

Report on the First Four Years of the Position of Young Adult Field Secretary in New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM)

Introduction

The original grant for this position outlined metrics delineating what successful outcomes might look like. Based on those metrics, this position has been hugely successful. This has been due partly to the design of the position, and partly to the strong gifts that Gabi Savory Bailey has brought to this work.

Since the beginning of the Young Adult Field Secretary position in 2011, there has been a shift away from Young Adult Friends (YAF) programming as a separate group focused on summer sessions and YAF retreats, and towards YAF being well-integrated into their monthly meetings and the yearly meeting committee structure and sessions. Some are unhappy with the shift, but the gain is way greater than the loss.

Here's what we have seen: There is less perceived tokenism. There is a greater understanding of our Quaker "toolkit," both a capacity to use it, and a recognition that we need to transmit it better to our youth. There are more YAF involved, more regional groups, more YAF on committees, more YAF seeking membership, more YAF interest in being fully integrated into our community, and great interest in YAF transforming our community into one that is more in keeping with our spiritual ideals. We are able to see more clearly the constituency of YAF in New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) and better understand and meet the needs of these Friends.

Metrics Outcomes

Details of comparative results of the surveys conducted in 2015 and 2012 appear below. The percentages are of the number of YAF surveyed, not the whole YAF population.

More Young Adult Friends active in local meetings, at worship, and on local meeting committees.

Local meeting participation. At least 12 members of the group (approximately 9% of those surveyed) have become members of their meetings in the last three years, nearly doubling the percentage of YAFs who are now members. (see Appendix D2.) Twenty-three percent have begun attending meeting regularly. Seventeen percent have joined a committee.

Worship. Seventy-three percent now attend worship two or more times a month; many self-identify as "regularly attending" even when attending less than once a month.

Committee participation. Local meeting committee participation has increased 10%.

Sense of connection to, and degree of involvement in, local, regional, and yearly meetings.

Involvement in Quakerism generally. Forty percent of YAF report increased involvement in Quaker life in general, and similar percentages report an improvement in the quality and satisfaction with their involvement. Twenty-three percent have begun attending meeting regularly and 17% have joined a local meeting committee.

Tokenism—being asked to serve based on age rather than gifts. Thirty-eight percent of YAF report a decrease in the sense of tokenism at the local meeting level; 66% report a decrease at the yearly meeting level. This points to an apparent correlation: the more that meetings and committees view YAF involvement in terms of gifts rather than just filling a slot with a young person, the more young adults become involved and the more satisfied they are with the experience of service. The Yearly Meeting is doing a better job of this than local meetings are,

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perhaps because of Gabi's persistent presence and message at Yearly Meeting sessions, and the difficulty of visiting the large number of local meetings.

Young Adult Concerns Committee (YACC, a NYYM committee). YACC has been revitalized after a collapse in 2011. The Committee more effectively serves the group's needs for both Quaker community and individual spiritual nurture. It is more diverse racially and chronologically. Parents and families are now participating, whereas before, there were none. The Committee now includes members who became Friends as adults in addition to those who are alumnae of Powell House and Junior Yearly Meeting. The Committee meets much more regularly, including at some Spring and Fall Sessions.

Yearly Meeting committee participation. YAF participation in Yearly Meeting committees has increased as part of a 10% increase in committee participation in general.

Quarterly/Regional networks

Several regional YAF networks have emerged over the past several years. This includes a multigenerational worship group in the Farmington-Scipio region, a very vital group in the metropolitan NYC-area, and four gatherings for YAF and families in New Jersey. In the largest regional mini retreat so far, 20 of 25 attenders had not been to a NYYM YAF retreat before.

Worship groups on college campuses

One NYYM YAF worship group was established at Princeton University, but was laid down when the participants graduated. One of these Friends has gone on to become pastor at Farmington Meeting, NYYM.

Greater attendance at Yearly Meeting sessions

Spring/Fall Sessions attendance by YAF is up 42%. The survey results do not clearly indicate Summer Sessions participation; those that do attend Summer Sessions, however, are significantly more involved in both YAF activities and the Yearly Meeting sessions.

Ministries & outcomes not envisioned in the original metrics

Personal leadership and YAF participation beyond NYYM: Gabi has assumed a leadership role in cultivating a network of YAF staff and workers across the continent and across branches of Quakerism. Staff from other yearly meetings are adopting some of Gabi's insights and practices. Some NYYM YAF have participated in Quaker Voluntary Service and Young Adult Friends Conference at Pendle Hill.

Ministry to families: When Gabi began her work, no parents participated in either the Young Adult Concerns Committee or the wider YAF community. Now parents regularly participate. She not only has brought families into the community, but also done much to bring their needs to the attention of both local meetings and the Yearly Meeting, and has ministered to those needs herself in important ways.

Individual pastoral care: Many YAF have turned to Gabi for personal counsel and she has become an important mentor, not only to individuals but also to the wider YAF community. This counsel includes issues concerning mental health, substance abuse, discernment on life choices, financial concerns, prayer support, and requests for other kinds of spiritual nurture. See Lessons Learned below.

Religious education of YAFs: Recognizing that YAF unfamiliarity with Quaker process, jargon, and culture impedes YAF participation in meeting life, Gabi has conducted "seminars" in these areas for groups of YAF at sessions, and explanatory comment sessions during the sessions themselves. Many YAF come to Gabi personally for guidance on issues like meeting membership, Quaker process, marriage under the care of the meeting, and Quaker faith and practice.

Lessons that we have learned:

- PERSONAL connection and care can change lives, can help someone gain access to a meeting, and can ground a person. The Yearly Meeting clearly needs a point person to whom YAF and families can come for resources and advice on an extremely wide range of concerns. One YAF comments: "Many young adults are new to Quakerism and need spiritual conversations and guidance. Quakers who have been with us a while want nurture. The transition to adulthood is not easy, and wrestling with new adult lives means a wrestle with spirituality. We as a community are missing opportunities to sit and listen, support and cherish people in this transition."
- When asked in 2015 how they have been involved in the past three years, **the largest category was with the monthly meeting.** (50 respondents)
- There seems to be a shift in which YAF and families are more involved at the monthly meeting level than at the yearly meeting level, although the size of Yearly Meeting and of the populations that attend Yearly Meeting sessions may make their participation less noticeable.
- It is important to notice and celebrate that there seems to be a boost in how connected YAF feel to their monthly meetings, even if that does not result in participation in YM sessions. More YAF are serving now than three years ago (up 10%), and they identify as attending regularly and as part of the community even when they are not serving on committees. The level of committee participation is not an indicator of how connected a YAF feels to a meeting. In the past this has been how we measured how integrated a YAF is in a meeting. We need to revisit this assumption.
- It seems that as the perception of tokenism declines, the level of involvement goes up.
- We have found with YACC that in order to observe right order and participate in the NYYM committee structure they needed a base level of information and education, which most of them do not have when they come to a committee. One respondent said, "This YM does an extremely poor job of providing the support and education young adults need in order to be able to take an active role in the business of the YM." (See Appendix C: Feedback Quotes below.)
- We did not realize how important explicit Quaker religious education is in preparing our youth to participate in the life of their meetings and Yearly Meeting. Our existing youth programming (Junior Yearly Meeting, Powell House Youth Program, and local meeting First Day School) do not effectively give our youth this preparation. Here are some of the things our YAFs have said: "As a birthright Quaker from NYYM, I feel that I reached adulthood without having a good grasp on the "nuts and bolts" of Quakerism, including Quaker process. I hope that I can find a way to change this for my children." (See Appendix C: Feedback Quotes below.)

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- Young Adult Friends have come to Gabi as the first point of contact for a range of personal concerns. However, we need personal contacts to whom she can refer them for professional attention beyond the kind of pastoral care that she have been providing.

Conclusions and Queries

This half-time position was an experiment, and did not exist anywhere before. There was a steep learning curve, and as the work has progressed, the job has changed to fit what has been found. Quoting Gabi: “I feel like now, there is a *better* understanding of who we are, where the needs are regarding YAF and families, and the beginnings of what changes may be necessary to realize an inclusive, integrated, vibrant, multi-age Quaker Meeting. I cannot stress enough how important it is to have individual communication with people. It has become default to send out mass invitations on email, newsletters and Facebook, and expect people to be engaged. As I have seen over and over in my work, and supported by the survey results, personal connections, visits, and face-to-face interactions are powerful. The notes and individual phone calls are harder and more time consuming, but in the end the gain is greater, the work more satisfying, and the connections deeper and more long lasting. Personal contact with the YAFS has been the key factor in the improvements demonstrated by the survey results and anecdotal reports.” This highlights both the importance of the Young Adult Field Secretary position and Gabi's effectiveness in that role.

It is not hyperbole to state that Gabi's work is transforming this yearly meeting. And what we have learned has been shared broadly, in an FUM gathering of staff whose work is nurturing youth and young adults, at an FGC consultation with a similar focus, and through informal networks of YAF workers. Our experience is shaping how young adult Friends are being nurtured and integrated across the North American continent.

The success of this experiment is largely due to the generosity and support of the Shoemaker Foundation. It has been a mark of deep faith in our vision of doing the work of Young Adult Ministries differently. It takes the type of support that the Shoemaker Foundation had given us to go beyond the boundaries of what has always been done and venture into the uncharted waters of creating change that may have an impact on Friends, not only within New York Yearly Meeting, but also across yearly meetings and the other branches of Quakers. Thank you for the faith you had in our vision and the support you were willing to give us.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Methodology and exploration of the 2015 Survey

Gabi Reports on Her Work

It is very difficult, almost impossible even, to quantify the interactions I have had and their results. I cannot say in most cases whether a change was directly attributable to me, or to a general change in the culture of monthly meetings and the Yearly Meeting, for which I was directly or indirectly responsible. I may not see the full results of my work for some time, and will likely never know much of the impact of work I have done. I do know from the feedback I have received that many individuals and meetings report positive feelings and see some changes. See Appendix C: Feedback Quotes below for more detail.

Follow-up Survey:

I conducted this survey as the Young Adult Field Secretary (YAFS) for New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM).

I collected 126 responses from June 2014 to February 2015. This does not at all cover the *entire* population of Young Adult Friends in NYYM at this time. The responses represent MANY opinions and experiences, and should not be used to categorize all Young Adult Friends (YAF), the opinions of the Young Adult Field Secretary, or those of NYYM.

I administered the survey to those who

1. Identified as a Young Adult Friend. (I also explained the traditional ages of 18-35, I did not ask their age, but allowed them to self-identify.)
2. Those who wanted to take the survey. I carried this survey as I traveled through NYYM.
3. Those who had filled out the last survey.
4. Those who have young families in NYYM. (They determined what was meant by young families.)

The survey includes responses from each of the nine regions of New York Yearly Meeting. There are not responses from each monthly meeting. If Friends are interested I can provide a further breakdown of responses from each region.

As opposed to the previous survey, most of the surveys were completed online using Survey Monkey, an online Survey application. Those surveys that I got in paper form, I entered into the program. I distributed the link via email to all clerks of NYYM, I posted it in my newsletter, I posted on Facebook, I emailed those who had participated last time, I spoke to people individually, I asked people to spread the word and link, I had fliers available at Summer Sessions. Therefore the 2014-15 survey was more self-selective.

Not all the fields on the survey were filled out for each survey. Many questions were left unanswered. Some people answered with multiple answers. When percentages are given, they are of those that responded to that question, which may or may not be the whole survey population.

The work that is being done is hard to quantify, and there were some flaws in the surveys that also made quantification difficult. It is difficult with a geographical area and a population as large as NYYM to know what changes are directly, indirectly, or not at all related to the work of the Young Adult Field Secretary. This report is an attempt to understand the bigger and more subtle shifts that seem to be happening at various levels of our yearly meeting.

If you have questions, or would like a copy of all the data, graphs of multiple choice answers, and responses to the queries I posed, please contact Gabi Savory Bailey, Young Adult Field Secretary, [nyym.yafs@gmail.com](mailto:nnym.yafs@gmail.com).

Appendix B: Extent and impact of travel on the work of the Young Adult Field Secretary

Gabi Reports:

Since 2011, I have traveled to all nine regions of the yearly Meeting, worshipping with or meeting with Friends from at least 32 Monthly Meetings and Worship groups. I have taken two weeklong trips across the yearly meeting, attended Farmington Scipio Spring gathering four times, attended most of the Meetings for Discernment, facilitated a multi-generational retreat for a monthly meeting, and one at Powell House. I have attended all but two Spring and Fall Sessions and all Summer Sessions, coordinating committees at Sessions, as well as Coordinating Committee weekends. I have represented NYYM by presenting at an FUM conference in Indiana and attending an FGC consultation. Both were for YAF and YAF workers.

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Throughout my travels I have found moments of profound presence of Spirit. I have attended potlucks, regional YAF gatherings, individual lunches and dinners, and stayed in people's homes, gratefully receiving hospitality. In the course of my travels I hear the stories, concerns, joys, and Spirit that is moving in individuals and their meetings. It is a rare gift that I would not get by simply attending sessions, or YAF gatherings. I have seen the diversity of our yearly meeting, and our monthly meetings. The gift of sitting face to face with Friends of all ages is irreplaceable, and has allowed me to know Friends and their experiences in a way that is not quantifiable, if only that I have faces and stories to carry with me as I do my work and report to the NYYM body. Due to this level of interaction I can more easily recommend the gifts of people to nominating committees, and to YACC, when they may not have had the opportunity to meet in person I can put faces to names and provide YAF and families throughout the region a face they can also connect to when they need to get information or care. Here is some feedback that I have received as a result of my travels:

Appendix C: Feedback Quotes

Regarding the impact of my travels:

“There is an increased awareness of young adults and families within NYYM. Young Adult programming is fuller and spiritually nurturing. Young adults in more isolated meetings have been made aware of the wider community.”

Regarding YAF mini retreats:

“The YAF Mini Retreat was an all-around great, uplifting, and empowering experience. The ability to fit a retreat into one Saturday was perfect for my busy schedule.”

“I was skeptical about devoting a day to an event where I knew so few people going in. I can't recommend it highly enough, though. I felt like I grew in my understanding of Quaker practices and developed friendships I wouldn't have otherwise. I'm so appreciative that the meeting supported an event like this!”

“Among the paths that come out of the Christian tradition, Quakerism is unique in its emphasis on finding Gospel truths by discerning the light within. This retreat offered concrete tools to help us connect with the Inner teacher. I loved it.”

Regarding my role as a spiritual nurturer of individual Young Adult Friends:

“Many young adults are new to Quakerism and need spiritual conversations and guidance. Quakers who have been with us a while want nurture. The transition to adulthood is not easy, and wrestling with new adult lives means a wrestle with spirituality. We as a community are missing opportunities to sit and listen, support and cherish people in this transition.”

Regarding my role as a religious educator and the need for better religious education for our youth:

“This YM does an extremely poor job of providing the support and education young adults need in order to be able to take an active role in the business of the YM.”

“Powell House Youth programs were great. Meetings I've encountered don't have reliable childcare/First Day School as far as I can tell.”

“I really think NYYM needs to cultivate a pre-k to adult first day school curriculum, which is offered as a full term syllabus but is also fairly modular so that it can be adapted into other existing programs. Generally our approach to children is spiritually negligent.”

“I think that if I raised a child in my MM that I would have no worries. Their programs are great...however, they do struggle with maintaining teenage attendance/programs. I think

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Junior Yearly Meeting is boring and repetitive. I would not think it would be spiritually enlightening for my child.”

“There was a time I didn’t want to go to Silver Bay because I found a greater Spiritual home at FGC.”

Appendix D: Relevant charts and graphs

D1: What *can* versus what *has* the YAFS done for you?

In 2012 . . . what can the YAFS do for you?	In 2015 . . . what has the YAFS done for you?
Get me info (44%)	Facebook alerts (33%) Newsletters (28%)
Help me get involved (31%)	Personal notes and invitations (20%)
Help me find conferences (26%) Organize local gatherings (44%)	Mini retreats (32%)
Help me meet other YAF (28%)	YAF gatherings (25%)
	Visited my meeting (30%) Reports and messages (28%)

D2: Meeting membership figures

	Members	Attendees	Total	Percentage
2012	37	74	111	24%
2015	65	50	115	57%

D3: Change in involvement in Quakerism (from the 2015 survey)

Change in involvement & connection to Quakerism	Percent
It has increased	38.89% 49
It has remained the same	20.63% 26
It has decreased	24.60% 31
I became a member of my Meeting	8.73% 11
I have begun attending Meeting regularly	23.02% 29
I have joined a committee	17.46% 22
I have attended more programs	14.29% 18
I am not currently involved with Quakerism	3.17% 4
Responses Other (please specify)	