

May 9, 2014

Yearly Meeting Staff Report

ARCH (Aging, Resources, Consultation, and Help)

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As ARCH staff members, we have been very present to the day-to-day experiences of our work: facilitating care for those among us who are growing older, and differently abled adults. And even while we do this, we find that we are also looking to the future: planning for the continuing care of our vibrant network of ARCH Visitors, and growing into a more integrated role as NYYM staff.

The ARCH Program *is* our network of trained volunteer Visitors in a very real way. And this network has continued to grow and flourish this year. Over 80 people have attended a weekend long Visitor training retreat to date. Visitors take on many roles other than simply “visiting.” Some facilitate workshops or conversation groups in their meetings. Others help Friends complete their advanced directives paperwork. Some are resources for their meeting: connecting them with information about Medicaid, housing options, or other local senior services. Some provide spiritual support in bedside worship, clearness, or more informal listening and conversation. And still others pursue social justice for aging incarcerated people, provide ministry around grief and loss, or grow in the spirit of their own aging, being an example and a Friend to those around them. Many Visitors are finding that their training supports the work they are already engaged in among Friends and in the world.

As ARCH Coordinators, part of our work is to nurture and grow this network. In 2013 we facilitated two well-attended ARCH training weekends: one in Syracuse, NY and one in Ocean Grove, NJ. Both of these retreats were intensive experiences of learning, nurture, and growth for those who attended. Many found their relationships to their

Monthly Meetings shifted or deepened after their training. Attendees were as diverse in age, geography, ethnicity, and economic means as our Yearly Meeting is. Another training weekend was held at Powell House in May 2014.

ARCH Visitors from the Great Lakes/Central NY area joined Barbara Spring at Ithaca Monthly Meeting on September 13. New York City's vibrant network of Visitors met for an evening of fellowship and reflection with Callie Janoff on December 4. Our network is enriched as groups of Visitors join one another to discuss their experiences, learn from one another, and grow in community. Both of these Visitor Enrichment gatherings show us the way forward: once the Visitor Training is over, our network needs tending and nurture to remain engaged and to flourish in their work with their local meeting communities. As we look ahead to the future of our program, this guides our imagination and planning.

We were deeply disappointed when we had to cancel a weekend retreat planned for caregivers at Powell House on November 4 due to lack of enrollment. But with those lemons we made some truly delicious lemonade. Those who care for the particularly disabled, frail, or ill among us have a special class of need, because they are often giving of themselves in ways that stretch them to the limits of their capabilities. We realized how challenging it is to step out of that role to take off a whole weekend to care for yourself. So in March of 2014 we offered a one-day retreat in the New York Metro area and another in the Upper Hudson region. Both were well attended and sparked both tears and laughter as we shared our journeys, ate together, were treated to massages, relaxed and worshiped. We were aided by Patricia Runkle of Chatham-Summit Monthly Meeting who led both groups in a creative collage project that facilitated reflection on our many blessings and challenges in the course of our life's journey. New York's gathering was facilitated by the entire community of city visitors who provided respite, made and delivered the food, gathered supplies, shared rides, and helped to organize and make possible a truly restful day of opening, renewal, and F/friendship.

In 2013 and 2014, ARCH has been guided by two particular areas of concern: aging incarcerated people, and issues of housing in later life.

Barbara and Anita have been meeting with the Committee on Aging Concerns' subcommittee for aging incarcerated people, which includes multiple seasoned prison visitors, prison worship group facilitators, and AVP participants. They have also been asked to visit several prison worship groups. They are working closely with Larry White of Morningside Monthly Meeting as he grows closer to implementing his "Hope for Lifers" program with the assistance of AFSC. This work is important to counteract the long sentences and the erratic parole process. There is growing interest in the inside and outside worship group communities to share resources and we continue to seek way forward with this work.

Our work with housing is also slow going. Our initial goal was to develop a material resource to aid Friends as they consider "Where will I live as I grow older?" We are learning that while some information about the basic classes of housing, what they generally cost, and what they offer is in high demand, other more specific information about what is available locally and the details about actual options are slippery, subjective, and confusing to navigate. At Spring Sessions 2014 we presented a workshop to participants to consider the query: "Where will I live as I grow older?" in a spirit of discernment. In this spirit we were able to sort through information relevant to our concerns or interests while compassionately listening to what arises in us given the sometimes overwhelming emotional content of this question. We would like to continue engaging with these housing questions, and are imagining a tool that might address both the material and spiritual concerns embedded in the questions we ask.

All three of us continue to offer workshops on particular topics to groups on retreat, in their local Meeting, and at larger gatherings. Popular topics this year have included "Aging and the Quaker Testimony of Community," "Quaker Values and End of Life Decision-making," "Ministry at Life's End -Vigiling," and "The Power of Music."

We continue to craft new workshops or learning opportunities for groups on request.

We also provide direct care and nurture for a number of Friends around the NYYM community. In addition to making referrals to local Visitors when aging related needs are identified, we also provide support ourselves when the need arises. We make personal visits to individuals and families all over our NYYM geographic area, correspond by email, and spend time on the phone with as many Friends as we can.

We make a regular contribution to our NYYM newspaper *Spark* in a column called “ARCH Ways.” Please look for our upcoming events and offerings in *Spark* and *InfoShare*.

Our work continues due to the generous support of the Friends Foundation for the Aging, and the grant that they award to our program each year. As we look ahead to the year before us, and the year after that we continue to seek out how we can be of the best use to our Yearly Meeting. We see our work not as singling out the oldest among us and targeting those people for our services. Instead, our work is to identify those who become separated from their communities of care due to the circumstances of their aging, disability, or the strain of caregiving for another; and as much as we can to reunite them with a loving community committed and well prepared to be in relationship with them. Our effort is not targeted at the old, but rather the whole of the body. It is in this spirit of wholeness and with a vision of unity and integrity that we continue to undertake our work with you, and we thank you for undertaking your work with us.

- *Callie Janoff, Anita Paul, and Barbara Spring*