

## Friends Camp Director's Report NEYM Sessions – 2022

We are so grateful! During the summer of 2021, more than 270 campers and more than 40 staff members together experienced a total of more than 7,300 “person days” at camp. For the 2022 season, we are returning to our pre-pandemic session structure and camper capacities, with more than 400 campers experiencing at least one camp session. While operating camp presents challenges during this pandemic, we are proud to have offered joy-filled in-person youth gatherings for campers desperate to be in community with peers. Our focus at camp since the pandemic has been to help campers and staff heal from a challenging few years through community, the outdoors, Spirit, and joy.

Moments at camp, little and big, have provided moments of grace for me as the camp director during these difficult few years: an 8-year-old first-time camper holding hands with her counselor on their walk to Vespers, a group of teens commenting on the sense of relief they feel without their phones at camp, a spontaneous mid-dinner dance party on the field outside the dining hall, birds chirping during Meeting for Worship held outside due to Covid-19 protocols. The work of gathering in person has not been easy, especially working to make safe decisions in the absence of clear guidance from governing bodies. We have balanced different families' needs and expectations, as well as the dual threats of Covid-19 and of isolation for young people. We have hoped to increase access to camp while also managing limited capacity requirements.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact Friends Camp in many ways. The staffing shortage across the United States has made it challenging to fill our staff roles. To encourage staff members, we have increased pay modestly, added an extra day off between each session, and are offering a vocational discernment program in partnership with Beacon Hill Friends House. The costs for goods and services have increased, and availability of items we need such as rental vans, lumber and property supplies, and food by delivery has been limited. The most significant impact of the pandemic, however, has been the mental health challenges faced by our campers and staff, which have been exacerbated through the pandemic. We are seeking to support campers and staff as best we are able in the camp setting, and we feel concern about the state of teen mental health in and beyond our community.

I am extraordinarily grateful for the ways in which Friends across New England have helped to create the “nest” of camp for our young people. Through volunteer stewardship, prayers, governance, and financial contributions, you have made the camp experience possible. For 2022, more than 25% of campers report a Quaker affiliation. At a recent Young Friends retreat in Portland, nearly everyone in the room stood up during a “Big Wind Blows” frenzy when the question was asked “Have you ever been to Friends Camp?” Many staffers for JYM, JHYM, and YF programs first felt inspired by Quaker youth work at camp. Our camp is a vital and ongoing ministry for New England Yearly Meeting, and we are grateful to be a “garden” for Quaker community and leadership.

Respectfully submitted, Anna Hopkins Buller (Camp Director)