



Introducing Melinda Wenner Bradley

NYYM Children & Youth field Secretary

April 11, 2016

Dear Friends,

It is with joy and enthusiasm that we announce the hiring of the new Children and Youth Field Secretary, Melinda Wenner Bradley. We welcomed Melinda at our recent Spring Sessions, and she will be starting in slowly this month as she wraps up previous commitments. She will begin working 28 hours per week as of May 1st. Her work is supported through a generous grant from the Shoemaker Fund, as well as through support from the New York Yearly Meeting operating budget.

Her main focus will be supporting children, youth, and young families to be fully integrated into the life of their monthly meetings. She will support and collaborate with meetings, helping with programming and curricula designed to foster the spiritual lives of children, in creating a more welcoming environment for younger Friends, and with outreach to local communities.

Melinda's gifts and experience make her an ideal person to help us with this vital work. For most of her adult life she has been an educator of Quaker children, and has spent much of the last decade exploring with other adults how to bring meaningful spiritual engagement to our youngest Friends. Her work is informed by a quote by Maria Montessori:

*Education is not so much teaching with love but participating,
as one teaches, in the energy of God, who is love.*

In her career as an educator and in service to religious education programs, she has worked with children and youth of all ages. Her work has been shaped by listening to children and by collaborating with both her teaching colleagues and the families of her students. For her, teaching and working in service to Quaker religious education programs has always felt like a leading and a place where she is called to grow.

Her work has included growing sustainable models for children and youth programs, developing, identifying and sharing resources, and building networks to lift up the many gifts among Friends. She views spiritual formation of all ages as a ministry that our Religious Society can be more intentional in supporting. A co-author of the Faith & Play stories, she has introduced and taught Friends to use the Godly Play/Faith & Play method and stories at Powell House, Woolman Hill, Pendle Hill, dozens of monthly meetings in twelve yearly meetings around the country, and most recently, at the FWCC World Gathering in Pisac, Peru. She is the co-founder of QREC, the Quaker Religious Education Collaborative, which has grown to involve more than 200 Friends

from 19 yearly meetings passionately living out the question of how to better nurture the spiritual lives of our youngest Friends. She is a Quaker teacher of all ages, a collaborator, author, speaker, mentor, presenter, and leader. One Friend who knows her work well has described her as “a Force.” And she is.

Like Gabi Savory Bailey, her counterpart serving young adult Friends, Melinda will make herself available to all meetings in the yearly meeting to offer support in our efforts to better nurture our youngest members. Melinda will also give extra focused attention to six project partner meetings, two meetings chosen in each of the next three years. As part of the grant from the Shoemaker Fund, and in collaboration with New England Yearly Meeting, she will work intensively with those meetings in an experiment to see how we can effectively help our children and young families establish stronger roots in our monthly meetings. Our goal is not only to help individual meetings to become fuller multigenerational communities, but also to learn what efforts lead to better participation, more of a sense of belonging, deeper spiritual engagement, and greater numbers—and also to learn what efforts do not help. Through surveys and focus groups, we hope to learn not only what works, but why it works. NEYM and NYYM’s commitment is then to publish what we have learned, to support this work in the wider Religious Society of Friends.

Many in the yearly meeting have yearned for a Friend doing this work for many years. The first call for such a position came in 2001. More recently, Friends clearly articulated the need for help in this area across this yearly meeting in the Priorities Working Group listening project. We are exceedingly grateful to finally have some staff ready to meet the needs of our meetings in nurturing and retaining our children.

If you would like Melinda to visit your meeting, provide support or counsel to your First Day School or Religious Education Committee, or otherwise support children, youth, or young families in your meeting, you can contact her at childrenyouthfs@nyym.org.

More information about the Project Partners program and how to apply to be one of the six meetings will be forthcoming shortly.

In Faith,

Barbara Menzel, Clerk, NYYM Personnel Committee
Christopher Sammond, General Secretary