

Young Adult Leadership Development 2008 Program Report

Introduction

The Young Adult Leadership Development program maintains a unique and vital location on the landscape of opportunities for young people within the Quaker context. YALD offers a seven-week residential immersion that invites practicing a new paradigm of sustainable living and servant leadership. In the last two years this vision for leadership development has gained clarity and now embodies a balance of community responsibility and interaction, deep spiritual exploration and formation, and service and witness in the world. Operating from the belief that these three areas of focus cannot respectively manifest without the others, the program is envisioned as an integration that emphasizes the interrelation between one's life in community, one's life in relationship to Spirit, and one's life in relationship to the world around us.

Program Participants

This year our top twelve YALD applicants all had experience with Quakerism either from their upbringing or from attending Quaker schools. This is the first year in which the YALD program attracted even a majority of Quaker-experienced participants. In terms of building group cohesion, delving deeply into spiritual exploration including drawing on religious tradition and language to do so, and articulating a spectrum of resources in engaging the world around us, accessing the wealth of Quaker traditions and practices was an abundant source of support.

This year's group came from across the United States and the globe, with international participants from Kenya and Britain. This group also had an equal gender representation, for the first time in the history of the program. Twenty-five percent of the participants were people of color. This kind of diversity provides an essential richness of experience and background in the community's learning together.

YALD Program 2008

In reviewing this year's program we will give further attention to the program elements of service learning, spiritual exploration and formation, and community living, but first let's look at how several YALD participants saw the purpose of the program.

- ❖ "YALD endeavors to nurture young adults in spiritual transformation, sustainable living, community consciousness, service-learning, and leadership development."
- ❖ "To engage young Friends at a critical time of life to show how Quakerism can actually be a powerful force for change, both within ourselves and in the wider world."
- ❖ "A great program where you get to have fun with people your age. You learn and work hard but you gain more than a semester or year of school. You come out a changed person."
- ❖ "The purpose of YALD was to strip down the layers of comfort that keep us from being where we are called to be in the world. As sculptures of God, the program handed us chisels of faith, and we lovingly chipped each other down."

Service Learning

Service is incorporated into many aspects of the YALD program. Each participant works three mornings a week in various operations departments at Pendle Hill, totaling more than 600 hours of

service. Work was done in support of Grounds, Maintenance, Hospitality, Kitchen, Housekeeping, and Gardening. Each participant as a member of the Pendle Hill community also does a full regiment of daily jobs each week. The third component of service involves working two full days off-site with a local community nonprofit. This summer our participants offered a total of more than 1,000 volunteer hours with five nonprofit organizations. These service opportunities offer meaningful experiences in providing vital work and responsibility within community contexts, inside and outside of Pendle Hill.

This summer we returned to work with two organizations with which we have a long standing relationship, Delaware County Literacy Center and Southwest Community Enrichment Center, and we partnered with three new organizations, Chester Children's Chorus, Southeast Philadelphia Collaborative, and Yes And...Camp. The overall feedback from the organizations and YALD participants was very positive. One YALD participant wrote in his evaluation, "My experience was very rewarding, and the positive feedback I got there made me more confident in my ability to help people."

With each partnership we seek a mutually beneficial relationship wherein the organization receives an energetic and gifted intern and the intern receives meaningful work within which they can contribute and thrive. All of the partnering organizations emphasize education and empowerment, some through literacy and math, others through gardening, or singing, or theater. The diversity of work enriches the dialogue that takes place within the YALD program, as participants share their experiences and challenges with one another and support each other's learning. For the last two summers we have placed participants in pairs, creating a special opportunity for them to accompany each other in the process, similar to the function practiced in Quaker tradition.

Spiritual Formation

Over the last two years, the YALD program has moved with greater intention toward a cohesive curriculum of classes and opportunities for reflection which has provided this program greater stability and depth. This summer three classes were specifically designed for the participants of this YALD class: *Principles and Methodologies of Nonviolence*, *Topics in Quakerism*, and *Prophetic Communities*. Each class was held weekly. The course on nonviolence delved into the foundations of nonviolent practice and explored the specific methods of Nonviolent Communication and the Alternatives to Violence Project. The course on Quakerism included analysis and discussion of Quaker heritage, tradition, theology, and process. And the course on prophetic communities explored the theology and practice of the prophetic possibility, in personal and corporate experience, drawing on biblical narrative as well as historical case studies that included the Satyagraha Ashram, the Finkenwalde Seminary, and community-based organizing within the American Civil Rights Movement. In all of these classes there was particular attention to context, practice, and application, so that YALD participants return to their respective communities better prepared to respond and engage. For the final class of this course, for example, our time was devoted to sharing each participant's respective vision for how he/she would take the learning from the course and apply it within his/her community: How could the prophetic possibility be realized in your community?

Each week there were corporate and personal opportunities for reflection. Each Wednesday evening the YALD group met and shared experiences, challenges, and learning. These opportunities were critical in the group's ability to recognize and understand itself as a body, and to better support its members. Also on a weekly basis, each YALD participant met with a spiritual nurturer for an hour of personal reflection time. This time was essential for individuals receiving the personal support of another person in addressing new growing, struggles, and visions for next steps.

Community Living

Residential life at Pendle Hill offers many unique growing opportunities in and of itself. YALD participants this summer occupied the second floor of Chace and shared the weekly responsibility of vacuuming the hallway and cleaning the bathrooms and kitchenette. Like daily jobs, this practice of care for one's surroundings fosters a holistic vision of stewardship. One YALD participant shared that such work provided "excellent opportunities for contemplation, community bonding, and a sense of responsibility for the right operations of Pendle Hill."

The 2008 summer program staff paid particular attention to creating opportunities for the whole residential community to gather together regularly. Two weekly sessions were designed with this in mind. On Sunday evenings, YALD designed and hosted a worship service for the whole Pendle Hill community. These offerings were rich and diverse, and we received a lot of positive feedback from those who participated. Tuesday evenings were set aside for community events that included three concerts, a movie night, a guest speaker, and an open mic. One YALD participant wrote in her evaluation "I valued the Tuesday time as a less serious time to decompress and relax. It was sometimes disappointing when very few other members of the community showed up." However, even when there was low attendance, these sessions offered a great deal to those who participated.

Quaker Focus

We received a lot of positive feedback concerning the opportunities to explore faith and Quakerism more deeply. We had participants who did not consider themselves Quaker, but were familiar with Quakerism to some extent. One such participant shared "The Quaker focus helped show me that Quakerism has really shepherded me through the past 10 years of my life, and at its best has reminded me that right relationship, not Quakerism per se, is the goal: relationship with the divine, with other people, and with myself. The Quaker focus this year was not actually a Quaker focus, but a God focus in the manner of Friends, and it must be kept as such to be meaningful to someone like me, a non-Quaker (and maybe to Quakers, too)."

For those raised Quaker and still seeking clarity about that identity the program served their interests as well. One YALD participant wrote "I have always felt myself a Quaker at some level. This program was very important in reviving the relevance of Quakerism in my adult life." Another shared "The Quaker focus was pivotal to my spiritual development. I needed clarity about a variety of Quaker topics and I needed to better understand how my Quaker faith can be grounded and more intentional."

Conclusion

This program has evolved a great deal and now embodies a definite rigor and purposefulness in its design and implementation. The fruits of this effort have been many. It begins with the special gift that is offered to young people when they are taken seriously as agents of social transformation, children of God, and active members of community. The resources provided to and the experiences engaged by these individuals through study, service, and community living, empower at a deep and lasting personal level. Each year Pendle Hill is offering the world a priceless gift.