

## **Discernment about BYM's STRIDE program**

Dear BYM Friends,

At last the preparation has been completed so that we as a Yearly Meeting can discern our way forward with BYM's STRIDE program. As you will see, there are budget considerations, a staff job description, and a change in the committee support given to STRIDE. Yes, a lot of good work has been done. Some main things to know about STRIDE are given later in this letter, after the decisions we need to make are described.

As most of you know, STRIDE is a program that was started nearly ten years ago, and then expanded and made stronger in 2015 with the application for and receiving of a substantial grant from the Shoemaker Fund. The grant covered the cost of a fulltime staff person, the Outreach and Inclusion Coordinator, whose job was to guide and mentor the many volunteers part of this program. While there were various difficulties that came up in the implementation and administration of this program, the program itself has been very successful. Our BYM camps are more diverse, and they are places where equity, diversity, and inclusion are intentionally practiced; campers are prepared for camp, and the camps have been made welcoming for the campers. These are real accomplishments, and it took a lot of work to make them happen. Making real diversity happen is not easy – we have reason to celebrate.

The grant money has not yet been fully used, but will be used by the end of 2019. Because of the difficulties implementing and administering this program, those involved in the STRIDE program have worked this year (since September) without a staff person, and have found it to be very difficult – really, too difficult. Some of the STRIDE programs are now weaker than before, and those that are strong have required a level of dedication from the volunteers that is not sustainable. For the program to continue, it needs a staff person.

The question before BYM at Interim Meeting on March 23 is: Do we, as a Yearly Meeting, want to fund the staff person and other expenses related to the STRIDE program to keep the program going starting in 2020 and beyond?
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Usually this kind of question does not come up for standing programs. It comes up now because BYM has not yet made the STRIDE program part of the regular budget. That is the change that is being proposed now. It will be an increase in the budget that will be covered by income and possibly other funds, but not by an increase in apportionment.

A budget is attached, which includes the proposed STRIDE Coordinator and the expenses of preparing and transporting the campers to camp. Also attached is a job description for the STRIDE Coordinator.

Giving this program the committee support it needs within BYM has not been straightforward, but now there is a plan. Please keep reading! We are in the intricacies of

how BYM gives a program support that is necessary and that is sustainable. And it seems we have found a way to do that.

Originally the program was put under the care of a working group that was under the care of the Camping Program Committee, but this did not work out because the committee felt it had too many other tasks to do given the size of its committee. The ad hoc Growing Diverse Leadership Committee then offered to be the home committee for the STRIDE Working Group, which contains the STRIDE program, but because there is a staff person involved, it seemed right for the committee to change its status from ad hoc to being a standing committee.

The charge for a new Growing Diverse Leadership Committee is attached.

With a supporting committee, a staff person, and a budget, the STRIDE program would now be well supported.

Funding the STRIDE Coordinator: For 2019, the plan is to have an Interim STRIDE Coordinator who will work quarter-time for 24 weeks. This will get the program through the spring and summer. Then, in September or October, the permanent position of STRIDE Coordinator would begin. **The funds for the staff work in 2019 will be covered by remaining funds from the Shoemaker grant.** The budget will be increased BUT the funds needed to cover the increase will be released from funds we already have.

The 2020 will be the first year that BYM would need to stretch its capacity to cover the STRIDE program. This means that the permanent position should really be started only if we are in unity that the Yearly Meeting intends to cover the cost of the STRIDE Coordinator and program expenses for 2020.

There has been great enthusiasm for the STRIDE program within BYM. It is a unique program for us. Here some things I think is important to know as we prepare to discern our way forward with the STRIDE program:

- We have a goal of diversifying our Yearly Meeting, and the STRIDE program is successfully bringing diversity to our camps.
- Those who work in STRIDE are part of the camping program and were once themselves campers. This group felt led to make changes they thought were needed in the camps, and they have been willing to develop a vision and put in the work to make the program successful.
- Campers are encouraged to return to camp year after year. This means that there are real relationships being built between the campers and the camps. There is a goal of having STRIDE campers go all the way through the program and then become counselors when they are old enough.
- The STRIDE program raises funds to cover most of the camp tuition (families are asked to pay a small amount if they can) and also prepare the campers by building relationships with campers' families, providing needed gear, taking prospective campers on a practice hike, and in other ways thoroughly preparing them for camp

- The STRIDE program supports diversity training for camp staff members who in turn work with all the campers – by making the camps welcoming for STRIDE campers, the program makes the camps more welcoming for everyone. All our campers are more knowledgeable about the basics of maintaining an equitable, diverse, and inclusive camp.
- The STRIDE program is the only BYM program that works directly with communities who are not only communities of color but are also underserved in our cities.
- The STRIDE program is well organized with a written out description of the “cycle” of activities that it follows. This was developed by our original Outreach and Inclusion Coordinator, and has served the STRIDE Core Groups well.
- There are STRIDE Core Groups in four cities now – Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and Charlottesville. There is hope that a group in Richmond and/or Frederick might be added in the near future.
- The young adults who do the actual work of the STRIDE Core Groups have a place to use their Quaker skills in organizing, using Friends decision making processes, creating peaceful settings for others, having meaningful discussions about important topics, and more. They also receive mentoring to grow in these skills, and in turn, mentor campers and new STRIDE members. The program meets its mission in many ways.

Some concerns—it is important to consider these and the implications of them

- Is this the most cost effective way to implement a diversity program? While this has been asked, no one has brought forward a more cost effective program.
- How can we afford this? One problem with this question is that BYM promised to continue the work after the Shoemaker grant was finished. We started the STRIDE program with no end date – the grant was to be used for the first three years of the program, and then the program was to continue. We said we would find the money. The people participating in the program became involved in what they thought was a standing program of the YM.
- How can we afford this? This is what we need to discern.

As the Clerk of Interim Meeting, my task is to discern with you the way that BYM is led to move forward in a wide variety of things. The STRIDE group seems to be more confusing than other topics that have come forward, in part because the program is not well known to everyone. Please read the information that is provided with this letter and look online for even more information. STRIDE is on the list of BYM Committees on the BYM website.

Being knowledgeable about STRIDE will help us discern our way forward with the STRIDE program at Interim Meeting on March 23. What is the Spirit leading us to do?

In gratitude for our work and for our community,

Marcy Baker Seitel  
Clerk of Interim Meeting