

Young Friends in Residence Pilot Program  
Final Report

November 2011

***“I can’t remember what I originally thought we, as a program, were going to all be about. The only thing I remember is that it wasn’t what we ended up with. Because the YFIR program, it turns out, is about living deeply into community.”***

Anna Obermayer, YFIR Intern

On August 31, 2011 The Young Friends in Residence Pilot Program was completed. Throughout the pilot and in the subsequent months the YFIR Committee and members of Perry City Monthly Meeting have examined the lessons learned, successes accomplished and difficulties encountered. We’ve interviewed interns and reviewed articles and reports submitted by different participants in the program. We have found that the program transforms individuals and faith communities in vital and profound ways. It is as one intern put it, *“really worthwhile work and work that needs to be done.”* What follows is our attempt to share with you the depth and promise of the program and an outline for its continuation.

### Transformation

All four interns shared how they became adult members of the Quaker community through the program. They moved from being a child of a meeting or a satellite youth program alumnus to a participating, informed member of the yearly meeting, the regional meeting and the monthly meeting. Franklin Crump wrote last spring,

*My biggest hesitancy in accepting the job with YFIR was my uncertainty of my legitimacy as a Friend. I had long been a satellite of the yearly meeting, taking part in JYM at summer sessions and APing at Powell House - a kind of Quaker groupie. By taking an active role in the business of the local, regional and yearly meetings as a YFIR intern, I began to feel a deeper, more meaningful connection to the Society.*

For some the connection was more strongly felt in their participation in Perry City Monthly Meeting while others were inspired by the vibrancy and work of the regional meeting. All seemed to value their connection with the Yearly Meeting with a new found or renewed sense of responsibility for the work and life there.

This transition went both ways. Monthly meeting members and other Friends also grew in their recognition of young Friends as adults and spiritual leaders. Early interviews with interns revealed their frustration at what they experienced as resistance to their leadership in the program from older Friends. One intern shared about the frustrations of being young in an

aging Society of Friends. *“Older friends want youth but find it hard to trust and to give up being in charge.”* Perry City Friends confirmed that early on it was hard to let go especially around input into youth conference themes and structure. But Perry City Friends first and later regional Friends did trust both the interns and the process and were very pleased with the results. Donna Beckwith in her article in SPARK writes, *“One intern taught us that Young Friends want to be valued for their gifts, not for their age. We were gently taught not to say, ‘Oh it’s so nice to have young people here.’ We are learning, we are changing, we are riding the gentle ripples with faith.”*

The early resistance turned out to be a wonderful point of growth for the interns. They became much clearer in articulating their work and their faith in their communications with the support committee, regional meeting and yearly meeting. Owning their leadership role became important. One intern shared that while she always liked leadership positions the challenge here was becoming such a public leader: needing to speak to larger groups of people; making eye contact with others, realizing she was a role model for others. It was hard but a really valuable experience. She learned that there was a *“whole level of modesty you have to lose and a whole level of humility that you have to gain.”* In the end there was a real sense of accomplishment among the interns in making the program something that is taken seriously in the wider Quaker community. One intern shared that she felt that at Yearly Meeting Summer Sessions this past year it really meant something to be a YFIR intern. *“Spiritual weightiness is now recognized.”* A Friend from Perry City echoed this when she spoke of how valuable and moving it was to have the interns speak at yearly and regional meeting sessions about the life of what was happening in the program and their own faith journeys. *“You begin to understand why the youth program is so powerful. Real spiritual growth is occurring not just fun and games.”*

#### Youth Program as Springboard and Anchor

Initially the youth program piece was what drew three out of the four interns to YFIR. Those three had extensive experience with youth programs both as former participants and leaders and a strong desire to give back some of what they felt they had received. It was also something recognized by the region and the yearly meeting and considered by those entities important to fund. It was an area where the interns felt capable of leading and an area of shared work. Adults who had previously not been a part of youth retreats had an opportunity to see what successful retreats consisted of and were impressed by the themes explored and the variety of activities which made up a typical weekend including thoughtful discussions, alone time, field trips to local farms, and play. The youth program also cast the farthest net bringing in participants from across the state and even outside of the Quaker Community, not to mention guest facilitators from all over, including out of state. And, the youth program is the

thread connecting the pilot YFIR program to an anticipated ongoing YFIR. Guest young adult facilitators are continuing to hold youth programs as we seek our next round of full time interns for the program. (See Appendix A: YFIR Youth Retreats)

While the youth program provided a solid core around which to establish the YFIR program, adult ministry became an integral part of YFIR, thanks to the leadership and passionate calling of one of the first interns. She listened deeply to Perry City Monthly Meeting Friends during her interview process, worked closely with Perry City's Ministry and Council committee and followed her heart. She developed three Quakerism readings and discussion series, lead a monthly bible study and began a series of workshops on contemporary Quaker Faith and Practice issues. Her classes were described as reflective and spirit-led, the readings as challenging and often very rewarding. (See Appendix B: YFIR Adult Programs)

Both the youth program and the adult program demonstrate the essence of the work of the young Friends in residence: creating stable, long term, accepting and affirming spaces, loving places where the deep need to belong is met. These are places to nurture one another, celebrate deep connection and explore spiritual and life issues with peers and mentors.

### Connections

Deeper connection with young adult Friends leading the way was a clear outcome of the program. One of the interns during closing evaluations summed it up this way. *"The program was really challenging but it really does strengthen community on all sorts of different levels in the Quaker community. It does this in ways that are purposefully designed to put Young Adult Friends in a leadership role in that process. I can't think of another program that does that."*

The connections did not just occur between interns and other Friends. Perry City Friends and Ithaca Friends shared their joy in getting to work with one another. Perry City Friends write in their State of the Meeting report:

*We...are grateful for the contacts that have grown through the YFIR program. Young Friends from Ithaca attend the retreats and a few Ithaca Friends have come to the adult education classes and Bible study. Some Friends from Ithaca also helped us with our fundraiser at the Grassroots Festival by baking and selling Quaker oatmeal cookies. We hope to build on these beginnings and find ways to share more together.*

Donna Beckwith in her article in SPARK comments on Perry City's growing connection to the Yearly meeting:

*Because Perry City is a very small meeting, Friends have a small presence in and understanding of NYYM. YFIR has increased interaction of Perry City Meeting as well as*

*some of the neighboring meetings with NYYM. There are Friends doing committee work who have never served on a NYYM committee before. This means that the meeting has developed more awareness of the larger body of Friends. It also means that some Friends from NYYM now know there is a Quaker presence in central New York.*

Participation on the Yearly meeting YFIR committee has also drawn young adult Friends and teen Friends into the wider work of the Yearly Meeting. Abe Kenmore writes in a recent SPARK article:

*I started coming to these (NYYM) sessions because of the YFIR Committee, but just as importantly, outside of the committee meetings I was finally able to see the larger body of NYYM at work. Indeed, during general business meeting for the Yearly Meeting I witnessed a process that, while not easy, was deeply centered in and around the Spirit in a way I had rarely seen elsewhere.*

*Being able to work on the NYYM level gave me a broader sense of the Society of Friends outside of my monthly and regional meeting, and it gave me new insight into my own private faith and practice. I believe this experience contributed directly to my fully identifying as Quaker.*

### Spiritual Depth, Spiritual Connection

Here's what program participants have to say:

*"Living in intentional spiritual community with my fellow interns, taking part in bible study and adult religious education classes organized by Anna, and engaging with Friends from other yearly meetings and branches of Quakerism has enabled me to take ownership of my identity as a Friend. This greater knowledge of self that I have gained as part of the YFIR program has made what I want to do beyond this program much clearer to me. With this clarity, way has opened, and I have more of a long term life plan than I ever have before."*

*"I am fortunate to live in the community most directly influenced by this program, and it is very powerful. My 12 y.o. daughter has participated in retreats led by the current Young Friends in Residence and it has been a wonderful source of strength for her. Each of the current interns has contributed to her understanding of herself and of her community. What a wonderful gift to share with young people."*

*"As a family, we're re-imagining our relationship to a faith community. As a mom, I am grateful for you helping my daughter find deep strength and meaning in her young self - the best defense against poor choices, peer pressure, and depression! She gets SOO excited now when it's retreat weekend!"*

*“YFIR has really meant a lot to me these past few times I’ve come; it’s a great way to meet new people and to form new perspectives and ideas. I dearly enjoy all the laughs and great fun that naturally occur, but also the engaging discussions that have let me get to know other people’s opinions. I would like to sincerely thank all the hard workers who make these retreats possible.”*

*“The program has breathed new life into Perry City Meeting, the fruit of which is growing steadily. I think the adult ministry in particular has planted strong roots.”*

*“The YFIR program has meant building connections with wonderful young adult Friends, learning new things about myself and my spiritual journey, and benefiting from their vision and hopefulness for Friends. Thank you!”*

### Intentional Community: The Crucible

A vital part of the program turned out to be the intentional community piece. It was also the most difficult piece. It was here that the interns experienced perhaps the most personal and spiritual growth and also the greatest frustrations. Within the intentional community framework they successfully dealt with the language of faith. Around the dinner table, on long car rides and working on the intentional community document during house meetings the interns developed a real tenderness for each others’ spiritual journey and the vocabulary that went with it. They moved beyond the words that in the past may have separated them from one another and had deep discussions on faith and spirituality. Striving to live into Quaker testimonies of simplicity and concern for the environment was also a group effort. Food prep, worm farming, composting and wood stacking were all areas where the interns connected with one another. For most of the interns though the living situation was a stretch on a number of levels. As one intern put it, *‘Living with so little money is really hard in this culture.’* The location of the home in a rural hamlet also felt isolating. Lack of clarity on expectations and degree of commitment to being physically present in the house was a real source of friction.

That said it was clear in working with the interns that they had a great deal of tenderness towards one another. They recognized that bond and shared that it was easiest to feel when they were away from the house but still together: at yearly meeting and regional sessions and road trips for intervisitation. As they put it *“we’re Team YFIR. We feel like a cohesive group. We feel supported and supportive of each other.”* It is hard for the interns to imagine the program without the intentional community piece.

The wider community also benefited from the intentional community: From Perry City Friends:

*This energy is also enhanced by the Blessed Community House where the YFIRS live. They are actively building a spiritual community there and we feel the energy from that*

*process in our meeting. Those of us who spend time with them at their house benefit from this spiritual work that they are doing.*

*YFIR interns are involved with NYYM's Circle of Young Friends. This group has met at Beloved Community House (the home where the interns live) and Perry City Meeting House. Having a group of Young Friends living together offers a cohesive meeting point. And now the neighboring meetings have a stronger sense of CYF, since Young Friends have worshiped with local Friends and done service projects.*

### The Wider Circle of Young Adult Friends

YFIR has been embraced and owned by the young adult Friends and teens within New York Yearly Meeting. Word is also spreading beyond the yearly meeting and generating excitement. Young Friends have been present at yearly meeting sessions to support the program. They have responded to calls for help from the interns, offering to be adult presences at retreats and filling in as facilitators for the youth retreats in the interim period between interns. They serve on the YFIR committee in real ways, participating in evaluations, interviews and publicity. They see it as an option for service in their future. We are moving to ensure that that is the case.

### Next Steps

In recognition of the value of the work of the YFIR program for young Friends and the wider Quaker community, the Young Friends in Residence Program was minuted as an ongoing program of New York Yearly meeting at its Spring Sessions in April 2011.

By August 2011 all four interns had completed their service to the program. We had hoped to have another round of interns ready to start in September 2011. We have had a number of inquiries about the internships but currently do not have any applications. Initially we had thought it important to have continuity between interns and had envisioned a two-year commitment with two interns coming on each year and two leaving.

Our experience has shown that that model is neither feasible nor desirable. A significant amount of leadership, ownership and sense of community developed within and among the interns as they designed the scope and style of the work they would be doing together and alone. A real strength of the program has been its flexibility and openness to the gifts of its participants. Beginning anew every couple of years will help to maintain this spaciousness. The current hiatus will also allow the YFIR committee and Perry City Friends to evaluate structural components of the program and strengthen them before our next round of interns. (See Appendix C)

## Appendix A: YFIR Youth Retreats

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Planning</b>                               | Dec 5 2009                    |
| 2. <b>Winter Wonderland</b>                      | Feb 19-21, 2010               |
| 3. <b>Creating a Safe Space</b>                  | March 12-14, 2010             |
| 4. <b>Living Planet</b>                          | April 30 -May 2, 2010         |
| 5. <b>You Are What You Eat</b>                   | June 18-20 <sup>th</sup> 2010 |
| 6. <b>H2Oh yeaah!</b>                            | August 6-8th 2010             |
| 7. <b>Play Us A Song</b>                         | September 10-12, 2010         |
| 8. <b>First Annual YFIR Film Festival</b>        | October 1-3, 2010             |
| 9. <b>A Gathering Together</b>                   | October 15-17, 2010           |
| 10. <b>What Makes You Come Alive?</b>            | November 5-7, 2010            |
| 11. <b>AVP Workshop</b>                          | December 17-19, 2010          |
| 12. <b>Warm Heart, Warm Hands</b>                | January 7-9, 2011             |
| 13. <b>The Friendly Firebrand: Social Action</b> | February 25-27, 2011          |
| 14. <b>Green Eggs and Hamlet</b>                 | March 11-13, 2011             |
| 15. <b>Finding the Inner Me</b>                  | March 25-27, 2011             |
| 16. <b>Thank You for Being a Friend</b>          | April 15-17, 2011             |
| 17. <b>He, She, Ze... Me?</b>                    | May 13-15, 2011               |
| 18. <b>Creating Your Way</b>                     | June 10-12, 2011              |
| 19. <b>Ch-Ch-Changes</b>                         | August 2011                   |

Then two during the transitional period with guest facilitators:

1. **Second annual YFIR Film Festival** with Kody and Margaret September 23-25, 2011
2. **Myths and Mythologies** with Natalie and Helen October 21-23, 2011

## **Appendix B: YFIR Adult Programs**

### **Classes**

*The Theological framework for Quaker Traditions and Prophetic Witness* (nicknamed Quakerism 101 and 202 by those Friends who took it.) The class was based on readings from Micheal Birkel's Silence and Witness and Lloyd Lee Wilson's A Quaker Vision of Gospel Order  
This class ran almost every week starting at 9:30 am-10:30 am on Sundays before Meeting at Perry City Meetinghouse, November 2009 to June 2010

*Quakerism and Mystical Traditions: A history of radical theology* (Quakerism and Mysticism for short) from September 2010 - December 2010.

*And the Greatest of These is Love: Thomas Kelly and understanding a mystical experience of God.* This series ran for 12 weeks and was centered around readings from A Testament of Devotion and Love Poems From God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West (Compass) translated by David Ladinsky.

### **Anna's List of Suggested Quaker Faith and Practice Facilitated Discussions**

- Meeting For Worship: Deepening the Space
- Fellowship Among Friends: How do We Pray Alone, How Do We Pray Together?
- Fellowship Among Friends: A Community More than One Hour A Week
- Meeting For Worship With A Concern For Business: Deepening the Space
- Greeting The Stranger: Newcomers and Hospitality
- The Many Parts of the Church: Naming of Gifts and the Work of Friends
- How High Is Our Hedge? : Our Quaker Community and Our Secular Communities
- That Still Quiet Voice: Nurturing Vocal Ministry
- Some Quakers Have Pastors: Understanding and Nurturing Community Between Monthly Meetings and Wider Quaker Community
- What is the Spiritual Aspect of Money? Finances, Tithing, and Covenant Donation

These workshops were designed to be less academic and more prayerful planning sessions where participants work together to come up with ways to deepen and nurture our communities around these issues.



## Appendix C: Outline of the Transitional Work of the YFIR Committees

### **Intern Support**

#### Compensation

- Identify ways of deferring or addressing school loans during internship
- Review stipend, board and travel amounts

#### Elder Component

- Develop process for selecting and assigning elders to interns
- Review the elders' experience
- Complete expectations of elders document

#### Finances and cash flow

- Develop clear and easy procedures for obtaining cash for program and travel expenses and documenting those expenses.

#### Intentional Community

- Identify housing possibilities with location and intentional community potential as significant factors
- Complete the intentional community expectations document begun by the interns
- Identify ways in which support committees can assist in the intentional community discussions/development

#### Support Committee Structure

- Review current committee structure and identify alternatives if necessary looking specifically at how the committees support the gifts, work and spiritual nurture of the interns and also how they help identify the needs of the participating monthly meetings and where intersections between gifts and needs occur.
- Review communication channels between all YFIR related committees and make any necessary changes to best utilize the gifts of those serving on the various committees.

## Training and Evaluation

- Identify training needs
- Develop a training and evaluation schedule
- Develop a directory of potential facilitators

## **Getting the Word Out**

### Recruiting

- Document current recruiting strategies
- Implement those strategies

### Reporting

- Develop a reporting schedule and format designed to keep monthly meetings, the regional meeting, the yearly meeting and donors apprised of the work of the program.

### Publicity

- Identify and document publicity channels for YFIR programs and activities

## **Sustainability**

### Funding

- Identify and pursue supplemental sources of funding for the program. Current partial funding for the program is coming from the yearly meeting, regional meeting, some monthly meetings and individuals.

### Transitions

- Identify and develop training needs for new and continuing committee members and others involved in the support and continuation of the program.
- Identify and implement processes to sustain the program during transition periods. For example those times in between full time interns.