teens don't regularly check email. We say that maybe it's OK that teens are leaving our Society so that they can go figure out for themselves what they want, that maybe Quakerism is really mostly for adults anyway. We say that the teens will act like adults if we just set those expectations. We say that if the teens really wanted [insert event or activity here], then they'd do it.

Yes, these are things I've heard, said, or thought at times.

What to do? In some ways, forming a Youth Program Committee and hiring a coordinator might feel like paying to have a veggie farm-box delivered to your door. Now *that* will solve my veggie-eating problem, right? The truck drops off the box, and maybe there are some turnips or salad mix that I can eat straight out of the box. But the butternut squash, the sunchokes, and the leeks? The beets? They need some preparation before being edible.

Some people make New Year's resolutions; the PYM Youth Program has goals and objectives (see sidebar). One of our objectives is to "organize one or two additional teen-centered gatherings, 10-20

teens per gathering, with teens from both quarters participating each year." Sound easy? In planning for events, still perplexing us is the problem of transportation to events that do not include car-driving parents; the difficulty in finding weekends and school breaks that work for enough teens so that an event can become viable; and the challenge of communicating, organizing, and planning with teens and adults who are geographically spread out.

So in looking at the calendar we see that in addition to what we already offer, there are many opportunities to build on (Quaker Center Workshops, Woolman Weekends, overnights at Quarterly gatherings). That's a boon to the Quaker diet. Yet we are striving to find ways to create some new things, too, by collaborating with some other "cooks": the teens and their adults allies from Palo Alto and Santa Cruz asked the Youth Program to help them organize a teen retreat to which they could invite all high school PYM Friends in late March. A little help from the Racial Justice Subcommittee of PYM's M&O is adding a special ingredient to the stew: an afternoon workshop for the teen retreat on racial healing as a special preview of an upcoming Quaker Center workshop in April.

The skills of being an ally to youth are transferable to being an ally to other marginalized groups. One way -but not the only way- to be an ally is to serve as a Friendly Adult Presence (FAP) at a teen gathering.

SAVE THE DATE!

3/23-25 Teen Retreat: Palo Alto, CA. All high school-aged PYM teens are invited.

3/24 Workshop for Adults: "Being an Ally to Youth as a Friendly Adult Presence (FAP) and Beyond." Includes lunch with teens. At Palo Alto Meetinghouse. (To be repeated in Southern California.)

4/20-22 Workshop for Youth and Adults: "Partners in Healing, Racial Dynamics Among Friends." Sponsored by the Racial Justice Subcommittee of PYM. Ben Lomond Quaker Center.

4/28 For All Ages: "Woolman Spring Clean Volunteer Day." Eat, work, play music and welcome Spring. Bring work gloves, garden tools, and musical instruments if you have them. At Woolman School in Nevada City, CA.

This spring the Youth Program is organizing two workshops on “Being an Ally to Youth as a Friendly Adult Presence (FAP) and Beyond.” Fully being an ally is like serving a rounded meal at a dinner party where all are welcome.

While these are great opportunities (please come!), it is in the everyday life and in our local Meetings that we can practice these skills. Keep trying. Taste something new.

In the spirit of planning effective intergenerational events, here are some advices and queries, drafted by the PYM Youth Program for seasoning. (Oregano and crushed red pepper, anyone?)

ADVICES AND QUERIES

“Mutual respect and care among Friends form the foundation from which we can test, support, and exercise leadings of the Spirit. At its best, a Friends community provides a framework for us to learn and practice mutual care, which strengthens us as we act in the world. All members of the Friends community should share in the care of one

another.” Paraphrased from *Faith and Practice, Pacific Yearly Meeting* (2001, pp. 58-59)

All members of a Friends community have gifts to share with each other, yet not all feel equally welcome to share them. Younger Friends especially feel pressure to wait for a time –later– when their contributions would be ‘significant.’ Yet all of our gifts are significant now.

Seek to create welcoming environments that invite all people to share their spiritual gifts with each other. Seek to build a community of ministers that is diverse, inclusive, and united in the Spirit. Make use of the practical experiences that Friends have acquired in structuring group activities to foster respectful, equitable, and meaningful sharing. Also respect the need that minority voices feel to seek special support from their peers. Sew new wineskins to hold new wine: Pay careful attention to agendas and logistics as a means of creating spaces that help Friends engage in deep listening—to God, to each other, and to those who might otherwise feel ignored.

GOALS OF THE PYM YOUTH PROGRAM

PYM’s Youth Program Coordinator (YPC) and the YPC Supervisory Committee work together with youth and adult Friends throughout PYM to fulfill the following goals:

Goal 1: Provide opportunities for PYM teens to grow in faith and fellowship.

Goal 2*: Provide opportunities for PYM young adults to grow in faith and fellowship.

Goal 3: Provide opportunities for adults in PYM – as individuals, committees, and whole Meetings – to grow in their abilities to support youth effectively and to develop corporate practices for doing so.

Goal 4: Provide opportunities for youth and adults in PYM to develop a spirit of mutual learning while seeking unity around matters of faith and practice.

Goal 5: Develop systems of communication with youth and Monthly Meetings of PYM.

Goal 6: Develop and maintain administrative systems to support the work of the YPC, the YPC Supervisory Committee, and the Youth Program.

* (Note: Goal 2 has been temporarily de-emphasized in order to focus more effort on the other Goals at first, although some work is continuing in this area.)

A full copy of the Goals & Objectives can be accessed at <http://www.pacificyearlymeeting.org/>.

☛ Do members of the event’s planning committee represent a wide range of ages? Are young people supported with two or more from their age group on the committee?

☛ Can the planning committee state the purpose of each activity that it includes in the event schedule?

☛ Does the event schedule include a balance of different types of activities? For example, quiet & rowdy, verbal & nonverbal, serious & light-hearted, structured & free-form?

☛ Does the event schedule encourage participants of all ages to participate in the “house-keeping” work that supports the event?

☛ Are some of the activities structured to encourage intergenerational sharing about profound experiences from everyday life? Are queries phrased in ways that elicit each person’s deeply felt experiences, regardless of how long they’ve been around life or Quakerism?

If you or your Meeting tests out these advices and queries, please report back to Alyssa Nelson. How did they work? What did you learn?

Alyssa Nelson is a member of Davis Friends Meeting. You can reach her at pym.youthcoordinator@gmail.com.

Friends from any Yearly Meeting are welcome to sign up to receive information about youth programming - just “like” the Pacific Yearly Meeting Youth Programs page on Facebook! p.s. Eat your rutabagas!