

Canadian Yearly Meeting Quaker Education Program Newsletter – July 2013

Children in our Meetings

In the almost 3 years I've been serving as Quaker Education Program Coordinator, I've received only one request for resources for children in Meetings. This came from an isolated Friend who was looking for a curriculum to use for home schooling. As I happily provided her with a couple of links and sent off a hard copy of a curriculum based on children's story books, I pondered why I hadn't had more requests. It occurred to me, yet again, that the larger Meetings where there are more likely to be children have a wealth of resources within their community for a variety of learning experiences. This reflection, then led to the theme for the July newsletter. I invited Friends from a number of Meetings to share their experiences of children in their Meetings...and, because I wanted to present the material in a single offering, this issue is unusually long. I hope Friends will welcome the stories and articles, a reflection of the joys and challenges of working with the children in our Meetings.

Peterborough Meeting – An experiment

There are three of us now in our Meeting who are working with the children--Mary Conchelos, Linda Thomson and I (Margaret Slavin). We have been a team on this since we began in November 2011, and it feels comfortable to have 3.

Meeting had been attempting to get ready for possible children well before that. A committee of 2 developed our basic principles, brought it to Meeting which approved it, and after potluck one Sunday we role-played a typical session, with most of us playing the role of children--some acted up quite a bit! The point of this was to lessen the fear and awkwardness many of us feel in regard to taking charge of a program for children.

Time went by, however, and no children turned up. Our members and attenders don't even have grandchildren--except for one who turns up once a year and lives in Mexico.

In the spring of 2011, three families with children contacted us inside of 2 weeks, and some of us felt that way might be opening. We contacted each of the families and found that once a month felt right to them. One family had previous Quaker experience and the others didn't. None of them attended Meeting. We realized that we needed to offer something concrete.

We discovered that we already had in our library Earthcare for Children: A First Day School Curriculum, by Sandra Moon

Farley, Diana Gail Egly, and Thomas Baxter Farley, issued through Friends Committee on Unity with Nature. This has since been revised and the second edition is available through [Quaker Books](#). Each of the sections is so full of activities that we easily expanded each one into 3 sessions. At the rate of once a month, with the summer months off, we will be another few years just getting through the curriculum once. Its purpose is: to nurture a spiritual connection with the Earth. We added "For children accompanied by an adult."

We again took it to the Meeting, and it was a wise move, as several Friends raised concerns about the implications of children in our midst. Especially children who belonged to people we didn't yet know, who did not yet attend Meeting. The experiment was approved, however, and we announced the first three sessions. We did not announce it as First Day School, as this means little to non-Quakers. We called it Earthcare, and let interested parents know that it would begin with ten minutes with the Quaker group, and then proceed to another room for activities and for outside explorations. Then we would return to the Meeting room to report and to have a treat. The parents who were interested were comfortable with the word "spiritual" and okay with Sunday morning and the association with Friends.

In addition to offering a genuinely excellent program for children, our purpose was to show these parents that we are a child-friendly group, and let them take it from there. If Friends is not for them, the program is still a valuable thing to be doing. If some parents decide that this is the spiritual group they have been looking for, Earthworms in a mother's hand for themselves as well as for their children, that will be wonderful too. Our part is to be faithful about offering it each month.



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We have had two occasions when no children came. However, we can now pretty well count on 3-6 children turning up. A total of 8 families have expressed interest and receive our email reports. The curriculum includes outdoor visiting of the same spot every month, and taking observations, which include photographs.

Close-up of snowflakes (We use the hula hoop in Quaker red and black to delineate a space for close examination)



In the summer, there is no program, but Meeting is held in the homes of Friends. Three of these this summer are being called "field trips." Tomorrow, for instance, is at the home of Bill and Rosemarie McMechan, where we will have Meeting for Worship--some adults will go for a nature walk with the children. Last summer there was one child. We are expecting 4 tomorrow, and 5 parents. After the walk and at the rise of Meeting, there will be a potluck and then a tour of the McMechans' berm house. One father is planning to come by himself, without his child, for the first time.

The initial circle in our usual program, the part we worked out long ago, includes a time of listening. The children are used to it now. We ask them to listen "outside and inside" and then we are silent for about a minute. "What did you hear?" They hear cars outside, each other giggling, music playing elsewhere in the building. But one girl now says, "I heard my heart beating." I love to remember a boy who came only once (his family was breaking up and he moved elsewhere) but he said, "I hear panthers running across the savannah!!"

Ages of children range from our own homegrown baby, who is about to turn 1, to a girl who is 8. This program, however, is highly flexible and could include older children very readily.

We are having a great time. The main glitch to date is that the parents always go out with us, and we think it is because we are having such a blast. But we hope that if they are craving some silence, they will begin to choose to stay behind. It's an ongoing experiment.

One Child - Prince George Worship Group - Vernon Meeting and Thousand Islands Meeting (Kingston)

Peter Stevenson, Prince George Worship Group writes, "Well, to tell the truth, it has been a challenge here in Prince George. Generally we have been having four adults at meeting, including Jesse and myself, and our son, who is now 2 1/2 years old. On the one hand, we like the idea of having him there, experiencing meeting with us, and having both of us there as well. However, we also both find it difficult not to focus on him when he is there. Then, when one of us does go out with him, two-fifths of the Meeting leaving the room.

Currently, what we generally do is sit with our son for about five to ten minutes at the start of Meeting, and then one of us takes him out for about twenty minutes, when we switch. He then comes back for the last few minutes and often breaks Meeting himself. This seems to work best for everyone. However, we do find that we have been getting less spiritual nourishment from First-Day mornings than we had before he was born."

Kate Johnson, Thousand Island Monthly Meeting shares a different experience with a child who is a little older. "Our one child now attends the Religious Education program at the Unitarian fellowship where we rent meeting space. The Meeting has been very gracious to put up with less-than-ideal worship space in order that we can have consistent programming for him during the school year. Our Meeting finds this a better arrangement than one where parents sometimes feel resentful at having to do all the organizing of first day school and other members feeling guilty for not contributing more. The Unitarians do seem to appreciate his presence and he enjoys much of what he is exposed to there. We do lament the lack of Quaker education but he is connected to the Meeting through our monthly shared meals."

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Youth at Vancouver Meeting – There and Not There *(thanks to Mavis Dixon for this report)*

For 16 years to a greater or lesser degree I have been involved with First Day school, child minding and family-oriented events at Vancouver Monthly Meeting, and its child-friendly worship group in North Burnaby, BC. It has been rewarding because over that period of time, the number of children I associate with the Vancouver Meeting has grown to more than 20.

In April at our Easter Retreat we had 19 youth and children (20 years and younger) and 18 adults. When I reported this to Monthly Meeting, it was with some surprise I heard a Friend comment "Who are these youth and why do we never see them at Meeting?"

They are there and not there. Part of the mystery is that many of the engaged youth a) live too far away from the Vancouver Meeting House to visit regularly, as our main Meeting House is located in the southwest corner of the town and b) Sunday morning is often time to make up one's sleep deficit. To maintain the thread of connection to Quakerism, less-frequent overnight gatherings are important. You will see Vancouver Quaker kids at Western Half Yearly Meeting in the spring in Sorrento, BC. You will see them at the Easter Retreat. Perhaps most frequently, you will see them monthly at the North Burnaby Worship Group.

Our families share the load of organizing these events and other small family get-togethers in each other's houses. Lately, the cost burden has crept up for weekend retreats as many places where we would gather for the weekend have increased their per-person fees, added minimum charges and added restrictions around self-catering. Our modestly funded Monthly Meeting is not able to provide much subsidy. I am not sure how long our Easter Retreat tradition can remain affordable.

The North Burnaby Worship Group is an ideal place to foster families' connection to Quaker worship. Every fourth Sunday, we meet in the beautiful setting of Cranberry Commons' co-housing common house. We

are able to eat breakfast together before meeting. This treat-filled feast can motivate even a sleepy teen to get up and attend. We often sing together afterward. Now some of those children are amazing musical accompanists playing many of the Rise Up Singing songs by ear.

For several years, it was my pleasure to gather the children in a First Day conversation - I hesitate to call it school. As the parent of my own three kids, these monthly (or twice monthly at times) conversations provided me with a chance to talk and listen to them in a way that daily life doesn't allow for. The teens surprised me with their profound insights and tried to shock me with their "un-Quakerly" irreverence. Through it all, they have formed bonds with each other that tell them more about the Quaker experience of love than all the "schooling" they received from me.

I worry about the youngest kids in meeting today. I have passed the baton of First Day School to a new person, father of a young girl. He is motivated, but the next wave of young children is a tiny cohort compared to the one my older children (now 15 & 17) were a part of.

In addition to the person first-named for First Day school, at the Main Meeting House located at 70th and Oak Street in Vancouver we have a joyful, steady, paid child minder to make our main meeting welcoming for babies and younger children. We initially struggled with paying someone to do this as we felt it was not in keeping with tradition. I am glad we have committed considerable resources to paying to have child minding available at every Meeting, because it has proven to make our Monthly Meeting more

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consistently welcoming to families with small children. Of course, people may always bring their children with them into meeting as well, for part or all of the meeting. We do not see child minding as replacing the service of First Day school. Our caregivers have been loving women from outside of our meeting who live close to the Meeting House. They do not provide any religious instruction.

The North Burnaby worship group does not provide paid child minding. We manage to find a way to include children in our meeting without it. If anyone needs proof that the North Burnaby Worship group really does put children first, consider this: when the kids' numbers overtake those of the adults, after starting meeting as a group it may be the **adults** who get up and leave 15 minutes into meeting to move into a quiet small adjacent space to continue worship, leaving the kids and First Day School free rein of the meeting space.



Vancouver MM youth on the Meetinghouse steps

Toronto Meeting – Long Established Programs

In the younger class, we tell stories. Our favourites are Bible stories, but we also like Quaker history and children's literature (two favourites (by Aston and Long) have been [An Egg is Quiet](#) as an example of how magic can happen when we are still and quiet, and [A Seed is Sleepy](#) as a complement to the parable of the Sower and the Seeds).

We borrow from Jerome Berryman's way of telling stories, outlined in [Godly Play](#), to create a sense of wonder and invite the children to explore meanings for themselves. But our style has become more interactive as we invite the children to create the settings with small wooden (Kapla) blocks, and act out the stories using [Mary Snyder's simple wooden play figures](#) (available from FGC). We also encourage

questions, speculation, and comments during the storytelling.

We have found that it takes two adults. We choose the story that we will tell well in advance, discuss what place the story has in our own spiritual journeys, and brainstorm about what we will do with the story. During the class, one person tells the story, and the other is there to observe, offer assistance, and sometimes lead an activity. We usually have parents participating and try to make the class a sharing and exploring time for all. (*Thanks to Ginny Walsh-Toronto MM, for this article*)

The high point for the older children is always writing and acting the Christmas play. This year they met every week from October until the presentation, with some extra rehearsals thrown in. One might think that this means just sitting and writing. However, Morgan Phillips and Erin Oke, who direct the play, believe in children talking and discussing topics, such as "What would happen if Christmas were cancelled?" By listening and discerning in an inclusive, Quaker way, using all the talents of the group, the children create a play as well as a community.

In the winter, we met sporadically around sports events, family commitments, and exams, to talk in the living room after 15 minutes of silent worship in the Meeting for Worship. Jaya Karsemeyer, Doug Morris and Leigh Turina, with the help of various other parents and adults, discussed topics such as "What is your favourite treasure and why?", honesty, Quaker weddings, and containers. While there will be those who ask why we have not studied solely about Quaker history and stories, the Bible, etc., young people, just like adults, are trying to figure out their lives. How to live a Quaker life in

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today's world is of upmost importance. The way one figures this out is by listening and discerning and doing.

Games Night was run 3 times this year. The children bring games for all ages so that we as an intergenerational group can play together. They seem to like creative or strategic games best. One games night one of the teens organized a spaghetti dinner. Games provide us with a chance to be together, to talk and to share.

The older children met almost every weekend in the fall with Morgan Phillips to create their annual play. In a slightly different format this year, it was a radio play with sound effects and scripts. They did not meet in the winter/spring months, although the co-clerk of Ontario Young Friends, tried to get a teen retreat to Friends House in May. At the last moment, not enough Friends could come.

This is typical of the challenge for older Quaker children and teens. They love to get together, but they lead busy lives. In most Meetings and Worship Groups, there are few children and a wide age range. This is why Canadian Yearly Meeting is sponsoring a Youth Challenge this year. Young Friends, who applied to their Monthly Meetings for a minute of support, could apply for funding to go to Yearly Meeting this August. TMM wrote minutes for 4 teen/young adult Friends as well as a Young Adult couple. All of these Young Friends have come through our First Day School, either currently or in the recent past! Canadian Yearly Meeting feels that Yearly Meeting is the Monthly Meeting for Young Friends...the place where they worship, do business and create lasting friendships. For this reason, supporting Young Friends to go to Yearly Meeting is important. Thank you, Toronto Friends, for supporting these Young Friends. *(Thanks to Leigh Turina for this article, taken from Toronto Monthly Meeting First Day School Report 2013, report from Older Kids/Teens class)*

NB: The following song was written by Morgan Phillips, Erin Oke, and the children from TMM First Day School. We are unsure of the year - plays have been produced every year for at least 20 years. And we are clear about

unity...it just did not rhyme as well with offences! If Friends would like the lyrics and chords laid out together, contact Sue Starr for a copy.

SONG – Lentil Soup Tomorrow/Quaker Play Tonight

*(From Tragedy tomorrow/Comedy Tonight.
From A Funny Thing Happened to me on the Way to the Forum)*

Something with Quakers, friends and peace-makers
Something for everyone: a Quaker play tonight
Something with silence, nothing with violence
Edited quite carefully for young and old alike!

Nothing with greed, nothing with pride
The seven deadlies must just step aside
So take no offences, when making consensus
Mend all your fences with delight!
Lentil Soup tomorrow, Quaker play tonight!

Approved by committee, the play will be witty
They passed a [minute on this Quaker play tonight
Is it controversial? Did you see rehearsal?
Is there even Christmas in this Quaker Play, tonight?

Something with structure, something with plot;
The regular trimmings this play's surely got
Old leather britches in much need of stitches
No need of riches or of spite!
Lentil soup tomorrow, Quaker play tonight!

Ottawa Meeting has a vibrant and rich FDS program which has been building slowly over the years. We are excited to share some of our stories/experiences and to read about yours!!

Nuts and Bolts: We have approximately 25 children and Young Friends who come occasionally with about 8-10 in attendance on any given Sunday. We split the kids into nursery age, 4-8s and 9-16(ish). We have, in the past, had a Young Friends group as well, but currently we do not. Each school age group is led by a group of three leaders

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who take turns preparing and running the program one week for the 1-3rd Sundays and they are assisted by at least one helper. Each week we start the FDS session with a singing session, which involves all the ages together and then we split into age groups. At the end of meeting the FDS children usually go into the meeting and share what they have learnt/done during FDS. On the 4th and 5th Sunday we have a paid professional caregiver assisted by a teen or Young Friend who supervises all the ages together. This gives the leaders and helpers a break.

We have a wonderful FDS coordinator who specifically finds the helpers, makes sure we have supplies and resources and researches curriculum. The Coordinator receives a modest honorarium in recognition of the challenging task of finding volunteers for each week and keeping our large FDS program running smoothly. We also have a FDS Committee, which is chiefly made up of leaders and parents. The FDS coordinator is responsible to the FDS Committee, and especially the FDS clerk.

Neat Features: There are a few things that particularly enrich our meeting and FDS that we would like to share

- Outreach to families - we send postcards to all the children during the summer and for special occasions to keep in touch with the families and to let the kids know they are important to the meeting. Our Coordinator has also called families that don't attend often or are absent for a long time to check in with them.
- Bilingualism - Over the past year due to the arrival of an active Burundian family of conservative Friends, we have tried to offer our FDS programming in both English and French. Our older age group currently operates almost entirely in French due to the make-up of the children; however we are always prepared for and value our English-only speaking teens when they appear because our leaders are bilingual.
- The meeting as a whole takes responsibility for FDS - Because the meeting has an awareness of this

commitment many helpers and leaders are involved each week - usually two leaders, at least two helpers and someone in the nursery. This enriches the connection of the children to the adults in the meeting and the helpers receive ministry from the children! Ensuring that there are always two adults with the children at any time is really helpful to the program leaders, but also helps to keep our children safe.

- Flexible use of curriculum - both age groups have based their programs on FGC curriculums - most recently we have used "Living our Faith: the Bible and Friend's Testimonies" and "Practicing Peace: Teaching Young Children the Quaker Peace Testimony". Having a common curriculum allows the leaders to plan their programs separately while still maintaining some continuity in themes and focus. Other useful resources have been "Quakers on the Move" and material on Quaker values such as the S.P.I.C.E.S model. With the older group particularly we are careful to include material of relevance to both conservative and liberal Friends.
- Singing - for the last year all the age groups have been singing together for the first 10 -15 minutes of the FDS session. A few musically talented members of the meeting often join us for these sessions to help play guitar and lead the songs (more opportunities for interaction with members of meeting)
- Ministry for children during Meeting for Worship - some of the members of the meeting have felt led to provide ministry during the first 15 minutes when the children are often sitting in meeting. These have been a series of stories or parables that are accessible and

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interesting to the children and adults, but also demonstrate what ministry is.

- Reporting back to meeting - after each FDS sessions the children go upstairs to provide a report to meeting on what they have learnt or done. Often this will be done by one or more of the children from each age group. This gives the children an opportunity to speak to the entire meeting, to keep the FDS programming visible to the meeting and for the children to feel appreciated.
- A FDS Coordinator - having a coordinator has noticeably lightened the load of the FDS committee and provided valuable support to the FDS leaders.
- Paid child care during important FDS events. We have organized in the past for our paid child care professional to supervise the children during important meetings events such as weddings and funerals.

Thanks to Anna van der Kamp, Judith Brown and Signy Fridriksson for contributing this article.

Hamilton Meeting – Big Hearts and Mischief

Wilf Ruland, Hamilton MM, writes, "The young people in Hamilton Monthly Meeting are a wonderful crew with big hearts, but they also have a mischievous side to them.

As an example of the 'big heart' side, some years back I was part of a civil disobedience campaign, to help bring Abousfian Abdelrazik back to Canada. I did a lesson on civil disobedience, and the history of Quakers and others in various world-changing civil disobedience campaigns.

The children felt moved to write a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (I did some editing, but the content came from them)

* * *

Mr. Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs House of Commons
Parliament Hill Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6
May 3rd, 2009

Dear Minister Cannon,

We are children who attend the First Day School of the Hamilton Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (the Hamilton Quakers).

We have learned about the story of Mr. Abousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen who is stuck in Sudan because your government refuses to issue travel documents to allow him to come home. This is very puzzling for us, and we want you to explain why your government is not letting him come home.

Quakers highly value the truth and honesty - and we do not think that you have been telling the truth about Mr. Abdelrazik. We think your government should be setting an example for Canadians, but we think that what you're doing to Mr. Abdelrazik and his family is not a good example. It looks like bullying to us.

We do not understand why you are keeping Mr. Abdelrazik from his family here in Canada. We have heard that his older daughter since she was 19 has had to act as the parent for her younger sister, because her Dad (Mr. Abdelrazik) is stuck in Sudan and because her mother has passed away. This seems very wrong to us - children should not have to do the job of parents. His children haven't seen their father in over 6 years. We think this is awful. We would miss our parents very much if we didn't get to see them for 6 years.

We think this case is very simple: - If he has done something wrong, then he should be brought home to face charges and have a trial. - If he has done nothing wrong, then he should be brought home for sure. Please stop acting like a bully and allow Mr. Abdelrazik to come back to Canada right away.

Yours sincerely,

The Children of First Day School Hamilton Monthly Meeting
Religious Society of Friends 7 Butty Place,
Hamilton, Ontario L8S 2R5
P.S. We are sending a copy of our letter to the following: -
our Member of Parliament (Mr. David Sweet)
the Prime Minister (Mr. Stephen Harper)
the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Michael Ignatieff)
the Leader of the NDP (Mr. Jack Layton)
Mr. Abdelrazik, and his family

* * *

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For the last 2 years I have worked with them to put out a "Snoozeletter" on April 1st, with prank Quaker or Hamilton Meeting themed stories to mark the day." Here are a couple of selections from the newsletter.

FIRST DAY OF THE FOURTH MONTH, 2013

First Day School Snoozeletter

Meeting House Cookie Supply Missing, Perpetrators at Large!

Hamilton Police have been called to the scene of a terrible mystery - the Meeting House of the Religious Society of Friends (ie. the Quakers), at 7 Butty Place. It appears that as a result of a daring overnight heist, all of the cookies belonging to the Quakers were taken.

Andrew Muller, Clerk of the Hamilton Monthly Meeting, told police "As best as we can piece together, the cookies were still here on March 31st, but when we arrived for Meeting this morning they were gone!" . Members and attenders were shaken by this startling event. Rex Barger, a long-time member, said he couldn't remember anything like this having happened before. Another long-time member, Beverly Shepard, told our reporter "I don't see how they gained access - the doors were all locked and no windows had been forced or broken."

Younger Quakers were at a loss for words, but seemed to see the lighter side of the situation. Sylvie Ruland smiled mysteriously when asked, but didn't offer any insights into what might have happened. Nina Hay-Cooper likewise was smiling but strangely silent. Both girls seemed to have developed mysterious mumps-like symptoms, with swollen cheeks. They were nonetheless obviously in high spirits.

Some of Meeting's newest attenders (two charming young ladies named Emily and Rosalyn, and their parents) seemed to be taking the mysterious disappearance in stride. "We'll not let it dissuade us from coming to Meeting" they said.

Jeff Mahoney <jmahoney@thespec.com>

Quaker Advice Column

Dear Margaret,

Our Quaker Meeting House isn't comfy enough! Do you think it could be rebuilt using pillows, padded walls and floors, and bolsters?

- signed, Uncomfy Emily

Dear Emily,

This sounds like quite a dilemma! I would encourage you to pursue your dreams. Hire a good architect, do some imaginative fundraising, and above all be willing to spend the time needed to persuade others at your Meeting of the merits of your idea. Some older Quakers might balk at the thought of physical comfort, but if you set up a demonstration room they'll come around soon enough.

- signed, Dear Margaret

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