

## **Camp Program Manager Report 2018**

Camps across the board were 88% full, slightly below our average of 90%, but within our normal range of 86-94%. About 30% of our campers are Quaker, and 28% are campers of color. Of our 156 campers of color this year, 24 (15%) came from the STRIDE program. It is important to note that STRIDE is just one part of our efforts to increase diversity at our camps

BYM Camps gave out over \$99,800 toward fees for 110 campers from our Financial Aid Fund, Grants, and Diversity Funds this past summer. The Monthly Meetings contributed another \$45,213 to assist 63 campers this summer. Thanks to all of you who donated to BYM and/or your Monthly Meeting to help support camper attendance this past summer! One of the things that makes my job really worth doing is making sure campers get the help they need to attend camp.

This past winter, I got a call from a mother whose daughter had attended Opequon through a program sponsored by Langley Hill Meeting partnering with Bridges 2 Independence (B2I), which helps homeless families get back on their feet. Langley Hill Meeting has been sponsoring a couple of campers from B2I for more years than I have been in this job – that is more than 14 seasons! Because the whole point of this organization is to move families from homelessness into shelter and jobs, we do not usually get campers returning from this program and partnership with Langley Hill. But this winter, out of the blue, this mom called to ask if there was any possibility of her daughter being able to attend Opequon again. She explained that they lived in a subsidized apartment, and she was able to work part time for \$10 an hour. Her daughter kept talking about Opequon and what a big impression it made on her. So the mom reached out to see if it was at all possible that her daughter could come back. She admitted to me that she probably could not contribute toward fees, and she had no car to get her daughter to camp. I asked what her daughter remembered about Opequon that motivated the mom to call. She said, “My daughter could not stop talking about the food – how good the food was.” That just about broke my heart. I have heard a lot of reasons for campers wanting to return to camp before; I have read lots of evaluations talking about how camp contributed to spiritual growth, confidence, lifelong friendships, resiliency, how campers come home from camp singing and doing chores, but I never heard a camper say the number 1 reason they wanted to come back to camp was the food. Don’t get me wrong, I think we serve great food at camp, but that is just not the first thing cited by campers. At any rate, I knew that I would make it happen for this camper to return to Opequon this year. It took a lot of courage for this mom to ask for her daughter – to find us, to call me, to ask. So I said “Yes” to this mom and this camper. As it happened, it was not hard at all to find the help I needed to send this camper back to Opequon. I got in touch with the Langley Hill Meeting volunteers who work to get the B2I campers to camp, and asked if they would be willing to help this camper come to camp again. They said they would try, and in fact, they found the money, and got her the rides she needed. BYM Camps supplied the gear. Over the years I have done this job, I can tell you many similar stories of pairing a camper in need with a Meeting passionate to help. So thanks to all of the Meetings, and individuals, over the years who have said “YES!” when I call wondering if they could help out. Those “Yeses” and being able to say “Yes!” when a family in need calls, is what keeps me going.

This past year, as part of our annual planning weekend with the Directors and Camping Program Committee, we added a day and had a workshop with Brooke Carroll, of Brooke Carroll Consulting, on mental health and our campers/youth. The Directors of our camps, Jossie Dowling, BYM Youth Secretary, and I all spent a day with Brooke to learn more about working with campers/youth struggling

with mental health challenges. Over the past decade or so we have noticed a sharp increase in the number of our campers who are facing mental health challenges. This reflects the same challenges we are seeing throughout our culture. Brooke consulted with many past and current health workers associated with our camps and came up with a great day of discussion and training around mental health at camp and how to help us better support our campers. We learned that anxiety was the most common co-factor in most mental health challenges facing youth, and it is one that we can impact with some careful management. As a result of the training, the Directors and I were better prepared to face the summer. We made some changes to our procedures for check-in day, adding a Director Welcome with question-and-answer period for parents, checklist for check-in day, and greeters. In addition, we changed visiting day policy for campers in the middle of the session – we got rid of it, as we had observed over the years that it contributed to homesickness and the premature departure of many campers. We promised to have campers send more letters home and to provide our once-a-session updates from each camp for parents. This resulted in far fewer campers leaving camp early due to homesickness. Another item we discussed at our training was campers and staff alike getting more sleep, as adequate sleep is a major contributor to good mental health. I am quite pleased with the training and the good information we were able to take away from it. My thanks again to Brooke Carroll for planning and executing such a helpful training, and for her follow-up help!

A looming issue on the horizon for our Program is the increase in flooding that particularly impacts Opequon Quaker Camp. The recent increase of storms, with higher rainfall concentrated in the same location, creates a potential problem at Opequon. In order to enter the camp, one must cross a low bridge over a tributary to the Opequon Creek. Several times this late spring and summer, the creek flooded, closing access to the camp for 24-48 hours at a time. All summer I kept a watchful eye on weather patterns over Opequon, particularly during “changeover” when campers come and go for the session. Luckily, the floods this summer missed the changeover weekends. If the creek were to flood on one of those weekends, we would have a logistical nightmare. Not being able to get campers in and out of camps on the scheduled dates would create problems for every camper’s family. In addition, there are safety concerns – emergency vehicle access, while still possible via a neighboring property, is less than ideal. So in addition to needing new bathhouses at Opequon, the increased risk of flooding is making the current site of Opequon problematic. A sub-committee made up of members of the Camping Program Committee, Camp Property Committee, the Development Director, Camp Property Manager and I are actively looking for a camp property to purchase for Opequon.