



FGC's Young Adult & Youth (YAY) Gathering was a joyous experiment in co-creating Quaker community. 114 children, youth, parents, Adult Young Friends, and volunteer Adult Friends gathered in Radford, VA from July 6-10, 2022. The experience was meaningful and impactful to all participants. This unique Gathering was precious for Friends, both for long-time Gathering attenders returning after years away – and new Friends joining for the first time. Some Friends had only participated in Gathering virtually, and were experiencing their first in-person FGC Gathering. As one Friend shared, **“having Quaker space that was both intergenerational and youth/young adult centered felt so good!”**

A beloved part of the week was the intergenerational worship held each morning. All participants were invited to begin the day with semi-programmed worship. A circle of chairs opened into a big space full of books, pipe cleaners, and coloring books for Friends who engage with. Friends stretched, moved, and shared vocal ministry. Worship opened each day with a picture book and closed with a song. One parent shared, **“Intergen worship every morning was a blessing. This is the only Quaker space where I have felt I could fully be present with my child and my family - to be centered and held. This is not possible in other Quaker spaces and I am so grateful for this experience.”**

After worship, Friends had opportunities to build fellowship in age-specific groups through Junior Gathering programs, High School, Adult Young Friends (ages 18-37), and workshops for parents. A few joyful highlights from the week include the AYF programming including a field trip to Claytor Lake State Park. An Adult Young Friend shared the value of **“the AYF Fishbowl because I learned about my faith and how welcome I am.”** In Junior Gathering, the Sprouts Group held daily mushroom explorations and baked bread for Saturday's continental breakfast. The High School Program engaged in a 2-day anti-racism training, had a meaningful business meeting and nominated new clerks for 2023. In the words of a first time High School attender, the program **“honestly has opened my eyes to many things, and has made me excited to explore more in the community and my own identity as a Quaker.”**

Afternoons allowed time for families & participants to rest and regroup – and also share gifts & fellowship through intergenerational activities such as kickball and soccer, puzzles, dancing, singing, story time and more! FGC's QuakerBooks set up a bookstore and shared Faith & Play lessons with participants. Many attendees enjoyed the spaciousness and slow pace of YAY Gathering. One Friend share, **“I liked that the schedule felt much more open than the traditional Gathering, with explicit time every day for play and rest.”**

We are so grateful for the leadings of many Adult Friends who supported YAY through volunteer presence. Due to the new format, many Friends attended simply to support and make the event possible for younger Friends. FGC is so grateful for your invaluable contributions.

Though there were some positive COVID cases before, during and after the event, FGC staff and volunteers were careful and cautious to implement a rigorous COVID safety plan to protect participants and keep them healthy. FGC will be reviewing its COVID policy for future Gatherings.

YAY Gathering ended with a joyful all-Community block party with water games, dress-up, popsicles and super bubbles. There was also an intergenerational talent show, where Friends did ballroom dance, shared their knowledge of state capitols, solved math problems, sang songs about salmon, imitated animals sounds and more! FGC is overjoyed with the opportunity to experiment in this new Gathering format and will continue discerning the learnings from YAY as it explores the future of Gathering.

Author: Marian Dalke, Gathering Youth Coordinator, 8/11/22