

Youth Programs Manager's Annual Report 2017-2018 - Jossie Dowling

As the school year closes out and the summer begins, I reflect on another successful season of youth conferences. The Junior Young Friends Program and the Young Friends Program continue to uplift the young people of BYM and foster a community based on caring, trust and love; brightening their inner light that they then extend to the world outside of our yearly meeting.

This past year, the Junior Young Friends Program (JYF) was stronger than ever, and by far the most fun. We had an influx of new 6th graders that brought an exciting new energy to our group. I was really impressed with the regular attenders who built a strong sense of community within the program (a sentiment that is hard to find in middle school groups). This year's JYFs were kind, compassionate, silly, eager, funny, and witty. I could not have been more impressed with them and I am excited to see them continue to mature next school year. After some feedback from parents, the Youth Programs Committee decided to teach components of the Our Whole Lives (OWL) curriculum for our workshop series. OWL is a comprehensive and progressive sexuality education program for youth created by the Unitarian Universalist Church that models and teaches caring, compassion, respect, and justice. We have taught elements of the OWL program on a 3-year cycle and reintroduced it to our program this year. We want to make sure our youth have a thoughtful, healthy, and consensual understanding of sexuality and reproductive health so that they can make educated and informed decisions.

Attendance at our Young Friends Program continues to be very low. Over the last two years, the average attendance at a conference was 45 Young Friends, down from the previous average of about 60. Though, we had many new attendees recruited from BYM's Camping Program, as usual. The Young Friends had much less official business this year and thus, had fast and easy business meetings at all of their gatherings. The Young Friends designed a new T-shirt this year; an image of spheres of lights emerging from a jar to represent their inner light radiating out into the world. T-shirt will continue to be available for sale for those that are interested. Unfortunately, we had a serious shortage of Friendly Adult Presences (FAPs) serving at our gatherings this year. We will be hosting a training for new FAPs at the end of the summer and hope to recruit more adult to serve in this role in the upcoming year.

YPC had a fun and fulfilling fall retreat in which we discussed the larger vision of youth programs and troubleshoot some of our challenges. We hope to make retreats an annual event to strengthen our committee and the work we fulfill. The Youth Programs Committee is still searching for new members that are interested in supporting our programs. Our low membership has been challenging and we are eager to invite new members with new energy and perspective to join our team. Furthermore, YPC is on the search for a new Junior Young Friends Assistant that can help facilitate the programming of our JYF weekends. Please help spread the word about this new and exciting opportunity.

I want to thank the whole BYM community for their continued trust and support of the youth in our community. I also want to give a special thank you to the parents that trust their kids to build positive and supportive communities that help the whole yearly meeting thrive. We look forward to what the coming school year has to bring and I can't wait to discover the new ways that our young people will impress me (and everyone else) in the year to come and beyond. Please invite our youth programs to host a gathering at your local meeting!